

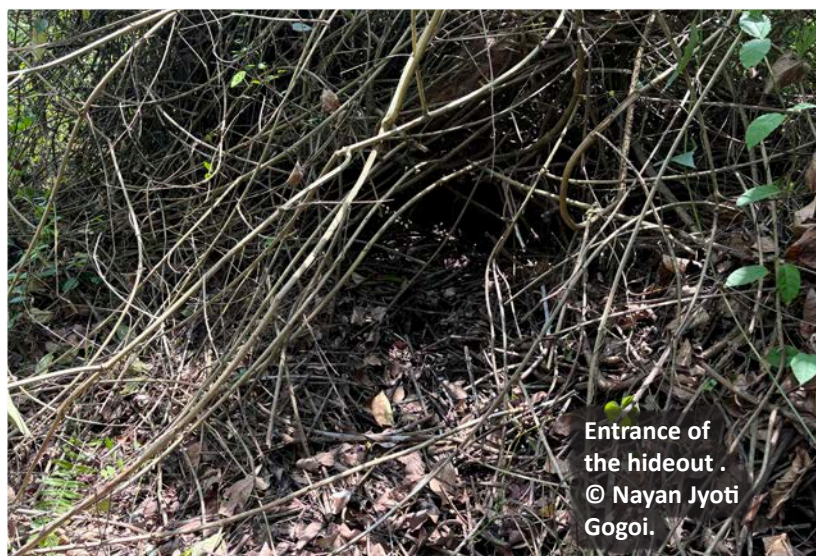
## A note on Royal Bengal Tiger cub reunion in Kaziranga Tiger Reserve

Temporary separation and subsequent reunion of young animals with their parents in the wild is a common phenomenon. Such separation may last from a few hours to several days and, in some cases, may be permanent (Sparks & Casey 1998). Separation can occur due to several reasons, including parental movement in search of food or water, straying into human-dominated landscapes, poaching, hunting, intra- and inter-specific conflicts, or predation affecting either the young or the parent. In several felid species, including tigers and leopards, mothers often leave their cubs concealed in secure locations while they hunt, returning later to nurse or relocate them (Laurenson 1993; Sunquist & Sunquist 2002). Similarly, in many deer species, mothers hide their fawns for extended periods, returning periodically for nursing while minimizing predation risk.

Biswanath Wildlife Division forms the northern buffer area of Kaziranga Tiger Reserve and comprises the Brahmaputra River and its dynamic riverine islands. Kaziranga Tiger Reserve recorded 148 tigers, including 27 individuals in Biswanath Wildlife Division (Gogoi et al. 2024). The landscape is highly dynamic, with continuous changes due to flooding and erosion (Gogoi et al. 2025). These riverine islands serve as critical corridors facilitating tiger movement between Kaziranga and adjacent habitats such as Nameri–Pakke, Laokhowa–Burachapori, and Orang.

### Observation

During routine patrolling on 29 April 2025, staff of Lahorijan Anti-Poaching Camp sighted two Royal Bengal Tiger *Panthera tigris tigris* cubs inside a bush in the 10th Addition of Kaziranga National Park & Tiger Reserve, with no immediate sign of the mother nearby. Prior to parturition, a tigress typically selects a secure and secluded den to protect her litter from predators and conspecific threats (Singh & Kumar 2022). Such dens may include rock crevices, caves, or shallow depressions within dense vegetation (Sunquist & Sunquist 2002). The incident was reported to the field director and divisional forest officer. Following expert consultation, staff was instructed not to touch or disturb the cubs, as it was unclear whether they had been temporarily left by the mother or were truly orphaned. Tiger cubs may become separated due to maternal mortality caused by poaching, intra-specific conflict, or natural causes. In some cases, cubs may also be abandoned due to congenital weakness, illness, or injury (Nigam et al. 2016).



Entrance of the hideout.  
© Nayan Jyoti Gogoi.

### Plan to reunion

In Assam many cases related to leopard cubs revealed that many cubs rescued under the assumption of being orphaned were, in fact, not abandoned by their mothers (Ali 2017). Reuniting cubs with their mothers is therefore considered the most appropriate management option when cubs are healthy, as it ensures proper social development and acquisition of natural survival skills (Gupta et al. 2020). Accordingly, it was decided to leave the tiger cubs undisturbed and monitor the site. Rescue and rehabilitation were to be considered only if the mother failed to retrieve the cubs within a stipulated period. A committee was constituted to provide technical guidance and conduct daily monitoring in accordance with the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) Standard Operating Procedures for abandoned or orphaned cubs.

### Methods of evidence collection

On 30 April 2025 at 1000 hrs during a period of minimal tigress activity (Pusparini et al. 2018) a team visited the site to assess the condition of the cubs. The hideout was located within woodland habitat with approximately 75% canopy cover, comprising trees, woody shrubs,



Photographic evidence from camera trap showing the tigress retrieving her second cub. © KNPTR Camera Trap.

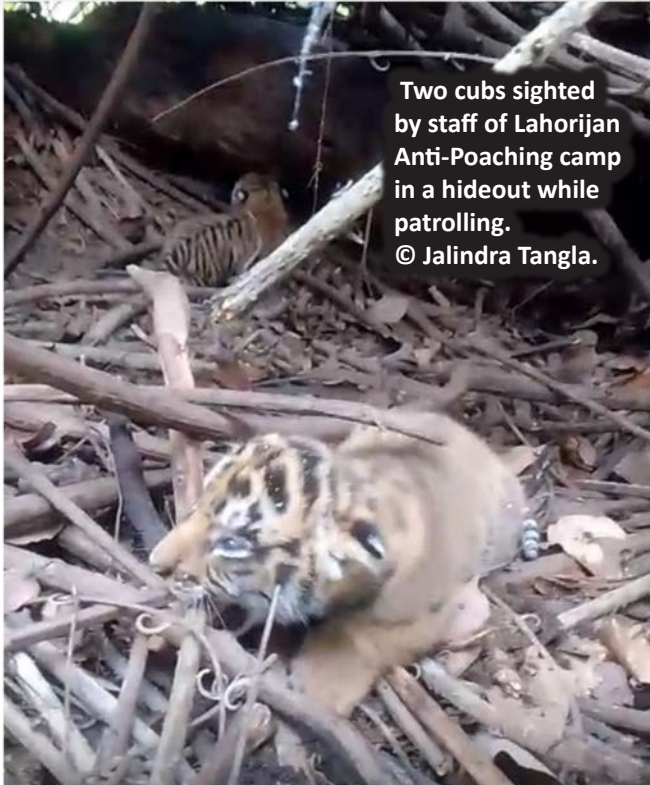


The Team fully equipped and ready, before entering the field © Khirud Hazarika.

and thick leaf litter. The hideout consisted of a dried *Lantana camara* bush shaped like a hemisphere, with a dimension of approximately 4–5 m radius. Upon inspection, one cub was found missing while the other remained at the site. The absence of one cub suggested possible relocation by the mother, as tigresses frequently shift cubs between locations (Sunquist & Sunquist 2002), although predation could not be ruled out (Nigam et al. 2016).

The team searched for pug mark of tiger or any other predator nearby but failed as the underground is covered by leaf litter and vegetation. A semi-decomposed livestock carcass was detected approximately 15 m from the hideout, though pugmarks were not discernible due to dense leaf litter. Livestock depredation by tigers in fringe areas of Kaziranga has been previously documented (Borah et al. 2018). The remaining cub appeared healthy and was attempting to crawl within the hideout.

Based on physical characteristics, the cub was estimated to be 6–14 days old, as its eyes had recently opened (WWF 2025). To monitor movement, camera traps were installed along three approach routes to the hideout to capture any activity of the mother tigress or other predators. After installing the camera traps,



Two cubs sighted by staff of Lahorijan Anti-Poaching camp in a hideout while patrolling.  
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Semi-decomposed livestock carcass near the hideout. © Nayan Jyoti Gogoi



Forest staff placing camera trap near the hideout to record evidence.  
© Nayan Jyoti Gogoi.

The Assam Tribune

Date 11 May 2025

## Tigress retrieving abandoned cub caught on camera in KNP

SIVASISH THAKUR

GUWAHATI, May 10: In probably the first ever documented case of a tigress reuniting with her cub after it was left abandoned for over a day, a tigress was filmed retrieving her cub from a 10th Addition area of Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve bordering human habitation.

The entire exercise was done by the Kaziranga National Park authorities in co-ordination with Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) and residents of Bihupukhuri, a fringe village along the southern boundary of the 10th Addition.

"This is a successful case of a tigress



coming back to retrieve her cub and reunite, which is certainly the first such documented case in the Northeast, if not in the country," Dr Panjit Basumatary, wildlife veterinarian with WTI, who supervised the exercise, told *The Assam Tribune*.

After the tigress – which had also killed a cow – was noticed with two cubs in the area, a joint team of Forest and WTI led by Range Officer Nayan Jyoti Gogoi found one cub inside the 10th Addition area on April 30 but the tigress and the other cub were missing.

"We found one cub resting under a dense bush undergrowth, and thick leaf litter. There was no sign of the second cub. A carcass of a cow was also there, suggesting the tigress may have stockpiled food prior to giving birth. The tigress had already shifted one cub and was likely to return for the other," Range Officer Nayan Jyoti Gogoi said.

The team identified three approach routes to the bush and installed one camera trap per route to document any movement of the tigress.

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Tigress retrieving the abandoned cub news published in "Assam Tribune" daily English newspaper.

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A heartwarming first: A tigress in Kaziranga National Park was captured on camera reuniting with her lost cub, marking a milestone in wildlife conservation.



First documented tigress-cub reunion in Kaziranga captured.  
From assamtribune.com

Honorable Chief Minister of Assam shared this incident in his "X" handle.  
© X handle of CMO Assam.

the team vacated the site. Following expert advice, the area was left undisturbed for 48–72 hours. Fringe villages were informed about the presence of the tigress and advised not to venture near forest areas to avoid potential human–wildlife negative interaction.

### Results

On 2 May 2025, the team revisited the site at 1000 hrs, carrying a plastic basket cage in case rescue became necessary. Electrolytes, glucose

solution, and a baby milk bottle fitted with small kitten nipples were also carried to rehydrate the cub if it had not been retrieved by the mother. Previous records indicate that tiger cubs may die of starvation following prolonged separation from the mother (Nigam et al. 2016).

The team cautiously scanned the area and approached the hideout, where it was observed that the cub was no longer present. An impression was noticed at the entrance of the hideout, suspected to have been made by an animal. Camera trap data were subsequently reviewed. Of the three camera traps installed, one captured photograph of the tigress approaching the hideout at 1300 h and leaving at 1302 h on 1 May 2025, carrying the cub in her mouth. This event represents the first documented case of successful tiger cub reunion in northeastern India.

### Discussion

Reunion is the most appropriate management strategy when a wild animal cub is found in healthy condition, and clinical intervention should be minimized. Reuniting cubs with their parents facilitates the development of normal behavior and survival instincts essential for functioning in the wild (Gupta et al. 2020). A tigress may leave her cubs in a secure hideout for several days while searching for food and frequently shifts them from one location to another by carrying them in her mouth. Therefore, a tiger cub found alone should not be immediately rescued under the assumption that it is orphaned or abandoned. A reunion attempt should always be prioritized before considering rescue and rehabilitation.

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