

'Tourism overkill endangering Corbett'

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Alarmed at the uncontrolled tourist flow into the Corbett National Park, Brijendra Singh, the park's honorary wildlife warden, has emphasised the need for the State Government to 'act urgently' to check tourism and ensure that it did not turn the park into a "glorified, large zoo".

Talking to *The Pioneer* at Wycliffe, his residence here, on Monday, Raja Sahib (as he is popularly known) said that the State Government should constitute a committee — consisting of representatives from the fields of forest, tourism and wildlife — which should rethink on the resorts that have come up in places where corridors for animals should have been set up.

Singh said that the committee should make sure that these resorts are removed and compensation is paid to their owners. "And it should decide on the establishment of corridors," said Singh

who has been the honorary wildlife warden of the national park since 1982. "The committee should holistically look into the problems at Corbett," he said.

Dr Rajesh Gopal, member-secretary of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), and Brijendra Singh will be at Corbett from June 3 to June 5 to look into

the problems arising out of 'over tourism' in the park. Singh said if the problems were not sorted out immediately, things would be over for Corbett and it would be reduced to a safari park. "However, all is not lost and things can be worked out even now and some corridors can still be established," he added.

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Honorary wildlife warden Brijendra Singh asks Govt to control mushrooming of resorts around the park



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But, says Raja Sahib, if things are not taken in hand now, then saving Corbett will become a losing battle.

Brijendra Singh, who spends most of his time patrolling the Corbett Tiger Reserve and organising sting operations to nab poachers, says over tourism and lack of involvement of local villagers had been the two major problems that had affected the park.

"We need more efforts to involve the locals. Unfortunately, many locals sold their property to resort owners who came to Corbett from Mumbai and Delhi. And now these villagers, who once owned that land, are working as waiters in these resorts."

He said it was important to involve the locals as Ramnagar was entirely dependent on tourism. "If at that time the Government had controlled the sale of land around the park, things would have been quite different now," said Singh, who divides his time among Delhi, Corbett and Mussoorie.

Singh said another problem plaguing Corbett is the trees planted on the fire lines. "It has led to a Catch-22 situation. If these trees are not removed, we cannot

have clear fire lines and if they are felled then again we will be in the wrong," said Singh, who is the longest serving member on the Indian Board for Wildlife.

Brijendra Singh's association with the park began as a school boy (from The Doon School) in 1957. "We used to go for our mid-term breaks from the school. Thick forests started from Haridwar itself. Corbett was a paradise."

His love for the park grew with each visit. His active involvement with the park began with his successful campaign to stop construction of a three-star hotel at Khinnanauli by the Tourism Department of Uttar Pradesh, in 1968. This area today is the prime tiger habitat and the pride of Corbett.

Having come from a background where hunting, at the time, was a part of life, Brijendra Singh grew up as a hunter and is well-known in the hills around Mussoorie for having shot many cattle lifting and man-eater leopards in the area. Though he gave up hunting in 1970, he is still called upon by the forest department when in crisis to put away man-eater leopards, a task which he reluctantly undertakes.