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# Tiger Trail

*Raise stakes in the big cat's protection*

The latest tiger population census showed the numbers rising from 1,411 in 2008 to an estimated 1,706. Yet the National Tiger Conservation Authority seems not to be taking any chances. It's to conduct yearly censuses in India's 39 tiger reserves, besides the customary headcount every four years. While it'll provide equipment like camera traps to capture data for analysis, field workers will train for upgraded tracking exercises. With periodic alarms raised about vanishing tigers—recall Sariska or Panna—and credible information about their plight in our tiger belts often hard to come by, the move makes sense. Annual counts will make the conservation effort more accountable, simply by keeping field personnel on their toes.

While success in tiger conservation has been uneven across India, 12% of tiger habitat has been lost in just four years thanks to encroachment. Poaching remains lucrative business, not least due to enduring demand for tiger parts in places like China. Nor is the poacher-forest official nexus a secret. It's no wonder tiger-rich Karnataka is to form a Special Tiger Protection Force, a first in India. Taking on poachers and smugglers, STPF patrols must feature in other tiger-dense states too. Let's also boost well-regulated tourism to nurture both tigers and the ecosystem that the big cats are part of. By attracting resources and attention to commercially packaged reserves, conservation will offer its own economic incentive. The more cocooned protected zones are, the less transparently they're managed. Let's make the tiger accessible to wildlife enthusiasts. That way, we'll spread awareness about the endangered animal and raise collective stakes in its protection.