

# IN 2022, MADHYA PRADESH LOSES MORE THAN DOUBLE BIG CATS COMPARED TO KARNATAKA, ITS NEAREST RIVAL FOR 'TIGER STATE' TAG

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Facing the challenge of retaining the status of India's "tiger State", Madhya Pradesh lost 34 big cats in 2022 as compared to just 15 in Karnataka, its nearest competitor in housing the number of tigers in the country, according to official data.

The deaths were reported in the survey year for the country's tiger census, whose results will be announced later in 2023.

A senior forest department official said it is a "mystery" as to why Madhya Pradesh has recorded higher tiger deaths than the southern State though both had almost the same number of big cats as per the 2018 count.

Karnataka, home to 524 tigers as per the 2018 census, is competing with Madhya Pradesh (526) for the tag of India's 'tiger State'.

The national tiger census is conducted once in every four years. The latest All India Tiger Estimation (AITE) was conducted in 2022 and its report is scheduled to be released this year, a forest department official said.

As the country eagerly awaits findings of the quadrennial count to know which State stands where in terms of tiger population, data on how many big cats India lost in the year just gone by is now available.

Madhya Pradesh lost 34 tigers in 2022, while its nearest rival for the "tiger State" status, Karnataka recorded the death of 15 big cats, according to data uploaded on the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) website.

The causes of these deaths were not mentioned.

The NTCA is a statutory body under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change constituted under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, for strengthening tiger conservation.

Total tiger deaths in India in the previous year stood at 117, as per the NTCA website.

“We (MP) have the maximum number of tigers and we take into account all the carcasses found in our state. It is a mystery for us why lesser tiger deaths were reported there (Karnataka) when the number of big cats is almost the same,” Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (Wildlife) J.S. Chauhan told *PTI* when asked about the wide gap in mortality figures in the two States.

He said the average age of tigers is 12 to 18 years.

If longevity criteria are taken into account, then about 40 deaths annually should be considered natural as the State had recorded the presence of 526 tigers in the last estimation conducted in 2018, he said.

In 2021, Madhya Pradesh lost 42 tigers out of 127 fatalities recorded in the country that year.

“I don't know about other states but no tiger death goes unreported in Madhya Pradesh. We investigate every case of tiger death and take legal steps if something suspicious is found,” said the senior forest department official.

Mr. Chouhan said sometimes big cats die naturally deep inside forests and caves which can't be spotted.

Asked about the birth rate of the feline, the forest officer said around 250 cubs are born annually in Madhya Pradesh, which is home to six tiger reserves—Kanha, Bandhavgarh, Pench, Satpura, Panna and Sanjay-Dubri.

Of the 34 tiger fatalities recorded in Madhya Pradesh during 2022, the biggest loss was suffered by the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve, where nine big cats died in the 12-month period, followed by Pench (five) and Kanha (four), according to the NTCA website.

Asked about the high number of tiger deaths in Madhya Pradesh, wildlife activist Ajay Dubey said the central State has been leading the country in natural as well as unnatural death of big cats since the past decade.

“The State is leading because the accountability of officials has not been fixed in tiger deaths and their intelligence network is poor. Prosecution and conviction in poaching cases have been poor. NTCA directives are clear that official accountability must be fixed in cases of tiger deaths,” he maintained.

Mr. Dubey said Bandhavgarh, which accounted for the highest tiger deaths in the State in 2022, has a high density of big cats and the reserve, located in the Vindhya Hills of Umaria district, is also a big tourist attraction.

As per the website, the highest number of tiger mortality in the country during the period 2012 to July 2022 was recorded in Bandhavgarh (66) followed by Kanha (55).

Madhya Pradesh (257 big cats) had lost the 'tiger State' tag to Karnataka (300) in the All-India Tiger Estimation exercise of 2010.

In 2006, Madhya Pradesh had got the 'tiger State' status with 300 big cats compared to 290 in Karnataka.

Officials believe the number of striped animals dipped in the central State during the 2010

census primarily due to alleged poaching in the Panna reserve, which lost all its tigers in 2009. Panna is now estimated to inhabit around 70 tigers following a decade-long reintroduction programme.

In the 2014 census, MP slipped to third position in the country with a population of 308 tigers, after Uttarakhand (340) and Karnataka (406).

Madhya Pradesh regained the top position in the 2018 tiger census after it was found to be home to 526 felines, two more than Karnataka (524). Uttarakhand held the third position with 442 big cats.

The estimated count of tigers in India had increased from 1,411 in 2006 to 2,967 in 2018, according to the last census report.

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