

# Struggle for survival: Two tigers make it to neglected Chaprala sanctuary

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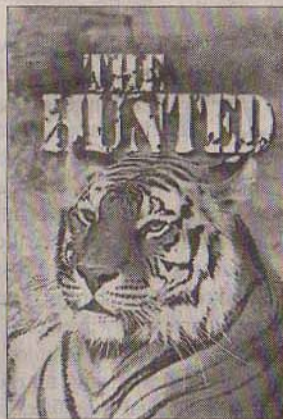
NAGPUR, APRIL 19

In a state that has the least priority for it, wildlife is finding its own natural ways of surviving and thriving. Reflecting the grave irony is the latest news from the embattled Chaprala sanctuary in Gadchiroli that had recorded the last tiger sighting in 2003 — at least two tigers have come to stay in what surely is one of the most neglected wildlife areas of the state.

Besotted by sustained campaign by local politicians for denotifying the sanctuary to support the existence of an illegally-built temple on encroached land inside the sanc-

tuary, Chaprala virtually has nobody to fall back on. As a result, unwarranted human interference in the form of temple devotees has turned the sanctuary into a virtual nightmare for wildlife. In the 1990s, the 137-sq km sanctuary had about seven tigers, last of which was seen in 2003. It has no leopard, but still has a good population of spotted deer, sambhar and chousinga (four-horned antelope), considered a rare animal.

"The movement of two tigers is being noticed since January this year. We don't yet know if they are males or females, but they are fairly grown up," says Divisional Forest Officer in-charge of Chaprala RG



Govekar.

Govekar believes the tigers must have come through a broken corridor of about 7 km that connects Chaprala with Kothari range in Chandrapur, which eventually connects with

the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) through another corridor. "But the fact that the tigers had come to Chaprala all the way from there after so many years shows their desperation for their territories. How are they to know if the place they have come to is perhaps the most vulnerable one in the region," asks Nitin Desai, central India director of Wildlife Protection Society of India.

"There is always a clamour against the sanctuary when we make a move against the temple. An agitation had been staged three years ago for denotifying the sanctuary. There is continuous movement of visitors and an occasional yatra

when the entire sanctuary gets besieged by thousands of people," Govekar says. "We are not allowed to even charge a fee for entering the sanctuary."

The sanctuary has five villages inside and 21 in close vicinity.

Shockingly, there is no vehicle for the forest staff here. "We have a post of Assistant Conservator of Forest and a Range Forest Officer vacant. We need about 20 guards and five-six foresters but we currently have only eight and two respectively," Govekar says.

Govekar says there is a proposal for restoration of the broken corridors that will help connect TATR with Indravati Tiger Reserve.