

Delay in the protection of corridors threatens tiger population

Precious time Construction of a vehicular flyover designed to facilitate animal movement has been delayed. | Photo Credit: [I. P. Bopanna](#)

It is not just poaching or habitat loss that threatens India's tiger population. Delayed action to protect crucial wildlife corridors — despite the availability of relevant ecological knowledge — is also killing these big cats, shows a study published in conservation journal *Oryx*.

For species like tigers which move across large distances, wildlife corridors, protected patches of land connecting two habitats, are crucial. Uttarakhand's Chilla–Motichur corridor is one such patch connecting the eastern and western tracts of the Rajaji Tiger Reserve. It is the only way tigers from the eastern tract (part of a larger, more connected landscape) can colonise the isolated western one. Over the years, however, the corridor has been deteriorating due to reasons including the expansion of nearby townships and the construction of a national highway and rail line.

Multi-pronged approach

Scientists at the Panthera, Nature Conservation Foundation and the University of Kent, U.K., used a multi-pronged approach to study the status of the Chilla–Motichur corridor. First, they studied tiger presence in the area using presence–absence surveys of tiger signs, assessing change in tiger presence from data gathered between 2002 and 2009. While the eastern tract showed a high presence of tigers, the western one showed a distinct decline in tiger numbers and presence.

Second, the team studied the corridor's connectivity using remotely-sensed night-time lighting as an indicator of urbanisation.

They found that since 1993, urbanisation had decreased opportunities to restore the effectiveness of the corridor considerably.

The team compiled 31 research articles on the corridor and made 14 distinct recommendations to restore corridor connectivity. Only five recommendations have been incorporated into government management plans, and delays in mobilising funds and approvals from state departments followed by the lack of deadlines to implement these actions exacerbated the problems.

“Institutional failings are mirrored in the inability of many state and central departments to work together for the restoration of Chilla-Motichur; this case typifies what happens with most wildlife corridors across the country,” says lead author Abishek Harihar (Panthera and Nature Conservation Foundation). “If immediate action is not taken, the population in the western tract could go extinct.”

Tux brushing tussar, cards being exchanged like cocaine packets, billionaires mingled at Illuminating India

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