

# Ranthambore's star grapples with old age

Anindo Dey | TNN

Jaipur: A young calf tied to a tree just outside the Lakarda outpost may look strangely out of place at Ranthambore National Park. However, conservation has its strange stories in the wild.

The calf was kept as a reserved food for Machli, the most famous tigress of the national park. More than 15 years of age now — the maximum a tiger can live in the wild — Machli's health is often unstable and her future is "uncertain." In the event she was not able to hunt, the calf will be given to her.

"Sometimes she is not able to hunt for days together. In such cases, she shrinks in size and in extreme cases, she may die. Therefore, we have to be ready with such measures," explained R S Shekhawat, director of the park.

Machli or T-16, is not only the most famous tigress of the



**TIME TAKES ITS TOLL:** Machli or T-16 is the most famous tigress of the park — thanks to it being sighted by numerous visitors

## Machli tales

- ▶ Also called Lady of the Lake
- ▶ Age: 15 years
- ▶ No. Of cubs till now: 11
- ▶ Is the most photographed tiger in the world
- ▶ Even has a fanpage on Facebook

park — thanks to it being sighted by numerous visitors — It has also given as many as 11 cubs to the park. Hence there was no surprise when, in April last year, the Travel Operators For Tigers (TOFT) gave her the 'Lifetime Achievement Award.'

Machli had lost three of her teeth in fights with crocodiles to save her young ones in summer. "I have seen three instances when she killed a crocodile during my tenure. The crocodiles come up on dry land in summer and are a danger to the cubs," said Shekhawat. But with years the story has changed. Conservationists, though

not willing, when coaxed into it, agree that her future is uncertain. "Anything can happen to her anytime," they say. Now she lives in the Lakarda area of the forest and has managed to add a bit more to her territory after the death of another tiger, T-4, beyond the Lakarda nullah.

"In her prime, she not only ruled the Lakarda area but also had the Malik talab, Tambakhan, Padam talab, Rajbag and lot of other areas beyond the fort to her credit. Eventually, her daughter, T-17, snatched away some of her territory and others too were taken away," says Shekhawat. In fact, two of the tigers relocated to Sariska are also her offsprings.

According to an estimate by TOFT, Machli in the past 10 years has contributed more than \$10 million per annum to the economy of Ranthambore.

Why then should a tigress so brave be called Machli? "It's because of the marks on her face that resemble a fish," says Shekhawat. Something to watch out then for the lucky few who manage to spot her this time when the park reopens on October 1.