
ANALYSIS OF TIGER DEATHS IN INDIA

Seelam Sai Kiran, Symbiosis Law School, Nagpur & Dr.Jerryl, AVI foundation

In Indian culture, *tigers play a significant role*. It has long been a symbol of majesty, strength, beauty, and fierceness. The tiger also plays a vital role in Hindu mythology as Goddess Durga's conveyance.

Importance of tigers:

Tigers live in tropical and subtropical forests, evergreen forests, mangrove swamps, and grasslands, among other places. *The tiger is a one-of-a-kind animal that is vital to an ecosystem's*

health and variety. It is the pinnacle of the food chain and a top predator. The existence of tigers in the forest is a good sign of the ecosystem's health. The protection of tigers in forests also preserves the habitats of a variety of other animals. Protecting rivers and other water sources, preventing soil erosion, and improving ecological services such as pollination, water table retention, and so on are all indirect advantages. This apex predator's absence indicates that its environment is not adequately protected. Tigers are classified as both a Flagship and an Umbrella species. They are crucial for conservation as Flagship species, and as Umbrella species, protection of tigers leads to conservation of other species. Tigers with high-intensity biotic disturbances like poaching and kill theft do not mix. If wild tigers are to survive, other wild animal species that are directly or indirectly part of the food chain must also thrive. As a result, the tiger's survival is a crucial criterion for determining whether or not a healthy forest ecosystem exists. *Because the tiger is at the top of the food chain, it keeps numerous animal populations under control. Ecosystems with tigers will collapse if tigers are not present.* The tigers do not have enough time to recuperate since they are being hunted so quickly. This might lead to the extinction of tigers, which would have a long-term impact on the planet. When a species becomes extinct, it creates a scar on the ecosystem as a whole. Another reason for saving the tiger is that our woods serve as water catchment sites.

As a result, rescuing a magnificent animal isn't the only consideration. It's all about ensuring that we live a bit longer since forests are known to provide ecological services such as clean air, water, pollination, and temperature regulation, among other things.

Tigers in India:

The conservation of the tiger and its natural habitats was originally championed by India. Project Tiger, which began in 1973 and ended in 2003, was one of the world's greatest conservation efforts. It has had mixed effects after a period of enormous success. Many ideal tiger habitats have been declared as Tiger Reserves, with a renewed focus on tiger conservation concerns across the country. In certain locations, conservation efforts have resulted in excellent habitat improvement and a robust tiger population, while in others, the outcomes have been less successful. Poaching, habitat loss, human-tiger conflict, and habitat fragmentation are all threats to tiger conservation.

Around 75% of the world's tigers are found in India. Tigers are present in 19 Indian states. Tiger reserves, National Parks, and Wildlife Sanctuaries, often known as Protected Areas, have been established to better manage tiger habitats. Today, our country has 39 Tiger Reserves, some of which were newly added.

Tiger Deaths:

The number of tigers was estimated to be approximately 40,000 at the time of independence in 1947, but poaching and habitat destruction have reduced it to dangerously low levels. ***In the previous eight years, India has lost 750 tigers. According to India's tiger conservation organisation, 126 of the endangered big animals perished in 2021,*** the highest number since records began a decade ago. Before the ***National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA)*** began collecting statistics in 2012, the greatest number of fatalities per year was 121 in 2016. India and 12 other nations struck an agreement in 2010 to quadruple the number of tigers by 2022. The government said last year that it had met the goal ahead of schedule, with an estimated 2,967 tigers in 2018 compared to a record low of 1,411 in 2006.

369 tigers died naturally, 168 died as a result of poaching, 70 fatalities are under investigation, and 42 died for unnatural reasons. Between 2008 and 2018, a total of 384 tigers were slaughtered. The tiger population was estimated to be about 1411 in March 2010. The dramatic drop in the population of India's national animal sparked widespread concern about the potential of tiger extinction in the country. Despite all of these measures and public awareness, tiger fatalities have occurred on several occasions.

Factors for Tiger fatalities:

While India historically had over 100,000 tigers wandering freely in their natural environment, as trade routes opened up, more tigers and other endangered species were slaughtered for their skin and body parts. Tiger organs are said to have therapeutic properties in many cultures, and tiger furs are used as a fashion item. The Indian government launched Project Tiger, a statewide programme focused at safeguarding the tiger population and ensuring that more tigers survive in their natural environment. Since its beginning in 1973, however, the programme has done nothing to dissuade poachers from shooting tigers. Despite the existence of laws against such crimes, poachers were able to travel freely due to a lack of convictions. Many additional reasons have led to the tiger population's fall in India. The dwindling natural habitat of tigers was one of the most significant reasons, which boosted human-tiger conflicts.

The tigers are being attacked for a variety of reasons, one of which being concern for people's safety. Tigers murder at least 30 people every year on average, according to the results. As a result, the villagers are only too happy to battle for their lives. The tigers' attacks on animals, particularly cows, are another important reason for the murders. Farmers usually lose a lot of money when their high-value cows are killed. They end up hunting and poaching tigers to prevent such assaults and pay for their losses.

Even the "pirates," local counterparts of the Mafia, have been poaching and murdering tigers on a big scale. The killings are mostly carried out to "show off" and frighten local captives, as well as to gain notoriety by portraying themselves as "heroes" who saved people from tigers. Some pirates think tigers may be utilised for medical and spiritual purposes, according to the study. Male pirates, in fact, wear tiger teeth as pendants because they are thought to boost sexual virility.

Today, habitat degradation and fragmentation, as well as poaching, are the most serious threats to tiger populations.

Habitat fragmentation and loss

Land modification for agricultural reasons, logging, and land conversion for grazing domestic animals all result in habitat loss and fragmentation. The number of feasible tiger habitats has decreased due to the fast rising human population. In India alone, the human population has expanded by about 50% since 1973, with a total population of around 931 million in 1995.

Forests and grasslands, which are ideal tiger habitats, are being transformed for agricultural purposes. Approximately 470,000 square kilometres (181,467 square miles) of forest were destroyed in Asia between 1980 and 1990. Deforestation is expected to continue at a pace of 47,000 square kilometres (18,147 square miles) each year.

To sustain healthy breeding populations, tigers require huge contiguous areas of appropriate habitat. Wide swaths of open terrain created by land conversion for agricultural purposes may divide tiger populations from one another. Because of the increased struggle for food and mates, fragmentation may lead to more hostile interactions between tigers, in addition to lower genetic variety.

Poaching

The illegal killing of an animal is known as poaching. Tigers are poached for two major reasons: their threat to animals and/or people, and monetary gain. Tiger poaching in India has had a significant influence on the tigers' chances of survival. There are just about 3,000 wild tigers left now, compared to 100,000 before the turn of the century. The majority of tiger components are sent to China, where a single skin may fetch Rs. 6.5 million. Tigers were once hunted for their furs. While some are still marketed illegally, public awareness initiatives and international trade prohibitions have helped to curb demand. Tigers have been unlawfully shot at or poisoned by ingesting baited corpses because they feed on farm animals. Tigers, on the other hand, are mostly hunted for their bones and other body parts, which are in high demand for traditional Chinese medicine.

Because poaching networks are well-organized, and nations where tigers thrive generally lack the means to employ, equip, and train law enforcement officials, illegal commercial business is difficult to manage.

In recent years, there have been several incidences of tiger poaching in India's national parks. Poaching isn't the only threat to the tiger's population, though.

In recent years, one of the most prevalent causes of tiger mortality has been the rise in human-tiger fights. In Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh, several human-tiger confrontations have been documented. Tiger habitat loss and a shortage of prey in tiger reserves have forced the big cats to the edge of the reserves, resulting in civilians being killed by tigers.

In the majority of these situations, the locals retaliate by killing the tiger. This has been a recurrent occurrence, and officials appear to have no clue how to resolve the situation.

Tiger poaching in India has had a significant influence on the country's tiger population. The campaign to save the tigers is losing steam. According to the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, as revised in 2002, hunting or poaching is punishable by a minimum of three years in prison and a maximum of seven years in prison, as well as an obligatory fine of INR 10,000, which can be increased to INR 25,000.

On the one hand, we observe how the government has established conservation programmes such as Save Tiger and Project Tigers, but on the other side, we are secretly losing the struggle to save the tigers. With almost 51 deaths in the first five months of the year, 2019 has been a particularly devastating year, with 384 deaths in the last ten years.

Although not all tiger fatalities have made the news, the fact that 10 tigers die per month is cause for concern. We really hope that the responsible authorities investigate this grave concern and find the best possible solution to safeguard tigers and other animals.