

INDIA'S TIGER CENSUS REVEALS THE TRUTH REGARDING TIGER NUMBERS

The long awaited results of the Indian tiger census have been revealed at last (see the Ministry of Environment and Forests press release below). As anticipated, the numbers are dramatically reduced, compared with the previous census figures from 2001-2002, which were 3,642 tigers. The Indian subcontinent remains home to the greater proportion of the world's wild tigers.

At only 1,411 tigers estimated in this latest census, this looks like an appalling fall in numbers, however this was rationalised by the government change of methodology used to count and extrapolate this final figure.

"This report appears to provide a much more accurate view of the reality of tiger numbers in India, which experts have been purporting for a number of years," said Amanda Bright. "The figures, for which we have been waiting far too long, at last seem to reflect the drastic position that now face wild tigers in India."

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Ministry of Environment and Forests
Press Release

<http://pib.nic.in/release/release.asp?relid=35336>

TOTAL COUNTRY LEVEL POPULATION OF TIGER 1411

ALLOCATION FOR TIGER CONSERVATION ENHANCED TO RS.600 CRORES DURING PLAN PERIOD

ENHANCEMENT OF VILLAGE RELOCATION PACKAGE FOR RS.10 LAKHS PER FAMILY

Total country level population of tiger is 1411 with a 17.43 per cent coefficient of variation. The lower limit is 1165 and the upper limit is 1657. Making a presentation about Tiger census in a press conference today Dr. Rajesh Gopal, Member Secretary, Tiger Project explained that the assessment shows that though the tiger has suffered due to direct poaching, loss of quality habitat, and loss of its prey, but there is still hope. The government has declared more eight new tiger reserves to strengthen the population of tigers. He said an area of around 31111 sq.km. of tiger habitat has been notified/identified by tiger states as per provisions of the wildlife (Protection Act).

New and additional methods have been used in Tiger Census. Giving the details the Minister said The Project Tiger Directorate (now the National Tiger Conservation Authority) of the Ministry of Environment and Forests initiated refinement of the ongoing process of tiger estimation using pugmarks (footprints) in 2002. This was a collaborative initiative with the Wildlife Institute of India and 17 Tiger States. Based on a pilot study done in the Satpura Landscape of Madhya Pradesh, the methodology was mainstreamed as a country-level process, which was endorsed by the Tiger Task Force. The new process has been conceived, financially supported and implemented by the Ministry of Environment and Forests (now the National Tiger Conservation Authority), with internal and external peer review during field data collection.

Dr. Rajesh Gopal informed that results pertaining to four major tiger States (Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan) were finalized / released in May 2007. This report evaluates the current status of tigers, co-predators and their prey in India. The Member Secretary informed that the status of tiger, its co-predators, prey and its habitat has not significantly / adversely changed in the Tiger Reserves and Protected Areas. However, there is a decline in the same in outside areas. The spatial occupancy of tigers and other animals have been done for all the 17 tiger States, and mapped in the GIS domain.

Regarding non-availability of Census in certain areas Dr. Rajesh Gopal, cited difficult circumstances and reasons:

(a) Indravati Tiger Reserve (Chhattisgarh): Estimation could not be done since the area is inaccessible owing to Naxalite engineered problems.

(b) The population estimate relating to Palamau Tiger Reserve (Jharkhand) could not be fully assessed owing to extremist engineered disturbances. However, available information, based on spatial occupancy data collected, indicates a low density of tiger in the area ranging from 0.5 to 1.5 per hundred sq.km.

(c) The population estimation in Sunderbans (West Bengal) is ongoing as a separate exercise owing to the unique habitat conditions.

There are three promising areas i.e. with high probability of long-term persistence. They are:

- (1) Shivalik-Gangetic Plain Landscape Complex Corbett
- (2) Central Indian Landscape Complex (Kanha)
- (3) North East Hills and Brahmaputra Plains (Kaziranga-Karbi Anglong)

Tiger populations having potential to persist as Meta populations are:

- (1) Rajaji-Corbett
- (2) Dudhwa-Katerniaghat
- (3) Satpura-Melghat
- (4) Pench
- (5) Bhadra-Kudremukh
- (6) Parambikulam-Indira Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary

The Census suggests that four Landscapes in the country are in need of inputs:

- (1) Nagarjunasagar Srisailem
- (2) Ranthambhore-Kuno
- (3) Indravati-Northern Andhra
- (4) Bandhavgarh-Sanjay-Palamau

To ensure the long-term survival of tigers in India it is imperative to offer strict protection to establish source populations, and manage areas with restorative inputs by involving local communities in buffer and corridor areas by providing them with a direct stake in conservation. The Government of India has taken several steps to strengthen tiger conservation in the country, through implementation of the urgent recommendations of the Tiger Task Force. This, inter alia, includes enhancement of village relocation package from Rs. 1.00 lakh per

family to Rs. 10.00 lakhs, central assistance for protection and deployment of Tiger Protection Force involving local people and ex-army personnel, rehabilitation/resettlement of denotified tribes/communities involved in traditional hunting, strengthening corridor connectivity, providing safeguards and retrofitting measures for wildlife, establishing eight new tiger reserves, fostering eco-tourism to benefit local people, and strengthening the National Tiger Conservation Authority. The allocation for Tiger Conservation has also been enhanced to Rs. 600.00 crores during the Plan period.

Earlier the Minister of State Shri S. Regupathy, MOS of Environment and Forests released the report of Tiger Census and State Forest Report 2005. A presentation was also made on State Forest Report.

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