

# 66 tigers dead in 8 months

Avijit Ghosh | TNN

**New Delhi:** Tiger deaths continue at an alarming rate. Statistics collated from different parts of India by a prominent wildlife NGO show that between January 1 and August 19 this year, at least 66 tigers lost their lives.

Of these, 23 died due to poaching. The list includes seizures of skins, bones, claws, skeletons, canines and paws by police and wildlife authorities during this period. The remaining 43 died of a variety of reasons such as infighting, old age, tiger-human conflict, accidents and disease, according to statistics provided by Wildlife Protection Society of India.

"In the last few months, Uttarakhand in the north and Karnataka in the south have recorded particularly high numbers of tiger deaths, which illustrates that the problem exists throughout the country," says Belinda Wright of WPSI.

One incident occurred near Pataur area in Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh where a tigress was found dead on Tuesday. "It could be a case of poisoning. But right now we can't say for sure. The samples have been sent to the forensic lab in Sagar and to the veterinary college, Jabalpur," says S K Patil, field director of the re-

## STATE OF AFFAIRS

State-wise break up of tiger deaths from January 1 to August 19, 2009

**ANDHRA PRADESH** | 1 tigress poached and 1 skin seized

**ASSAM** | 6 tigers found dead, 1 found incapacitated dies, 1 shot dead by forest dept, 1 tigress poached, 5 kg bones, 4 canines and other body parts seized in two separate cases

**GOA** | 1 tiger poached

**KARNATAKA** | 6 tigers found dead, 4 tiger skins seized

**MADHYA PRADESH** | 1 skin seized, 1 tigress poached, 10 tigers, including 3 cubs, found dead

**MAHARASHTRA** | 7 tigers, including 3 cubs, found dead. Another tiger poached, bones and 10 claws seized in two separate cases

**MANIPUR** | 2 skulls, 2 paws and 16 kg bones seized

**ORISSA** | 1 tiger poached

**RAJASTHAN** | 1 tigress found dead

**TAMIL NADU** | 1 skin seized, 1 cub found dead.

**UTTAR PRADESH** | 2 tigers found dead, 1 tiger shot dead by forest dept, 2 skins and 30 kg bones seized

**UTTARAKHAND** | 6 tigers found dead, 1 skin & skeleton seized

**W BENGAL** | 1 tiger found dead, 2 skins & one skeleton seized

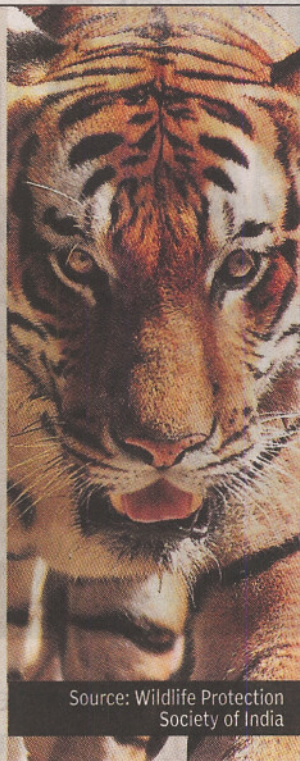
serve. The tigress had three cubs. "Two have been spotted. We are trying to trace the third," says Patil.

National tiger census figures released in Jan 2008 showed a mere 1,411 tigers alive as compared to 3,508 in 1997, a drastic drop of 60%.

K Ullas Karanth, Bangalore-based senior conservation scientist, says decline of tigers since 1990s can be attributed to "the collapse

of field protection and patrolling."

This, he says, is fallout of "a mission drift in forest department" which has moved away from its "core task of protection, towards eco-development, needless habitat modifications and such other distractions." He also points out that both tigers and prey are being poached where field protection has collapsed.



Source: Wildlife Protection Society of India

"In areas where these protective measures are still reasonably in place tigers are doing okay. The key issue is not just poaching of tigers, even more important is the issue of their prey species being hunted out. There are vast extents of forests in India where tigers are absent not because of direct poaching, but because their prey has been hunted out," Karanth says.