

Man-killing tiger keeps forest dept on toes

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Lucknow: Pilibhit forest division is in news again. Deoria range of the division is gripped with fear of a man-killing tiger. Though forest officials have not labelled it as a man-eater, yet. The stray big cat has killed and partially eaten five men, at different points of time, over a period of past three months.

The sub-adult tiger made its first killing on May 3. It struck again on June 7, killed and partially ate a 50-year-old man, Ved Prakash of Parewa Turraha village of Pilibhit. The body was lying about 1 km inside forest area. The right arm of the man was eaten by the big cat. On its third appearance on June 23, the tiger killed Bulaki Ram. On July 25, it killed Shyamal and on July 27, it killed Jamuna Prasad.

Forest officials came into action after the fourth incident was reported on July 25. "We got eight web cameras installed in Deoria range," said V K Singh, DFO, Pilibhit. The camera was installed at 5.10pm and it was within 10 minutes that the first snap of the tiger was clicked by one of the cameras. "We got sure of tiger's presence in the area," said Singh.

The killing on July 25 took place in Deohana beat of the range and July 27 killing happened in Ghundchal beat of the range. There is an aerial distance of about 2 km between the two beats. However, when the tiger killed Jamuna Prasad on July 27, the incident was not clicked by

the cameras. But cameras will continue to be in place.

Almost all the killings have taken place in the daytime because victims had gone to the forest area to either collect firewood or grass. Besides, monsoon is also the season for 'katarua' mushroom in Pilibhit forests. Villagers collect the mushroom and sell them for Rs 70 to 80 per kg in markets. Bundles of grass, firewood and bags with mushrooms have been recovered from site of killings. Besides, the men have all been attacked while they were squatting on the ground and tiger mistook them to be quadrupeds.

As far as eating men is concerned, tiger has not eaten the men immediately after killing them. Though it has partially eaten all the bodies, it has eaten them a day after the killing. "When men had gone to search Jamuna Prasad in the morning, they had seen tiger eating the man's leg," said Singh. The approaching men, however, had scared the tiger away.

It is a case of man intruding into tiger's territory as all bodies were found lying deep inside the forest.

Hence, it does not make any sense in branding the big cat a man-eater, said DFO. However, this has not lessened the seriousness of the incident for the forest department.

The forest department has created

three teams headed by range officers to educate and inform villagers about the presence of tiger in the locality. Each team has 9 to 12 members. The teams will hold meetings with villagers and educate them about taking precautions. "We also have decided to get strict," said Singh.

The people who are found entering the prohibited area of forest will be detained for trespassing. Though, they will be allowed to go after initial warning. On second occasion, they will be charged a fine of Rs 250 and on third occasion, they will be arrested, produced in court and sent to jail for 14 days. This effort will continue for a month-long period.

Apart from this, informative posters have been put up at PHCs and primary schools. Deoria range spreads across 712 sq km and has 36 villages on its periphery. All the villages are under watch.

Poacher couple put behind bars after 21 years of trial

Neha Shukla | TNN

Lucknow: The conviction of tiger poacher Dariya and his wife, Bhagwati, under the Wildlife Protection Act (WPA), 1972, in a 21 years old case could go a long way in tiger conservation. The couple, who were Bawariya poachers, were sentenced to three years' rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs 10,000 by judicial magistrate in Sihora, Jabalpur district, MP, on Wednesday.

The convicted poachers were residents of Samalkha, Panipat district in Haryana. The conviction has come in a case which dates back to 1988. Dariya and his wife, along with seven others, were arrested in Bahoriband range of the then Jabalpur territorial division in MP. A tiger skin, tiger bones, four tiger paws, three cans of tiger fat, a hyena skin and eight spring traps were recovered and seized from them. (As per an assumption, seizure of 10 kgs of tiger bones is taken as one adult tiger killed.)

However, the accused were granted bail and they absconded. This kept the trial pending for more than 21 years. Though Dariya was arrested in April, 2008 at Corbett Tiger Reserve, he was granted bail again. "We always knew he was living close to Corbett Reserve and tried tracking him," said Tito Joseph from Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI). The agency works with state forest departments to tackle cases of wildlife crime.

On March 27, 2009, officers of Karni forest division arrested the poacher and his wife in Ramnagar, Uttarakhand. However, seven others, who were arrested with the two in 1988, are still absconding.

There are very few poachers who have been convicted. Between 2000 and 2009, over 882 people were accused in tiger cases (including tiger poaching and seizure of tiger

parts) but only 18 have been convicted in six court cases. Wildlife crime is a wide nexus of poachers, carriers, traders, tanners, exporters and importers. "Due to this it is always easy for poachers to get bail," said Joseph.

A Bawariya poacher, Totha Ram, who was convicted in a five years old case by a court in Khatima, Udham Singh Nagar, Uttarakhand in December, 2009, remained an absconder till Uttarakhand police arrested him in November, 2009. He was arrested twice before, in May, 2003 and August, 2004 but was soon out on bail. In 2004, he was caught by Terai east forest division staff, from Banbassa in Champawat district with a 12 ft long tiger skin with 16 bullet marks. A case under WPA was registered at Khatima range against him. In 2009, a court sentenced him to three years' rigorous imprisonment and a fine of Rs 10,000 in the same case. He and his family were active in Terai areas killing tigers in UP and Uttarakhand.

The Bawariya and Bahelia tribes are major threat to big cats. Bahelias are a tribe from MP and Bawariyas are from Haryana. Bahelias are mostly found involved in poaching cases happening in and around MP. Bawariya poachers, on the other hand, have been found involved in wildlife crime cases all over the country.

Poachers from both the tribes follow almost similar tricks to trap and kill a tiger. They target big cats close to water sources in forest. They set a trap from which a tiger can never free itself. Bawariyas re-visit the place and make the trapped tiger to roar by nudging it with a long stick. As soon as it opens the mouth they force that stick in its mouth to stuff it. With so many men attacking from all sides, the helpless big cat has no chance to escape the painful end.

