

STATUS OF TIGERS OUTSIDE THE PROTECTED AREAS IN MIZORAM

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Introduction

Mizoram is endowed with unique flora and fauna, rich in Biodiversity comprising of rare and threatened animal and plant life. The tropical ecosystem of the territory falls within the mega diversity zone identified as a hot spot for precious biota, warranting in depth scientific study and effective priority conservation measures.

The territory, popularly known as 'Lushai Hills' (earlier), extends over 21,087 km² in the North-East with a North-South stretch of 277 km and East-West width of 121 km. The State is bounded by Cachar District of Assam and Manipur State in North forming a common boundary of 123 km and 95 km while towards East and South flanked by Chin Hills and Arakan Hill Ranges of Myanmar and on the Western front forms common boundary with Chittagong Hills of Bangladesh. The State of Tripura borders towards North-West extending over 66 km in contiguity with Bangladesh. The long International border with Myanmar stretching over 404 km and Bangladesh common border extending over 316 km have immense significance for conservation of Tigers due to potential corridors with neighbouring countries.

Tiger Situation

The hilly terrain with steep gradients supporting innumerable valleys, streams

and 13 perennial rivers although does not provide an ideal hunting ground for Tigers yet ensures protection besides meeting water requirement in the peak dry periods of summer when human habitations face acute water scarcity.

As per 1997 *State of Forest Report* of Forest Survey of India (Anon., 1997), Mizoram has 4,348 km² (23.15%) area under dense forests while the open forests occupy 14,427 km² (76.84%) of the total forest area of 18,775 km². Dense forests are conspicuous towards North along Cachar District of Assam recognized as Inner Line Reserve Forests whereas a sizeable forest exists towards South bordering Myanmar. Besides these dense forests, pockets of dense vegetation are found spread all along North-South length of the territory. A major portion of open forests interspersed with Bamboo growth and chunks of natural forests fringing streams, rivulets and plantations of Teak, also provide shelter and security to herbivores and Tigers. Further, Jhum areas extending over 4,000 km² (approx.) covered with Bamboo and miscellaneous vegetation are the moving ground for wild animals.

Although there is no authentic information on Tiger population outside the protected areas, there are evidences of presence of Tigers in the proximity of few villages. At the commencement of the current year, two Tiger pug marks were

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observed by the villagers of N. Khawbung outside the Murlen National Park. The pug marks were of an adult and a small Tiger having unequal dimensions presumably a male and female or a female Tiger accompanied by a grown up cub. Further the Assistant Conservator of Forests Champhai has reported on the frequent visits of Tiger in the outskirts of Vangchhia village which is in the proximity of Murlen National Park. During first week of July 1998 a young mare was killed by the Tiger about 2 km away from the village, where the entire kill was devoured by the Tiger. Again in the latter part of the month, a young bull was killed above Sazep-Vangchhia road about 3 km from the village. The carcass was noticed by the villagers but later on the same day it had disappeared. On 15.7.1998, a horse belonging to a villager of Vangchhia was killed presumably by the same Tiger at a distance of one km from the village on the western slope where the kill was dragged down over hundred metres and the flesh from hind portion and chest region had been consumed by the Tiger. On 19.7.1998 another horse belonging to the same villager was attacked and killed about 150 m from the earlier site on the eastern slope. Only a small portion of hind portion was eaten by the Tiger when first noticed. After few days when the field staff visited the site only the skeleton and skull portion of the horse were found but in thickets nearby disfigured pugmarks were observed at the first site. Another report of sighting a Tiger with two grown up cubs at the tri-junction of Lianpui-Sazep and Vangchhia village by a Myanmar National along the old inter-village hilly path has been received.

Such evidence of presence of Tigers outside Protected Area show that either the Tigers move outside the Protected Area

or migrate from the adjoining Myanmar forests. It is possible that the prey animals in the Protected Area are not adequate to meet the food requirement of the Tigers. Besides, the jhum land and the fringing forests outside the Protected Area are disturbed by the jhum cultivators and domestic animals, threatening the multiplication of prey animals obviously attracting the Tigers to turn on to domestic animals for their food. Till now not much of study has been carried out on Tiger population vis-a-vis other wild animals outside the Protected Areas, nor any relevant information on the presence of Tigers outside has been collected. The evidence on preying upon the cattle and horses amply show the inadequacy of natural food of the Tigers in their habitat. Till now there has not been any incidence of maneater in the territory.

The long international border with Myanmar forms an ideal corridor for Tigers to stray into Mizoram. The rivers De, Tuichang and Ngenpui adjoining Myanmar form an established migratory route for Tigers. Past observations of pug marks reveal that the Tigers usually follow the river beds. Although Bangladesh forms the common corridor for Tigers to migrate into Mizoram, the forest area across the border is quite disturbed.

Constraints

The forests are not contiguous, but broken with jhum land and extensive Bamboo vegetation almost gregarious over vast tracts. There is no land management plan. Absence of cadastral survey and record of rights has adversely affected the consolidation of forests. There are several encroachments and allotments inside the notified forests which entail management

difficulties. Annual burning operation during jhum season seriously affects the Tiger as well as other wild animal population.

(a) *Administrative* : Myanmar and Bangladesh international borders providing corridor to Tiger population is of late full of insurgency activities obviously, killing of wild animal, trafficking in wild animal products cannot be ruled out. Even from Tripura side also there is increasing threat to neighbouring forest area due to migratory population as well as underground forces active in the forest area.

(b) *Financial* : At present the Wildlife Protected Areas have only received due attention in funding for conservation and management aspects. A proper survey and status assessment for Tigers outside the Protected Area need adequate financial assistance. As per the directives of the Hon'ble Supreme Court Dt. 15.1.1998, the existing Protected Area Network has to be increased to 10% of the forest area which requires adequate staff and financial support to identify the potential areas survey and preliminary requirements.

Strategies for effective conservation of Tiger population

- (i) A mutual Tiger protection strategy with neighbouring Myanmar and Bangladesh needs to be formulated to established Tiger route, habitat study, protection strategy, prevention of poaching, smuggling of Wildlife and products etc.
- (ii) A Tiger cell in the State is necessary to highlight the significance of Tiger conservation programme, survey, habitat study, awareness programme,

monitoring of conservation mechanism, liaison and rapport with global Tiger forum, Wildlife Institute and other Tiger Conservation Organisations.

- (iii) Adequate security to staff in discharging effective functions for Tiger Conservation.
- (iv) Providing proper mobility to Wildlife staff involved in Tiger Conservation activity, effective communication facility through Wireless Network etc.
- (v) Seeking co-operation with Border Security Force, Customs and Police Officials for prevention of poaching, infiltration of insurgents and detection of trafficking in Wildlife and trophies etc.
- (vi) Co-operation from NGOs for creating awareness for Tiger conservation and detection of Wildlife offences, poaching and restrictions on use of crop protection guns in the proximity of Tiger habitat.
- (vii) Adequate compensation facility to the villagers suffering the loss of their cattle and other domestic animals killed by Tigers.
- (viii) Strengthening of Wildlife Wing with adequate field staff for effective implementation of Tiger conservation programme.
- (ix) Incentives and Welfare measures to Wildlife staff.

Conclusion

Tiger Conservation Programme needs

priority attention as the existing infrastructure with the State Wildlife wing is not adequate to meet the challenge for protection of threatened Tiger population. A coordinated global programme with concrete conservation strategy may only help the cause of revival of Tigers subjected

to constant threat. Potential areas for Tiger habitat with emphasis on protection and habitat improvements of prey animals to ensure availability of natural food of the Tiger should be aimed at. A Tiger cell in the States would be inevitable for rehabilitation of Tigers in the Country.

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SUMMARY

In this paper, the status of Tiger outside Protected Areas (PAs) in Mizoram has been highlighted. The hilly terrain with dense and open forests forms an ideal habitat for Tiger. Administrative and financial constraints in PA management are pointed out and strategies for effective conservation of Tiger population outside PAs are discussed.

मिजोरम के सुरक्षा प्राप्त क्षेत्रों से बाहर बाघ की स्थिति

एस.एस. पटनायक

सारांश

इस अभिपत्र में मिजोरम के सुरक्षा प्राप्त क्षेत्रों से बाहर बाघ की स्थिति पर प्रकाश डाला गया है। घने और खुले वनों वाली ऊँची भूमियाँ बाघ के लिए आदर्श प्राकृतवास हैं। सुरक्षा प्राप्त क्षेत्रों में प्रबन्ध करने की प्रशासनिक और वित्तीय कठिनाइयाँ बताई गई हैं और सुरक्षित क्षेत्रों से बाहर बाघ का प्रभावी संरक्षण करने के लिए समरनीतियों का विवेचन किया गया है।

Reference

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