

SARISKA WEARS THE STRIPES OF SUCCESS

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

Toil for conservation: A tigress with her cub drinking water at a pond in the Sariska Tiger Reserve. Special arrangement

The measures for habitat management for tigers launched about six months ago at the famous Sariska Tiger Reserve in Rajasthan's Alwar district have started bearing fruit. The tiger population in the wildlife sanctuary has gone up to 25, while the resources are being provided to create water holes and develop grasslands for ungulates as a prey base.

New tourist route

The forest administration has opened a new route in the tiger reserve's buffer zone, adjacent to Alwar town, for tourists to facilitate better sightings of the big cats. The new Bara-Liwari route, located in the region where a tigress gave birth to two cubs recently, will reduce pressure on the core area and increase livelihood opportunities for the rural population.

A foundation established by a private bank has started delivering goods and resources which the Forest Department could not arrange because of a variety of handicaps. As part of its corporate social responsibility expenditure, the foundation is funding development of grasslands, earthen bunds and water holes for wild animals at 10 different locations and making livelihood intervention for the villagers being relocated from the sanctuary.

The tiger reserve, spread across 1,216 sq. km, witnessed the first-of-its-kind tiger relocation from the Ranthambore National Park by helicopter in 2008 after the felines became extinct in the sanctuary. Since then, the animal has taken some time in multiplying at its own ease, unlike the Panna tiger reserve in Madhya Pradesh, where a similar aerial translocation was carried out in 2009.

Aid for guards

The foundation has distributed 23 motorcycles with helmets to the forest guards in Sariska for monitoring the tiger movement with the pledge that one new motorcycle per new tiger will be given in the future.

Tourism & Wildlife Society of India (TWSI) honorary secretary Harsh Vardhan, who has been visiting Sariska for the last four decades, told *The Hindu* that the forest was now depicting an appropriate balance between the prey and predator.

The grassland habitats developed in dry patches of land have helped ungulates to feed better and breed in the areas such as Naya Pani, Dabli and Bhagani, leading to an enhanced feed for tigers.

The forest administration, assisted by the foundation, has created new water sources at 10 diverse habitats within the forest, where solar pump-based tube wells were being sunk. This will facilitate the supply of water to far-off areas, even in the elevated zones without any diesel pump noise as faced in the past.

Sariska Tiger Reserve's Field Director R.N. Meena said three more zones in the core area would be opened for tourists in the near future. Re-routing has been done for the visitors'

vehicles so as to occasionally remain off-beat and cover inner forest regimes to gain better sightings of tigers.

Amid the efforts being made for relocation of villages, about 1,000 families are still staying in the forest area, with some of them residing within the core area of 881 sq. km, such as in Madhopur, Indala, Kundalka and Haripura.

According to the forest officials, the rehabilitated villagers' needs, including the *khatedari* rights on the land allotted to them, have been met on priority to act as a catalyst for the remaining villages to be shifted out of the reserve areas.

'Immense potential'

Mr. Vardhan affirmed that all issues of the wild species in Sariska would become easier to tackle if the ecology of the forest was understood and action taken accordingly. Being the nearest Project Tiger reserve to the national capital, Sariska holds an immense potential for ecotourism with its rich wildlife and beautiful mountains, streams and lakes, as it is flourishing again with tigers.

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