"LET ME ROAR": The Bengal Tiger of Indian Himalayas

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The Endangered Royal Bengal Tiger [*Panthera tigris tigris* (Linnaeus, 1758)] probably arrived in the Indian subcontinent approximately 12,000 years ago. It occurs in India, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh (Luo *et al.* 2004). Most Bengal Tigers are found in India. Recently India's national tiger census methodology has added a new dimension to results obtained from extrapolating site-specific densities derived from camera trap and sign surveys using GIS. The 2010 survey resulted in an estimated population of 1,706 (1,520–1,909) (Jhala *et al*. 2011; Sharma and Jhala 2011), an increase from 1,411 in 2006 (Jhala *et al*. 2008). The increase is in part due to inclusion of new areas in the most recent survey (Sunderbans, some portions of North East and parts of Maharashtra), but tiger densities were found to have increased in areas of Uttarakhand, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra and Karnataka (Goodrich *et al.,* 2015). However, the survey found a decrease in tiger range of 12.6% in connecting habitat corridors from 2006–2010 (Jhala *et al*. 2011).

Tigers are generally solitary, with adults maintaining exclusive territories, or home ranges.

Tigers (*Panthera tigris*) today face multiple threats to their survival in the form of habitat loss, poaching, depletion of wild prey through hunting by people and loss of connectivity between populations. Monitoring of tigers is crucial to evaluate their status and react adaptively to management problems (Goodrich *et al.,* 2015).

Sighting of Royal Bengal Tiger at Corbett Tiger Reserve

"Corbett" attained the glory of becoming the first national park to be established in mainland Asia in 1936. The area came under project tiger in 1973 when

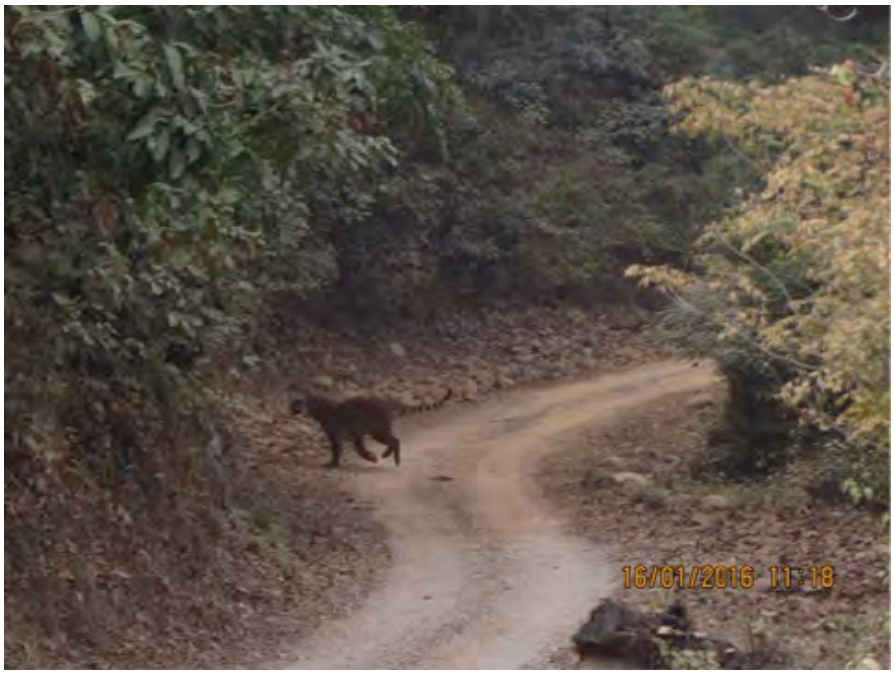

Fig 1. The Bengal tiger observed on the main road at Dhikala zone, Corbett Tiger Reserve

Fig 2. Tiger sighting Region (TSR 1) in Dhikala zone, Corbett Tiger Reserve, Uttarakhand, India

Government of India launched this phenomenal conservation project. Corbett Tiger Reserve extends 1288.31 sq kms spreading over three districts of Uttarakhand *viz.,* Almora, Pauri and Nainital. Corbett National Park covers an area of 521 sq. km and together with the neighboring Sonanadi Wildlife Sanctuary and Reserve Forest areas, forms the Corbett

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Fig 3. Pugmark of the observed tiger at Jamunshole, Dhikala zone, Corbett Tiger Reserve

Tiger Reserve. Geographically it is located between the Shiwalik Himalayas and the terai. The weather in the park is temperate compared to most other protected areas of India. The temperature may vary from 5^0 C (41^0 F) to 30^0 C (86^0 F) during the winter and some mornings are foggy. Summer temperatures normally do not rise above 40^0 C (104^0 F). Rainfall ranges from light during the dry season to heavy during the monsoons. Corbett supports a diverse group of plant and animal species, representing Himalayan as well as plains ecosystem. Though the main focus is protection of wildlife, the reserve management has also encouraged ecotourism. The Park is divided into six ecotourism zones *viz.,* Dhikala, Bijrani, Jhirna, Sonnanadi, Durgadevi and Dhela.

While visiting as a normal tourist for exploring wildlife in Jim Corbett National Park, on the morning of 16th January 2016, during the first safari (Dhangari Gate to Dhikala FRH) in Corbett Tiger reserve, at 11.18 hrs we observed a Royal Bengal Tiger *(Panthera tigris*) on the main road near *"Jamunshole"* (Fig. 1). We noticed the tiger first at TSR 1 (Fig. 2) at a distance of 250-300 ft when we were in the moving Gypsy. The tiger ran and disappeared quickly on the left high ground. Only a single photograph could be clicked from the moving gypsy. The Pug mark (Figure 3) photo clearly identified this individual as a male tiger. The tiger was perhaps moving towards a *"nullah"* but reversed its direction due to disturbance. Before disappearing it ran 20-25 feet along the main road and then made a quick left turn into the dense forest strands. More than half an hour was spent to observe further movement but no sign of the tiger was traced or any alarm call heard.

Note on Major threat

In the early 1990s, it was feared that poaching of tigers for the use of their bones in traditional Asian medicine would drive the tiger to extinction (Nowell 2000). Despite strong international actions the illegal trade persists (Nowell 2007). Tiger bone has long been considered to hold anti-inflammatory properties, with some support from Chinese medical research, but many consider the effect to be more psychological than pharmacological (Nowell and Xu 2007). Although all countries have banned the use and manufacture of medicines from tiger bone, illegal production persists in countries like China, Malaysia, and Vietnam (Nowell 2007). There are illegal markets for other tiger products, especially skin, teeth and claws that contribute to pressure due to poaching. Tiger poaching is driven less by poverty but more for the wealth (TRAFFIC 2008). Tiger products are expensive and within the reach of a rapidly growing group of potential consumers. TRAFFIC has documented rising levels of recent illegal trade within the tiger range countries, with seizures and confiscations in 2007–2009 averaging the equivalent of approximately 150 tigers per year (Verheij *et al.* 2010).

Note on Tiger conservation

The Tiger Summit held in St Petersburg, Russia in November 2010 by 13 Tiger Range Countries adopted a Global Tiger Recovery Program (GTRP 2010). It includes actions to i) effectively preserve, manage, enhance and protect tiger habitats; ii) eradicate poaching, smuggling and illegal trade of tigers, their parts and derivatives; iii) cooperate in transboundary landscape management and in combating illegal trade; iv) engage with indigenous and local communities; v) increase the effectiveness of tiger and habitat management; and vi) restore tigers to their former range. In India, The National Tiger Conservation Authority was established in December 2005 following a recommendation of the Tiger Task Force, constituted by the Prime Minister of India for reorganized management of Project Tiger and the many Tiger Reserves in India. New dimensions have been added to the existing scientific methodology for estimating tiger (including co-predators, prey animals and assessment of habitat status) and it has has been mainstreamed by NTCA. In spite of continuing progress for making complete area-coverage and making other refinements in the methods the findings from fresh estimation and assessment since 2008 are forming the new bench marks for future tiger conservation strategy.

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Announcement

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