

Project Tiger in India

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Abstract: Project Tiger is a tiger conservation programme launched on April 1, 1973 by the Government of India during Prime Minister India Gandhi's tenure. The project aims at ensuring a viable population of the Bengal Tiger in its natural habitats, protecting it from extinction, and preserving areas of biological importance as a natural heritage that represent the diversity of ecosystems across the heritage that represents the diversity of ecosystems across the tiger's range in the country.

Key words: Tiger, Conservation, Wildlife reserve, people

The tiger is an endangered species in the world. At the turn of 20th century, India had a population, of tigers that ranged from 20000 to 40000. Due to hunting practices of the Maharajas and the British, as well as the poaching activities, their number had dwindled drastically to about 182 in the seventies. Another reason for the sinking population is the scarcity of prey for these wild cats. In the Initial years of this project there were only nine tiger reserves in India these are Jim Corbett, Manas, Ranthambore, Simlipal Bandipur, Palamau, Sunderbans, Melghat and Kanha national parks. The Country aims to sustain a viable tiger population based on a scientifically calculated carrying capacity of habitats while maintain a balance between development and wildlife conservation.

The Tiger *Panthera tigris*, an apex predator, that requires vast habitat to harbour viable population. Tigers have declined globally due to direct hunting, prey deletion and habitat destruction (Wikramanayake et al., 2010). The continued illegal trade of tiger body parts and products driven by high demand in China and South East Asia threatens the species with extinction (Dinerstein et al. 2007). Wild life and tigers have been an integral part of India history, culture and religious. The most ancient records of tigers are found in the cave paintings of Central India (Badam & Sathe, 1991). It was only after colonial occupation of India that systematic removal of wild life, including that of tigers, was under taken by Government through bounties and state sponsored actions (Rangarajan, 2005).

As the number of tigers is decreasing day by day, we need to take preventive measures to save them from getting extinct. Numerous efforts are being carried out to save their species, and project tiger is an important movement to save them. The habitat required for tigers should be made proper and any cutting of trees in that area should be avoided. Being the national animal of India, it is our duty that we safeguard the wildlife property. The tiger is the biggest (Sunquist and Sunquist), the most iconic and one of the most endangered of all cats (WWF- UK, 2014). Tigers occupy an important place in the Indian culture (Thapar 1992) and served as cultural icon by the people. (Weber and Robinowitz, 1996). Since ages it has been a symbol of magnificence, power, beauty, fierceness and has

been associated with bravery and valour. It is admired by people for these natural and supernatural attributes (Tamang 1993). The tiger also has a significant place in Hindu mythology. Tiger is the national animal of both India and Bangladesh. Tiger are very significant in ecological point of view. Tiger is the top predator, which is on the apex of the food chain. Therefore, tigers protects habitats and health the forest. Its conservation leads to the conservation of other species, which are directly indirectly part of the tiger's food chain.



Management actions:

India is very densely populated country. The tiger conservation in India cannot be successful, if it is not supported by the people.

- The legal land rights should be given to the historical residents in reserves, thereby reducing their antagonism to government policies.
- The use of Chemicals for agriculture around the forests and buffer zones should be restricted.

- The locals opposition to government policies is increased by allowing the industrial use and restricting communal use of forest resources. The policies should be designed in such a way that it allows at least limited extraction for livelihood by reducing and restricting industrial extraction from forests.
- Incentives should be given to the farmers, who lose their livestock to the tigers.
- The people in the reserve can be relocated to better places and the adjacent communities in the reserve can be employed in tourism, providing them a sustainable income.
- An active education will help the locals to understand the importance of conservation of Tigers.

Objectives of Project Tiger:

- Reduce factors that cause the diminishing of tiger habitats.
- Ensure a viable tiger population for scientific, ecological, economic, aesthetic and cultural values.

Methodology of project Tiger:

- The administrative body for the project is the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) formed in 2005.
- The Conservation units are
 - Sunderbans Conservation Unit
 - Northeast Conservation Unit
 - Western Ghats Conservation Unit
 - Shivalik-Terai Conservation Unit
 - Eastern Ghats Conservation Unit
 - Sariska Conservation Unit
 - Central India Conservation Unit
 - Kaziranga Conservation Unit
- The reserves are created and functioned on a core/buffer strategy. That is, the core areas have the legal status of a national park or sanctuary in India. The buffer areas form the peripheral region and are a combination of forest and non-forest lands. The project purposes of adopting an exclusive tiger agenda in the core areas and an inclusive people-centric approach in the buffer regions.
- Project Tiger also does the job of conducting tiger causes in the country. It also combats poaching.
- In India tigers are present in 19 States. States maintain the special Tiger Protection Force to protect tigers in the reserves.
- The project is in the process of creating a national database of individual tigers with photos so that seized body parts or dead tigers can be traced.
- A software based monitoring system for tigers was launched in 2010.
- The E-Eye system was launched in 2016 at Corbett national park, which uses thermal cameras for enhanced surveillance.
- The project is working towards eliminating all human activities from the core area. In the buffer areas, it is working towards minimising tiger-human conflict.

- Wildlife research is also carried out under the project and this includes flora and fauna assessment.
- The Forest Rights Act was passed in 2006, which recognized the rights of certain forest –dwelling communities.
- Poaching is a big menace in India. Tigers are especially vulnerable because tiger skin is in huge demand in the international black market.
- The project has brought about significant changes in the tiger population in the country from 2010 to 2014, there has been a 30% rise in the number of tigers in India.

A roaring success:

For sustainable tiger management, it would be prudent to adopt an environment, social, and governance approach. Speaking to environmental aspects, although most of the tiger areas have benefited in terms of an enhanced biodiversity index, certain inherent ecological issues need long term planning, like the clearing of invasive alien species (like lantana and parthenium etc.) to free the space for the growth of much needed grass, bamboo and other fodder trees as well as to reduce fire hazards—the two threats to our protected areas. The social aspect of tiger management involves the tiger VS tribal debate. It is good that ecotourism has given considerable stakes to local tribals in protecting the tiger, but it needs to be community-oriented with firm checks on commercial operators. The governing aspect needs improvement. The wages and salaries of the front-line staff are often delayed causing hardship for them and offering their mortal. Besides, skill building of the staff, particularly, in intelligence gathering, supply and training in use of arms and offer modern basic technological tools, proper investigation of suspected tiger death cases are a few of the crucial governance areas that need attention.

Conclusion: As per National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) website, Tiger is an umbrella species which ensures viable populations of other wild animals and forest, thereby ensuring the ecological viability of the entire area and habitat, which also ensures the water and climate security of the region. Even though there is significant reduction in tiger poaching due to better technology and protection mechanism, it remains to be a big threat to the big cats besides habitat fragmentation and degradation. The goal of project Tiger would be to have a viable and sustainable tiger population in tiger habitats based on a scientifically calculated carrying capacity. We cannot increase the tiger population of the country at the same pace because that will result in an increase in conflict with human beings. The project Tiger generates employment for local people annually. The success of project Tiger is a matter of pride not only for India but for the whole world.

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