

ORISSA SAYS TIGER COUNT NOT ACCURATE

Trying to save face, Orissa Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik has refused to accept that the state had a mere 45 in the wild instead of 173 it has claimed for the past several years.

Terming the tiger estimation report as “ unacceptable ” he reportedly said on Wednesday, “ Many states, including Orissa, do not accept the recently published report which showed reduced number of tigers population.

He was reacting to the first – ever scientific and statistical assessment of the tiger population in the country, which was warned that the country – wide tiger population could be as low as 1,165 and 1657 at best.

The union environment ministry rebutted Orissa’s accusation immediately and defend the results. “ Our figures for Orissa are robust and based on unexceptional science and field work in which the state forest department was involved as well” said Rajesh Gopal, member secretary of the National Tiger Conservation Authority.

Sariska shadow on Similipal Sanctuary

The worst kept secrets about the feline numbers in Similipal tiger reserve to be out.

If the tiger enumeration through the camera - trap method, which concluded here last week, is to be believed, the 2750 sqkm sanctuary in Mayurbhanj district of Orissa may not have more than 30 tigers, far less than the number of 101 put out by the reserve authorities in 2004.

Dehradun - based Wildlife Institute of India (WII) which is doing a habitat analysis of all the tigers reserves in the country since January 2008 as a response to the Sariska tragedy, found the presence of only Six tigers in the Southern part of the park’s 845 sqkm core area, said to be the most tiger – dense area.

WII is doing the all - India estimation of tigers, large carnivores, ungulates and their habitat status. The team from WII, which last year undertook the first round of survey in the park, had put the number at 11 after they asked the forest guards how many tigers they saw and finally extrapolated the data on a GIS map of the tiger reserve.

In the second part, the WII team placed 60 cameras traps in 120sqkm area of Upper Barakamuda Range in the core area during the month of March, April and May this year.

This part of the core area is believed to contain 50% of the total number of tiger - 80 felines – in the area.

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With the best preserved tiger habitat reporting low numbers, conservationists are now raising questions about the wild tigers in Similipal.

Though the WII team of researchers has sampled only a fraction of the whole park, the presence of only six individual tigers in the tiger – dense area of the reserve seems to have shocked the conservationists and the officials alike.

“ It is very small number. It has vindicated our claim that tigers are vanishing from Similipal like they are doing in the rest of the country. I guess the total number of tigers in Similipal would be no more than 30, which is hardly a number that can sustain itself” said Biswajit Mohanty of Wildlife Society of Orissa.

Well – known conservationists and editor of Sanctuary Asia magazine Bittu Sehgal was more caustic.

“ The tiger numbers in Similipal was always fiction. All along the wildlife officials have given everyone wrong idea about the tigers numbers ” he said.

A well placed source in the wildlife department said if the WII team does the camera – trapping on other less dense parts of the core area - said to be containing 80 of the 101 tigers – then the probability of getting tiger images would be surely come down drastically.

Debabrata Swain, director of Similipal tiger reserve, said the WII team could have captured the images of more tigers in the camera traps, had it been done in monsoon. “ The Tigers in Similipal are camera shy, ’ said swain.

Source: TheTelegraph, dt. June 6, 2007

India’s fourth largest tiger reserve Similipal in Orissa may just turn out to be another Sariska

India’s fourth largest tiger reserve Similipal in Orissa may just turn out to be another Sariska where the entire tiger population disappeared.

But wildlife officials refuse to accept the fact that the numbers were fudged using faulty census methods.

NDTV bring an on – the - ground report on faulty tiger census.

In 2005 the official census pegged the tiger population at 101 in Orissa’s Similipal – India’s fourth largest tiger reserve.

But 2005 was also the year of the Sariska scandal. The entire population of the sanctuary in Rajasthan has disappeared.

So in 2006 a national team visited Similipal for a more rigorous census.

And here was the shockers.

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The team found pugmarks and scat evidence of less than 12 tigers and could not physically spot any.

Again, early 2007 a team from the Wildlife Institute of India carried out a comprehensive study by using the more science Camera Trap Method.

Their census too showed the number of Similipal tigers to be less than 30 about 70 % less than the official figure of 101.

“ I don't understand why the tigers in Similipal are supposed to be invisible because no one ever sees them. There is definitely no sign of any good number of tigers in Similipal because there are so many other corollary evidence that the tigers are very less in number.” said Biswajit Mohanty Secretary, Wildlife Society of Orissa.

Any doubt that the official figures may have been grossly inflated have been shot down with contempt by forest officials.

Source : NDTV, dt. November 14 2007