

Too many tigers leads to death of 1

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Jaipur, Oct. 22: A male tiger was today found dead in Ranthambore National Park after a territorial fight with another, prompting wildlife officials to complain that the core area of the reserve is too small to hold 34 adult tigers.

The three-year-old T-36, which wore a radio collar, was found dead two days after wildlife officials lost its signal.

Ranthambore's deputy forest conservator R.S. Shekhawat said the tiger was believed to be fighting for territory with another three-year-old male, T-42, for the past few days. "Today we found T-36 with a broken neck and severely bruised body. Perhaps he had died two days back," he said.

Shekhawat said the dead tiger's mother was killed in a territorial fight in September 2008. T-36 was then released in the area with a radio collar to keep constant track of his movements.

Wildlife observers say the 274.5sqkm core area is not large

enough for 34 tigers. Because of overcrowding, the tigers either fight it out among themselves or stray out of the park. In 1973, when Project Tiger began, there were six to eight big cats in Ranthambore.

Rajpal Singh, a tiger expert and member of the state government's Empowered Committee for Wildlife and Forests, said there is a dominance of male tigers in the park. He added that the core area is only capable of holding 20 to 22 tigers. If the Sawai Mansingh sanctuary to the park's southwest and Kailadevi sanctuary to its north are included, there would be space for 30 to 32 tigers, Singh said.

Earlier, the forest corridors stretching into the sanctuaries provided the tigers shelter even if they strayed out of the core area. But now with the forest depleted, they become easy prey for hunters. Besides, the prey base is minimal in Kailadevi and with lot of human interference because of villages in the area, tigers are not able to stay put there.

Singh says there is an urgent need to increase the prey base in the

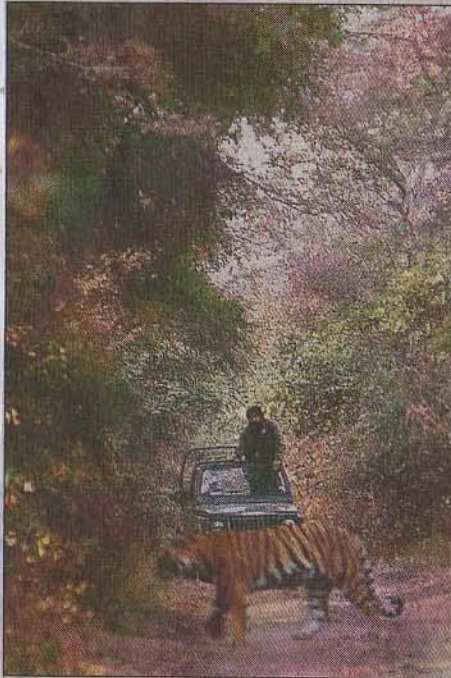
buffer region and extend the core area of the park, which has 34 tigers left after five were moved to Sariska.

Many tigers have strayed out of the park to form their own territories. At present, at least three are out of the park but their movements can be tracked by their radio collars.

At least 1.5 lakh tourists visit the park annually, earning it Rs 60 crore in revenue. The park permits 15 jeeps and 20 canters at a time, accommodating 460-475 visitors during one safari, leading to considerable vehicular pollution.

There are more than 50 hotels around Ranthambore, which are almost fully booked in the October to February peak season.

To add to the chaos, there is the Katy Perry-Russell Brand wedding at a luxury resort on the edge of Ranthambore tomorrow. With the American singer and her British comedian fiancé opting for a big Indian wedding with elephants, camels, horses and singing and dancing, the animals will bear the brunt.



A tiger in Ranthambore National Park.
 File picture