

# INVOLVING LOCALS IN REVIVING TIGER POPULATION PAYS OFF IN PANNA TIGER RESERVE

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Biodiversity, Ecology, and Wildlife Related Issues

T1 and one of its cubs at the Panna Tiger Reserve. On April 16, 2010, T1 delivered its first litter — four cubs — the first of a tigress reintroduced in the Reserve. File | Photo Credit: [R. Sreenivasa Murthy](#)

In 2009, as a homesick T3 meandered almost 442 km to return to the Panna Tiger Reserve, its former home, large numbers of locals helped bring the male tiger back to the Panna Tiger Reserve, where it had been translocated.

Foresters tracked T3's movement using radio collar signals, locals alerted other villagers living along the trail, temporarily cut off power supply to wire fences around fields, and identified some common abodes and caves where the tiger could take shelter.

A sense of ownership had taken over them, following a meeting with the Forest Department on November 5, 2009. Scores of villagers came out to accompany 70 foresters and four elephants to ensure T3 returned to the Panna Tiger Reserve (PTR), where tigers had gone extinct by the beginning of that year.

Registering a 7% growth in its tiger population every year since, the PTR, where population stress, poaching and management gaps had caused their untimely extinction, houses 52 tigers today. All the seven tigers, reintroduced under the Tiger Recovery Plan, have bred cubs.

“Panna's revival has been people-centric,” says Rangaiah Sreenivasa Murthy, former director of the reserve, who led efforts from 2009 to 2015. “It has been about inculcating a sense of ownership for tigers among local staff and those living around the Reserve.”

Spread over 576 sq. km. of deciduous forests in the Bundelkhand region of Madhya Pradesh, PTR used to be a hunting preserve for rulers of the princely states of Panna, Chhatarpur and Bijawar. In fact, to conserve the species then, there was a ban on killing females, cubs, and tigers shorter than 9 feet. “People here are trigger-happy,” said Mr. Murthy. “For the feudal lords here, honour and pride means everything.”

## A tale of two tiger reserves

So, foresters told the community patriarchs they met: “You have lost the tiger, the pride of Bundelkhand. We want to restore it. Support us and get involved.”

They devised a conservation model focused on coexistence with tigers, and involved ‘*Jan samarthan se baagh samrakshan*’ (tiger conservation with people's support). Under the ‘Friends of Panna’ initiative, foresters met and shared information with every local on the revival plan and their role in it. Children were taken to nature camps inside the park, in collaboration with the World Wildlife Fund.

But the threat of international poaching rackets, flourishing under mercenaries from the local Pardhi, Kanjar and Baheliya tribes, loomed large. Complacent field staff, under pressure from poachers, sometimes tried to bury evidence and even connived to organise hunts.

To counter this, supervisors began handling confrontations with poachers. Four field staff were jailed for dereliction of duty; the conviction of 11 poachers instilled the fear of law among others.

After T3 was brought back, it mated with T1, a tigress brought to the reserve earlier, with the help of urine-lure technique, wherein urine of a tigress is sprayed around to attract a tiger. On April 16, 2010, T1 was delivered of the first litter — four cubs — the first of a tigress reintroduced in the Reserve.

In 2011, T4 became the first orphaned tigress in the world to be re-wilded, and bore and reared two cubs to adulthood in the wild.

Today, PTR's tigers occupy a range from the Narmada to the Son rivers, having established themselves in the Satpura and Sanjay Tiger Reserves as well.

According to Mr. Murthy, an abundant prey base (chital, sambhar, neelgai and chinkara) and the perennial river Ken, which flows through the Reserve, have contributed to the revival.

Expanding tourism in the reserve is a new challenge. In contrast to approximately 20,000 visitors to the Reserve previously, 50,000-60,000 people visit it in every season now, he said, which may cause stress to tigers.

Pardhi and Baheliya villagers were trained as guides and made aware of tiger conservation, said K.S. Bhadoriya, PTR's current Director. One member from each village household is a part of one of seven groups, and they take turns to patrol the reserve with the forest personnel.

The Reserve has been rated "very good" in the four evaluation cycles of the National Tiger Conservation Authority from 2006 to 2018. According to the results of the tiger census declared on July 29, Madhya Pradesh has topped the country with 526 tigers.

Support quality journalism - [Subscribe to The Hindu Digital](#)

Please enter a valid email address.

How Hyderabad's NIRD-PR campus is reducing its carbon footprint and setting an example with its model road technologies and eco-housing methods

We head to HMA Greens Hydro Farm to understand how hydroponics works

Support The Hindu's new online experience with zero ads.

Already a user? [Sign In](#)

**END**

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com