

No protection for tigers in Lansdowne

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At a time when all out effort is underway to increase tiger population and eight new reserves declared across the country, the lesser known connecting link of Lansdowne forest division, between Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR) and Rajaji National Park (RNP) in Uttarakhand is yet to have even a protected status despite sighting of 8-10 tigers in a recent camera trapping exercise.

The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has pushed the ball in the court of the State Government, sitting over a proposal for declaring it buffer zones to the adjoining tiger reserves.

The prolific tiger presence in this 450 sq kms of contigu-



ous forest land came to light by recent camera trapping exercise carried out by the Wildlife Institute of India in association with the Operation Eye of the Tiger (OEOT)-India, a Dehradun-based US-funded NGO and Lansdowne Forest Division has indicated the presence of at least 9-10 tigers.

"This is the result of exercise undertaken in the Dugadda and Kotri Ranges which are just two of five ranges under the division", said DVS Khati, Chief Conservator of Forest (CCF) Garhwal. "There is also a good base of prey species, including sambar, cheetal, barking deer, wild pigs, goral or mountain goat besides elephants and otters as well," he added.

The former wildlife warden of Rajaji National Park and Trustee OEOT Rajeev Hardwar regretted that despite a tiger density of six-seven per 100 sq kms, the division did not find a place in the new list of eight tiger reserves declared by Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh recently.

The forest division is crucial by virtue of its geographical location connecting CTR and RNP and forms a small pocket of the 6000 sq kms Terai Arc Landscape, extending from River Yamuna to River Sharda, which is amongst the best tiger bases in the world.

"The tiger population can not be wiped out from here due to the continuity of the forest", he pointed out. In fact, Lansdowne division was earlier a part of Malan Wildlife Sanctuary that got denotified about two decades ago", he added.

The DFO Lansdowne Division, Narendra Singh maintained that Lansdowne Forest at least deserves the status of a wildlife division, but prior to that the three adjacent ranges of Kotri, Lansdowne and Dugadda should be declared a buffer zone of Corbett Tiger Reserve, while Kotwar and Laldhang range that are adjoining the western side of Rajaji National Park can come under its jurisdiction.

Interestingly, CCF Garhwal said that ultimately it depended on the level of forest protection, which according to him, was good in this division. Further, in keeping with the national average of 4.95 per cent of protected areas in the country, the State already has 13-14 per cent of such areas.

Member Secretary NTCA Rajesh Gopal, however, observed that proposals to extend the buffer zones of Corbett including the adjoining ranges of Lansdowne Forest Division, had been sent about three years ago, which is pending with the State Government.

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