

State loses 55 tigers in a decade

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GUWAHATI, Oct 11 – The truth or the lie, depending on the perspective, is finally out. Assam has lost at least 55 tigers between 2000 and 2010. Data provided by the Assam Forest Department, under the RTI Act, indicate that tigers have died due to various reasons, including poisoning and gunshot wounds in some cases.

A senior forest official, who wished anonymity, told this correspondent that the number would actually be higher, because some deaths are not known, and therefore go unreported.

The highest toll was reported in 2006, during which 10 tigers were found dead. Four deaths took place at sites under the Eastern Assam Wild-

life Division, while six animals died in spots under the jurisdiction of Mangaldoi Wildlife Division.

Significantly, the loss of four tigers that year was attributed to poisoning. All the four poisoning cases, which included three cubs, were reported



by the DFO, Mangaldoi Wildlife Division.

Another appalling year for the highly endangered animal was 2002 during which nine tigers died, most of them in the

Eastern Assam Wildlife Division. Four of those, according to the Forest Department, died due to old age, and one was killed by CRPF personnel. One was a victim in a hit-and-run case, another died due to infighting. The cause of death of one could not be ascertained.

Another major decline in tiger population was noticed in 2008 when eight deaths were reported mainly from the Eastern Assam Wildlife Division. Most of the deaths were reported between autumn and winter with four deaths taking place within 48 hours on December 23 and 24.

Tiger deaths were reported throughout 2009, a period where a number of animals died due to infighting. Of the seven that perished, four were (See page 4)

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killed in infighting, one died of old age, and one died due to a buffalo attack. The cause of death of another animal could not be ascertained.

This year, tiger deaths have also been reported from Kaziranga National Park. On February 2, a male tiger aged between three and four died, and another was found dead on February 18. The cause of death of both was stated as

unknown.

The data makes it clear that the Eastern Assam Wildlife Division has witnessed the largest number of tiger deaths in the last decade. Serious threats have also been seen in areas under Mangaldoi Wildlife Division, where animals have been poisoned.

Interestingly, in a number of cases the Forest Department could not state the nature of deaths. In its response to the

RTI application, the office of the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife), Basistha mentioned, "...the information being furnished is incomplete. Therefore, your application has already been transferred under Sec. 6 (3) c of the RTI Act, 2005." It is now clear that the office does not yet have crucial data in its possession at a time when the issue of tiger conservation has come into sharp focus.