

Food For Thought

LEAVE US ALONE!

A cute little tiger,
 So weak and forlorn,
 Waits in the undergrowth,
 All alone.
 For his mother to return,
 If she ever will
 Because there are hunters
 Just waiting to kill
 This mad behaviour
 For just little fur
 Can only belong to
 A scurvy cur
 Lets join hands
 And call out to the world
 Let them know the tiger's plight
 And let man's truth be unfurled
 Save the tiger
 I cry out to you all
 So that they may live to see
 Many a summer, winter and fall

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Bhuvan Ravindran, X – J, AIS Noida

Our Constitution guarantees us the right to life and the right to freedom. God too guarantees the same to each and every creature on this beautiful planet. But unfortunately, we have amended the latter, providing many rights to ourselves but in the process, leaving the other creatures bereft of the same. Nature did not ordain the world to be inhabited by man alone. His survival is deeply intertwined with the survival of other creatures and particularly the tiger who stands at the top of the food chain. The tiger population that stood at 100000 at the turn of the 20th century has now reduced to 3200 with around 1411 in India. People frequently ask me, "Why on earth do you ask us to save the Tigers? We don't kill them!" We need to understand that those who kill them, will not save them. Also, all of us do contribute towards the destruction of their habitat by way of deforestation. Project Tiger was very successful in the first 2 decades after its initiation in the 70's. However, Tiger population began to dwindle both in Sariska Tiger Reserve as well as in Corbett since 1998. This means something is definitely wrong. But what?

Says Dr. Ullas Karanath, Director, Centre for Wildlife Studies, Bangalore, "Increasing complacency among people and political leaders was one of the main reasons. The surge of urgency at the political front had somewhat waned. Also, the unscientific monitoring of the Tiger population by the Pugmark Census Technique [PCT] is extremely unreliable. In India, we have recorded a 20% over-estimation rate in

a wildlife sanctuary, do not litter as it is the home of many animals including the tiger. Report any suspected case of wildlife trafficking to the nearest police station. Help in policy making by writing to policy makers and by donating to NGOs like WWF. With NGOs like WWF that work in close collaboration with the government, we could ensure that the Tigers can breathe easy a little longer. WWF has been the right

has stepped in to save the tigers of Pench. Success stories like that of a tiger giving birth to three cubs in the forest of Panna is a heartening example of conservation. But a lot more needs to be done.

We students can contribute our bit to strengthen tiger conservation efforts. A major part of our population is totally ignorant about tigers. Hence spreading awareness among people through articles in the newspapers and volunteering for conservation projects is the first step. The message could be spread when in social gatherings, chatting with friends, delivering lectures in the class, organizing street plays, etc. But for all this the student himself must possess the knowledge required before preaching apart from being dedicated to the cause.

There is no divide that exists between man and animals that we take indiscriminate decisions of killing them. The denizens of the forest don't need to justify their existence anymore than we do. Do we ever think about the fact whether we are going to live the next day or not? So why should they? The tiger needs your help. Join hands and save it before it is too late. Think about the time when they will be extinct. It is then that we will regret not having saved them. IT IS NOW OR NEVER!👊

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Tiger population. Lack of Forest Guards and sincere leadership at the field is also of major concern." But just analysing the problem is not enough. Urgent and committed action is required if we are to save the tiger. You might ask what can one do to really save our Tigers? To begin with, we can minimize the use of goods derived from forest produce. Also discourage others from using medicines made from parts of the tiger. Whenever you happen to visit

hand of the Government in saving the tiger. This NGO is in the process of educating the members of the Pardis tribe, who are entirely dependent on hunting for a livelihood. It has provided necessary equipment to various tiger reserves in India and has played a pivotal role in the Global Tiger Forum. Owing to successful conservation methods, Kaziranga now has the largest density of tigers in the World. Jairam Ramesh, the Union Environment Minister

According to WWF, the tiger is now officially the world's most endangered species. Joseph Vattakaven, Senior Coordinator – Tiger Conservation explains to Bhuvan Ravindran, X J and Shahnawaz, XII C, the need to save the poetic hunter not only in the Year of the Tiger, but forever.

Sir, can you tell us what inspired you to take up a career as a tiger conservationist?

The tiger is my biggest inspiration. Seeing this beautiful animal in the wild inspired me to work for its conservation. I have come from a very rural background and did not have much exposure to visit wildlife national parks then.

Do you think that the efforts of the govt. for saving the Tigers are sufficient?

It was predicted that tigers would probably become extinct by 2010. But there are still 1411 left which is a proof that the efforts of the government have been fruitful. Project tiger launched by Indira Gandhi in 1972 was by far the best and the most constructive step to save tigers in Indian history. A census had then been conducted and only 1800 tigers were estimated in India. But after some time, increasing callousness and decreasing vigilance led to a further depreciation in the tiger population and tigers were wiped out from Sariska and Panna Tiger reserves. The number of tigers in Ranthambore are ever fluctuating. The unscientific Pugmark Census Technique has now been replaced by Camera Traps that are more reliable. PCT estimated 20% exaggeration in tiger population. Once a team was sent to a tiger reserve to check the tiger population through PCT and they counted six tigers whereas there was only one.

I have been to the Sunderbans twice but never spotted any tiger. There was however an abundance of prey. Does this indicate that there are less tigers in the habitat?

The tiger is a solitary animal that likes to live in places where there is an abundance of prey and shelter. Places like the Sunderbans provide them with just that! The very fact that you did not hap-

"The tiger is my biggest inspiration"



Shahnawaz(L) and Bhuvan Ravindran(R) with Joseph Vattakaven

pen to see tigers is a positive sign.

To what extent is the land mafia responsible for the fall in tiger population? Do you feel effective measures are being taken to counter them?

The mafia is largely involved in deforestation and construction of tourist resorts especially around Tiger Reserves. The resorts are increasing in number, blocking important corridors for migration of animals, especially elephants and tigers. Some re-

sorts have discs too that disturb the animals at night.

The Indian Government must spend 11000 crore to rehabilitate villages from forested areas. With so much expenditure on Commonwealth Games, will the rehabilitation ever be possible?

The rehabilitation of the families living in core forested areas is not something that can happen overnight. It will be done but it is a very slow process and will thus take time to happen. The co-operation from the State Governments is required for it to take place.

The youth wants to save the tiger and other endangered species. How can they do this?

It is very important for the youth to first develop a love for animals. The backyard of their house or society is a good place to start with. Watching a cat prowl and hunt its prey is as good as watching the tiger. They must update their knowledge and be well versed with issues regarding conservation of the natural environment, primarily the tiger. Schools should also show documentaries made by WWF to children to develop an interest for the flora and fauna around them.

What must one do to pursue a career in wildlife conservation?

You can write the Civil Services examination and join the Indian Forest Service. In this way you can protect the entire landscape under your charge. You will be in a position of power to protect the animals that live in the region assigned to you.

You can also work on the field, studying the behavior of the tigers and other species.

Majoring in Life Sciences and enrolling for a post graduate programme at Wild Life Institute of India, Chandrabani, Dehra Dun are other options.👊