

INBREEDING FEAR

Just 2 big cats can be shifted to Sariska park

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NEW DELHI: After the Madhya Pradesh government refused to relocate tigers for Sariska, a government institute has zeroed down two tigers that can be shifted from Ranthambore to Sariska.

The Rajasthan Forest Department was keen to relocate two more tiger couples from Ranthambore to Sariska, where the big cats went missing in 2004. But, genetic similarity between tigers in Ranthambore was considered the biggest stumbling block.

The three tigers — a male and two females — were transferred from Ranthambore to Sariska about two years ago but because of reports of genetic incompatibility among them, they had failed to breed.

This time, the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) was keen to find out the level of genetic similarity between the tigers in Ranthambore and Sariska and asked the Bangalore-based National Centre for Biological Sciences to conduct DNA tests.

After DNA tests of eight tigers from Ranthambore tiger reserve, the Centre suggested translocation of only two tigers with "lowest relatedness" with three relocated tigers in Sariska.

BROTHERS & SISTERS

- International studies, as reported by HT, had suggested that incest between tigers could lead to inbreeding.
- NCTA officials said the DNA tests have raised hope of the possibility of tiger relocation to Sariska for breeding.
- But NCTA has ruled out relocation of two tigers from Corbett and Rajaji National Park though the Centre found no similarity between their DNA with the ones in Sariska.

"The tigers from Sawai Madhopur range in Ranthambore are the two individuals best suited for relocation," the NTCA told the environment ministry. The relocation can take place only after the ministry's approval.

The institute, in its report to NCTA, found that six other tigers had high degree of relatedness with big cats in Sariska and said it would not be ideal to introduce them in Sariska.

Valmik Thapar, member of Tiger Task Force said the government should ensure that the tigers for relocation from Ranthambore should not be selected from core areas.

"The animal for relocation should be selected from fringe areas with the help of local people," he said.