

No more chicken, sick tigers go on soup diet

After the outbreak of a virulent bacterium that killed several big cats, Karnataka puts its carnivores on a special detox plan with red meat broth, tanker water and antibiotics



SUFFERING IN SILENCE? A tiger at the Bannerghatta Biological Park, which has been severely affected by the salmonella outbreak

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IN BANGALORE

Following the death of a young tigress, a cub and two lions at Bannerghatta Biological Park (BBP) due to a virulent strain of salmonella bacteria, the Karnataka zoo authority is striking chicken off the menu for more than 1,000 carnivores in the state's zoos.

There are seven major and five mini zoos in various districts of the state. The carnivorous animals have been housed only in Bannerghatta, Mysore, Shimoga and Davanagere. Every day, more than 1,000 carnivores were being fed chicken along with beef, mutton and eggs. "We don't want to take any more chance chances as the situation is bad," said M N Jayakumar, additional principal chief conservator of forest and member secretary, Zoo Authority of Karnataka. An emergency had been declared after the outbreak of diarrhoea and gastroenteritis which left more than 11 big cats critically ill and several dead. The bacteria so far has shown resistance to 30 antibiotics and anti-bacterials and

according to scientists, the resistance may be linked to drug-intensive poultry farming practices.

CASCADING EFFECT

Forest department sources said BBP has the highest concentration of carnivores in the country. Even a minor disorder can have a cascading effect on all other zoos in the state.

"While we have a testing mechanism to check the quality of meat in zoos, we do not have a system to check the quality of chicken," said yet another senior BBP official.

SERVED WITH A PINCH OF SALT



For the last couple of days, tigers at Chamarajendra Zoological Garden in Mysore and Tavarekoppa Tiger-Lion Safari at Shimoga have not been fed chicken, fearing the salmonella outbreak.

"Though we have not decided on banning it permanently, we will put a hold on it until everything subsides. If we are able to tackle the outbreak, perhaps we could get chicken only from branded companies henceforth. A decision in this regard will be taken later," said Jayakumar.

PROTECTING MUMBAI'S CARNIVORES

Dr Sanjay Tripathi, Deputy Superintendent (in charge) and veterinarian of Byculla zoo confirmed that all precautions are taken while feeding the three carnivores – lioness Jimmy and two hyenas – at the zoo.

"We get beef from Deonar abattoir which

Experts from Karnataka Veterinary, Animal and Fisheries Sciences University have now prescribed therapeutic packages to detoxify the affected animals through a controlled diet system, said a senior BBP veterinarian, adding, that the 15 tigers, which were given antibiotics, are slowly recovering.

As part of this programme, tigers have only been given beef and a few of them, beef soup. Because of the medication, some of them were reluctant to eat. "But we are chopping the meat into very small pieces, cooking a broth with essential salts. For those tigers deficient in potassium and calcium, we are administering liquid food rich in these salts," Jayakumar said.

The tigers are also been given tanker water, as opposed to water from borewells or open wells and medication thrice a day.

is checked by doctors before it is depatched to the zoo. Even our staff members inspect it. We boil the meat before feeding it to the lioness, which reduces such risks. Since hyenas, which are scavengers, have high levels of immunity, we need not boil the meat for them," said Tripathi adding that the meat is also dipped in a mild solution of potassium permanganate to keep food-borne diseases at bay.

Dr Vinaya Jangale, wildlife veterinarian at Sanjay Gandhi National Park, which houses three lions, six tigers and 23 leopards said, "We regularly take random samples of meat to keep a check on its quality. Though the meat coming from Deonar undergoes quality checks there, we also inspect it for its colour and texture before feeding it to our animals."

Inputs by Virat A Singh