

Karnataka tigers get commando security

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Karnataka will have a commando force — Special Tiger Protection Force (STPF) — to protect its diminishing big cat population from smugglers and poachers, for the first time in India.

Come January 4, this special unit will guard tiger reserves on direction of the Ministry of Environment & Forests (MoEF).

Principal Conservator of Forest (Wildlife) Karnataka BK Singh told *The Pioneer* that the force will protect over 300 tigers and their habitat. According to Singh, this STPF has 58 personnel comprising an assistant conservator of forests (ACF), three range forest officers (RFOs), 14 foresters and 40 forest guards. This force is fully trained to handle modern weapons.

He said, "This special squad is undergoing training at police school in Yelahanka. This one-and-a-half-month training will end on January 3 and they will be deployed at tiger reserves to prevent poaching. This novel initiative will help save tigers."

According to statistics, since January 2006, more than 48 tigers have died in Karnataka, 25 tigers killed by poachers. The STPF, equipped with modern weapons, binoculars and wireless sets, is expected to prove a serious deterrent.

"The 13-week training includes physical, unarmed combat, weapons, field engineering, map reading, disaster management, first aid and crowd control management," said Singh.

According to forest department records, three and two tigers were poached in 2010 and 2011, respectively.

Karnataka is the most tiger dense State. The recent census in Karnataka shows six major reserves, with a population of over 300 tigers, of the total 1,700 in the country.

In 2008, the Centre had given a one-time grant of ₹50 crore to the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) for raising, arming and deploying STPFs in 13 sensitive tiger reserves — Dudhwa-Katerniaghat, Corbett, Ranthambore, Pench, Kanha, Bandhavgarh, Pakke, Bandipur, Tadoba Andhari, Mudumalai, Kaziranga and Simlipal.

