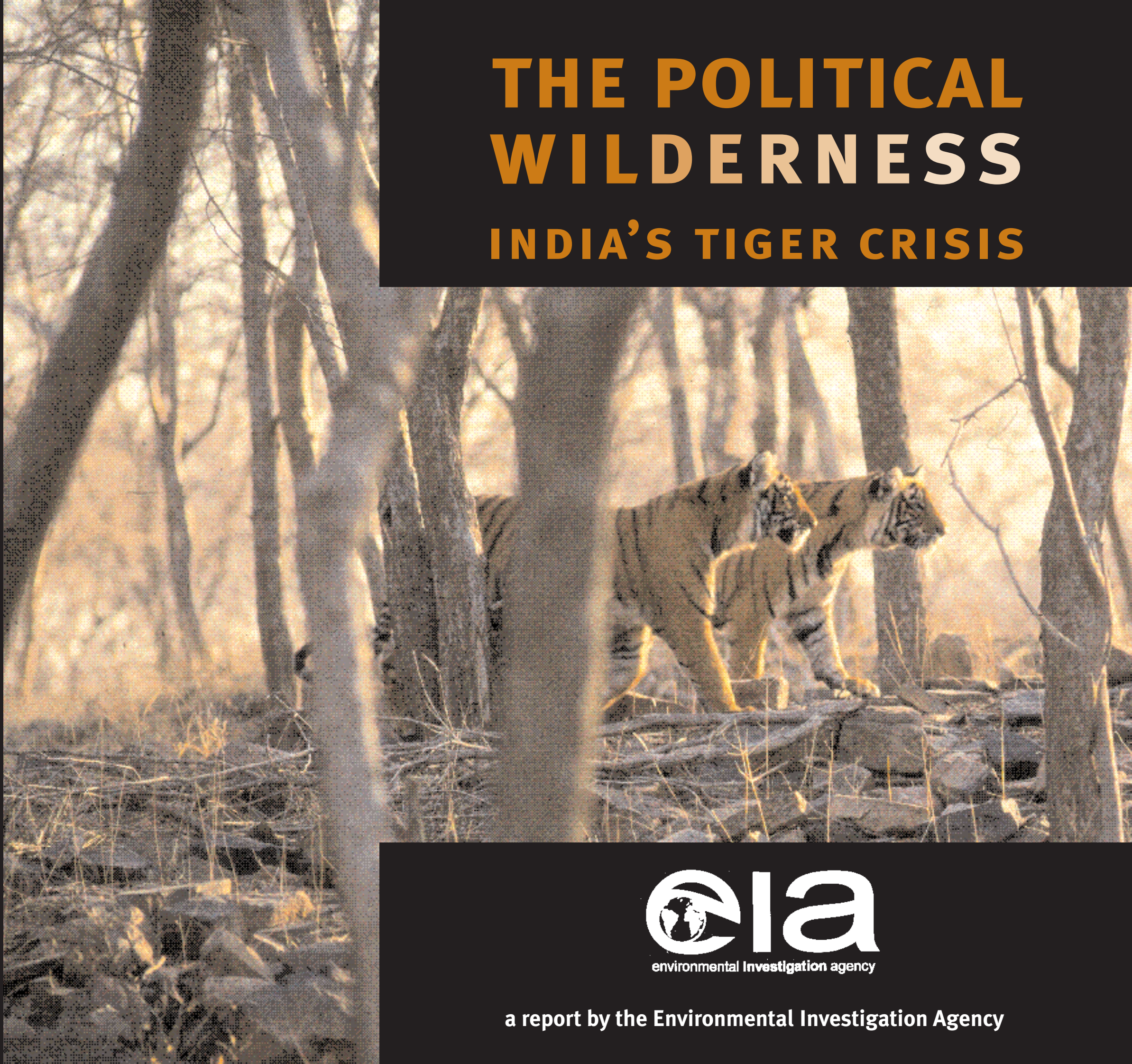


THE POLITICAL WILDERNESS INDIA'S TIGER CRISIS



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The Political Wilderness - India's Tiger Crisis

This report pulls together information gathered throughout India and other parts of the world. It portrays a country rapidly losing its remaining wildlife and forests and destroying the unique culture of tribal people who have lived in the forests for hundreds of years.

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Introduction

Three sub-species of tiger have become extinct this century without a whisper and only five remain. India is home to two thirds of the world population of tigers. The immediate threat to their survival is from poaching to supply the Asian markets for tiger bones and body parts. In India the Royal Bengal tiger edges towards extinction because of a complete lack of political will to save it. Indian experts know the problems, are aware of some of the solutions and advocate them daily. But they are routinely ignored.

This report stands as a plea to the office of the Indian Prime Minister to act to reverse the rapid loss of India's wildlife and forests.

The political wilderness

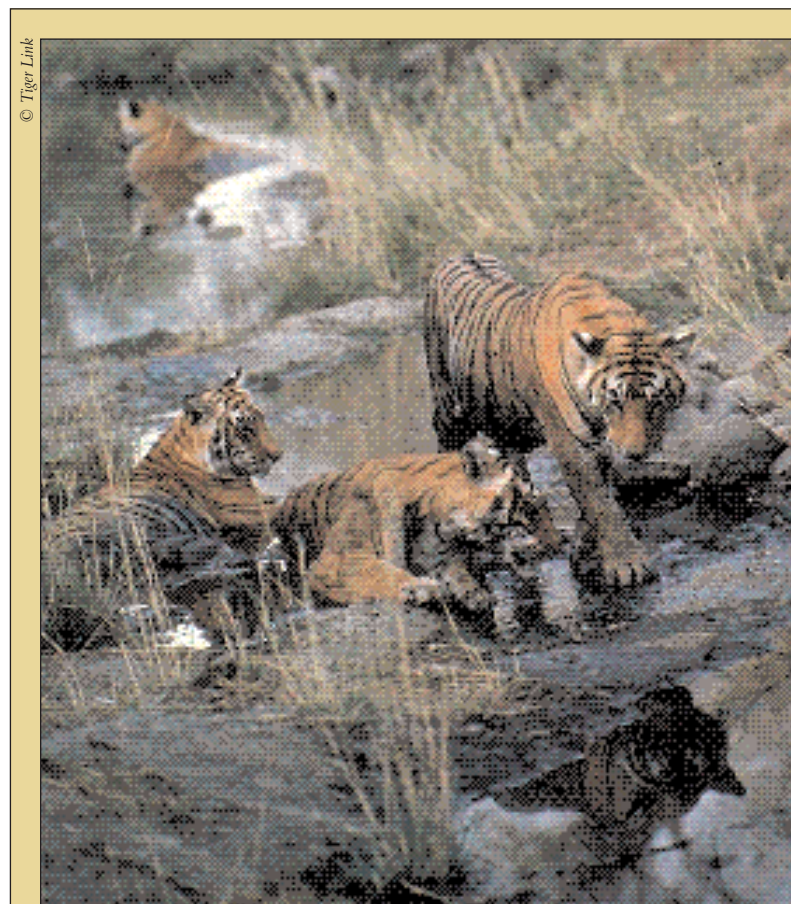
Indian Bengal tigers are being poached at the rate of one a day.¹ In the last few years some of the highly endangered one-horned rhinoceros have disappeared from areas previously considered protected. Male elephants have been so heavily poached for tusks that in one of the most famous sanctuaries the ratio of males to females is a staggering 1:200.² These species are some of the most visible and revered in the world, and India, to its credit, has more tigers, more one-horned rhinos and more Asian elephants remaining than any other country. But not for long.

The highest wildlife body in India, chaired by the Prime Minister - the Indian Board for Wildlife - has not even met for the past eight years.³ Environmental protection and wildlife conservation have been relegated to the political wilderness.

India has faced a huge onslaught on its wildlife before. In the early 1970s field surveys revealed that tigers were rapidly disappearing, mainly because of the international skin trade and hunting. The Government, recognising that strong leadership and swift action were required, acted decisively: new legislation was enacted, new protected areas, including Tiger Reserves with special Government support, were created and bans on hunting and trading were imposed with new Government structures and increased resources. Although some funds came from abroad, India provided most of the financing itself because it was unacceptable to its Government and people that their tigers, and the forests in which they lived, would be gone forever.

The tiger was rescued from extinction because Indian politicians, led by the Prime Minister, recognised that future generations would forever blame them if the tiger "burning bright" was extinguished forever. India became a world leader in wildlife conservation and deservedly enjoyed a respected and distinguished voice in the international community.

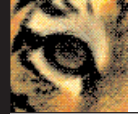
The legislation and Government structures remain. There are still some Government officers who go beyond the call of duty to fight for India's wildlife despite the huge political pressures against them. In the forests some of the poorly paid forest guards and rangers still fight on against poachers, illegal loggers and illegal industrial developments. Extraordinarily, despite some of the most difficult conditions and, in some cases the non-payment of wages for months, some of these people are still willing to risk their lives to protect the forests. Some of them have been killed. Others, after years of exemplary and effective service, are moved to areas where they can no longer be effective, seemingly as a disincentive to others who may still take pride in their work.



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Executive summary

- The primary factor threatening the Indian tiger, its habitat and other wildlife, is the complete lack of political will on the part of the Prime Minister of India's office to act. Expert committee reports recommending strong, effective action are filed away on Ministry shelves. The Indian Board for Wildlife - supposedly India's highest wildlife advisory body chaired by the Prime Minister - has not even met for eight years.
- Poaching for bones for Chinese medicine, for skins, penises, teeth and nails is responsible for the death of at least one tiger each day in India. Poachers and dealers, when they are occasionally apprehended, are routinely released on bail and re-offend.
- Tiger Reserves, National Parks and Sanctuaries can no longer be seen as "Protected Areas". Economic liberalisation has opened all areas to development and tiger habitat across India is being encroached upon, polluted and destroyed by industrial concerns.
- Committed conservation staff are treated with complete indifference. They are poorly trained, poorly equipped, and many go long periods without pay. Wildlife positions are often regarded as "punishment postings". In some areas the situation is so bad that staff have no boots and are stranded at guard posts because of lack of transportation. Forest Department elephants have been found starving with some of them having suspected cases of TB due to malnutrition.
- The Government's Project Tiger has lost its direction and failed to deal with the various crises as they have developed. At the time of going to print, the post of director of Project Tiger had lain vacant for two months because the Prime Minister had not signed the necessary documents for the new director to be appointed.
- Other wildlife trade is also out of control in India including the trade in leopard skins, elephant ivory and rhino horn. India is also the main consumer of the protected and endangered Tibetan Antelope. India has failed to crack down on illegal sales of the wool from these animals (known as "shahtoosh") by the Government of Kashmir and private dealers.
- The solutions to the crisis are known within India, have been repeatedly expressed by Indian tiger experts and have been accepted by Ministry of Environment and Forests expert committees. They await implementation.



“Really strong political will is the one single factor that can really change everything.”
- S. Deb Roy,
former Addl. Inspector General of Forests (Wildlife), Government of India, August 1996.

The laws set up to protect India's wildlife and environment are strong but, unenforced and open to flagrant abuse, they have become useless. If poachers and major wildlife traders are caught, they are usually released on bail the next day and rarely face any punishment. Even India's most notorious wildlife trader remains free and apparently unpunishable, protected in the courts by expensive lawyers.⁴ Diligent and committed wildlife enforcement officers from the State of Uttar Pradesh who have worked so hard to put him in jail for decimating the State's wildlife, are transferred from their posts – seemingly “punished” for their loyalty to wildlife and the law.⁵ A Government commission reports that 90% of dams completed or under construction in its survey of 319 dams have failed to comply with mandatory conditions laid down by the Ministry of Environment and Forests.⁶ Meanwhile, a Tiger Reserve field director symbolically ties a ribbon across the sluice gates of a completed dam to “prevent” it from flooding part of the Reserve, destroying habitat and displacing villagers.⁷

The failures of the Government do not remain undocumented. Some of the most prolific critics of the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) projects are expert committees and commissions set up by MoEF itself. In this respect MoEF could be congratulated for taking such criticism so openly, except that most of the reports of these commissions are filed away on the dusty shelves of the Ministry, never again to see the light of day. One day historians from future generations will dust off the files to discover why India has no forest left with no wildlife and no forest-dwelling tribal people.

Economic pressures

India's rapid change of direction to a free market economy has let loose a variety of powerful factors and created new icons and different measures of “success”. Some investors step cautiously into the Indian bureaucracy while others take advantage of political and institutional corruption. The prospect of cheap labour and weak enforcement of environmental law is extremely attractive to the unscrupulous investor or foreign corporations which constantly scan the globe for ways of gaining price advantages over their



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competitors. Yesterday Bangkok, today Ho Chi Minh City, Bhopal and Calcutta. With these investors come forces which are almost impossible to overcome without strong political support. With the increase in incomes for the small proportion of the population that have benefited, come new power structures within India which break down centuries of Indian culture and sensibilities. Those people in positions of power and influence stand to gain the most if they are prepared to sell their laws, timber and land to the highest bidder. There has never been a greater test for India's political democracy because the temptations for politicians have never been greater.

Out of this dramatic change comes further pressure on the forests and last remaining habitats for India's rich but depleted wildlife. Early conservation policies,

developed before Independence and followed by the Government of India, are now profoundly questioned. The debate is about people and wildlife, so often pitted against each other in former policies. Forest people were evicted from their land as protected areas were set up across India. Promises of relocation and support were broken. Protected areas became seen as playgrounds for the wealthy as foreigners and Indian VIPs were seen visiting ancestral forests.

Enlightened conservationists understand that there has to be a balance between helping local communities and enlisting their help to conserve the forests and wildlife. Abuse of the local people is an abuse of the environment. In an effort to right some of the past wrongs, schemes have been set up which are known as “ecodevelopment”. But the definition of this term is so broad that it is currently used by some politicians to justify encroachment into the protected areas. “Ecodevelopment” funds are available from a wide range of sources and sometimes huge sums of money are involved.

The World Bank is supporting an experimental US\$67 million project over five years on “ecodevelopment” schemes around protected areas in India. But critics have accused them of redefining “ecodevelopment” to mean “economic development” and squandering large sums of money on consultancies and foreign travel. By flooding the fringes of protected areas with new infrastructure and job creation schemes, there are well founded fears that these areas will act as magnets to more people moving in to benefit from such extraordinary amounts of investment. These are areas where, if you are working, a daily wage may not be more than Rs 30 (US\$1). With more people there will be even greater pressure on the forest for fuel wood and timber. More people will squeeze out the tigers, elephants, rhinos and destroy some of the world's richest patches of biodiversity.

Foreign wildlife consumption

The immediate problem facing the tiger is not the massive human population in India as many people would like to depict it. Of course this is an ongoing threat that causes conflict with all wildlife, especially in a country where the majority of the population is rural. But it does not cause the loss of one tiger every day. That is caused by a growing demand for tiger bones, penises, nails and teeth in Chinese communities for use in traditional Chinese medicine and for frivolous food and souvenirs.

The increase in wealth in China and the increase in value of tiger bone has led to the demise of all remaining tiger populations. Every time a ranger, forest guard, or even poacher, is killed, it is directly caused by the buyers of tiger products.

EIA fully endorses international efforts through the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), and outside it, to bring this trade to a complete halt. India and other tiger range states have good reason to be angered by continuing trade. Widows and families of murdered field staff have good reason to wonder why relatively wealthy countries where the trade is illegal, will not, and do not, stamp out the trade completely. The international community has good reason to sanction the Japanese Government for refusing even to ban all tiger part trade. Real and meaningful pressure on countries failing to relieve tiger range states of the insatiable

consumer demand for their tigers must be applied. It can be done and much has been achieved in the last three years, but not enough.

The Indian Government cannot force China to act and stop demand for Indian tigers because of the very real fear of its increasingly powerful and populous neighbour. But the international community can take on this responsibility with leadership and real concern. However, this can only be effective if the Indian Government deals with its own responsibilities to its own environment.

The new Indian Government has a real opportunity to give genuine priority to reverse its serious neglect of India's remaining wilderness. It will need to harness support from State Governments, relevant Ministries and the Planning Commission. It will need to listen to all its Indian advisors and dust off reports and implement them. This will take political courage and true leadership and will deserve the strongest support from the world's leaders.

Without political leadership India's tigers, rhinos and elephants, together with many less visible species, will disappear within the next few years.

Try explaining that to the children of India.

Dave Currey
 Director, EIA
 22nd October, 1996

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Without political leadership India's tigers, rhinos and elephants, together with many less visible species, will disappear within the next few years.

EIA investigator examining tiger skeleton.



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*In an EIA
investigative
telephone survey in
1995 it was found
that 48% of 46
stores contacted in
Tokyo and
Yokohama admitted
stocking products
containing tiger
parts.*

International trade

The tiger: an international symbol of power and freedom, revered in eastern mythology, a creature of the 'jungle', star of Rudyard Kipling's "Jungle Book", Disney movies, company logos. Known by people of every culture in every part of the world.

Three sub-species gone forever this century, fewer than 6,000 live wild tigers left in the world, all on the verge of extinction, with two thirds in India. Tiger skins, bones, penises for sale in Chinese communities all over the world. Political compromises made at CITES, failure of some Governments to enforce legislation and failure of Japan, a major consumer, even to bother to ban all trade. US Sanctions on Taiwan have had some effect but "most favoured nation" China considered too powerful to threaten. South Korean traders rush to stockpile tiger bones because of their imminent extinction.

A very sorry tale of a world unwilling to save one of its best known animals.

Skin and bones

The world was touched by the concept of an India without tigers and in the early 1970s efforts were made to stop tiger poaching and end trade in tiger skins. The anti-fur campaigns in Europe and the USA contributed to relieving India of some of the pressure created by the international trade.

It was not until the late 1980s that the first signs of tiger poaching for their bones emerged in India. The infrastructure to fight the poaching was no longer in place and the pressure of the tiger bone trade was relatively unknown. Behind the trade were the traditional Chinese medicine factories mainly based in China. The skins, previously so prized, became the secondary market.

During this period the Chinese economy had changed and was on the verge of tremendous acceleration. Other Chinese communities in Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea and Thailand were already experiencing increased wealth. All of a sudden, the expensive medicines made from endangered species became affordable to an increasing number of people and drinking tiger penis soup became a status symbol. At the same time, because of poaching and habitat loss, the tiger populations in most of Asia, already decimated for tiger bones, were reduced even further.



The rarity of tigers pushed up prices and the only substantial "supplier" of wild tigers remaining was India.

During the 1980s other factors affected the increase in poaching around the world. Wildlife crimes were, and in most countries still are, considered of very low priority. The wildlife syndicates in India, parts of Africa, Taiwan, China, Hong Kong, Japan, Europe and North America all flourished. Today, illegal wildlife trade is considered by Interpol to be the second largest illegal trade in the world, valued in excess of US\$6 billion annually. Illegal international trade has always survived by diversifying its routes, its contacts and its commodities. The low risk of detection, coupled with extremely high profits, make it very attractive to the biggest international smugglers. Why risk heavy penalties for drug smuggling if equally huge profits can be made out of wildlife with no real risk of imprisonment? Some traders do both.

Japan continues the trade

One of the biggest consumers of Chinese tiger medicines is Japan.

Japan has no wild tigers but has been a primary destination for tiger parts and derivatives. All tigers were listed on Appendix 1 of CITES in 1975 (except the Siberian sub species listed in 1987) which banned all commercial international trade. Japan joined CITES in 1980 but, despite this, in 1990, almost two tonnes of tiger bone were imported from Taiwan according to statistics. It is reported that as recently as 1992, 14.4 million capsules of tiger derivatives were imported from China alone. Between 1990 and 1992 over 71 tonnes of tiger products, 6,430 containers, 40,000 bottles and 492 cartons of tiger wine were imported from China. In 1993 an import quota of 21.6 million capsules was set.¹ During the period between 1990 and 1992 Japan accounted for 30% of China's exports of tiger products (excluding grains, capsules and pills).⁶

In an EIA investigative telephone survey in 1995 it was found that 48% of 46 stores contacted in Tokyo and Yokohama admitted stocking products containing tiger parts. A smaller spot check of 6 stores not previously telephoned revealed that all of them had tiger products. The products were pills and tiger bone wine.²

After considerable international pressure Japan brought in new legislation to ban trade in endangered species in June 1995, but even then failed to ban products which were "not readily recognisable" such as pills and all tiger derivative capsules.³ In further measures Japan has decided to "regulate" trade in tiger parts by means of a voluntary management system within the industry although there is no evidence of

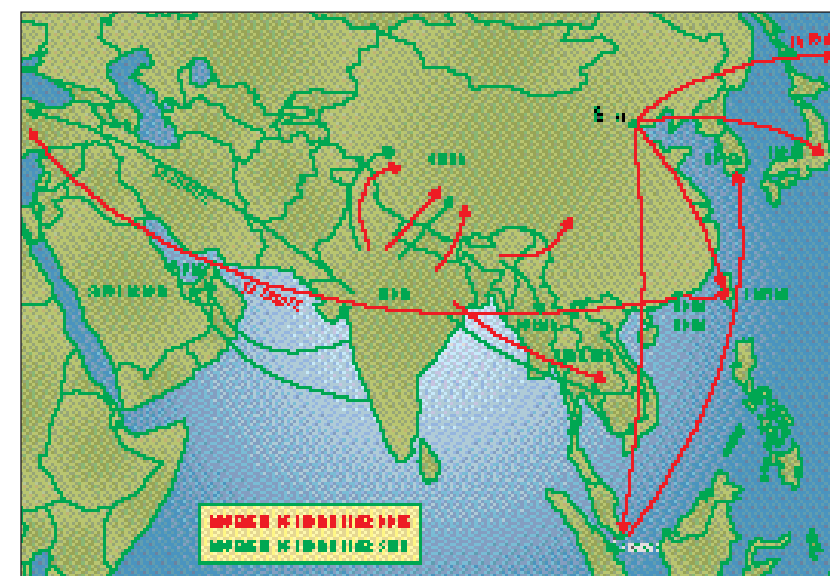
any enforcement activity. It therefore remains one of the few countries, and one of the largest consuming countries, not even to have legislation banning sale of products from this highly endangered species.

International trade routes

The Indian tiger bone trade has followed some traditional trade routes and, like many wildlife trade routes, has hidden in the dark corners of war torn areas and oppressive regimes. The two main tiger bone trade routes pass through Nepal to Tibet and directly into Tibet. The third takes advantage of the military dictatorship in Burma.⁴

Curiously, all these routes are overland and involve bartering other products - including wildlife, drugs and arms. The destination of the bone always seems to be China where the manufacture of medicines takes place. It seems likely that some tiger bone also travels directly from India to its destination by air. The import and export of unprocessed tiger bone has been illegal in China since it joined CITES in 1981,⁵ but the domestic sale was not banned until 1993.⁶ Nonetheless, trade continues.

The main markets for the skins are in the Middle East, parts of Europe and Southeast Asia.



China's appetite for tigers

New legislation and some evidence of increased enforcement in China must be recognised. However, the markets for tiger parts still indicate that China's trade remains very active.

The primary destination for Indian tiger parts is still China. Evidence from South Korea's import data shows that tiger bone imports from Thailand and Indonesia were surpassed for the first time in 1991 by imports from China.⁷ This is despite the fact that China has only a handful of wild tigers left. These exports of bone coincide with the increase in poaching of Indian tigers and evidence of the transport of their bones to China.

Meanwhile, China is the main supplier of traditional Chinese medicines for Chinese communities throughout the world. Tiger parts have been found and seized in the USA, Canada, the UK and Belgium as well as the usual Southeast Asian countries. Between 1990 and 1992 Hong Kong was the main importer of Chinese tiger products (excluding grains, capsules and pills) taking 48% of the business.⁶ Hong Kong is a trading post between China and the rest of the world for Chinese products and provides a convenient intermediary. Recent attempts by the Hong Kong Government to clean up endangered species sales from Chinese pharmacies are unlikely to have done more than scratch the surface of the transit trade.

International culpability

It is entirely fair for Indian conservationists to blame the international community for its failure to end the international trade in tiger parts. But nothing that the international community does will be effective without political leadership in India. Some international progress has been made in the last three years since powerful campaigns were launched against the main consumers, but not enough to prevent the demise of the last tiger. The increased value of tiger parts and the very low populations of all five sub species of tiger mean that even one major Chinese medicine factory could cause extinction.

Above: South Korean traders stockpiled tiger bones because of their imminent extinction.

Below: Bengal tiger skins for sale on Burma/Thai border.





"You can safely assume between 350 and 400 tigers were lost [in India] last year."

- Peter Jackson, Chair, IUCN Cat Specialist Group, February 1996

Above: Tiger bones seized in Uttar Pradesh in July 1996.

Below: Tiger & leopard skins seized.

Indian tiger poaching

At least 1 tiger poached every day in India

The trade in and hunting of wildlife is virtually banned in India under the amendment (1991) of the 1972 Wildlife (Protection) Act.¹ Nonetheless, the poaching of tigers has increased considerably in the last 8 years as Government complacency has set in.

There is considerable disagreement between the Government of India (GOI) and tiger experts over the number of tigers poached annually in recent years. The GOI has recently accepted that there has been serious poaching, but ludicrously claims that the situation is now under control, despite the fact that the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) has no central reporting system and much of the detection has been by non governmental organisations. At the same time the Ministry claims that seizures of tiger parts do not reflect increased poaching but better enforcement.²

It is accepted by enforcement agencies all over the world that seizures of illegal goods, whether of wildlife products or of other contraband, represent only the tip of the iceberg. Indian conservationists have claimed



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© Wildlife Protection Society of India

that for every seizure of parts of one tiger, eight tigers have been smuggled,³ and this could be fairly accurate.

Available data shows that 64 tigers were killed by poachers in 1994 and 114 in 1995.^{3/7/8} If the 8:1 ratio is used this known figure would extrapolate to a figure which suggests that at least 1-2 tigers are poached in India every day.

Renewed poaching

It was in the late 1980s that the rise in tiger poaching became apparent again but this time the target was increasingly tiger bone. The reason for this seems to be that the traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) manufacturers in China were running out of stocks of tiger bones. The tigers in China, Siberia, Indonesia and other Southeast Asian countries were in serious decline or almost extinct. Traders set their sights on the Indian tigers and close links were formed between Tibetan traders and Indian wildlife dealers to smuggle the bones into Tibet. Soon, other routes and contacts developed.

Tiger poaching out of control

Most tiger poaching is carried out in forested and rural lands by local forest dwellers or subsistence farmers.

The poachers are often encouraged to kill tigers by middlemen who are paid by the big traders. Tigers are usually poisoned but they are also shot and trapped. It has recently been learned that some traders now employ people to kill tigers and leopards. Other reports show that poison is supplied to villagers free of charge.

Poison (often Aldrin⁴ - a common pesticide) is either laid in a buffalo or cow carcass already killed by a tiger, to await its return, or it is put in small forest water pools. Steel traps are placed throughout a forest, in some cases making it difficult for villagers to enter the forest for fear of serious injury from the traps. Guns are used when there is little fear of being caught.⁵

It is reported by the Wildlife Protection Society of India that in 1994 four tribal people were paid US\$14 each to kill a tiger in the State of Madhya Pradesh. The killing method may cost US\$1.30 for poison or US\$8.60 for a steel trap. A middleman may receive US\$340 - US\$1,140 for a tiger skin and at most US\$2,400 for the bones. A major trader who deals with the foreign buyer will sell a whole tiger (skin and bones) for up to US\$5,700.⁵

Although not considered widespread, there has



been a report of tigers and leopards being killed for meat in the north eastern State of Nagaland. An Indian newspaper report states "Like the Chinese, the Nagas have gobbled up their wildlife. In fact they feast on anything that creeps and crawls. Visitors to Nagaland cannot help noticing the intense stillness - the absence of twittering birds and animal sounds."⁶

Poaching seems to continue unabated: by the end of August 1996 there had already been 27 tiger skins and 44 kg of bone seized and information on a further 21 tiger deaths.⁷ Around Dudhwa Tiger Reserve five tiger skins, four leopard skins, 16 kg tiger bones and 15 kg of ivory were seized in three separate incidents in a four week period.⁸

The Tiger State - the last stronghold breached

The State of Madhya Pradesh was declared "The Tiger State" in 1994 by the State Government in recognition of its unique status and in an attempt to attract development funds.⁹ This may be the last stronghold for the tiger in the world. The State still has 21% forest cover and may be home to over a quarter of India's wild tigers and about one sixth of the world population of all wild tigers.

It has also been hit very hard by poachers and between May and July 1994 two Ngo investigators, with the help of informers and undercover work, reported on the trade in tigers and other wildlife in Madhya Pradesh. Cat skins were found in every town visited. The districts with the biggest problems were Jabalpur, Mandla, Balaghat, and Satna. In these districts alone, 42 tiger and leopard poachers and 32 skin traders were identified. The skins and bones of 39 freshly killed tigers were offered, with further information on 45 tiger and leopard skins.¹⁰

Tiger trade routes

Tigers are poached in virtually all tiger range areas of India. Recent hopes that it had not yet reached southern India were dashed by a seizure of a skin in Bandipur Tiger Reserve in July 1995.¹¹ The skins and bones are dealt through traders in the main cities and kept in different places to avoid detection.

The main routes out of India are through the States of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Nagaland and Manipur. The town of Leh in the Ladakh region of Jammu and Kashmir had been considered a major trading route until recent seizures appeared to have put a stop to this. However, with the more recent seizure of a skin in Leh it seems that bones and skins are still traded from there.

Other routes are through the States of Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim and neighbouring countries Nepal, Bhutan and Burma. Major wildlife smuggling routes all lead to China. In some cases the tiger bones are sent by rail or air and at other times carried by yak by Tibetan nomads. The towns of Pithoragarh (Uttar Pradesh) and Shiliguri (West Bengal) have both been routes through to Tibet.¹² Gangtok (Sikkim) and Bomdilla (Arunachal Pradesh) are also on the tiger bone and skin smuggling route.¹³ In Burma the wildlife trade is reported to be under the control of the military rulers and passes along the same routes as the timber and opium trade to Yunnan in China.¹⁴ Major wildlife trade towns on the border with Burma are Tuensang and Noklang (Nagaland) and Imphal (Manipur).^{13/14} Dimapur is also identified as a major collecting point for wildlife before being exchanged for arms or drugs with the Burmese.¹⁵

© Tiger Link



Too easy to find tiger parts

In November 1995 EIA travelled to different parts of India to meet with tiger experts and assess the ease with which tiger parts could be found. A short undercover operation was carried out in Calcutta which resulted in the seizure by authorities of three leopard skins.

Investigators made initial enquiries in the New Market area of central Calcutta and within two days had identified a skin trader. He offered three leopard and one tiger skin as well as other wildlife products including ivory and snake skins. The tiger skin was seen and identified as authentic by the investigators.

Other investigations also revealed the ease of obtaining illegal wildlife goods. Although EIA recognises that enforcement of wildlife law is lacking in many countries, the ease of obtaining such products in three major cities in India was shocking. Most detection of wildlife crime is done by diligent Ngos and handfuls of committed and interested enforcement officers from various Indian Government bodies, including forest officials, the police and others. Where general enforcement activity exists, it is reactive rather than proactive and even then, in many cases, there is absolutely no interest from the authorities.



EIA investigators easily uncovered a trader in Calcutta.



“Every major controversy over the declining number of tigers in National Parks in northern India has, in fact, been traced to this one man.”

- Telegraph, Calcutta, 23rd July 1995.

Sansar Chand

NOTORIOUS WILDLIFE TRADER WALKS FREE - AGAIN AND AGAIN

One of the obstacles to stamping out poaching in India is the abject failure of the judicial system to deal swiftly and justly with poachers and traders. There are repeated claims of bribery of officials and judges.

The case of Sansar Chand is probably the most important and graphic example of the failure of India's justice system to stamp out illegal wildlife trade. He is said to be responsible for most of the major wildlife crime in northern India.¹⁶ The Indian press has covered the case of Sansar Chand and the repeated failures of the courts to take him out of circulation. At least 40 cases are pending against him dating back to 1974, as police, wildlife officials and wildlife Ngos have fought to get him convicted.

Sansar Chand comes from a family of wildlife traders and has been involved himself for about 24 years. He is believed to control the major poaching in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh. Many cases of poaching and seizures of skins and bone are reported to lead back to him. His network is said to be very sophisticated with agents who hire people to kill the animals and skin them. He is also said to have set up a network to get the skins and bones out of India especially to East Asia for Chinese medicines.¹⁷ Although there seems little doubt that Sansar Chand is one of the major dealers in India, he is not believed to be connected to Mafia or any other criminal groups. Wildlife trade has been in his family for generations.¹⁸ He knows nothing else and is clever enough to avoid punishment by his astute use of the weaknesses in the Indian legal system.

In July 1995 he avoided going to prison by falling “sick”, which prevented the authorities from being allowed to interrogate him. He was released on bail. In another clever move, to avoid being prosecuted in Uttar Pradesh where cases are pending against him, he had himself put under judicial custody for failing to produce a bail bond - he claimed this was to escape persecution by the forest department and Ngos!¹⁹

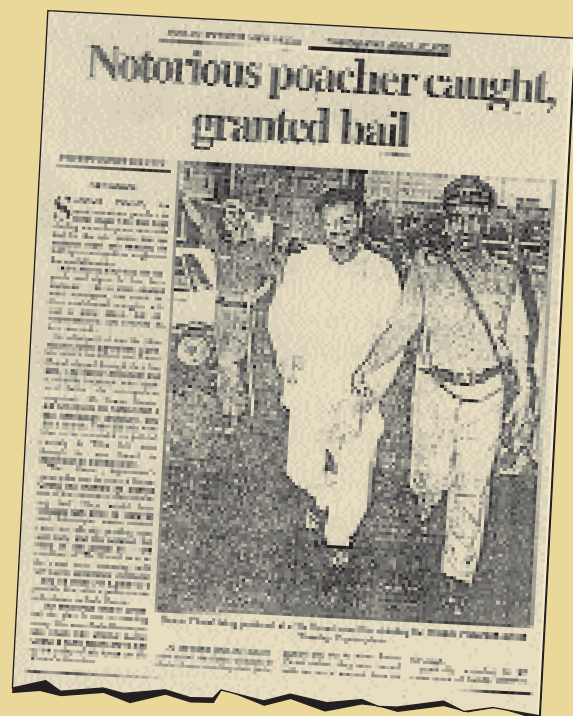
While Uttar Pradesh forest officials waited to arrest him with a non-bailable warrant outside a Delhi court, he was escorted by Delhi police who had been ordered by the judge to take him to Tihar prison. Sansar Chand is quoted as saying “I am sure they [the forest officials] will kill me in a fake encounter. How can I let them arrest me? Tihar is the safest place for me”.²⁰



© Wildlife Protection Society of India

Sansar Chand was finally jailed for offences in January 1993 for a case that was first heard in 1974. It had taken 19 years for the Indian legal system to deal with the proceedings, during which time his illegal operations continued to seriously impact India's wildlife. In many cases in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, poachers and traders caught with their booty have implicated Sansar Chand as the “owner” of the products.

After the July 1995 proceedings Sansar Chand was released again and further cases and hearings are continuing. The four main forest officials from Uttar Pradesh who had caught Sansar Chand and pursued him to Delhi, were transferred. These transfers will make it virtually impossible to continue these cases against Sansar Chand and observers read this as a loud and clear statement from the Uttar Pradesh State Government: “stay away from Sansar Chand.”²¹ The head of the team, the Conservator of Forests (Meerut Division) has been appointed regional manager of the Forest Corporation, a post which had lain unfilled for the previous two and a half years. The Ministry of Environment and Forests is reported to have described these transfers by Uttar Pradesh as “atrocious and senseless”.

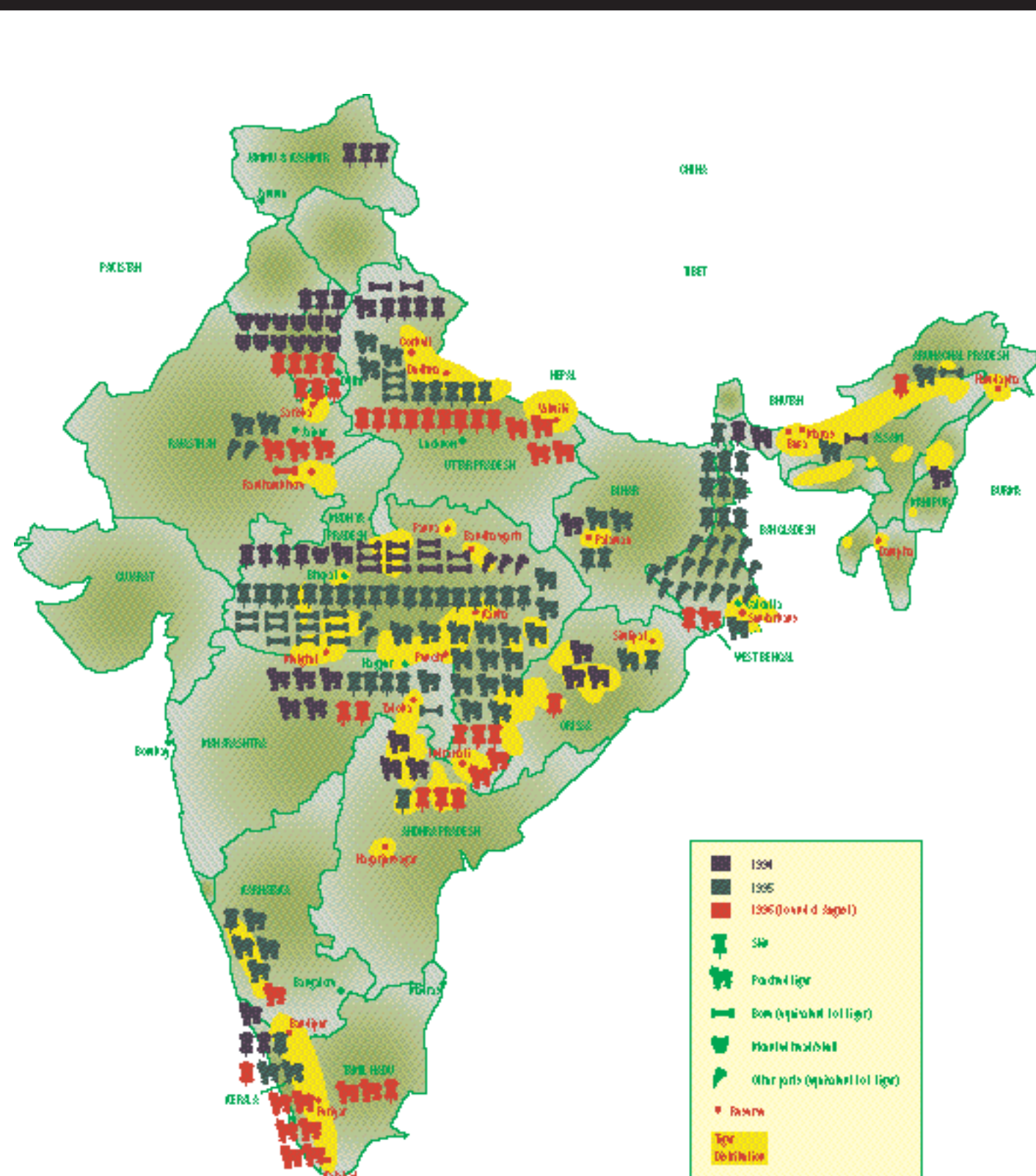


SOME OF THE CASES ¹⁹ SANSAR CHAND HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN

- 25/3/88 - seizure of 29,369 skins including 1 tiger, 5 leopard, 1,223 small cats and 25,800 snake and other skins.
- 23/2/90 - seizure of 92 skins and 30 kg tiger bones (1 tiger, 17 leopard and 74 otters).
- 27/10/92 - seizure of 45 skins (3 tiger, 29 leopard, 2 clouded leopard, 5 crocodile and 6 jackal).

- 11/5/93 - seizure of 20 skins (6 leopard and 14 otter).
- 8/93 - 265 skins (8 tiger, 165 leopard, 92 small cat and others).
- 4/5/95 - 3 leopard skins.
- 28/6/95 - 2 leopard skins, 5.5 kg leopard bones.
- 6/7/95 - 1 leopard skin.
- 17/7/95 - 1 leopard skin.

Map of India showing tiger range, Tiger Reserves, recorded seizures and poaching incidents by State, 1994-1996 (to end of August).^{3/7/8}



© EIA 1996



EIA was proudly told by a pharmacist in Guangzhou, China, that the bones he sold were not tiger - they were leopard.

Other illegal wildlife trade in India

While this report focuses mainly on the plight of the tiger and its habitat, many other species are suffering the same fate. It is therefore important to see the tiger trade in the context of the illegal trade in other wildlife.

There is an almost complete failure of the system to enforce the trade bans under the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act. Although trade is considered to have reduced since it was banned, many wildlife commodities are still illegally traded in vast numbers. For instance, in an undercover study in Madras in 1994, it was revealed that 400,000 snake skins were available annually.¹

Rhinos

The Indian one-horned rhinoceros is under very serious threat of being wiped out. Since 1992 it is reported that 123 one-horned rhinos have been poached in their last stronghold - Kaziranga National Park in the State of Assam.² It has already been exterminated from Laokhawa Wildlife Sanctuary, where only thirteen years ago nearly 5% of the world population remained.³ The poachers are exploiting the civil conflicts in the north east of India and the proximity of the rhino populations to Tibet, China, Bhutan, Nepal and Burma. There is a strong connection between the rhino horn and the drugs/arms trade. Gangs of poachers sell wildlife and especially valuable rhino horn in exchange for Chinese arms which are used to supply the Burmese military.⁴

Right: Trader offering ivory in Calcutta's New Market filmed on video by EIA investigators.

Below: 3 leopard skins seized in Calcutta in November 1995, following an EIA investigation.

SKIN TRADE

Many species are poached for their skins. In 1994 and the first three months of 1995 the Wildlife Preservation Department reported that the skins of 539 jackals, 145 civet cats, 942 jungle cats, 212 desert cats and 796 desert foxes were seized by police. Additionally they seized 416 kg of skin of the common fox, three tiger skins, 7 fishing cat skins and 21 snake skins.⁶



© Wildlife Protection Society of India/DRL

In 1994 over 143 leopard skins were seized as well as mounted heads and a whole stuffed specimen. In 1995 at least 23 skins were seized along with various leopard parts and 8 kg of leopard bones. In the first four months of 1996 two dead leopards were found and 64 skins seized including two big hauls of 20 leopard skins each in Orissa and West Bengal. It is reported that the skins in the West Bengal seizure were from Assam and destined for Calcutta.⁵

Elephants

Although the price of ivory has gone down in recent years, the ivory trade still takes its toll of male Asian elephants (females have no tusks) and in some parts of the elephants' range the male/female ratio is now considered to have reached a critical state for the future of wild Indian elephants.⁷

In recent months there have been movements of ivory out of India, mainly heading for the Middle East.⁸



© EIA

Other common wildlife trade

The musk trade is estimated to be worth US\$500,000 and in 1992 a kingpin of the business was murdered by rivals. Bear parts are being taken from poached sloth and Himalayan black bears and frogs' legs are believed to be smuggled in large quantities from India to Bangladesh. Trade in live birds and snake skins has been recorded in large seizures.

The Tibetan Antelope (Chiru) - linked to tiger trade

While India has good reason to ask for international assistance to stem demand for its wildlife abroad, the trade in the wool, known as shahtoosh, from the endangered Tibetan Antelope (*Pantholops hodgsoni*) involves consumption of a Tibetan species in India. Indians also sell the goods manufactured from this species to countries all over the world.

All commercial international trade in Tibetan Antelope is prohibited by its Appendix 1 listing on CITES. All internal trade is prohibited because of its Schedule 1 listing on the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act (WPA). Nonetheless, the State of Jammu and Kashmir's legislation does not conform to the WPA and has not prohibited the trade in shahtoosh within that State. It is clear, however, that any sale in any other Indian State is illegal.

The trade in shahtoosh and in the wool of a domesticated goat (pashmina) is linked to the tiger bone and skin trade. The tiger parts are transported over the mountains by Tibetan nomads who are often paid in shahtoosh and pashmina. In this way, a trader who invests in tiger parts can greatly increase his profits by

Tibetan Antelope - killed for its wool

PRIVATE SHAHTOOSH DEALERS

Private dealers approached by EIA had connections in Kashmir and some gave Kashmir factory addresses.

Investigators were approached on the street in Delhi and taken to "Karnai Cottage Exposition", Raza Market, Janpath Lane. They were shown shahtoosh shawls and told that they could be supplied in large quantities. Evidence was provided to show that shipments were sent to Toronto, Canada to prove that export was possible.¹²

In Calcutta most EIA investigations were centred on the cat trade but one private dealer offered shahtoosh. "Habib Mullick & Sons" is on Lindsay Street and investigators were shown shahtoosh shawls and offered them in bulk for between US\$630 and US\$715 each.¹³

In Bombay investigators were led to "Mahad Joo & Sons", 4 Merweather Road. They were offered shahtoosh shawls in natural (beige) and, the latest fad, brightly coloured shawls weighing 11g for US\$630. They were also shown cheaper mixtures of shahtoosh and pashmina. The salesman explained that each extra gramme of shahtoosh increased the price by US\$57. He claimed to be able to supply 2-300 shahtoosh shawls every 3 months but was not prepared to export, although he said the main customers for shahtoosh were the Germans, French, Italians, and Japanese. He said that the foreign demand had started 7-10 years ago and now the demand was outstripping the supply.

He also claimed to have a stock of skins under lock and key registered with the Indian Government in Kashmir which were not for sale: 100 leopard skins, 15-20 tiger skins and snow and clouded leopard skins.¹⁴

KASHMIR GOVERNMENT OWNED SHOPS

In both Bombay and Calcutta, EIA investigators visited the Kashmir Government Arts Emporium to see if shahtoosh was illegally available. In both shops it was openly for sale and the general sales talk was very similar.

In the Calcutta emporium shahtoosh was advertised

dealing in the wool and selling goods manufactured from it. It has been reported that profit margins can increase by 600% when exchanging tiger bone for shahtoosh.⁹

The Tibetan antelope is found in the high regions of Tibet and north western India bordering Tibet although it is doubtful if the Indian population exceeds 50 animals. The Tibetan population is about 35,000 animals.¹⁰ It is a small animal which lives above the tree line and the wool is sheared from the animals after they have been killed. Scientist George Schaller reports the hunting of the Tibetan antelope in large numbers.¹¹

Shahtoosh is a very fine and extremely warm wool and its name means "king of wool". The wool is woven into shawls in the Kashmir Valley and they can be passed through a finger ring and are therefore known as "ring shawls".

EIA investigators established how easy it is to find pure shahtoosh shawls in Delhi, Bombay and Calcutta in November 1995 and May 1996. A handful of private dealers were visited as well as the Kashmir Government Arts Emporia in Calcutta and Bombay. Evidence was gathered which showed that the trade was flourishing and orders were regularly taken for export sales.

© Dave Curney/EIA



quite openly. Investigators were quoted US\$1,085 for each shawl but negotiated this down to US\$805 each for a bulk order of 15 shawls. The manager said that they could supply 7 or 8 shawls immediately and he could get the rest within three weeks. He said he could easily get 10 shahtoosh shawls every three months.

Investigators were told that there was no problem with the export of the shawls. The Kashmir Government stamp on the shawl assured their security and they could be sent as "handicrafts". The manager said that they would prepare two invoices - one for the correct price for payment, and another one at a much lower price for Customs and tax officials to reduce import tax/duty liability.¹³

In Bombay the Kashmir Government Arts Emporium also openly advertised shahtoosh for sale. They had seven shahtoosh shawls in stock, 3 darker (US\$1,085), 3 lighter (US\$1,285) and one patterned with stripes (US\$1,285). They offered a 15% export discount. They claimed that the patterned shawl was a new product being tested on the market and only three had been made. They had received it the previous week.

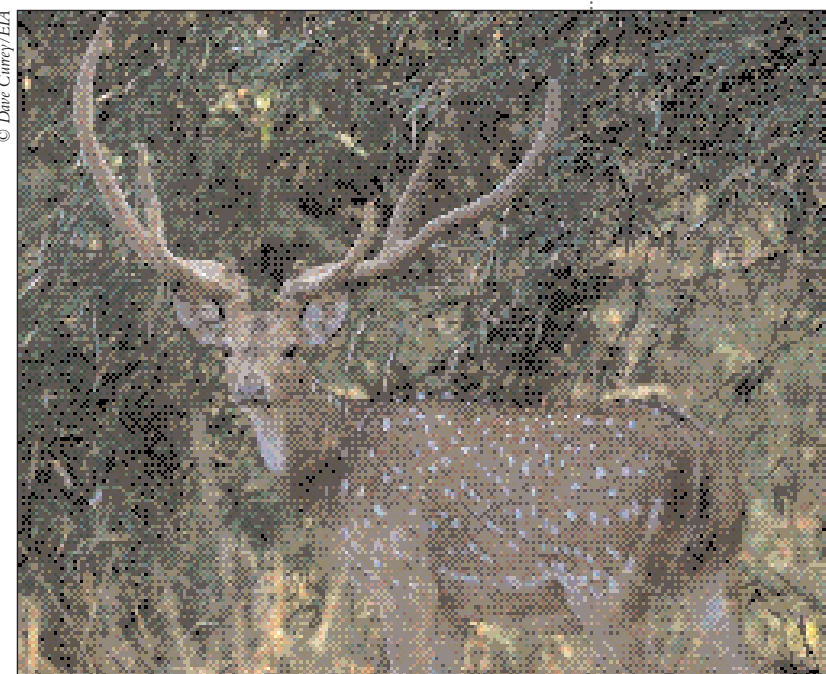
They showed the Kashmir Government embroidered labels and stamps on the shawl and explained that the Government provides a certificate of authenticity. As in Calcutta, they explained that they issued two invoices on Government paper - one real one and another undervalued for Customs. The goods are described on Customs documents as "handlooms". They claimed to be able to supply 50 per month without difficulty.¹⁴

Kashmir Government Emporia explained to EIA undercover investigators that they issue two invoices on Government paper, one real and another undervalued for Customs.

Above left: Kashmir Government Emporium in Bombay claiming to be able to supply 50 shahtoosh shawls every month to EIA undercover investigators.

Below: Chital - killed for their skins.

© Dave Curney/EIA





The recently retired director informed EIA that as a Government servant it was his job “to play down scandals.”

Project Tiger lost its way

Launched in 1973, Project Tiger now administers 23 Tiger Reserves and ploughs additional funds into these protected areas. The initial success of the Project seems to have effectively hidden from its administrators a number of serious problems which were building up. As Indian and international conservationists patted themselves on the back a number of serious factors were emerging. It would be unfair to say that these problems were not recognised, but they were certainly not dealt with in the same diligent and energetic manner displayed at Project Tiger's launch. As tiger populations recovered and Tiger Reserves flourished, complacency set in. Meanwhile the threats grew.

In the last 5 years the directorate of Project Tiger in New Delhi has failed to co-ordinate, assist or initiate rapid field action in the interest of the tiger. Bureaucracy and rhetoric are in greater supply than action. The recently retired director informed EIA that as a Government servant it was his job “to play down scandals.”¹

The director of Project Elephant wrote on 22nd July 1996 that “the Government of India considers the conservation of tiger a sensitive issue.” He asked the director of the Wildlife Institute of India to “assure the Government of India that no sensitive information will be let out”. At the time of going to print, the position of director of Project Tiger had been vacant for 2 months.

Some key factors affecting Project Tiger

Since the launch of Project Tiger:

- Political will to save tigers and their ecosystems evaporated with the assassinations of Indira and then Rajiv Gandhi. Abuse of power and political corruption increased and started to demoralise even



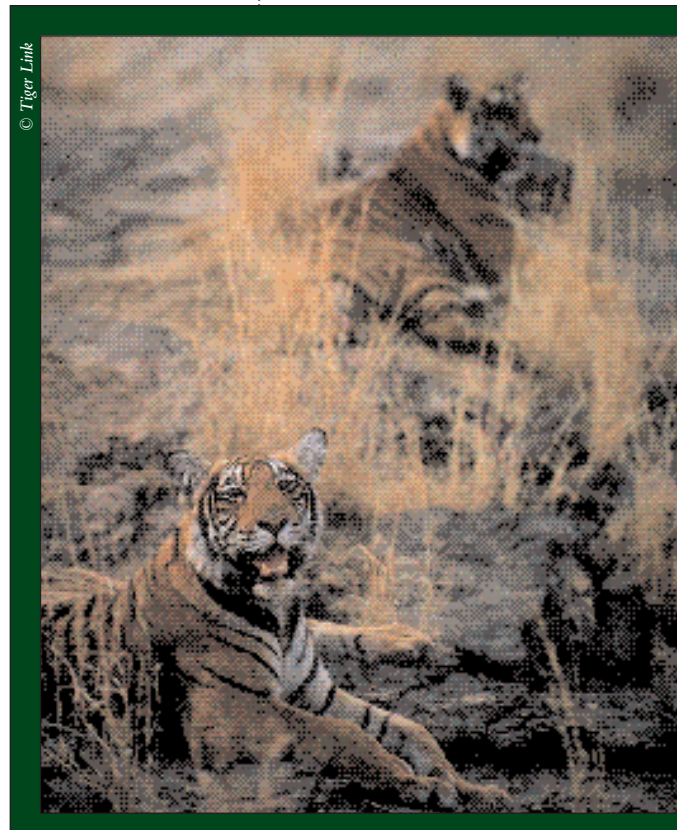
© Dave Curry/EIA

committed field staff.

- Greedy Chinese tiger bone dealers turned their attention on India when tigers were virtually wiped out everywhere else and bone stockpiles were used up. This coincided with increasing economic growth in Chinese communities.
- India turned to a market economy which created greater expectations of development and consumerism, accelerating illegal use of natural resources.
- India's human population increased by 300 million and the population of livestock in India increased by over 100 million.
- Poor rural villagers, displaced from their ancestral forests to create core areas, were not given sufficient support to create new lives outside the ecosystems they knew so well.
- Politicians, wildlife traders and developers stirred local discontent for their own ends.
- Political insurgents started to use the forests as their protection against the Indian Government and legal system, resulting in attacks on, and murders of, wildlife staff and destruction of Reserve infrastructure.

Above right: Sambar. Project Tiger was seen as a way of protecting a wide range of habitat with the tiger as a keystone species.

Opposite page: Area surrounding Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve.



© Tiger Link

WHAT IS PROJECT TIGER?

Project Tiger is a Government of India project working within the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF). Its director is based in New Delhi. It is funded mainly by Central Government as well as receiving external funding from other Governments, Ngos, and international agencies.

Project Tiger Reserves are claimed to be better staffed than other protected areas such as National Parks or Sanctuaries (those which are not under Project Tiger). The Project Tiger Reserves are claimed to receive four to five times more money than ordinary National Parks. Salaries are half paid by State Government and half by Central Government. Research, veterinary care, habitat improvement, capital expenditure and compensation are paid by Central Government. Management plans, staff recruitment and similar initiatives are carried out co-operatively between State Government and Project Tiger.¹

Ecodevelopment schemes for local communities are often funded by other Government agencies or by larger schemes with outside funding.

Funds accrued from Park entrance fees are not ploughed back into Reserves as a matter of course. However, the State of Madhya Pradesh, which currently has four Project Tiger Reserves, does put money earned by Parks back into the Parks² and the new Assam State Government has pledged to do the same.³

Field directors of most Project Tiger Reserves are moved on every three years and where infrastructure is poor (poor schools, no opportunities etc) they try to move more quickly.^{4,5}

THE EARLY YEARS

The first stage of Project Tiger displayed enthusiasm, expertise and an immense political will to save tigers and the ecosystems in which they lived. From the start this project was seen as a way of protecting a wide range of habitats and wildlife with the tiger as a keystone species.

Project Tiger was hailed as an international success story with reports of increasing numbers of tigers from regular censuses. The problems of poaching and sport-hunting were believed to have virtually stopped due to legislation, political commitment, and a decrease in the international demand for tiger skins. Reserves were set up with core areas and buffer zones. Core areas were supposed to be without human habitation while villages were still allowed in the buffer zones with certain restrictions.

But the initial success was not to last.

- Key field staff, including field directors, were moved from projects they had given their full commitment to because they stood up for their staff, their Reserves, or the spirit and letter of Project Tiger and the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act.

Govt apathy poses threat to 'Project Tiger'

Tigers outside Reserves

More than half India's tigers are believed to live outside protected areas but there is little verified information of their numbers. The human population increase and the consequent increase in demand for fuel wood and firewood has left some of these areas no longer suitable tiger habitat.

In a recent study, an area surrounding Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve in the State of Madhya Pradesh which was reported to be home to 36 tigers was visited.⁷ However, the report stated that the tiger “was conspicuous by its absence from most areas except in the immediate vicinity of the protected areas.” It also noted that there was hardly any prey base to sustain a tiger population. Villagers and forest department field staff were interviewed and it was clear that tigers had been present until quite recently, but any signs of them now are patchy.⁸

Many conservationists have already reconciled themselves to the idea that tigers will probably only survive in a handful of protected areas and will disappear completely from land where they compete with people.



© Dave Curry/EIA

VITAL ISSUES FACING PROJECT TIGER

The description of Project Tiger with its extra funds and personnel available sounds very productive. It is probably true to say that the extra resources, when and if they arrive, do make a considerable difference to protected areas. But such overall support conceals what is happening in the field.

Following is a list of vital issues affecting 16 Tiger Reserves identified at a meeting of Project Tiger field directors in 1995 and a subsequent survey through a questionnaire. This list is a damning indictment and demonstrates the serious neglect that the project has suffered.

The following is a summary of the full survey.⁶

CATEGORY	VITAL ISSUE	% (of 16 Reserves)
Project Tiger management	Do not receive their budget on time	63
Project Tiger management	Do not have an appropriate and approved management plan for the Reserve	31
Project Tiger management	Have vacant posts	88
Project Tiger management	Are not getting any special allowance for Project Tiger staff	69
Project Tiger management	Have not been given any format for inquiring into major death cases for tigers	50
Project Tiger management	Do not have any general instruction regarding night patrolling by various levels of staff	31
Legal	Do not have legal status in terms of final notification of the Park	82
Anti-poaching	Have reported cases of tiger or leopard poaching	19
Anti-poaching	Do not have an effective armed strike force for anti-poaching	75
Anti-poaching	Do not have a large vehicle for the mobility of this strike force	63
Anti-poaching	Do not have adequate funds for intelligence gathering	63
Anti-poaching	Do not have sufficient legal aid to deal with offences and counter offences	75
Anti-poaching	Do not have any registration of arms in 10 km radius of Park	69
Staff	Do not have a forest guard welfare scheme	81
Staff	Do not have a yearly award scheme	69
Staff	Are not able to provide any jungle kits for their staff (others are not able to provide kits for all their staff)	31
Community	Have villages in the core area	63
Community	Have not conducted any socio-economic survey of the area adjacent to the Reserve	44
Community	Are not spending any money on ecodevelopment. (In the majority of cases where money is being spent it is too early to comment on tangible effects)	19
Community	Do not have a regular programme of inoculation of cattle against diseases	50
Area management	Do not have unitary control of the area	50
Area management	Do not have good relationships with the district authorities	19
Area management	Have adjacent territorial divisions where tigers are found	100
Area management	Face problems of forest fires	75
Area management	Do not have a bilingual interpretation centre for local communities and tourists	75
Research	Do not monitor daily movements of tigers	56
Research	Do not have any serious research programme	38



The Indian Board for Wildlife - India's highest wildlife advisory body chaired by the Prime Minister - has not even met for 8 years.

Politics of poaching

The current Indian tiger poaching crisis has been recognised by the Government since the early 1990s. In 1993 the tiger census indicated a large drop in numbers, further fuelling calls for the Government to act. Although many initiatives have been undertaken, all of which look exemplary on paper, there has been an almost complete failure to implement any major activity. During this period protected area land has been diverted to other uses, poaching networks have become more organised and resentment of protected areas has continued to be stirred up in local communities.

EIA recognises the hard work and commitment of many Government staff and has heard their frustrations. But the political leadership has failed India's wildlife. This section highlights Government reaction to the problems and looks at the recommendations of Government reports.

The fiasco - "One tiger poached"

Perhaps the most disappointing Government reaction in 1995 was its absurd contention that only one tiger had been poached up to July.¹ Any close observer of the tiger poaching crisis, or reader of Indian newspapers, was aware of the ongoing problems. The statement given by the Minister of Environment and Forests (MoEF) in writing to the Indian Parliament, the Lok Sabha, was untrue, politically naïve, and demonstrated an arrogance by his Ministry that had followed years of complacency. Any hope that the last Government would implement meaningful action evaporated with this fiasco.

This statement was followed by Ngo criticism and



Pioneer, 15th February 1996. Interview with Peter Jackson, Chair of IUCN Cat Specialist Group.

evidence of the ongoing poaching of tigers.² The Ministry has counter-claimed that it has had some success in stemming much of the poaching with increased enforcement activity and the 1995 tiger census figures claimed an increase in numbers.³ The tiger census techniques are heavily criticised by many conservationists as being biased upwards. This is because the loss of tigers in any one area would indicate failure by the staff who also carry out the census. The method used is also under question.⁴

The Indian Board for Wildlife

This is the highest body for advising on the management of wildlife and is chaired by the Prime Minister.

It has not met since 1988.⁵

The Subramanian Committee

Published in August 1994 by MoEF, the "report of the committee on prevention of illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products" was the result of growing concern within India about the increase in poaching and illegal wildlife trade. It was chaired by the former director general of the Central Reserve Police Force and the National Security Guards, Dr. S. Subramanian.⁶

Not a single recommendation in the report has been implemented and it took a year for the Ministry to call a meeting of State wildlife representatives to "review" the findings. This was seen as another delaying tactic. The MoEF claims that the budgetary implications of the recommendations involve the Finance Ministry, and so the failure to act continues. Ashok Kumar, a member of the committee, is quoted as saying "Nothing has come of it, though we have written several follow up letters to the Ministry. The report just continues to gather dust." The Ministry has been accused of failing to take a lead in implementing the recommendations of the report and of allowing itself to be browbeaten into lethargy and virtual inaction.⁶

The committee made 56 recommendations which were designed to achieve the following:

- Enlist local people in the protection of wildlife (recs. 1-8).
- Develop an enforcement strategy (recs. 9-38).
- Motivate field staff and provide ameliorative measures (recs. 39-48).
- Prevent illegal import and export of wildlife and its products (recs. 49-56).

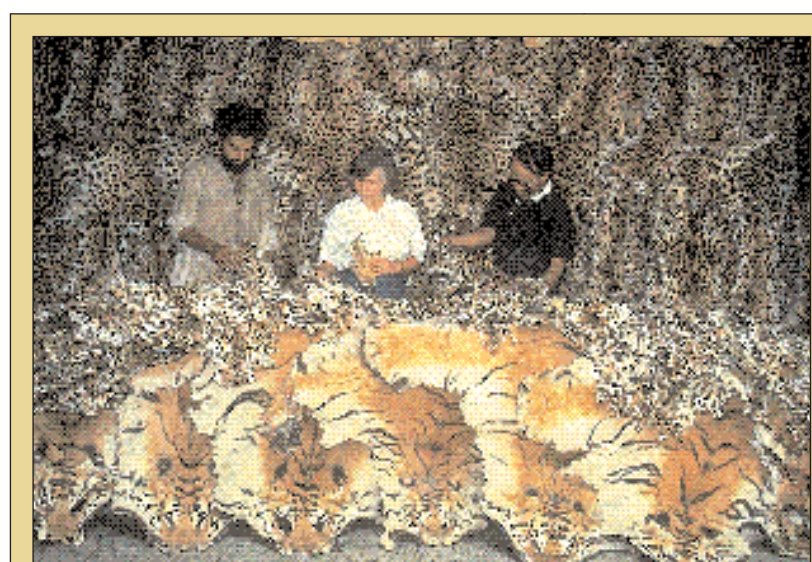
High Court

Following a High Court writ, the Hon'ble High Court of Delhi directed a committee to be convened to make recommendations to the court. The report of this committee, chaired by M.F Ahmed, Inspector General of Forests, was published in February 1996. It was highly critical of the current situation and made very strong recommendations (see box overleaf).

Two of its key recommendations are that the Indian Board for Wildlife, which it notes has not met since 1988, is given statutory authority under the Wildlife Protection Act. It also recommends that a new Ministry for Natural Resources (Forests and Wildlife) be set up to deal only with forests and wildlife. It states that "the Ministry of Environment and Forests spends a large portion of its administrative time and finances dealing with the evaluation and facilitation of large scale projects in the industrial, hydro-electric, thermal power, mining and other miscellaneous sectors."

This committee, chaired by the highest forest and wildlife civil servant in the MoEF makes some damning statements:

"All politicians and leaders of political parties seem to be unwilling to stand up for wildlife and take the risk of formulating a 'pro-wildlife policy'. Wildlife conservation, which has been implemented mainly through the Protected Areas system and the Wildlife (Protection) Act, is currently under attack as



Dr. Subramanian and his committee wrote on 8th August 1994:

"We are of the unanimous view that illegal trade in wildlife has raised its ugly head in recent times in an organised manner in our country and lack of a well-structured enforcement machinery and a system of flow of information are hampering any meaningful effort to put an end to this menace. There is a need for a time bound action plan. The several remedial measures suggested in order of priority are:

- (1) enlisting active co-operation of the local people by making protected area management pro-people, pro-poor and pro-nature;
- (2) upgrading morale and motivation of protected area staff;
- (3) strengthening of staff capability to prevent crime; and
- (4) last but not the least are the measures to apprehend criminals and achieve quick and deterrent punishment."

None of the recommendations have been implemented.

symptomatic of a power system which is undemocratic, authoritarian and contemptuous of the rights and the needs of the local communities affected by the imposition of the protective measures which favour wildlife!"⁷

"The political hierarchy followed by the bureaucracy have very little perception of wildlife, ecology and sustainable management, but nonetheless always decide the fate of wildlife."⁸

"... as the State governments are doing whatever they want, without any consideration to whatever may be the guidelines or whatever may be the directives or even in defiance of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, with impunity. There is just no priority for wildlife planning in the States.

"For example, central assistance in development budget allocation even in Centrally Sponsored wildlife schemes do not often reach the field in full. Such funds are often (almost regularly) diverted outside State forestry budget allocation not to speak of wildlife. This causes great harm to the wildlife interests, but the State Governments do not even care to respond to Central Government's queries in this regard."⁹

"Quite often people are posted in wildlife management, more or less as a punishment posting. Usually Government is so indifferent and irresponsible to wildlife management that good work goes unnoticed as also bad lapses go unpunished. Strong curative steps have to be taken against such whimsical treatment of wildlife matters by the State Government."¹⁰

"All politicians and leaders of political parties seem to be unwilling to stand up for wildlife and take the risk of formulating a 'pro-wildlife policy'."
- Report of Committee appointed by High Court of Delhi, February 1996.





Expert Committee reports gather dust on Ministry shelves.

SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT RECOMMENDATIONS OF COMMITTEE APPOINTED BY THE HONORABLE HIGH COURT OF DELHI, FEBRUARY 1996

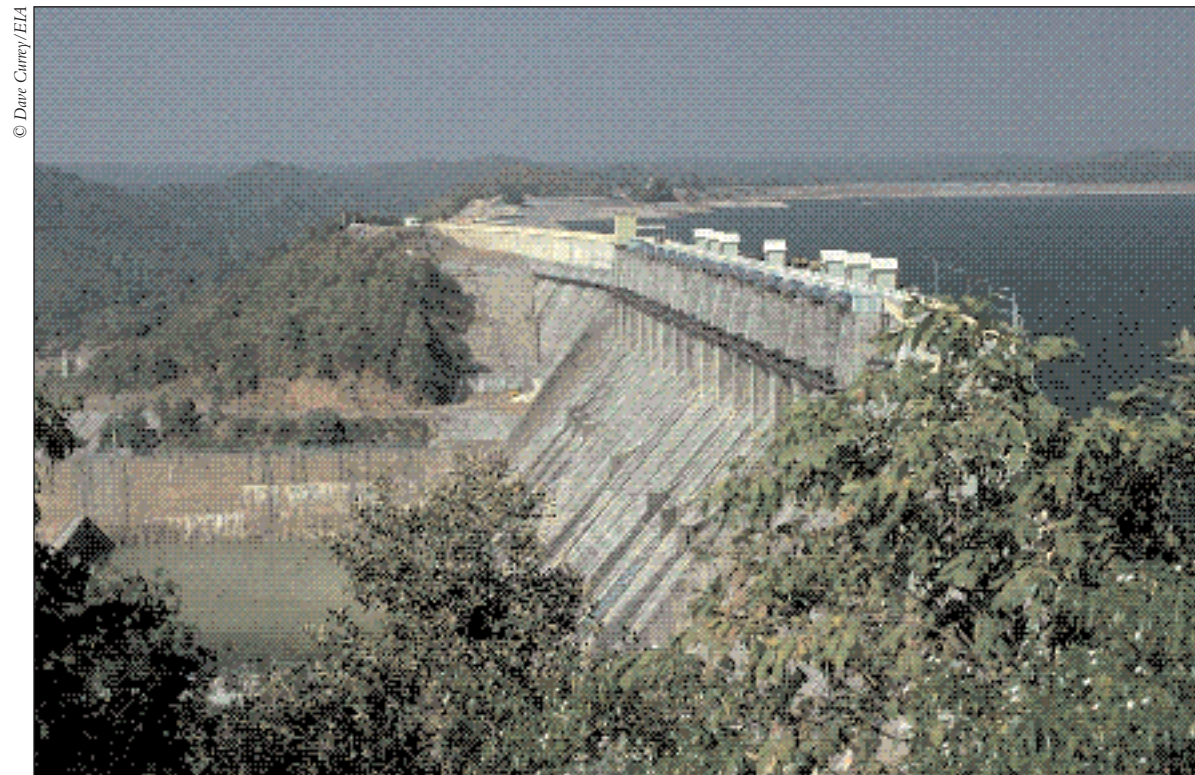
1. Create a separate Ministry for Natural Resources.
2. Indian Board for Wildlife should be given statutory backing, and Executive Director adequate powers, funding and secretariat in the proposed Ministry of Natural Resources Forests & Wildlife.
3. All State Wildlife Advisory Boards must be constituted and must meet regularly. Honorary Wildlife Wardens must be appointed.
4. Create wildlife wings in Indian and State Forest Services.
5. Ensure all Indian Forest Services as well as State Forest Officers, Foresters and Forest Guards receive wildlife training which should be specialised for those operating for the Wildlife Wing.
6. Implement S.K Roy report on tourism and Subramanian Committee report along with further suggestions of this report.
7. Increase India's Protected Area network to 7.5% by 2000 A.D.
8. Divide India into five wildlife zones and have action plans for each with implementation at zonal/State level.
9. Create Wildlife Protection Schemes for wildlife residing outside the P.A. network.
10. Better implementation of Centrally Sponsored Schemes like Rhino Protection Plan etc. is needed.
11. Protected Areas should be given more autonomy to utilise funds.
12. Institute incentive and award schemes and other welfare measures for field staff.
13. Improve scientific research and integrate it to field management of wildlife.
14. Improve anti-poaching measures.
15. Establish intelligence gathering network for control of poaching and wildlife trade.
16. Improve legal support system to control wildlife crimes.
17. Control illegal trade in wildlife derivatives by designating special courts, establishing intelligence gathering networks, exchange of information, associating other enforcement agencies.
18. Take steps to harmonise relationship of forest communities with wildlife.
19. Take steps to reduce human and livestock pressure on critical wildlife habitats.
20. Harness revenue from low impact tourism to conservation and community development.
21. Reduce pressure of urbanisation and economic development on wildlife habitats.
22. Improve education and awareness for wildlife protection.
23. Create new Wildlife Sanctuaries and National Parks.
24. A minimum of 15% of total forestry budget should be earmarked for wildlife management. Both financial and other resources have to be enhanced.
25. Wildlife field staff should have the same status as that of paramilitary or armed forces.
26. Additionally there are detailed recommendations on proposals to amend Wildlife (Protection) Act. These are contained in chapter 6 of the report.



© Tiger Link



The appraisal committee on river valley projects found that about 94% of the projects cleared had violated environmental norms.



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Survey of river valley projects

The Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) is responsible for the clearance of development and industrial projects based on Indian legislation and environmental norms. In 1994 MoEF reconstituted six environment appraisal committees to re-examine projects underway.

The most shocking results came from the committee on river valley projects. It found that about 94% of the projects cleared had violated environmental norms. In a letter to the Minister a committee member stated "It was also clear from the presentations that though the regional officers have regularly reported the status of compliance of conditions to the MoEF, the MoEF had been unable or unwilling to initiate action against the defaulting project authorities." A newspaper noted on 17th August 1995 "that the ministry has yet to reply to the letter or undertake remedial measures is an unfortunate underscoring of the 'inaction'."¹¹

Indian dam builders flout environment rules

The Global Tiger Forum

It has been over three and a half years since the Global Tiger Forum (GTF) was first mentioned at the "Delhi Declaration" in February 1993, when part of the agreed action included setting it up. Then in September 1993 it was again raised at the "Forestry Forum for Developing Countries", when most Ministers approved of the idea.¹² The idea was that GTF would work toward the survival and promotion of the tiger in tiger range states.³

It has not progressed as had originally been hoped. In March 1994 a meeting was held and the draft statutes were drawn up and three countries ratified: India, Bhutan and Burma (Myanmar). The formal establishment of the GTF requires five countries to ratify and the secretariat is only an interim secretariat

at present funded by the Indian Government. The GTF is being seen as a means to raise international funds and interest in supporting countrywide action plans and is unlikely to achieve anything quickly. It had been hoped that other countries would ratify but other political considerations are blocking this despite the watering down of initial aspirations.

Indo-Chinese Protocol

China was conspicuous by its absence from the first meeting of the tiger range countries held in New Delhi in March 1994. As a range state and the major consumer of tiger parts, China's failure to attend was a blow to the success of initiatives to co-operate to enforce CITES and national legislation.

The Indian Government sought an agreement with China at a bilateral level and a former Minister of Environment and Forests, Kamal Nath, signed a protocol with China on March 2nd 1995 which calls upon both countries to co-operate to save the tiger. It includes steps to stop illegal poaching of tigers and cross border smuggling, plans for the bilateral research and training programmes and the exchange of data for wildlife management programmes.¹³

The protocol has been widely criticised for including a reference to "sustainable development of the species" and for its article on captive breeding. Conservationists are suspicious that the language could give some credence to captive breeding schemes to provide bones to the Chinese medicine market. They also fear vital funds will be diverted to "captive breeding programmes" which have little significance in the conservation of the species in the wild. Captive cubs cannot be released into the wild because they require training from their mother.

The criticism and concern may yet be proven well founded, but the positive elements of the protocol have joined other Government of India documents gathering dust on the shelves.

Absolutely no constructive follow-up has been undertaken.

Indo-Chinese Protocol - absolutely no constructive follow up has been undertaken.



"I see no relation between liberalisation and environment."

- Deve Gowda, Prime Minister of India, in an interview when he was Chief Minister of Karnataka, published in 'Down to Earth', 30th June 1996.

The environment vs. economic liberalisation

The most important aspect of Project Tiger is its protection of vital tiger habitat, but this concept has been overtaken by the recent liberalisation of India's economy. Although tiger and other wildlife habitats are fairly well protected by the letter of Indian law, the Government of India and State Governments are systematically abusing their own laws for increased profits. Some of the last important habitats are being raped by industrialists.

There is obviously serious concern in India that the rapidly growing human population is fed, supplied with drinking water and given hope for the future. EIA recognises the difficult political decisions to be made to address the balance between a liberalised economy and environmental protection. However, when the forests are destroyed, rivers polluted and wildlife gone, it is usually the poorest of people that suffer. The forests are a vital element in protecting the water table and the rivers are the life blood of all living beings.

India has adopted good legislation to protect its environment. The Environmental Protection Act, the Wildlife (Protection) Act and the Forest Conservation Act clearly map out the restriction on development in protected areas. The law is not at fault - it is the failure to enforce it and the flagrant abuse of it by politicians and industrialists. These are the most sophisticated poachers of them all - powerful, greedy people prepared to sell the last square kilometre of India to line their own pockets.

In early 1996 when Deve Gowda, now India's

Prime Minister, was the Chief Minister in Karnataka State, he said in an interview "I see no relation between liberalisation and environment. My sole concern and objective is that Karnataka becomes number one in industries in the country."¹

Such blatant disregard for the environment will gain him many unscrupulous corporate friends but will also make him powerful enemies in a world which has started to learn from its many environmental disasters. No major international company wishes to be associated with loss of wildlife or environmental destruction. It costs too much in bad public relations.

It is to be hoped that, as Prime Minister, Deve Gowda will recognise the long-term needs of India's people, and its environment, and not cave in to short-term industrial interests.

A system of neglect

Across the country, essential forest habitat is being lost to mines, logging, hydro and irrigation schemes, power plants, orchards, tea plantations, and aquaculture development. Legislation designed to stop encroachment of protected areas is being systematically circumvented or ignored. Areas in and around National Parks, Tiger Reserves, Wildlife Sanctuaries and even World Heritage Sites and Biosphere Reserves have been destroyed, reducing further the habitat available for the tiger.

Mining activity has devastated thousands of hectares of prime tiger habitat and breaks up corridors, dividing genetic pools for future recovery of tiger populations. 65% of Project Tiger Reserves suffer from the negative impact of mining.

This neglect has not happened by accident. Appropriate authorities have consistently failed to notify or enforce environmental regulations and the Government of India has given a green light to those who are determined to exploit any of the numerous loopholes that riddle the environmental protection system. Industry has its sights on huge profits.

Some loopholes have been particularly useful to those seeking to exploit India's protected areas:

Failure to notify

Declaration by a State or the Government of India that an area has been designated a protected area, does not guarantee that it will officially become one. Across the country, many of the most important protected areas have not yet received full legal notification. In some cases, this has been the situation for decades. In a survey of 16 Project Tiger Reserves in 1995 over 80% of them had not received final notification of the entire Reserve.

In such scenarios, the integrity of Reserves can be called into question, as recently occurred in a case concerning tendu leaf collection from forests in Madhya Pradesh. In this case, the Court felt unable to stop the infringements since the Government had failed to notify the Reserves. The judgement added, however, that "inertia in this behalf cannot be tolerated",² and ordered the State Government to complete all notifications within six months of the case.⁴

Denotification

Even if a protected area does gain full legal notification, State or Central Government may later seek to denotify it. State Government can achieve this by a simple resolution in the State legislative assembly.

The Government of Maharashtra, for example, denotified about 500 km² (around one third) of the Melghat Tiger Reserve, an area of about 1,618 km² of dry, deciduous forest - mostly teak which was designated a Project Tiger Reserve in 1974. It is home to a wide variety of wildlife and plants including tiger, leopard, sloth bear, wild dog, jackal, hyena, gaur, sambar, wild boar, chital and nilgai and over 250 species of bird.⁵

The denotification originally stated that it would avoid difficult relocation of 37 villages required under the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972. However, the 1991 amendment of that Act specifically allowed for villages to remain within the boundaries and there are no villages located within the core area of Melghat Tiger Reserve. There is currently a stay of this order after the Bombay Environmental Action Group and others contested the denotification.⁶

The stated reasons for denotification have to be questioned because since the denotification in December 1993⁷, proposals for a dam project have been revived. The area to be submerged lies in the part of Melghat Tiger Reserve which has been denotified and would therefore no longer provide any legal impediment to the dam construction. In this area there are also proposals by the Maharashtra State Government Forest Department to begin tree felling and to exploit commercially valuable forest produce.⁸

Environmental Impact Assessments

The Ministry of Environment and Forests' (MoEF) guidelines for Environmental Impact Assessments are vague on a number of counts, and thus allow the "most obliging consultants"⁹ to certify minimum environmental impact.

The impact assessment for the proposed Sanjay Gandhi Thermal Power Station in Madhya Pradesh, for example, states that there are "No endangered species within 25 km of the site". The site is situated, however, within the Sohagpur Reserve Forest where 8 tigers were recorded in the 1993 tiger census. In 1994, a local resident reported the presence of breeding tigers just 5 km from the site. Wolf, leopard, and jungle cat have also been reported. In the district as a whole, 38 tigers were counted outside protected areas. Furthermore, the fact that Bandhavgarh National Park is just 30 km away, is not mentioned in the Environmental Impact Assessment.¹⁰

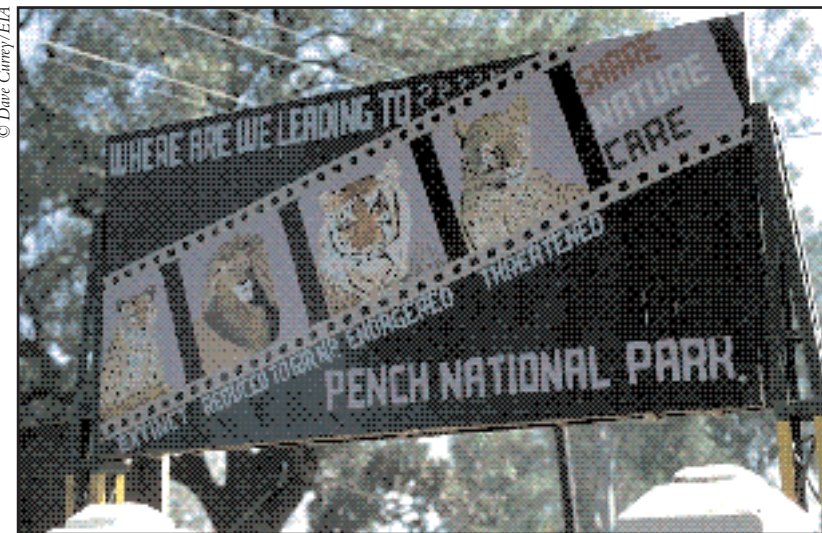
Conditional clearances

Projects are rarely rejected on environmental grounds, but are usually given clearance to go ahead subject to the fulfilment of specified conditions. Common examples are to ensure 'compensatory afforestation' of at least an equivalent area to that being lost, or for construction workers to be provided with fuel so as not to put pressure on adjacent forests, or for safe disposal of construction garbage.

In theory, non-compliance of these conditions should lead to the clearance being revoked, the project declared as illegal, and construction halted. In serious cases, project officials should be prosecuted.

MoEF is empowered to take such actions under the Environmental Protection Act (1986). Despite this, and despite the fact that, for example, in one appraisal of river and hydro schemes, over 90% had violated the conditions of their project clearance, these powers have rarely been used.¹¹

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Mining threatens tiger reserve

8,000 hectares of tiger land goes to mining projects

Mining projects ripping apart forest corridors

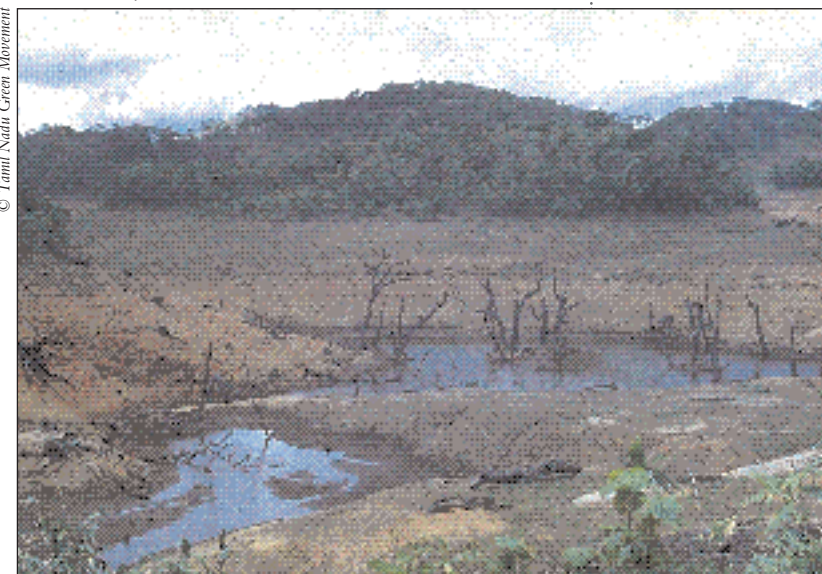
Ecology loser in battle for development

Wildlife sidelined by commercial projects



© Tiger Link

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“The Ghats’ prime forests are being sacrificed to make a quick killing.” - India Today, 15th August 1995.

Tigers, rhinos, elephants - 450 km long, 120 metre wide canal splits vital habitat

In March 1994 former Prime Minister Narasimha Rao assured the delegates at an international meeting of Tiger Range Countries that “the protection of tiger and its habitat has the highest priority on our national agenda, and the Government and people of India will spare no effort in it”.¹² In March 1996, Prime Minister Rao and the King of Bhutan are reported to have signed an agreement to construct a massive hydro and irrigation scheme, straddling the Indo-Bhutanese border called the Sankosh Hydro Project.

The scheme will involve a dam, located on the Bhutanese side of the border, and a main irrigation canal stretching from the dam, across northern West Bengal, to the Farraka barrage. The main irrigation canal, at 7 m deep, 120 m wide and 450 km long, and with a metalled inspection road and embankment along its length, will represent a complete barrier to all wildlife movement and migration along the route.¹³

The canal will pass right through the core area of Buxa Tiger Reserve, cutting the Reserve into two halves. Populations of tiger, prey species, and wild elephants will be split into two, with no gene flow between them.¹⁴ It will also cause irreparable damage to Jaldapara and Gorumara Wildlife Sanctuaries, the only two sanctuaries in West Bengal with rhino populations. In addition, the Mahananda Sanctuary, and parts of the Jamduar Reserved Forest of Kachugaon Forest Division in Assam, where the Golden Langur (*Presbytis geei*) was discovered, will be devastated.¹⁵

The canal will cut across the traditional annual migration route of elephants in north Bengal, isolating and concentrating elephants in an area of high human population and increasing human–elephant conflict.

The total estimated cost of the project is currently said to be US\$14 billion. Base camps, project offices and rest houses for project staff have already been built by India in Bhutan, and survey markings for the canal, including boards, stakes driven into the ground, and markings on trees, have been laid.¹⁶

Destruction of a Biosphere Reserve

Construction of the massive Pykara Ultimate Stage Hydro-Electric Project (PUSHEP) is already well



© Dave Gurney/EIA

advanced. Located in the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve, home to a third of India’s wild elephant population, the project will affect no fewer than three sanctuaries including the Bandipur Tiger Reserve.

The plans for this hydro–electric project were first announced in the 1980s by the Tamil Nadu Electricity Board. PUSHEP is projected to have horrific ecological consequences, including insularisation of wildlife populations, desertification of the thorn forest, and increased human–animal conflicts. According to a study published by the Bombay Natural History Society in February 1996,¹⁵ construction has already destroyed a vital elephant corridor, separating the Nilgiris population into two and ultimately leading to their genetic decline. A similar impact on tiger populations can be expected.

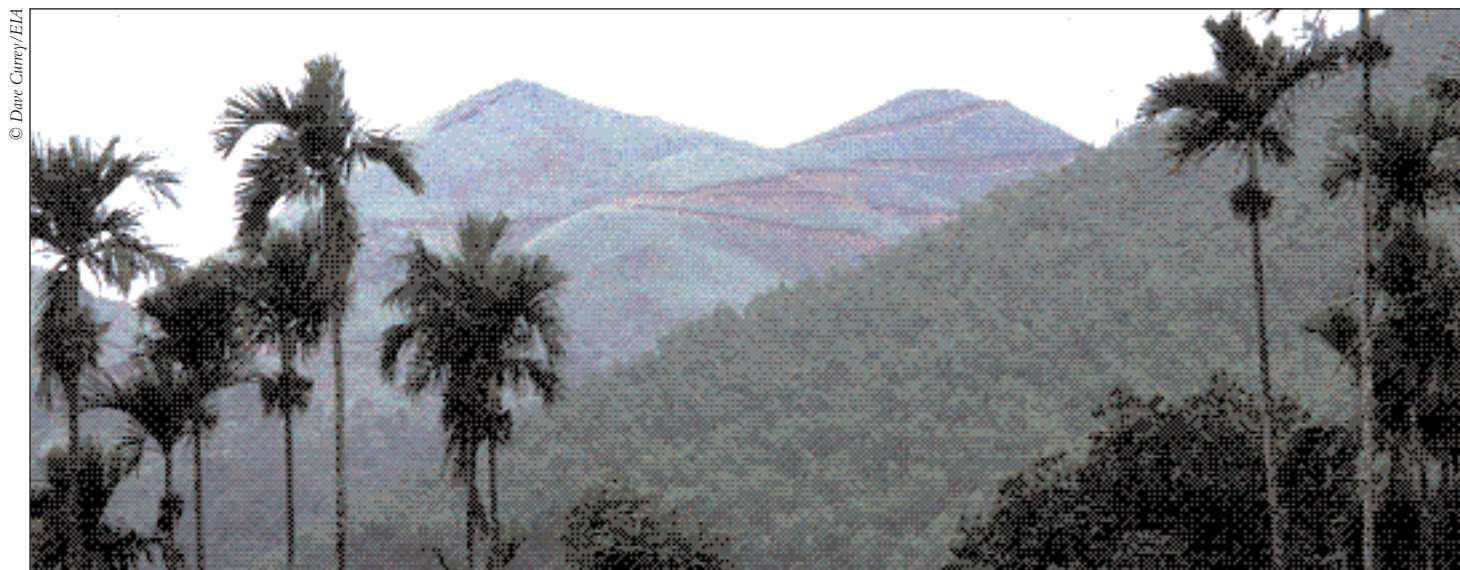
There have long been doubts over the economic viability of the project. In 1986, it was rejected by the Central Electric Authority as too expensive, but was later “mysteriously” cleared by the planning commission following approval by the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) in 1985.¹⁶

Construction is now hopelessly behind schedule, while the projected cost is now nearly twice that estimated in 1986. Half of this has already been spent,

Above right: Iron ore deposits pollute the banks of the River Bhadra, 15km downstream from the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company, Karnataka.



© Tamil Nadu Green Movement



© Dave Gurney/EIA

even though some of the major contracts have yet to be awarded.¹⁶

Local conservationists have now turned to the courts in a last desperate attempt to save the Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve.¹⁷

Iron ore prospecting in Kudremukh National Park

Kudremukh National Park is one of Karnataka’s most recently formed Parks, comprising around 600 km² of the finest evergreen ‘shola’ forest. It is rich in both fauna and flora, and supports a host of endangered species including tigers.

Kudremukh is also home to the largest iron ore mining project in India, Kudremukh Iron Ore Mining Company Ltd. The mine lies outside the Park but its operation affects both Kudremukh National Park and Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary. Current mine extraction rates are around 75,000 tonnes of earth every day, providing about 25,000 tonnes of iron ore.¹⁸

The MoEF has recently issued a prospecting license to the mine in the National Park and roads and prospect mines have already caused devastation. The General Manager defended the prospect mining and the possibility of future full-scale mining in the Park (the only objective of prospecting) by claiming there were “no animals there.” He also questioned why mining should not take place in the National Park if it can be done without environmental damage or with the possibility of improving the environment.¹⁸

This massive mining operation exposes the soil to the elements, creating an enormous run-off which heavily pollutes the River Bhadra. This river flows past villages and through the Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary, a very important local tiger habitat. Sand from the banks of the river 15 km downstream from the mine in the village of Balehonnur has been tested in a laboratory and found to be 57% magnetic.¹⁹

Proposed ACC Cement Plant, Meghalaya

Construction has just begun of a large cement plant on the boundary of Balpakaram National Park, in the Garo Hills of Meghalaya, an area that supports that highest densities of wild elephants in India and numerous other endangered species including tigers, leopards, lesser Pandas, and sun bears. In total, the Park and the surrounding region support 39 species listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife Protection Act 1972.²⁰

The plant and mine sites, to be built by the

Associated Cement Corporation (ACC), will cover an area of 14 km² and are located precisely within a narrow and intensively used elephant corridor. Obstruction of elephant movement will stop essential gene flow between populations, and increase human – elephant conflicts.²¹

As of March 1996, the Forest Department had still not been notified of the project, and clearance had not been given. Despite this, no measures have been taken to bring the unauthorised construction to a halt. The estimated cost of the project is US\$40 million.²⁰

There are proposals for limestone mining in the elephant corridor to supply the factory. An appeal to MoEF has been made by some of the most eminent scientists, experts and biologists in India to stop this proposal and protect the corridor.

Forest for tea in Kalakad-Mundanthurai Project Tiger Reserve

The tropical forests of the Western Ghats are considered to be one of the greatest ‘hotspots’ of biodiversity in the world.²² With a third of the cover lost already, sanctuaries such as the Kalakad–Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve, represent essential refuges for a wide variety of endangered animals, including tigers, elephants, and leopards.²³

In the heart of the Sanctuary on land owned by the State of Tamil Nadu, lies a commercial estate leased by the Bombay Burma Trading Corporation (BBTC) for tea, coffee and cardamom plantations. The three tea factories, with a resident worker population of 10,000 people, require enormous quantities of fuel wood. It is reported the company has chosen to source this wood illegally from the Reserve for over two decades.²⁴ Hundreds of acres of prime shola forest have been felled in utter disregard of the Forest Conservation Act (1980).

In an attempt to hide illegal activities, BBTC erected chain gates on all access roads passing through to the plantation, even though this itself was illegal. It is reported that when staff from the Tiger Reserve tried to remove one of the chain gates and stop the illegal felling they were subsequently assaulted by BBTC staff.²⁴

In 1995, the Tamil Nadu Government and the Project Tiger Reserve finally brought legal proceedings against BBTC, but by then thousands of acres of forest had already been lost. After initial success, BBTC then brought a stay order.²⁵

Iron ore prospecting inside Kudremukh National Park has already seriously eroded a mountain peak.

“Do you think you’ll be able to persuade the Environment Ministry that you can do open caste iron ore mining without destroying the environment in a National Park?”

QUESTION FROM EIA

“Why not?”

REPLY FROM K.V.THYAGARAJAN,

GENERAL MANAGER, KUDREMUKH

IRON ORE CO. LTD.



On pollution of the Bhadra River: "The results (of tests) showed 57% magnetism in the (sand bank) deposits... it violates the Water Pollution Act but the Water Pollution Board doesn't seem to be taking much action about it."
- Kaoosi Sethna, local environmentalist.

The following examples are the tip of the iceberg. Given the space, this report could be filled with cases of important tiger habitat under threat in India.

Sindh Dam project in Madhav National Park, Madhya Pradesh

The proposal for a dam, made in 1994, which would destroy 3,106 ha of forest and tiger habitat, did not mention that land was part of National Park area, and claimed that it was of "no significance as far as wildlife was concerned." Approval granted in ignorance of true situation. Mining also approved without knowledge of National Park notification.²⁶

Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary, Karnataka

In the central part of the Western Ghats in Karnataka and one of the most important tiger habitats in India.⁹ The iron ore mine on the boundary of the Sanctuary creates run off which spills into the forest and a new lease has recently been approved. New roads are being constructed into the forest to facilitate bamboo removal. Three new dams planned to be built inside Sanctuary.²⁷ Bhadra River is polluted by the Kudremukh Iron Ore Mining Company Ltd. upstream.²⁸



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Pench Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh

Fishing licences given by the Chief Wildlife Warden of Madhya Pradesh to local people to allow them to fish in the core area. This is in violation of the Wildlife Protection Act and in direct opposition to the neighbouring State of Maharashtra which forbids fishing in the Pench National Park which borders the Tiger Reserve.

Panna Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh

Reserve excellent for sloth bears as well as tigers. Mining for diamonds, limestone, sandstone, and granite on the immediate periphery of the Park, and encroachment inside. Dumping of mining garbage widespread. Rivers have turned brown with sediment.²⁶ 400-600 mines in the region. None complying with most basic regulations of the Mining Act.²⁹

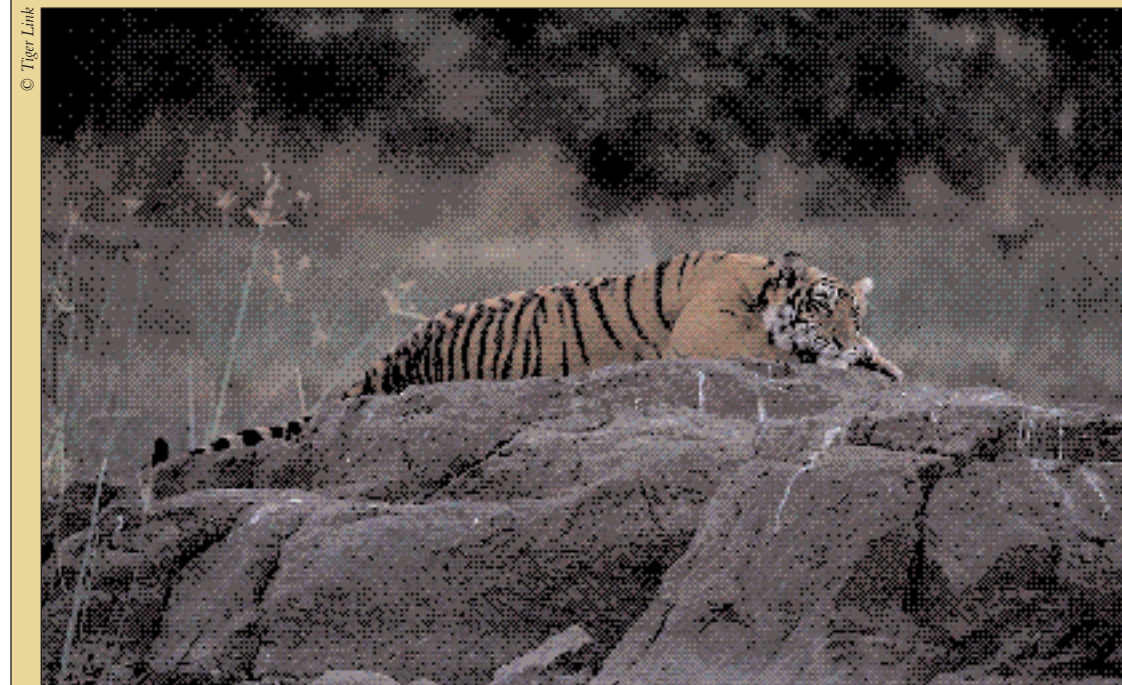


© Tiger Link

Above right: River Bhadra polluted by the Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Ltd flows through villages and the Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary. Picture shows clean water flowing into the polluted river.
Below right: Limestone mining near Panna Tiger Reserve.



Some of the last important tiger habitat is being destroyed by industry.



© Tiger Link

Jamva Ramgarh Sanctuary, Rajasthan

At least 40 marble mines operating in the Sanctuary. The leases for most were granted after the Sanctuary was declared³⁰ in 1982.³¹

Sariska Tiger Reserve, Rajasthan

Forests of Aravalli Hills, of which Sariska is a final remnant, act as a barrier against further desertification from west, thereby protecting Indo-Gangetic plains. Unprecedented deforestation since Independence has halved the length of the monsoon.³² Dolomite and marble mines operated in Reserve for many years, causing severe degradation. Government only clamped down on mines following judgement in Supreme Court ordering mining activity to stop.³³

Valmiki Tiger Reserve, Bihar

Railway embankment built without environmental clearance caused river to block during floods. Large area of Reserve, including an estimated 5,300 trees lost as a result.³⁴

Palamau Tiger Reserve, Bihar

Dam set to flood 1 km² of Reserve's core area.³⁵ In addition, the Hurilong mining project in the same district has led to the loss of 165 ha of tiger and leopard habitat.³⁶

Laokhowa Sanctuary, Assam

Entire land area given off to illegal settlers and Sanctuary seems to have "virtually vanished".³⁷

Shoolpaneshwar Sanctuary, Gujarat

Cutting down of bamboo for pulp mills.³⁷

Nal Sarovar Sanctuary, Gujarat

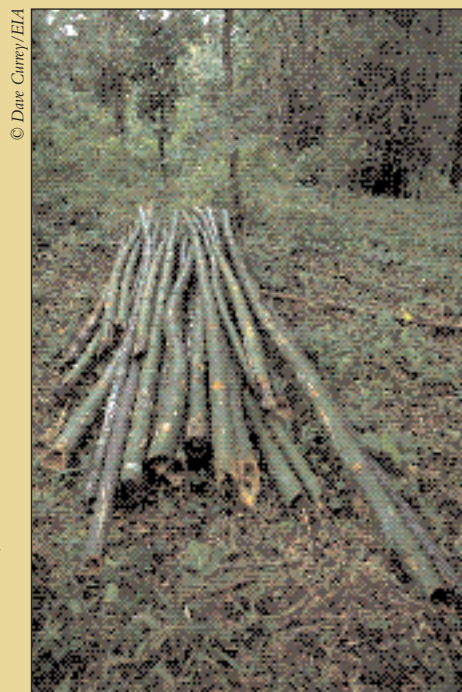
Bauxite mining in Reserve.³⁷

Narayan Sarovar Sanctuary, Gujarat

The State Legislature denotified 42% of the Sanctuary in July 1995 by State resolution to develop mining and the manufacture of cement.³⁸ Case subsequently defeated in High Court.³⁷

Sunderbans Tiger Reserve, West Bengal

The Sunderbans lies on the border of Bangladesh and West Bengal, India and represents the largest remaining mangrove area in the world and has the largest population of Bengal tigers in the world. By 1991 however, the total area in Bangladesh and India was half of what it was at the turn of the century. In West Bengal, 35,000 ha of mangrove have already been diverted for aquaculture and the diversion continues.³⁹



© Dave Curry/EIA

Bamboo cut inside Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary, prime tiger habitat. The bamboo is used commercially in construction and by the local paper mill.



Skilled and motivated staff will often be transferred from wildlife and be replaced by personnel with no wildlife training whatsoever.

Opposite page from top: Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve; Nilgai; Rhesus macaque with young; Pench River.

Below: Langur.

The front line - protecting wildlife in the field

No matter how much rhetoric flies around the world concerning tiger conservation, the day to day job of protecting the remaining wild tigers, as well as rhinos, elephants and their habitat, falls to the field staff. If these people are given political backing and are well resourced, they can maintain a high morale and miracles can be achieved.

This section looks at tiger habitats with particular reference to a World Heritage Site and a Biosphere Reserve in the State of Assam where the protection of wildlife rests solely on the commitment, bravery and resilience of the field staff. In both cases, the Government of India and the former State Government of Assam should be thoroughly ashamed of themselves. Staff have been murdered, their wages have been delayed, working elephants have been starved and officers have had to pay for supplies out of their own meagre salaries. Centrally sponsored funds have been diverted from wildlife protection by the former State Government, infrastructure and equipment have been neglected and committed staff have been subjected to conditions that would demoralise even the most motivated conservationists.



© Dave Currey/EIA



© Dave Currey/EIA

THE RANKS

The Indian system of wildlife protection involves military style rankings in the forest department. A State's chief wildlife warden works with directors of protected areas. The director is the head field worker with a divisional forest officer working with him and range officers heading up each of the ranges within the Protected Area. The range officers manage the other ranks including foresters, forest guards, mahouts and boatmen and casual staff. These are the foot soldiers in the war against poachers, encroachment, forest fires and the timber mafia.

India's Protected Area System

It has long been India's approach to wildlife conservation to designate certain areas as "Protected Areas" (PA). There are different levels of protection with Wildlife Sanctuaries and National Parks gaining the greatest level of protection. There are 80 National Parks and 441 Sanctuaries with a total PA of 4.5% of the land mass and 19% of the forest cover. There are six Ramsar wetland sites, five World Heritage Sites and eight Biosphere Reserves.¹

The management and development of PAs, including salaries, is paid for from the "Plan" budget which is provided by both the Central and State Governments. Additional "non-plan" budget pays for works in the Park such as road building, boats, and vehicles and is provided by the State Government.² In addition to this (or sometimes partly instead of), if the PA is a Tiger Reserve under Project Tiger, additional funds are available.³ There have been other schemes such as the Rhino Protection Scheme and Project Elephant - both of which supply additional funds.

Forest Department staff

It is a sad fact of wildlife conservation in India today that a wildlife position is often regarded as a "punishment posting".⁴ Forest guards generally lack specialised wildlife training, are offered no incentives and are often poorly equipped. Skilled and motivated staff will often be transferred from wildlife and be replaced by personnel with no wildlife training whatsoever. The same can be said of the higher ranks.⁴

This haphazard approach to PAs creates a huge variation in skill, aptitude and commitment of staff. In some areas it is staggering how staff continue to risk their lives and work all hours to protect wildlife despite repeated abuse by their political masters. In others it is equally staggering that untrained and unmotivated staff, with no commitment to protecting wildlife, are ever posted to the wildlife division in the first place.

TIGER HABITAT

EIA investigators have visited a range of tiger habitats in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Assam and Karnataka. The discipline and motivation of staff in the high profile Tiger Reserves of Kanha and Bandhavgarh, although low, was evidently higher than that in less visible National Parks and Sanctuaries visited in Maharashtra (Pench National Park) and Karnataka (Kudremukh National Park and Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary). The situation in Manas Tiger Reserve and Kaziranga National Park in Assam will be dealt with on pages 26-31.

Pench National Park, Maharashtra, borders the Pench Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh. It is prime tiger habitat and provides a vital extension to its neighbour. EIA investigators found no evidence of any staff motivation or interest during their stay. On one occasion a forest guard even asked why they wanted to enter the Park because there "is nothing in there". They saw a wide variety of wildlife including nilgai, gaur and chital. They also saw hundreds of head of cattle openly grazing in the forest within Park boundaries and fish poachers openly selling their catch at the side of the road in Totladoh. The fishermen were cleaning and repairing their nets in the water below the Totladoh Dam Police Camp.

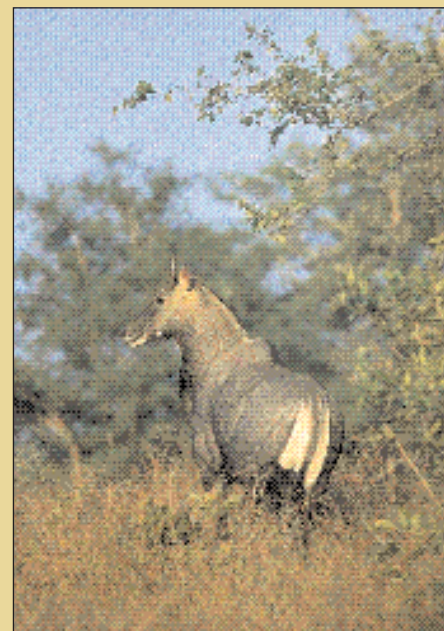
Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve is one of India's showpiece Parks and one would expect to find fewer problems in morale and management. However, the problems encountered were serious. The morale of staff was relatively low with no Project Tiger allowances paid and no forest guard welfare scheme.⁵ There were only two vehicles owned by the Park, one with the field director and one in the Park.⁶ Local community projects are in their infancy and the relationship of Park staff with locals is poor. At the time of the visit (November 1995) there had been five field directors in the last four and a half years.⁷

Kanha Tiger Reserve is threatened by poaching. The tribal people who were moved out of the core area are still not really benefiting from the existence of the Park. These poor people still live off the forest but a large part of their traditional resource has been taken from them. This has allowed political activists and unscrupulous traders to incite unrest among some of these people resulting in an increase in poaching - mainly around the Park, but also within it.

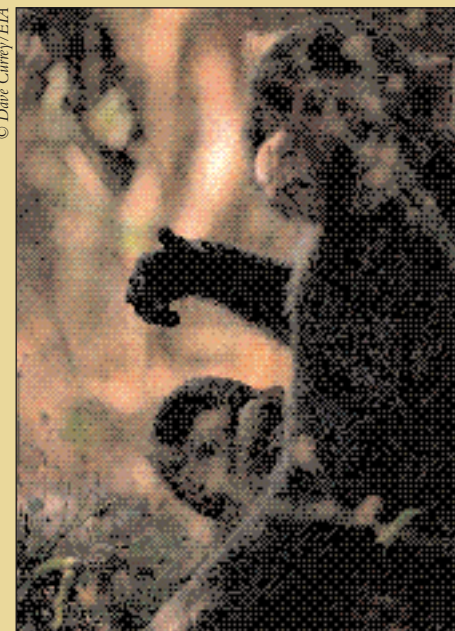
It is reported that as many as 15 tigers may be killed annually in and around Kanha including 5 killed in the Baihar region. It is also reported that forest guards in Baihar take bribes to record tiger kills so that compensation can be claimed as well as taking payment for releasing deer poachers.⁸ Part of the problem is the resentment from some of the tribal people living around the Park. There are still about 19 villages⁹ in the core area which create problems: the other 26 villages were resettled in the buffer zone.



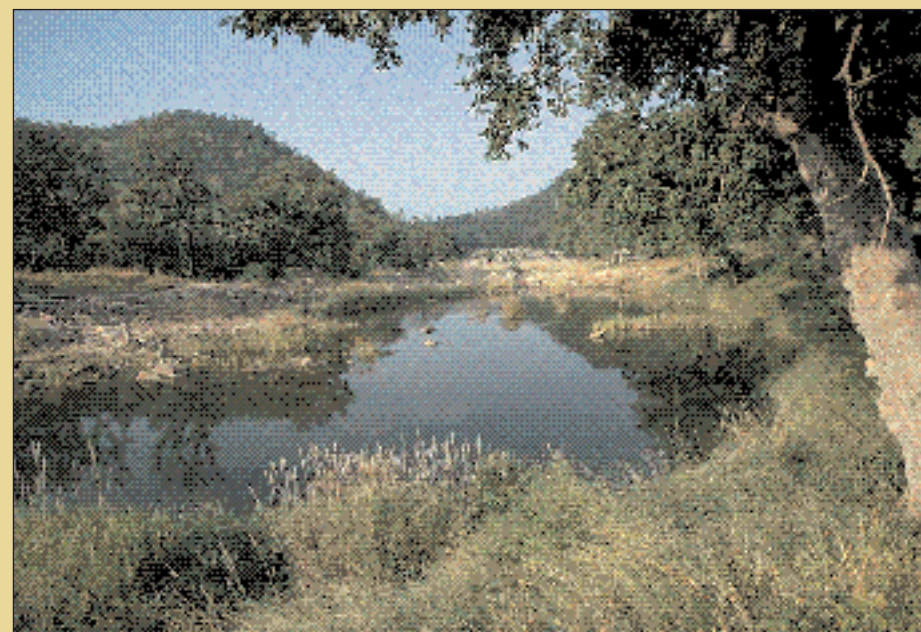
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"If these conditions prevail for too long then it (the Park)

will collapse."

- Pankaj Sarma, Western Range Officer, Kaziranga National Park.

Case history: Kaziranga National Park

Criminal neglect and political apathy have brought this remarkable area close to collapse. Kaziranga acts as a reminder to everyone how important it is to have good and committed staff. In the case of Kaziranga, the staff are extraordinary in that they maintain discipline, good humour and high morale despite every attempt by the former State Government to utterly de-moralise them and the failure of the Central Government to act. Many financial aspects of protecting the Park have been carried by the goodwill of local suppliers, but the debts have grown so high that they can carry them no longer. Local suppliers are owed US\$4,280 for petrol and diesel and US\$4,280 for vehicle repairs.¹³ The Park staff have been left with an impossible task and it seems unlikely they can go on much longer.

In EIA's brief visit only some of the most glaring examples of Kaziranga's threats came to light and are included in this report. For years there have been recommendations for extensions, changes in boundaries to take account of ecological change, and wildlife corridors, but little has been achieved. Many other problems exist and have been reported on after more extensive visits have been made.

One of the world's gems, this 430 km² National Park has been declared a Biosphere Reserve because of its remarkable and unique fauna. Open elephant grass plains interspersed with swamps and semi-evergreen forest are home to over 70% of the world's one-horned rhinoceros, over 70 tiger, 1,100 elephant, a third of the world's buffalo, and half the world's swamp deer.¹⁰ These swamp deer may be a unique subspecies representing 90% of the world population.¹¹ Hundreds of thousands of birds visit the area and in the summer when the Park floods, river dolphin move in from the great Brahmaputra River which forms the Park's northern border.



Above right: Isolated forest camp in monsoon.

Right: Half the world's Swamp deer are found in Kaziranga.



The staff, elephants and infrastructure

The protection of Kaziranga includes a neighbouring range and a number of proposed extensions increasing the area to almost 1,000 km². Many animals migrate out of the Park in the monsoon, when much of the Park is completely submerged, to the higher land in the Mikir Hills, a Reserve Forest area. The total Park workforce is 459 people with an additional 75 home guards and 42 Assam Forest Protection Force personnel. The director and divisional forest officer have four range officers managing the ranges, three of which form the National Park.¹⁰ Staff also have to tour the neighbouring villages, giving them a working area of around 1,800 to 2,000 km².¹⁰

The Park has 41 working elephants including the young. Twenty five of these are used for patrolling, moving supplies to the forest camps, and of these 6-8 take tourists out in the winter tourist season.¹⁰

The Park has 6 very old jeeps but little fuel to keep them going, two trucks (only one working) and a tractor which helps supply rations to the staff in the winter. A new speedboat donated by the British charity "Care for the Wild" is used extensively but three other motorised boats are too expensive to use except in emergencies. Only 80-90, out of 130 forest camps, have a simple paddle boat to patrol during the summer monsoon floods.

Forest guards

ON THE FRONT LINE

A. C. Rajbonsi, Forester (in charge of Disloomukh Beat) with forest guards at their isolated forest camp during the monsoon.

Mr. Rajbonsi's men were involved in an encounter with poachers in May 1996. They arrested one poacher and captured one rifle. No rhinos were killed.

In February 1995, at another encounter with five poachers, two of the poachers were killed and three escaped. No rhinos were killed.²



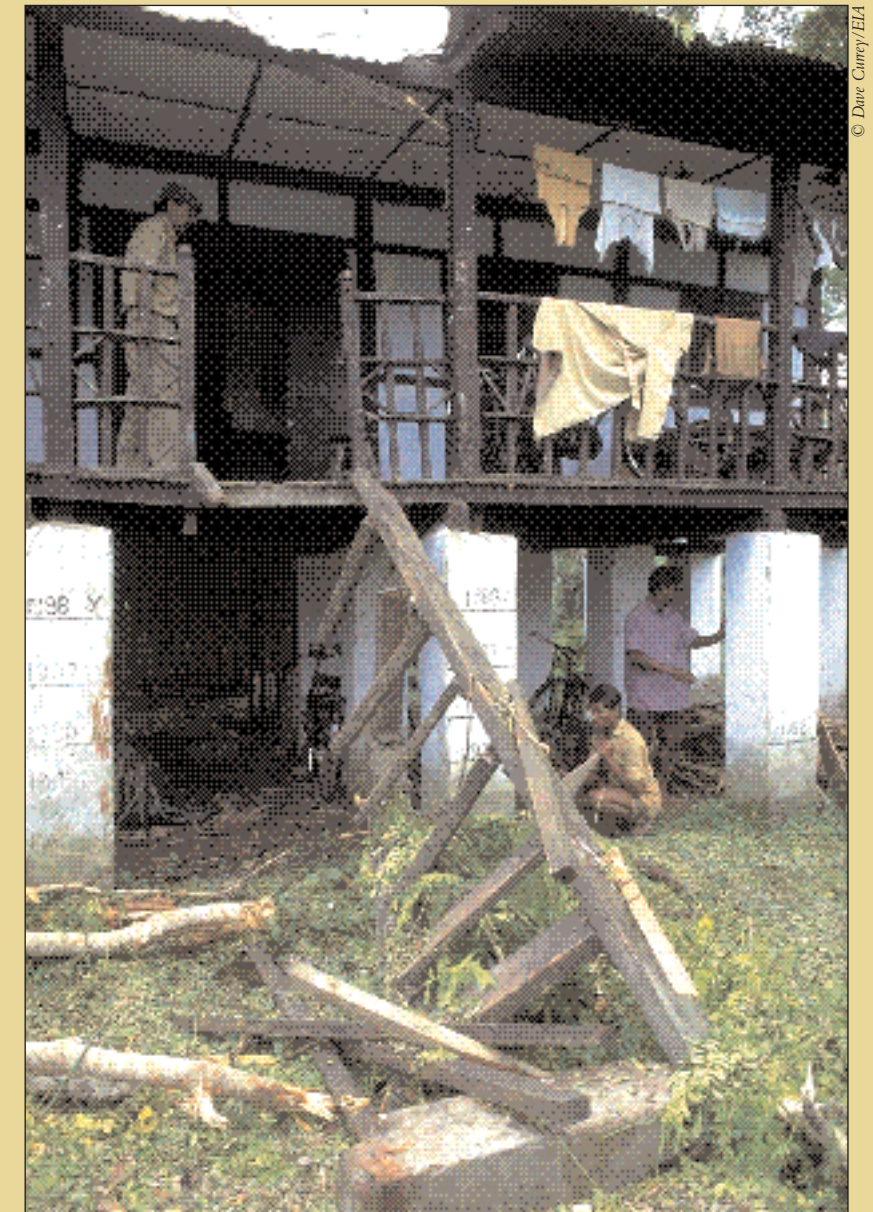
STAFF: NO PAY, NO SUPPORT

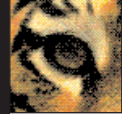
Forest guards live in isolated conditions dotted around the Park in stilted forest camps. Sometimes there will be five or six men and, when short-staffed, there may only be three. If a shot is fired it is hoped that two or three camps will be within earshot to react and encounter the poachers.¹² They risk their lives in shoot-outs with poachers and are the front-line defence of wildlife. Without committed forest guards with high morale the wildlife will soon disappear.

These men survive on rations of rice which they have to pay for themselves out of a US\$68 monthly wage. Only 50 of the camps have water filters (cost US\$20 each and last 5-6 years) and the staff suffer serious stomach and intestinal complaints. They have no access to preventative medicine and are prone to malaria attacks. If only three men are living in a camp it becomes very difficult for them ever to take leave which is supposed to amount to a few days each month to visit family. They have to feed their families from their salary as well.¹³

Between February and April 1996 the forest guards were unpaid. In July 1996 when EIA visited, their salary was three weeks overdue. They are seriously hindered from night patrolling because they have no batteries for their torches (total cost for all camps US\$340 per month) and their boots (cost US\$5.70 per pair) rot within three months. They often patrol barefoot in the leech and snake infested marshes. Their uniforms (cost US\$21) are supposed to be replaced annually but the Park only has funds to replace them every three or four years. The staff have to pay for their own and during the monsoon their clothes are permanently wet. The Park cannot afford a jacket for the staff in the winter (cost US\$31 each) or raincoats (cost US\$20 each) for all staff in the summer monsoon.¹³

The Park only has 53 wireless sets and communication is therefore difficult between camps and headquarters. If forest guards hear shots in the Park and they have no radio, they first have to travel to another camp which has a radio to inform headquarters. This makes quick response impossible and increases the risks to staff.





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70% of the world's one-horned rhinos are found in Kaziranga.

The poaching crisis

In Kaziranga the poaching menace is aimed at the one horned rhino. Tigers and other wildlife have so far been left alone because of the high value of rhino horn and the serious risks involved in entering the Park - the anti-poaching work is still effective. If the morale of staff continues to be undermined by the financial crisis, protection of the tigers, elephants and deer will also cease.

The preventative techniques that are available to the staff, such as intelligence gathering and community relations, have been severely hindered by lack of funds. There used to be a US\$430 annual budget for intelligence gathering, but this no longer exists.¹⁰

There are two types of rhino poaching - the pit and gun methods. In the former, a gang of 2-5 poachers will enter the Park and stay for 7-10 days. They dig deep pits on tracks regularly used by rhinos, sometimes with stakes in the bottom of the pit. Rhinos usually die quickly because they break their necks when falling into the pit. It is difficult to catch these poachers because they move silently and it is almost impossible to patrol the rhino tracks on elephant back because elephants fall into the same camouflaged pits.

Poachers armed with guns are usually in gangs of

Table: Rhino poaching statistics (by technique) for Kaziranga Western Range¹⁴

Year	Gun	Pit
1982	1	2
1983	0	8
1984	7	7
1985	4	14
1986	7	12
1987	3	4
1988	4	7
1989	11	6
1990	20	3
1991	10	4
1992	23	2
1993	19	1
1994	3	2
1995	2	2
1996 (until end May)	3	1

2-5. The larger gangs will include two shooters, 2 assistants and a local field person (maybe a local who knows the area or a former employee of the Park). They stay in the Park for 3-4 days, entering at night and sleeping over. There is no pattern as to the time they kill. The shots will be heard by forest staff and they have regular shoot-outs with poaching gangs, resulting in fatalities.¹² At a poaching encounter on 27th May 1996 a poacher overheard forest guards radioing base for more ammunition because they only had 5 rounds each.¹⁰

The most recent poaching encounters at the time of EIA's visit had been on June 21st and June 26th 1996. A rifle and a US carbine were seized and four poachers were killed.

WHERE HAS ALL THE MONEY GONE?

Kaziranga National Park has been starved of funds for a number of years. The budget, until the 1996/97 allocation, remained relatively unchanged despite spiralling costs and increased poaching in the 1990s.

The Park was eligible for additional funds from the rhino protection scheme paid for by the Central Government. The last payments actually received in the Park were in 1991.¹² It is alleged that almost US\$1 million from this and other centrally sponsored schemes has been diverted from wildlife protection by the former State Government of Assam to other unrelated areas since 1989.¹⁵ Since the recent elections the Finance Secretary of the previous Government has gone missing.¹¹ The Minister of Forests for the new State Government sadly admitted that the former administration had diverted these funds.¹⁶ He pledged that any further centrally sponsored funds for wildlife protection would reach the field.

Table: Budget for Kaziranga National Park (converted from rupees to US dollars at August 1996 rate)¹⁷

Year	Plan (development/management -incl. salaries)	Non-Plan (works/infrastructure/ etc)
1993/94	US\$143,000	US\$91,400
1994/95	US\$137,000	US\$80,000
1995/96	US\$148,500	US\$91,400
1996/97	US\$91,400	US\$17,100*

* This figure is budget for the first quarter although only US\$5,700 actually received.

**"The previous Government have already diverted some money."
- Nagen Sarma, Assam Minister of Forests on diversion of rhino protection funds, July 1996.**



© Dave Currey/EIA

STARVING ELEPHANTS

The working elephants carry supplies, patrol the Park, and are the only means of transportation in most areas. They require 10kg of gram flour or rice with husk every day. Resting elephants require half this amount. Unlike wild elephants, these working animals cannot graze all day and need extra nutrition to help them gain strength for the work. The Kaziranga working elephants, at the time of the EIA visit, had not been fed for six months and were visibly suffering from malnutrition and three of them had

suspected tuberculosis.¹³

The elephants used to be led into a particular area and buckets would be brought out with the food and they would get really excited. Now they're just taken into the same place and they look around, waiting. This pathetic situation was described by a number of staff as "criminal-like starving your own children." The local supplier of feed is already owed over US\$17,000 and simply could not carry on increasing the debt.¹³

© Dave Currey/EIA



**"Elephants are staff - so just as the staff should get pay, the elephants get rations, so we are failing to even supply this now. This is a crime."
- Bupen Talukdar, Central Range Officer, Kaziranga National Park.**



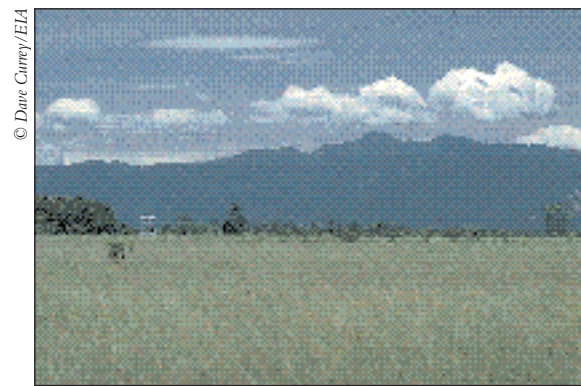
In a 1996 report on Manas it is claimed that from an estimated population of 100+ rhinos, only about a dozen exist today and the endangered swamp deer population which had built up to about 500 animals, has been virtually wiped out.

Case history: Manas Tiger Reserve

This was one of the first Tiger Reserves created under Project Tiger in 1973 and was declared a World Heritage Site in 1985.¹⁸ It was once remarked that Manas "is what the earth looked like before the arrival of man, a jewel encrusted on land reflecting nature's varied and brilliant hues."¹⁹ It rests intertwined with the Manas River and its branches under the foothills of the Himalayan mountain kingdom of Bhutan.

It is clear that Manas has suffered from serious problems of insurgency by Bodo militants seeking independence. Attacks on the Tiger Reserve have destroyed infrastructure, undermined staff morale, and wiped out much of its famed wildlife. What is less clear, is why there has been no attempt by the Central or State Governments to regain control of the Reserve. The solutions to this unique area are complicated and involve courage and leadership to bring law and order to the Reserve. With a complete absence of political will for so many years and diversion of funds from vital work, the Government of India and Project Tiger have failed this World Heritage Site completely. Meanwhile, staff and wildlife continue to die.

In a report on the Reserve, the former Additional Inspector General of Forests, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Assam) and former Field Director of Manas Tiger Reserve, S. Deb Roy, wrote "Since 1992, I have been raising my voice about the problems in Manas repeatedly seizing any opportunity that came by at any forum, but there has been no response, whatsoever from anywhere. It seems to be a good indicator about how serious are the Ministry of Environment and Forests about such squandering of a World Heritage Site".²⁰



Wildlife destroyed

Most experts on the area agree that the current poaching is carried out by criminals, not insurgents. In fact the insurgent group's command have recently ordered their people to protect Manas, not destroy it. Nonetheless, the poaching is carried out by large gangs of armed local people.²¹ The forest staff have very low morale and feel threatened and unable to act.

There have been few opportunities for accurate wildlife surveys to be carried out in this Reserve. Although the field director and staff know of only a few cases of tiger poisoning and snaring, conversations with mahouts indicate a sharp decline. Some of these men have been working in Manas for years and state that they no longer see signs of tigers when patrolling.²²

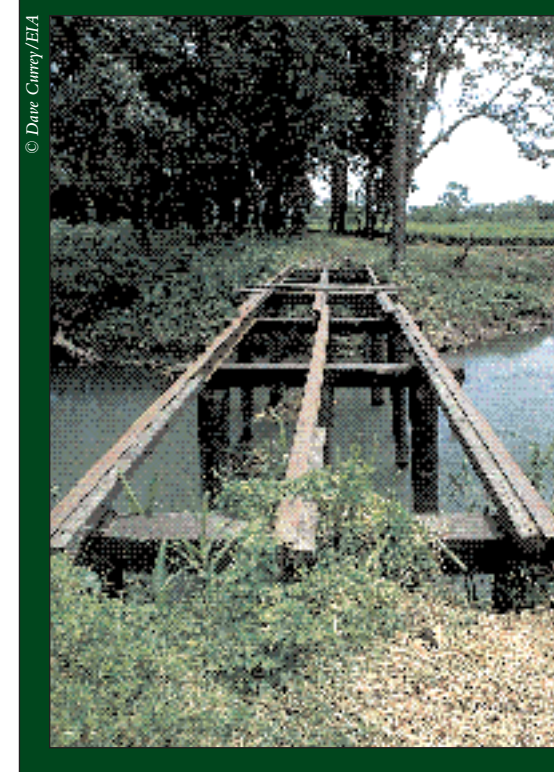
In a 1996 report on Manas it is claimed that from an estimated population of 100+ rhinos, only about a dozen exist today and the endangered swamp deer population, which had built up to about 500 animals, has been virtually wiped out. Elephants are poached and at least 15-20 may have been killed. It is also stated that since the southern area of the Park (more than half the area of the National Park) has been "freely vandalised by various groups of people including the neighbouring villagers, serious damage to the status of all wild animal species could be a sure outcome."²³

INFRASTRUCTURE UN-REPAIRED

The armed insurgency, deliberate destruction of bridges, forest camps and murder of Park staff is well documented. The troubles between 1989 and 1991 have left the Park with little working infrastructure. However, many years have passed and no positive action has been taken to give the field staff any support or real protection other than the posting of some Armed Forest Battalion staff. Even these men do not dare to take on the poachers.²³

The network of roads and patrol paths are impassable. Only one road remains open running north to Mathanguri. None of the others have been repaired and patrol paths have grown over. Consequently, the only anti-poaching patrols carried out are on elephants in the summer monsoon and by foot patrol in the dry season. There are only 22 operational forest camps in the 2,837 km² Park with a core area of 470 km².²⁴

During EIA's visit the peace of Manas was disturbed by the sound of blasting. The Bhutanese authorities are building a road through the Royal Manas National Park in Bhutan which has been widely criticised. It is feared that this road will open up the Bhutanese side for poachers providing them with easier access to Manas Tiger Reserve.



Starved of funds

Unlike Kaziranga National Park, the same failures of Central and State Government to financially support Manas have already demoralised staff.

In the 1995/96 financial year the budget for Project Tiger was set at US\$272,850, half to be paid for by the Central Government and half by the State Government. This figure includes US\$157,150 for salaries. The actual funds the Tiger Reserve was to receive was only US\$185,700 (US\$87,150 below budget) of which only US\$145,714 has been received to date. This amount does not even cover the salaries.²⁴

Additionally, in the 1995/96 budget, of US\$114,300 "non-plan" funds earmarked for capital costs and additional salaries for protection of rhinos, US\$46,600 has been diverted by the former State Government away from wildlife protection.²⁴ Under such circumstances, it is impossible for the field director to maintain control of the Tiger Reserve.

Lost control

There are many signs throughout the Park that poachers move around with impunity and that the Park staff have lost their authority.

In April 1996, S. Deb Roy, former field director of Manas Tiger Reserve, travelled to a few parts of the Park. At an artificial water-hole he reported finding the front leg-bone of a rhino and some old buffalo hooves. He also found a rotting sambar hide. When visiting the only interior camp possible for him to reach, he saw at least three well-trodden poachers' tracks. The staff at the camp admitted that poaching was rampant in the area and that they hardly ever responded when they heard shots - they were too afraid.²⁵ During EIA's visit to the Tiger Reserve, a member of staff explained that there were gangs of 20 armed poachers moving through the Park.²⁵

EIA investigators walked along the southern boundary to the west of the main gate. Within one



Left: "Narmada", an elephant shot by poachers during a sniping incident on 30th June 1996 when Mr Barek, a Forest Department boatman was killed. He was travelling back to camp on the elephant and was unarmed.

Below left: Fuelwood collection within the core area of the Tiger Reserve has become commonplace.

kilometre of the Forest Department's mahout camp villagers were crossing into the core area of the Reserve to collect masses of fuel wood. Stacks of wood were piled high in the Reserve and dozens of villagers were floating it across the flooded river. Herds of cattle were also grazing alongside Forest Department elephants in the Reserve.

In the village and all along the banks of the river timber was stacked high. Part of the edge of the Tiger Reserve had been cleared completely.

The staff at the camp admitted that poaching was rampant in the area and that they hardly ever responded when they heard shots - they were too afraid.²⁵

Indian conservationists have recognised the importance of gaining support for the protected areas from the local communities.

Local communities & ecodesvelopment

India faces massive problems with its growing human population which is rapidly running out of land. A conflict has developed between local communities and protected areas which has often been stirred and encouraged by ruthless politicians and business people seeking their own exploitation of the rich forest resources. Local tribal people moved out of core areas of Tiger Reserves, National Parks and Sanctuaries have often been promised good alternative land and support. These promises have too often been broken.

Indian conservationists have recognised the importance of gaining support for the protected areas from the local communities. If antagonised, some local people become the poachers or labour for the timber Mafia. When no respect exists between these people and the Forest Department the protected area is threatened by collection of fuel-wood, bamboo, timber and other forest produce. A survey of protected areas in the late 1980s revealed that 69% of surveyed areas had people living inside them and, in 64% of them, community rights, leases or concessions existed.¹

There is an urban romantic notion of forest dwelling tribal people surviving off the forest and continuing their lives in complete harmony with nature. Some would say that the forest dwelling people of India are the best guardians of the tiger. Such sentiments should be cautiously guarded because there are few areas of India today where these communities are not affected by modern influences. Many tribal people prefer to move out of their forest into developed areas to pursue the trappings of modern consumer life. Those remaining like to be consulted on their future.

Ecodesvelopment is defined in many different ways by different Governments and funding organisations.



This has led to conflict between conservationists and some "ecodesvelopment" schemes with accusations that the term is being used to set up economic development with no real benefits to biodiversity.

In recent years there have been attempts by the Government of India and some Ngos to build ecodesvelopment schemes providing the local people with basic amenities and local work. The Eighth Five Year Plan in 1991/92 budgeted almost US\$3 million for a scheme called "Ecodesvelopment around National Parks and Sanctuaries."² Some Ngos have been involved in local schemes providing health care, alternative facilities for livestock and family planning. Building successful schemes involves understanding the needs of the local community, the protected area and its staff and creating respect and communication between them. One of the few Ngos that has attempted this is the Ranthambhore Foundation, with a series of people-related integrated activities around Ranthambhore National Park. Unfortunately, the State and the Central Government have seldom bothered to have genuine discussions with such Ngos about future strategies.³

There is considerable fear of a massive World Bank project which will inject large sums of money into communities around protected areas. Concern

surrounds this large scale approach together with specific funding and proposal criticisms. There is also widespread suspicion of other World Bank forest monoculture projects.⁴

World Bank - the risks of big money in small communities

The complex issues that arise when developing strategies and projects to involve local communities and protected areas is sharply highlighted in the fight for, and against, a large project currently underway. Over the last two years the World Bank has been negotiating the "India Ecodesvelopment Project" with the Government of India. It will involve the injection of US\$67 million into seven protected areas including five Project Tiger Reserves and Nagarhole (a Project Elephant Reserve) and Gir National Park, home to the world's only wild Asian lions.⁵

A wide spectrum of Indian conservationists oppose the project in its current form, even though many of them embrace the concept of local community involvement in protected areas. Many other Ngos support it and the World Bank defends the project and believes much of the criticism is due to Ngos not fully appreciating the process or reading the latest documents. The micro-plan for the seven project areas will develop as the project gets underway.

Some fundamental objections are:

- The Project focuses too much on human development with too little emphasis on the protection of biodiversity.
- The Project risks building up development areas on the borders of protected areas thereby attracting more people to these sensitive zones and threatening the protected area further.
- The Project diverts funds earmarked for biodiversity to development schemes.
- The Project injects too much money too quickly into areas of extreme poverty, giving no time for growth of ideas and local participation in evolving the scheme to suit local needs This increases the likelihood of political corruption.
- The Project spends too much money on foreign travel and consultancies.
- The Project diverts protected area staff away from vital protective work.

Out of the US\$67 million for the 5 year project, US\$20 million is in the form of a Global Environment Facility (GEF) grant. A further US\$28 million is a 35 year loan from the International Development Association repayable with virtually no interest.⁶ The rest of the project budget of US\$19 million has to be found by the Government of India (US\$6.6 million), State Governments (US\$8 million) and the project beneficiaries - the poor local communities (US\$4.4 million). The local people will largely pay their contribution through labour and supply of materials and much of the Governments' contribution will come from salaries already covered under Forest Department budgets.

The Project's budget reveals that pre-operative expenditure (reports, visits, etc), consultancies and supervisory travel and foreign exchange certificates swallow up US\$20.5 million - more than the GEF grant. In addition to this there are further consultancies and budget travel lines hidden in other parts of the budget.⁷ According to the World Bank, much of this money will go to local Ngos for monitoring and assessing progress to build the micro-plan - arguably a vital safety net.



The proposal for one of the protected areas reveals that, although additional staff are provided for the ecodesvelopment project, existing Forest Department personnel are expected to spend 40% of their time on the project. This will actually reduce the staffing of the protected area which is already short-staffed. The Bank argues that this diversion of time will be phased in and is balanced by the additional protected area management funds and that the improvement of relations due to the project will reduce the threats.

The diversion of allocated funds away from protected areas is clearly not in the spirit of the project. Nevertheless, since the Planning Commission has not yet set budgets for the next five years, it will be impossible to ensure that the injection of World Bank money into this project will not reduce Government expenditure in other protected areas. In the past, additional funds have been used as a reason to reduce Government budgets in other wildlife sectors.

Carpet weaving ecodesvelopment scheme near Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve.

Fuelwood collection is illegal in protected areas although it still goes on. Some ecodesvelopment schemes attempt to provide alternative sources of fuel to relieve the pressure.





Madhya Pradesh officials seize tiger skin and arrest 2 traders, May 1994.

Enforcement of wildlife law

When the fruits of enforcement officers' exhaustive enquiries are abandoned by the courts they become understandably de-moralised. Too often, poachers and dealers have been released on bail in cases that rarely come to court. When the culprits re-offend they are released again. It must seem to the few committed officers in the Police, the Forest Department, the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, the Border Security Force and any other Government agency charged with enforcing law, that their activities are futile.

Although the situation is desperate in most parts of India, there are instances where local political will has backed the officers and real progress has been made.

Tiger Cells

After undercover activities by an NGO revealed widespread poaching and dealer networks in Madhya Pradesh, a co-ordinated body called the Tiger Cell was convened. Under the leadership of a senior policeman, the joint operations of the Police and Forest Department of Madhya Pradesh succeeded in seizing large quantities of wildlife, including two dozen tiger and leopard skins from one region.

Between April 1995 and June 1996 the Tiger Cell arrested nearly 150 people and seized 73 leopard skins or parts and 15 tiger skins or parts. Other wildlife products such as deer skins and antlers were also seized.¹

Despite this ongoing success it is reported that, when the head of the cell was promoted and two other heads came and went in six months, the cell was threatened. This followed the weakening of political support.²



© Wildlife Protection Society of India

In July 1996 in Uttar Pradesh, action by the Forest Department has resulted in seizures near Corbett Tiger Reserve. In one operation the Forest Department sought the help of an NGO which resulted in the seizure of a tiger skin and tiger skeleton.³ The local authorities, encouraged by this success, are following up with similar actions.

Weaknesses in the system

The question of effective enforcement is riddled with generic bottlenecks in the Indian bureaucracy. Liaison

between relevant departments (e.g. police and forest) is not always easy. At the top, the relevant ministries of the Government of India have only just started to consider wildlife crime and there has been no concrete action so far.

At a basic level, knowledge of the law, mainly the Wildlife (Protection) Act, is lacking in the police and the forest department. There is little or no training for officers and no legal support to help bring cases to court successfully. In the report of the committee appointed by the High Court of Delhi in February 1996 it was noted that "It has been repeatedly observed that complaints filed under section 55 of the Wildlife Protection Act, which forms the bedrock on which the entire edifice of the prosecution stands is drafted by the junior-most officers of the Department. This results in poorly prepared and drafted complaints, lacking in innumerable specific mandatory requirements".⁴

Tourism

Indian tourism in protected areas has largely been low cost tourism by India's own top earning classes. It has relied upon cheap accommodation, outside companies running the lodges, and little concern for, or interest in, the local people. Gate fees are so low that virtually no revenue accrues from tourism but there are plenty of problems: the spectacle of wealthy tourists kicking up dust at local people as their 4x4 roars past to the Reserve, can only create resentment by local communities when they receive no benefits from this invasion.

In all but two States (Madhya Pradesh and Assam) revenue from gate fees - entrance to the Park - are not invested in the protected area but go straight to the State treasury. However, there is good reason to believe that tourism could supply much needed revenue to the Reserves if all States allowed revenue to go straight back into the protected areas and if gate fees were considerably increased - especially for foreign tourists. None of this would require an increase in visitors. Foreign tourists are prepared to pay high fees in many African countries such as Tanzania, Botswana and Kenya. In fact, if the benefits that foreign tourist money brings are explained to the tourists, many may well dig even deeper into their pockets.

Foreign tourism is minimal, except in certain of the main Parks such as Kanha, Corbett, and Ranthambhore. Nonetheless, even low volumes of people can provide substantial income.

The future

Global tourism is now the world's largest single industry, employing more people than any other. Indian conservationists tremble at the thought of an invasion and the Indian approach to conservation has always been to protect an area from outside pressures - of which tourism is certainly one. However, on a Reserve by Reserve basis, plans could be drawn up to control and benefit from small scale foreign tourism - an industry which India as a whole is bound to attract more and more. If the mechanisms are put in place to involve local people in the schemes so that they gain benefit from the presence of foreign tourists, then it could be another way of helping the local communities see real benefits from the presence of tigers and all the

other species of the forest. But it would have to be done slowly, cautiously and with real involvement of neighbouring communities. Responsible, planned tourism can help, but if allowed to get out of control it can destroy the tiger. It is not a panacea for funding Parks in India.



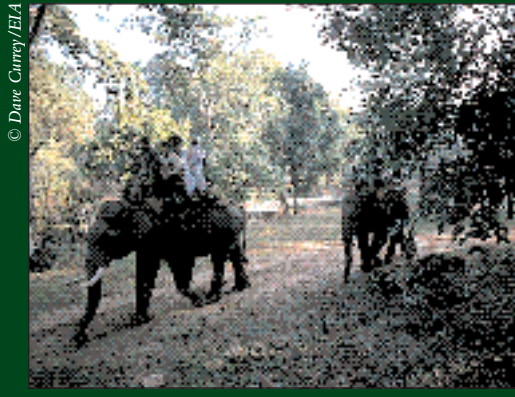
Revenue from Gate Fee increase

EXAMPLE: BANDHAVGARH TIGER RESERVE COULD RAISE US\$45,000

Park fees and other revenue earned by Parks in Madhya Pradesh are ploughed back into the Park. But this is minimal. On average there are about 16,000 visitors per year (only 10,000 in 1994) to Bandhavgarh, of which about 1,500 are foreigners, mostly from the UK and the USA.⁵ Park fees are as follows:

	Rupees per day	US Dollars (equivalent)
Vehicle (including 5 people)	10	28 cents
Extra person (over 5)	2	6 cents
Guide (compulsory)	30	86 cents
Still camera	10	28 cents
Video camera	200	5.71 dollars
1 hr Elephant ride	200	5.71 dollars

The deputy director explained that they were not allowed to charge extra for foreign visitors because there is a circular saying that this is not allowed. At first he felt that foreign tourism was not significant enough to make any difference. EIA calculated with him the amount of revenue that could be collected if Park fees equivalent to those charged in many African countries were imposed. On average, foreign visitors stay two days. We took US\$15 per



© Diane Gurney/EIA

day as a common Park fee (East Africa), and calculated that gate fees alone would raise US\$45,000 or more than 25% of his annual budget. Asked what he would do with this extra revenue, he said he would develop water-holes, increase fire protection and help local villages.



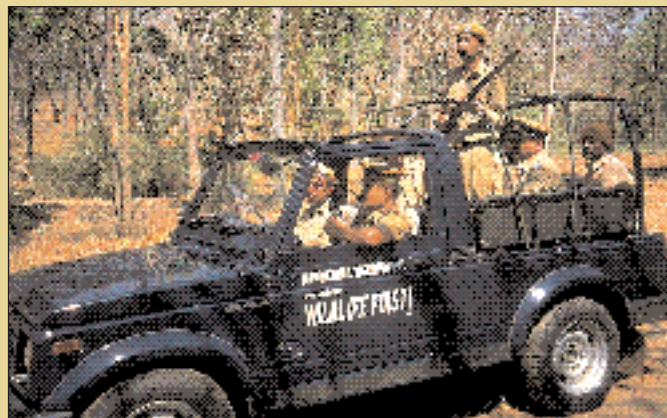
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Ngos

Indian Ngos fighting apathy with action

As the crisis facing India's remaining tigers has grown, there has been an outcry from many Indian Ngos against the failure of the Government to act. Among these are many distinguished wildlife experts who are recognised for their vital contributions to conservation in many parts of the world. Some of them have been involved in MoEF committee reports as members of the committee or by providing much of the information for them.

The openness of the Indian media to factual NGO information provides a sobering chronicle of NGO concern over Government inaction. The large volume of newspaper articles also demonstrates the resilience of the Government to justified criticism and its willingness to file away all the recommendations and action points rather than implement them.



© Tiger Link

Ngos have reached out to their supporters at home and abroad to come to the assistance of India's wildlife. In recent years some important research work has been funded from abroad and in the last year NGO funding has successfully reached the field by cutting through the Indian bureaucracy.

The following represents just some of the NGO activity:

- Four-wheeled drive vehicles, motor cycles and trucks have been bought for anti-poaching work.
- Boats have been bought for essential patrolling.
- Awards have been given to outstanding field staff to help bolster morale on the front-line.
- Wildlife trade investigations have been carried out.
- Ecodevelopment schemes have been funded including medical aid, dairy provision, sewing machines and provision for other local needs.
- Public awareness and education have been increased.
- Art initiatives have been encouraged.
- Starving working elephants have been fed.
- Advice has been given to local communities on compensation for wild animal damage.
- Press releases have been issued covering relevant details of tiger conservation including brave criticism of the Government when deserved.

Sadly, a recent response to NGO concern has been an attempt to curb some of their activities. Concerned by the level of "negative publicity" the Government is facing, chief wildlife wardens were told by the Additional Inspector General of Forests at a meeting in June 1996 to stop "unauthorised persons" from carrying out research and studies on wildlife in India, especially in protected areas.¹



Conclusions

- 1 The Indian tiger is under serious threat of extinction in the wild within the next few years. The tiger's fate is echoed by the threat to India's forests and all the fauna and flora living in them.
- 2 The Government of India has failed to deal with this threat over the last few years, even when the evidence of poaching, amounting to at least one tiger poached every day, was revealed. The Prime Minister's office has failed to provide leadership and direction and the Indian Board for Wildlife, chaired by the Prime Minister, has not met for 8 years. Project Tiger has been unwilling to recognise the problems and has even been involved in sweeping them under the carpet. At the time of going to press Project Tiger is without a director.
- 3 State Governments have largely failed to respond to the tiger crisis. In some cases they have diverted money earmarked for conservation projects and in other cases, they have delayed supplying funds for protected areas. Tiger Reserves and other protected areas have been de-notified by State resolutions and industrial encroachment has been widely allowed to occur.
- 4 The tiger and its habitat is threatened by poaching for bones and skin by industrial development, hostility from local communities and the activities of the timber mafia. The Ministry of Environment and Forests is sanctioning industrial development on the edges of, and sometimes inside, protected areas.
- 5 Wildlife trade in India is out of control, with elephant ivory, rhino horn and leopard skins easily available. The enforcement authorities, apart from a tiny minority, are completely failing to enforce the Wildlife (Protection) Act, the Environmental Protection Act and the Forest Conservation Act.
- 6 The highly endangered Tibetan Antelope is being driven towards extinction because of India's illegal consumption of the species. "Shahtoosh", the wool from the Tibetan Antelope, is commonly available from Kashmir Government and private stores throughout India. This trade is linked to the illegal trade in tigers.
- 7 Field staff are being killed in their courageous efforts to protect tigers and other wildlife. They receive little support and are all too often ignored. Starved of funds, they often live in appalling conditions.

Recommendations

- 1 The Indian Prime Minister must re-convene the Indian Board for Wildlife under his chairmanship and draw up an emergency plan to tackle the imminent demise of the tiger and its habitat. He must also gain political support from State Chief Ministers for new leadership on this issue.
- 2 The Planning Commission must look seriously at increasing the budget allowance for wildlife and forest protection in the ninth 5 year plan, as proposed by the Ministry of Environment and Forests.
- 3 The recommendations of the various Indian expert committees must be prioritised and implemented. Emergency actions, with funding, must be implemented immediately.
- 4 The international community must encourage the Government of India to create renewed political will to save the tiger.
- 5 The international community must do everything in its power to close illegal markets for tiger and other wildlife parts from India in a real effort to support the field staff who are risking, and losing, their lives in their attempts to stop poaching.
- 6 Consuming nations must redouble their efforts to clamp down on illegal consumption of tiger parts within their own countries.
- 7 If the Indian Prime Minister draws up an emergency plan to save the tiger, the international community must provide financial support to ensure its success.



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EIA has taken care to ensure the accuracy of the information in this report. We welcome comments, updates and new information on Indian tiger conservation, poaching and trade in wildlife. Please send to Dave Currey at EIA UK.