

# Rajasthan renews efforts to shift big cats to Sariska

## Experts have already identified new pair of tigers at Ranthambore

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After a lull of a few months, the state government has renewed its effort to relocate a pair of big cats from the Ranthambore National Park

to the Sariska Tiger Reserve.

According to Chief Wildlife Warden RN Mehrotra, two wildlife experts - Aparajita Dutta from the National Conservation Trust, who is also a member of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) and Prof AJT John Singh, former professor of the Wildlife Trust of India - have already paid a visit to the Ranthambore National Park to identify a new pair of tiger and tigress for relocation.

He said the experts had made the field visit between May 2 and May 6 and they will soon be submitting their report to the Union Ministry of Forest and Environment. "We are now awaiting a go ahead from the ministry," he added.

The experts had arrived from



Bangalore on Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot's initiative after four months of search for the pair selected earlier drew blank. According to Minister of State for Forest and Environment Ram Lal Jat, the previous pair had "strayed" out of core zone of the Ranthambore National Park. "The pugmarks have been seen in the area of Kali-Sindh River near Kota. However, difficult terrain has made it virtually impossible to nab them," he said. A team of

Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun, had also extensively searched for the tigress T37 in March without any success. He said till now wildlife experts were keen on relocating the same tiger couple which has been untraceable since January, apprehending threat to their life. However, when there was no trace of them even after four months a fresh request was sent to the Centre for relocation of a new pair.

Jat said once Dutta and Singh submit their report the relocation would be done swiftly. "We already have other requisite permission like use of helicopter and hence the relocation of new pair would not take much time." Chief Minister Gehlot is said to have been

keen to get this done in wake of the forthcoming Commonwealth Games as the state is hoping to draw a huge number of tourists, particularly to Sariska due to its proximity to New Delhi.

Meanwhile, in another development, the NTCA has constituted committees to speed up the process of relocation of villages away from tiger reserves so as to create more space for the big cats. There are nearly 21 villages identified for relocation from the Ranthambore National Park and over 10 villages from the Sariska Tiger Reserve. The Ranthambore National Park currently has around 400 sq km core critical habitat for tigers and the idea is to expand it to over 1,100 sq km.