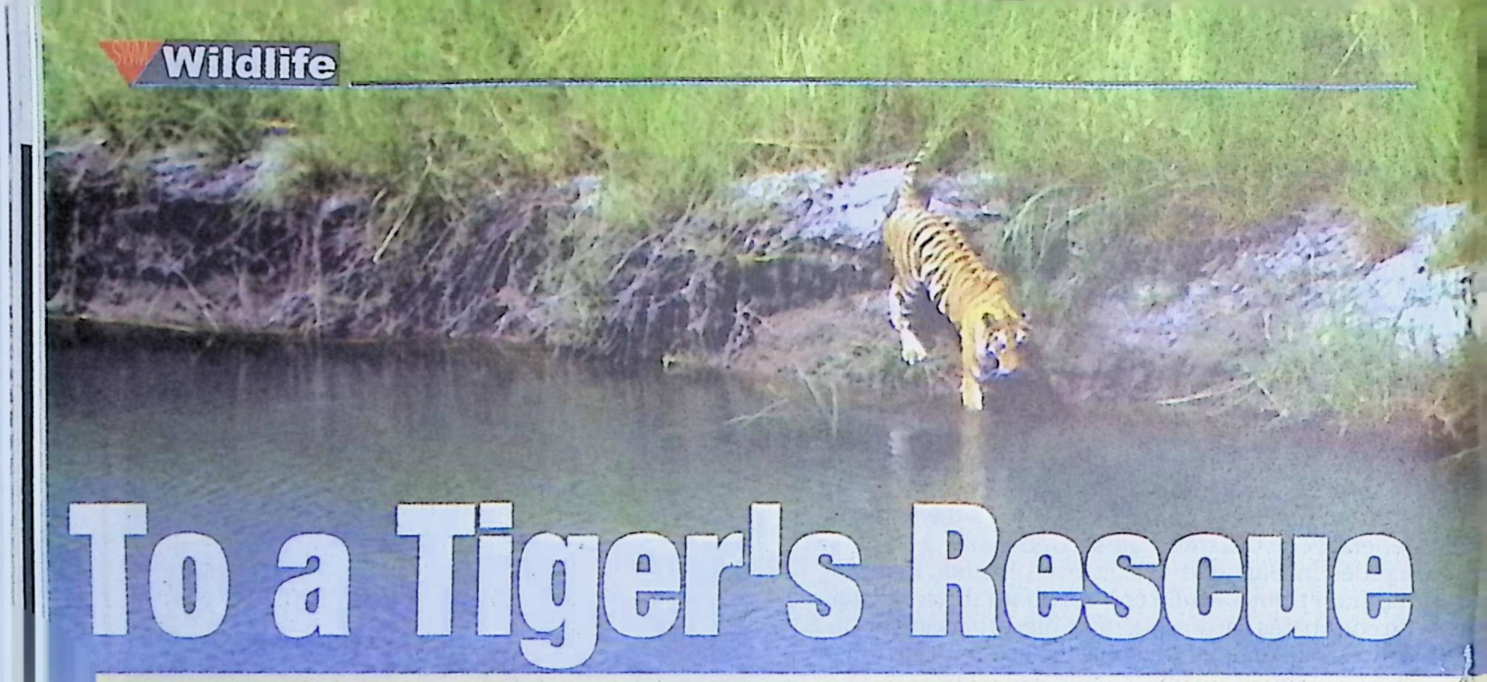


To a Tiger's Rescue

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Four days of peace and quiet in the beauty of the unpolluted Sundarbans took an unexpected turn for some foreign visitors when they ended up coming to the rescue of a cornered tiger.

Escaping from the smoky polluted noise of Dhaka to the quiet natural beauty of the Sundaabarns was something I had been looking forward to for quite some time. The opportunity to spend four days on a boat cruising trip through the forest, spotting dolphins, deer, monkeys, birds, crocs and the possibility of a Royal Bengal tiger in a clean environment (that was enough to get me very excited about going down there) was too good to miss.

The boat trip was magic; we spotted lots of wildlife and were even lucky enough to hear 25 mating calls from a tiger as we floated silently down an estuary in a small rowboat.

Enjoying the natural beauty of the area, we also had a brief glimpse into the lives of the people of the Sundarbans. A unique profession in the Sundarbans is breeding and training otters to fish, rewarding them after they push fish into the fishermen's nets. This tradition is dying out, but we were lucky enough to have moored right next to a boat with the trained otters. We paid for half of the catch they had been intending to sell in town and they showed us how it all worked. They were the noisiest, brattiest, pointiest toothed creatures you can imagine, but excellent little fishers!

We headed across to a village after our fishing demonstration to experience life as the Pied Piper. Many Bangladeshi villagers have never seen a real foreigner up close and were pretty curious. They stopped everything they were doing to come out and watch, invited us into their home, or followed us as we walked around the village.

As we wandered around an excited rumour had passed through the village. A couple of animated villagers veered from the usual 'what is your country?' and 'are you married?' to ask us if we wanted to see the tiger. Not being sure what they were talking about (chickens, fish and the odd dog we expected, but a tiger? Not possible!) but after hearing it from a couple of villagers we decided that there was something to it. With the language barrier we weren't quite sure what they were telling us, but it seemed like there was a tiger trapped in the next village and a villager had been hurt that morning. Knowing the likely outcome of a tiger encounter with hundreds of scared and angry villagers, then seeing the Foresty officials arriving with their guns, we decided to see if we could save the tiger.

We leapt on the back of motorbikes and raced off through the crop and paddy fields: a fast and bouncy ride filled with adrenalin and a dread of what we might find when we arrived there.

It was quite obvious when we arrived at the scene. There were hundreds of men forming a massive mob on all sides of the field and the same number standing around watching the drama unfold. Those in the mob were wielding very large sticks and the forestry officials were firing their guns into the air. The atmosphere was electric. We saw the tiger leap out of the waist high grass once then twice as it attempted to escape the mob. The crowd surged one way then another, for no discernable reason. It was obvious that the crowd was intent on beating the tiger to death.

We tried to stop the action unfolding in front of us, but