

Sad demise of a majestic Bengal Tiger and some related questions

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TIGER is the largest of the wild cats of the world. Siberian subspecies of tiger weighs about 50 kg more than the lion. We as a nation must be proud to have Bengal Tiger within our jurisdiction. Moreover it is our national animal.

About a century back tigers were present almost in 50 per cent land of Bangladesh, inclusive of all forests. Due to an overwhelming increase in human population, wholesale destruction of reserved and private forests, conversion of jungle-covered fallow areas and forested lands into agricultural fields and human habitations the infamous tiger of Bangladesh has been cornered into the confines of the Sundarbans.

We have no tiger alive either in the Sal-Gozari or mixed-evergreen and evergreen forests of the revenue divisions of Chittagong and Sylhet. In the entire range of distribution of the tiger from Bali in Indonesia to Vladivostok in Russia tiger never lived permanently in any mangrove forest but the Sundarbans of Bangladesh and India. Cat scientists conjecture that the tiger has been forced to live inside waterlogged Sundarbans because they cannot migrate to the Sal and evergreen forests of north and eastern parts of West Bengal of India and Bangladesh. There is a mammoth settlement of human beings from Khulna and 24 Parganas districts to Panchagarh and Jalpaiguri-Shiliguri districts of Bangladesh and India.

So, a population of 400 to 600 tigers within the Sundarbans must remain within this mangrove forest up to the time they are forced to extinction. However, tigers, like all other cats are very altruistic, curious, playful and adventurous. This inborn habit and competition for home range occasionally force a

juvenile or an old tiger to venture into tiger hostile habitats such as the human habitations bordering the entire east, north and western boundaries of the Sundarbans.

On May 28, 2003, a full grown majestic male Bengal Tiger did the same and crossed a human habitation of some 5km in one night and reached a village called Nalbunia under Chandpai Range. This particular tiger was within the forested areas under the Dhansagar Forest Station of the Chandpai Forest Range. The existence of the tiger

difficult to hide its massive body in the thickets of Nalbunia. Villagers spotted it and raised hue and cry and in the melee the tiger attacked and mauled a few villagers before taking shelter inside a sitting room of a villager.

The whole village folk of several hundred people gathered with machetes, crowbars, choppers and other homemade weapons and killed the tiger in no time. The forest officials had the information and the ranger from Chandpai rushed to the spot but only after the

aimed at the forest. It can have other tiger scaring device such as recording roars of a tiger and placing the sound in the middle of the forest and playing it once in a while. This will attract the tiger near the source of the sound and away from the village.

Well built tiger cage with trap door to be fixed with live bait to catch such a stray tiger from the village and then transport the same and release it back to nature within the home range from where it had originally misadventured.

charged artificially made human and cattle body/statue along the boundary of the Sundarbans where tigers usually roam freely. The shock a tiger will receive by attacking such models would normally not dare attacking either people or cattle in the near future. Such experiments have been made in the 24 Parganas district of West Bengal in India.

About 60-70 years back people in greater Sylhet and Karimganj (under Assam in India) districts used to catch tiger with nets. FD should get some people from Sylhet and try the old art and train the villagers along the Sundarbans to catch a tiger with net instead of killing it. For such a catch they can even be rewarded instead of punished under the Bangladesh Wildlife Preservation Act.

FD must device a long term policy of monitoring movements of tiger along the boundaries of the Sundarbans through radio tracking method and have a programme of tiger rehabilitation.

At the same time government must make it compulsory for FD to pay compensation to villagers mauled or killed by a tiger. FD must also pay compensation for the loss of any cattle due to a tiger attack. Indian government is doing it for many years.

Why our government won't do it? After all both forest and wild animals belong to our government as per the Bangladesh Wildlife Act of 1974. Since people are punished for cutting trees so the people must be compensated when they or their domesticated animals are mauled or killed by government-owned tigers.

Government must involve NGOs to work out a plan to introduce a kind of insurance policies for all those people who will enter Sundarbans for their livelihood, for government work, research works, etc., with government permission so that they get full life security as per the standard rates of the national insurance policies prevailing in the country.

In case a tiger is accidentally killed by villagers all efforts must be made that every part of the tiger is studied carefully so that we can get maximum information out of a dead tiger. This should involve preserving all the soft internal organs in formalin or other medium so that these can be studied under microscope in a laboratory for determining the health, age and abnormalities, if any, in the body of a dead tiger. All external parts need to be studied as well. These could give indication whether the tiger had any defective tooth, jawbone, paws, eyes, ears, etc. The number of bodies of tigers killed by people during the past three years could have given sufficient scientific material for writing a few masters' theses and provided a store house of knowledge regarding wild tigers. These could lead to conclusion as to what the tigers ate in the wild, whether salt water had any impact on the body of the tiger, what was the condition of the stomach, liver, pancreas, spleen, large and small intestine, etc.

I wish FD would have such measures to save every part of a dead tiger for scientific studies and use the services of the scientists of home and abroad to get these examined and studied for the betterment of the tiger itself.

FD should fix electrically

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The ill-fated tiger.

near the village was known to the forest officials. I presume it did stray a few times into the village bordering the forest.

As the daylight broke on fateful Tuesday the tiger was finding it

tiger was dead.

It was a rare opportunity for the villagers to kill and touch a tiger. Some started removing beautiful moustache, hairs from the tail and nail clippings thinking that these might have aphrodisiac values or simply to keep these as mementos.

As a simple village living folks the villagers did the right thing. They killed a trespasser which is their traditional enemy. However, from the wildlife conservation point of view this was simply miserable.

The custodians of the Sundarbans forest, the protector of the wildlife as per the Bangladesh Wildlife Preservation Act of 1974, the forest department has failed in saving a protected and internationally declared endangered species.

It is easy to blame the FD for all failures but we shall have to have consensus to stop such future happenings.

Once it is known that a tiger started straying into the villages the reason for doing so must be singled out and removed.

Else natural food for the tiger, such as spotted deer shall have to be procured, netted, trapped or obtained from other captive breeding places and wild boar specimens and that are to be placed inside the forest away from the villages. This must be within the home range of the tiger in question.

Villagers must be stopped from letting their cattle graze inside or at the edge of the Sundarbans where tiger roams freely.

Forest department should establish night patrol and allow firing of a few occasional shots

Endangered languors of Keshabpur

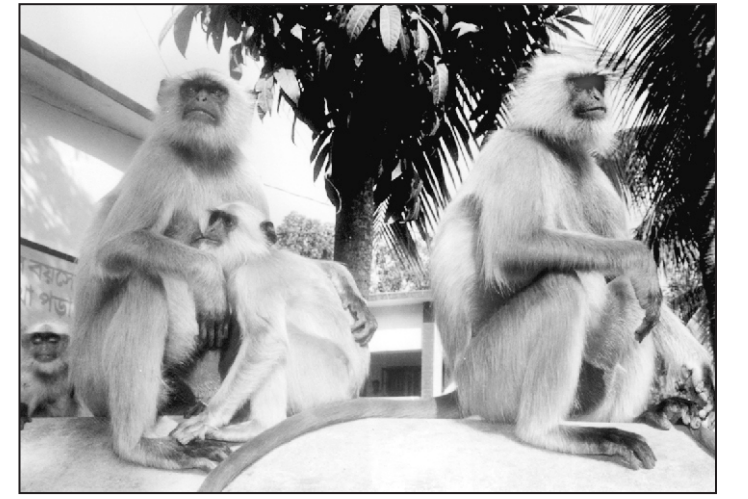
IFMA HUSAIN

BANGLADESH being located in the monsoon tropical region is endowed with a great diversity of fauna and flora. Bangladesh is a habitat for 119 species of mammals, 379 species of resident and 199 species of migratory birds, 124 species of reptiles and 148 species of amphibians. Out of 119 species of mammals about a dozen have already become extinct. Eleven more species, which include capped langur, are now endangered.

There are three varieties of languors found in Bangladesh. There are, common langur found in Keshabpur, capped langur in the Madhupur forest and Phare's leaf langur in Chittagong Hill Tracts. The common langur, isolated in the populous area of Keshabpur Upazila under Jessore district, is also endangered and on the verge of extinction.

According to the elders of the locality, more than four thousands languors of this species were seen 70 to 80 years ago, roaming around the jungles and villages of Ramchandrapur, Brahmakathi, Baliadana, Madhyapura and Bhangati under Jessore district. The common languors of Keshabpur are vegetarian and move in groups like the languors of other species. After roaming around in search of food during the day-time, there languors take shelter for the night on branches of trees 30 to 40 feet tall. The zoological nomenclature of this species of black-face langur is *Seminopithecus entellus*.

During the olden days the Keshabpur area was rich with an



an eminent social worker and Dr Dharendra Nath Dutt, a dentist in Jessore say the languors, after finding their food and shelter being uncertain, had migrated in large numbers to the nearby districts of Jhenidah and Kushtia and beyond the border to Krishna Nagar in neighbouring India. They found some safe shelter and food at the temple area of Shri Chaitanya Dev in Krishna Nagar.

At present there are about five hundred common languors living in seven to eight groups in and around Keshabpur. Each group is led by a male, who does not allow any other male member in the group (with some exceptions). So, whenever a mother langur gives birth to a male child, she takes the baby to a place beyond the knowledge and reach of the leader and rears the baby until it grows to adulthood. The new generation of adult males then form their only

persists to return to the fold of the group, she is harassed and beaten even to death.

True, they cannot speak human language, but they have senses as strong as human beings. They get furious when injured during visits to crop fields or fruit vines and later return there in groups to retaliate. If beaten up by men, they even go to law enforcers implicitly to seek justice and punishment to the wrong-doer.

Mother languors of the common species usually give birth to babies once in a year. Their average longevity is 20-25 years. Individual weight varies from 5 to 25 kgs. Their paws and feet are black as are their face. The body is covered by soft, gray hair, with patches of white and lighted under the belly. A langur moves with its tail erect, but relaxes it when sitting on a tree-branch. They are fearful of bows and arrows and guns as well. When smelling danger, some of the languors are occasionally seen clasping both hands in a gesture of seeking apology.

Statistics provided by Project Coordinator of Poverty Elimination Assistance Centre for Everywhere (PEACE) show that an average of 350 languors approached the five food distribution/feeding centres run by the organization. Of them, the number of male group leaders were 8, babies 40, young males 25 and the rest were female.

When a member of a group dies an unnatural death, all the other members mourn the dead by sitting in a circle around the body and then leave the place together.

PEACE has launched a programme under permission from the Ministry of Environment and Forest to protect/conservate and nurse the endangered species of common langur. It has so far been running the programme with its own resources since November 2002. But it is hardly possible for the organisation alone to bear the huge costs involved in feeding, nursing and protecting so large a number of endangered languors. It, therefore, looks forward to local and international donors and aid agencies for financial assistance in the materialisation of the noble venture.

IFMA Husain is Secretary General, PEACE.



Feeding of languors by a PEACE member.

abundance of both timber and fruit-bearing trees. The big banyans, with their cavities, offered safe and secluded abode for the languors to keep on their reproductivity. But with the passage of time, the vast resource of trees has been depleted either giving way to human habitation or being used as firewood at brick fields. This made the languors shelters, seriously disturbing their reproductivity and the number of langur population declined sharply.

Advocate Shri Nityanand Dey,

male groups for the time being (there are now two such groups of male adults in Keshabpur), wait for the opportune moment to attack the old guard of the original group to split that group into several ones to become leaders themselves. This grouping pattern revolves round the langur community.

Their community system is remarkably disciplined. But they are very rigid in their approach to any female member when she gets captivated by man and passes even a single night outside the group. In that event, the member is expelled from the group and if she