

**Tiger deaths in Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu due to natural causes – National Tiger Conservation Authority's report.**

National Tiger Conservation Authority in their report dated 06.10.2023 has clarified that the recent death of tigers including tiger cubs in Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu is not alarming in the context of current population size growth and dispersal dynamics in the landscape. They have further asked the tiger management to gear up to take preventive actions.

The National Tiger Conservation Authority is an apex body under Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) that provides guidelines to tiger reserves in India regarding the protection of tigers and management of Tiger Reserves.

According to the first All India Tiger estimation in Tamil Nadu in 2006, the number was 76. According to the estimation taken in the year 2022 it has now increased to 306 tigers. At the same time, the number of tigers in Mudumalai Tiger Reserve increased from 51 in 2006 to 114 as per 2022 estimation.

The NTCA conducts Management Effectiveness Evaluation in each tiger reserve every four years and gives rating. Based on that MTR was given "very good" rating in 2010, 2014 & 2018. The rating was "excellent" (90.15%) in the year 2022. In this year MTR was the only Tiger Reserve that scored maximum marks in "outcome category" (50/50 marks). The highest scoring in the outcome attributes to

- 1) Anti-poaching camps establishment
- 2) Strengthening protection by engaging anti- poaching watchers
- 3) Increasing the population of threatening species
- 4) Showing the increasing trend of Tiger populations.

As per National Tiger Conservation Authority vide letter No. F.N. 7-7 (vol VII)/ 2012-NTCA (ROSZ)/949- 955, dated 20.9.23, a team consisting of IGF, NTCA, Bengaluru, Dr. K. Ramesh, Scientist-F, Wildlife Institute of India & Dr. Kirupasankar Regional Deputy Director, Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) and Mr. Doki Adhimallaiah, Wildlife Inspector, WCCB

from Chennai undertook a detailed field appraisal on 25.09.2023 in Nilgiris regarding the 10 tiger deaths during the month of August and September, 2023.

The objective of the field appraisal was to (a) ascertain the level of seriousness of the issue and (b) suggest management actions.

Observations & Inference of the team are summarized below

1) NTCA has observed that MTR being the high-density tiger area, the first choice of the movement of tigers for dispersal would be to the potentially suitable, but less/unoccupied areas by other tigers to avoid potential conflict. Therefore recent spurt in tiger numbers in Nilgiris forest division, which is relatively less occupied by tiger is only expected line and should be placed in the context of normal population dynamics of tiger in such scenario.

2) NTCA noted that the survival rate of tigers is highly dependent on population density. In general, adult females deliver 2-3 cubs (sometimes as many as 5) in one litter with 50% cub mortality, attributed to several factors, such as disease, starvation, and infanticide. Possible reason for the death of 2 week old cubs in Segur area could be the weaker health condition of both cubs (at least one), leading to abandonment by the mother in order to conserve energy to raise fit individuals in the subsequent litter. Additionally, the early age of cub delivery (inexperienced mother) can be also one of the reasons for litter abandonment.

3) NTCA has observed that the four cubs that died in Chinna Coonoor area were two months old. The report cited two main reasons for the deaths of these cubs. First, at this age the cubs start to feed on kill made by mother. So the mother often has to make the kill to raise the cubs. Then the mother will have to travel a long distance if prey density is low. This leads to unattended cubs for prolonged periods. And if the denning site is deemed unsafe, the mother will shift the cubs (after 2-3 months) to another location. Particularly this present site is surrounded by significant human disturbance. Therefore, these cubs may have been left unattended by the mother during the transit for longer duration and hence, cubs died because of prolonged starvation.

4) NTCA also mentioned that the infighting is a common event for any territorial large carnivores, which depends on population demography, such as density, sex ratio, and resources as well as mate availability. Hence the two tiger deaths at Nadivattam and Karkudi were due to infighting.

5) NTCA has attributed that the deaths of two tigers (both males) in Avalanche were clear case of poisoning, a retaliatory killing by the aggrieved person (who has already been arrested by the department).

The Forest Department further added that a number of steps have been taken to identify mothers' of tiger cubs (2 cubs in Segur area & 4 cubs in Chinna Coonoor area)

More trap cameras were deployed around the places where the 6 cubs died to monitor the movement of the tigers. The cameras have been deployed in 40 places at Chinna Coonoor area and 18 places in Segur area. Further 6 teams were deployed in intensive search in those areas. Intensive search is also being done in the above Areas by 6 teams.

The monitoring teams got 15 tiger images from camera traps in Chinna Coonoor area. Out of this 4 were female tigers. Also in Chinna Coonoor area where the images of 4 tigresses were captured in cameras, teams have collected 6 scat samples. All the collected samples have been sent to labs for DNA analysis to match and identify the probable mothers of the cubs. 5 tiger images were obtained in Segur area. Out of this 4 were female. Search is now widened to cover all the adjoining areas to get more data on the possible movement of tigers.

The recent deaths of 10 tigers has caused wide spread concern. The Government of Tamil Nadu has taken several measures to improve the protection mechanism in the protected areas.

The government has regularized 210 anti-poaching watchers as forest watchers including 62 in Mudumalai Tiger Reserve. The protection has further been strengthened by setting up of three additional anti-poaching camps in the Mudumalai buffer Division. The Forest Department will leave no stone unturned in its endeavour to protect tigers.

**Principal Chief Conservator of Forests  
and Chief Wildlife Warden**

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