

# Maoists don't spare tigers either

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**Mumbai:** Left-wing extremism and insurgency are being cited as the major reason for the rising number of tiger deaths reported across tiger reserves in the country. An assessment made by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), a nodal body set up by the ministry of environment and forests, reveals that tiger density has decreased in as many as six reserves. "We found that in all these six tiger reserves, the respective states have been struggling with insurgency, be it left wing extremism or Naxalites," said a senior NTCA official.

It is estimated that there are barely 1,411 tigers left in the country, and this year between January and March alone, 18



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tigers have died as against a total of 85 tigers who lost their lives last year.

The NTCA made this assessment after studying tiger density and habitats of 39 tiger

reserves. "We have got evidence based on tiger estimation data which shows that in Naxal-infested forest reserves, there has been poor tiger density," said the official. Tigers are poached in conflict as insurgents come in close contact with them deep inside forests, he added.

According to the report, tiger density has fallen in reserves such as Palamu (Jharkhand), Valmiki (Bihar), Simlipal (Orissa), Nagarjunsagar (Andhra Pradesh), Indaravati (Chhattisgarh) and Nampadapha (Arunachal Pradesh). "We are but seeing a healthy density of tigers in 13 tiger reserves mainly in southern states such as Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and even in Rajasthan," the official said.

Parks such as Tadoba-Andhari reserve in Maharashtra

have registered a moderate tiger density due to human-animal conflict. "The buffer zone in the Tadoba reserve needs urgent protection. Permission for constructing a dam and leasing for mining in the buffer zone area in the park will create further ecological problems and this in turn will decrease tiger density here," warns the official.

Wildlife conservationists say it is a known fact that insurgents poach tigers and illegally trade wildlife products to buy arms. "It is a vicious circle. The presence of armed insurgents in the core area of these reserves makes the job of forest guards extremely difficult. As a result, poaching continues unabated," said Dr Anish Andheria, director, Wildlife Conservation Trust.