

EXPLAINER: PROTECTING THE TIGER'S HABITAT

Relevant for: Environment & Disaster Management | Topic: Environmental Degradation - Wildlife related issues

A sub-adult tiger seen crossing a river in Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra. |

Photo Credit: [K. R. Deepak](#)

Since 2016, the deaths of 13 people in the Pandharkawda divisional forest of Maharashtra have been attributed to tigers and at least five of them to Avni, a 6-year-old with two cubs. India's wildlife laws permit a tiger which is believed to have preyed on humans to be killed. The State's chief wildlife warden claimed he had evidence. The decision to shoot T1 (known as Avni) was taken in January but stayed by the Bombay High Court after appeals by activists. Three more deaths later, the Supreme Court, in September, cleared the way for the forest department to have the tiger killed. On November 2, it emerged that forest officials along with Asghar Ali, the son of hunter Nawab Shafat Ali, claimed to have chanced upon the tiger which, they said, charged at them. The hunting party failed to tranquilise Avni, as the rules required, and shot at it fatally. Union Minister for Women and Child Development Maneka Gandhi described the killing as "murder", and several activists and some veterinarians have alleged that no attempt was made to tranquilise the animal. The National Tiger Conservation Authority has commissioned an independent team of wildlife experts to investigate the killing.

The killing of a man-eating tigers is a rare but not unprecedented in India. As tigers are India's apex predators and symbols of its success at conservation, the unusual death of even one tiger causes disquiet in forest departments and among conservation biologists, tourism officials and activists. Out of 553 tiger deaths from 2012 to 2017, 22.1% were due to poaching, 15.4% were seizures, and 62.4% were attributed to natural causes and causes not attributable to poaching, according to information from the Rajya Sabha. India has 50 tiger reserves, but with forest area increasingly spilling into hamlets, there have been several instances of tigers preying on cattle, livestock and, sometimes, people. Days after the killing of Avni, villagers in Lakhimpur Kheri, U.P., crushed a tiger to death with a tractor after it fatally attacked a farmer.

While there is a larger concern about the shrinking space for tiger habitat in India, conservationists have also said that a few tiger reserves are being pampered at the expense of others. A recent study by the World Wildlife Fund said that eight tiger sanctuaries in India could, over time, support more than four times the current population of tigers in these sanctuaries. Ullas Karanth, the noted conservationist, has said that it is futile to preserve individual members of a species and that efforts must be made to conserve the species as a whole. Conservationists have also said that "man-eaters" is a legacy term from colonial hunters and incorrect in today's times. Tigers don't actively seek out humans; it is only because of increased contact between humans and animals that there are more conflicts which leads to deaths.

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