

NAXALITIES DESTROYING THE TIGER RESERVES

Tiger reserves in areas with heavy Naxalite presence and influence are the country's worst, according to the Wildlife Institute of India's tiger census report that has recorded a sharp fall in tiger population.

The reason for the fall in the number of tigers in these can be anything – from poaching to loss of habitat, it said.

Qamar Qureshi, WII's Chief Tiger census investigator, said the tiger reserves in Naxal – affected Chhattisgarh, Jharkand and Orissa have fared poorly. “ They are suffering because of Naxalism”, he said.

An official of the WII said forest officials in the three states have almost acceded control of the reserve to Naxalites. Five reserve - Indravati, Palamau, Saranda, Valmiki and Similipal - are in huge contiguous forest areas, making it impossible for the thinly armed forest staff to move in, the officials added.

The 34,000 sq km Indravati reserve in Chhattisgarh, identified by the WII as a “ vital tiger reserve” is now controlled by the rebels. The reserve may be having tigers left in a single digit as compared to 29 in 2001 census. “ The figures are as per the local estimation. No census was done because of the Naxals”. A WII investigator said.

The fall in the number is clearly visible from the population estimation in Similipal (Orissa) and Valmiki (Bihar – Nepal border). Similipal has only 20 tigers against 99 in 2001. Valmiki has 10, down from 53 in 2001. Qureshi said conservation in these reserve is not working because of the Naxalite threat, a charge the Orissa Government has refuted.

Source : Naxalwatch.blogspot.com, dt. February 18, 2008