

Corbett mulls special tiger police

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Amid mounting concern over the dwindling population of tigers in the country, a special tiger protection force has been mooted in the Jim Corbett National Park in Uttarakhand. The force will assist the staff of the country's oldest national park in reducing the poaching risk to the endangered animal.

There are only about 1,400 tigers left in the country, thanks to

poaching, shrinking habitats and a decline in the prey base. The Jim Corbett National Park, named after the celebrated hunter-writer who brought down many a man-eater in the hill state, has 160 tigers. This is the highest population of tigers anywhere in the country. The government, animal lovers and even some corporations are working overtime to save the animal.

What will be unique about the 112-man force is that it will include people who live in the vicinity of

the park, the Van Gujjars. They will make up 30 per cent of the people taken on contract. The total expenditure on the force will be borne by the central government. Attractive financial packages are also being offered for the rehabilitation of the people from the protected areas. "If we have to save tigers for posterity, India is the place where there is still hope," said Wildlife Institute of India Director PR Sinha.

In the Jim Corbett National Park, at least three tigers have

died since the beginning of this year. It is considered one of the best habitats for the big cat. Last year was also not good for tigers in Uttarakhand, when nine of them died.

Uttarakhand has taken proactive steps in the past to save its wildlife. In 2001, five elephants had died mysteriously in the Jim Corbett National Park. Their tusks had been removed. The police swung into action, much to the chagrin of forest officials, and the killings came to an end. The

police, at that time, had called for tiger police stations outside the reserve. But that never happened.

Great efforts are being put up at the highest level to save the tiger. Still, there are no visible signs as yet if poaching of tigers has come down. An estimate prepared by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, a United Nations agency, has disclosed that there were 100,000 tigers just 20 years ago in Asia. Now, only 3,200 are left in the wild.



The Jim Corbett National Park has 160 tigers, the highest population of tigers anywhere in the country. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG