

Feature

Man-eaters of the Sundarbans

by Khasru Chowdhury

One expert opinion is that shortage of food is responsible to some extent for man-eating. The slain bodies of five man-eaters bear witness to this. All of them were healthy except one, which confirms the notion. When a healthy tiger, for some reasons, kills a human being, it gets to know that man is a slow-footed animal and therefore, an easy prey. This helps the tigers to become habitual man-eater.

SOMEWHERE in the north-east part of the Sundarbans, there still roars and roams a tiger with all the royal majesty. But his fate now lies in the hands of or rather in the pens of the senior forest department officials. Because he may anytime be dubbed as a man-eater and then the hunters will snipe at him. He will be shot dead for his crime — killing at least 37 people in the

physically unfit to prey on other animals then it turns into a man-eater. Sometimes, it may mistake a human being for a game from behind and strike.

Both these reasons can be attributed to the casualties in the Sundarbans. But there are more behind this.

From 1985 onward, the incidence of tigers killing human beings are on the rise in the eastern Sundarbans. Some

fodder. The villager then started introducing their cattle inside the forests and in the process, the original habitat of tigers was disturbed. Finding no other food, the tigers started preying on the cattle.

The local people then stopped grazing cattle in the forest. But the tigers cannot go unmet. They had no games to prey upon. So they started invading the villages and often

ported. But one should also consider the fact that men have been penetrating into the forest too frequently for which sightings have increased.

There is now an urgent need to launch a tiger conservation project. Such a project would also aim at management of other species and the forest as well. This would effectively bring down the incidents of man-eating as has happened in



Illegal fishermen who so often invade the forest become the main victims of the man-eaters.

Photo: Rubayyat Mansoor

A derelict canal Khara. The tigers cross the canal and swoop onto the nearby villages. Sometimes, the cattle along the canal also tempt the tiger.

Photo: Rubayyat Mansoor

killed people when encountered.

It can be said categorically that the certain parts of the forest, where the number of games declined, man-eating incidents have increased. Chandeswar, Bhedakhali and Chandpal are some of the areas where there are few games with the highest number of man-eating incidents. On the otherhand, Katka and Kachikhati areas are densely populated and there are many tigers, but incidents of man-eating are rare because of the abundance of games.

One expert opinion is that shortage of food is responsible to some extent for man-eating. The slain bodies of five man-eaters bear witness to this. All of them were healthy except one, which confirms the notion.

When a healthy tiger, for some reasons, kills a human being, it gets to know that man is a slow-footed animal and therefore, an easy prey. This helps the tigers to become habitual man-eater.

Many may raise the question where the money for the tiger project would come from. One solution to this may be, if the government can stop the illegal extraction of wood from the Sundarbans, if the corruption of the forest officials could be stopped, the government would have a huge additional revenue earning. A small part of this earning would be enough to run the national exchequer.

Another way of raising funds is that the government can offer lotteries for the project.

Whatever can be the way of raising funds for the tiger project, it has become necessary to launch the programme as soon as possible because the Chandpal man-eater still roars and roams the forest. And at any time, another human being will fall prey to it. Like the Chandpal man-eater, many other tigers are on way to becoming man-eaters, unless steps are taken to check it.

There is a notion that the number of tigers has increased over the years in Sundarbans as more tiger sightings are re-

ported.

Now the question is, how many tigers are there in the Sundarbans? The government puts the figure at 450. This has no scientific basis. But for the sake of conservation and forest management, it is a must to figure out the real size of tiger population. On this size will depend the required number of other games.

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