

Full Project Report 2000 BT0856.1 Tiger Conservation Programme

Project Summary

Stringent wildlife legislation, pro-conservation development policy and environmentally compassionate Buddhist ethics, have kept the tiger population in Bhutan relatively stable. However, given the lucrative trade in tiger poaching for its parts and products used in oriental medicines and fragmentation of habitats due to developmental activities, the threat to tiger survival is never completely eradicated. Although several ongoing conservation programmes were indirectly connected to tiger conservation, no tiger-specific conservation initiatives were in place until 1995. The tiger conservation programme in Bhutan was jointly launched in late 1995 by WWF Bhutan PO and the Royal Government's Forestry Services Division to carry out tiger status surveys and information-building, public education, professional capacity building for tiger conservation.


Project Background:

Tigers occupy a wide range of habitats in Bhutan, from the tropical grasslands in the southern lowlands to the sub-alpine coniferous forests in the northern mountains, encompassing about two-third of the country. These habitats also support a healthy prey base for the tigers. The tiger population faces serious threats as a result of poaching prompted by a lucrative market for tiger parts and products, particularly for use in oriental medicines, fragmentation of habitats for expansion of developmental activities, and killing by local people in defense of livestock or in retaliation to livestock depredation. Shortage of trained personnel, lack of data and lack of public awareness exacerbate the problem. Whilst several conservation programmes indirectly contributed to tiger conservation, it was felt necessary to have a specific programme, which addresses tiger conservation problems and needs more tangibly. Consequently, WWF and the Royal Government's Forestry Services Division jointly launched a tiger conservation programme in Bhutan in late 1995. The programme is aimed at establishing modest conservation measures for the tiger, its prey base and habitats through status surveys and research, public education and awareness-raising, professional capacity building and enhanced anti-poaching support. WWF International channeled funds from WWF Netherlands' Tiger Enhancement Funds to start off the programme and has thereafter maintained inflow of funds from WWF-UK.

Project Objectives:

Specifically, the programme seeks to:

- Carry out status surveys of tigers using appropriate scientific methodology to generate reliable data for tiger conservation planning;
- Promote extension and public education to improve public understanding and enlist their support for tiger conservation;
- Enhance professional capacity for programme implementation through training of personnel and workshops, and through provision of equipment for tiger survey and monitoring;

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- Promote field research to improve tiger conservation interventions;
 - Strengthen anti-poaching activities to mitigate the killing of tigers and their prey species.

Evaluation Criteria:

Activities:

- Complete 10 rounds of tiger status surveys covering the whole tiger range in the country;
- Develop a field manual for tiger survey and monitoring;
- Complete countrywide assessment of livestock loss from tiger predation;
- Organize 1 inter-agency workshops to discuss, develop and finalize a compensation scheme for livestock depredation by tigers;
- Conduct events of public education and awareness campaign on tiger conservation;
- Train staff in tiger survey and monitoring;
- Two week study tour to Nepal

Outputs:

- National tiger conservation strategy;
- Comprehensive baseline information, including a GIS database, on tiger population, habitats and distribution;
- Mechanisms for monitoring tiger population ongoing;
- A cadre of well-trained and equipped tiger survey staff;
- Increased popular appreciation and support for tiger conservation;
- Availability of key research information on tigers;
- Compensation scheme for livestock depredation by tigers.

Indicators:

- National tiger conservation strategy document;
- Comprehensiveness of available baseline information;
- Utility of available baseline information in tiger conservation;
- Frequency and amount of inflow of field information on tigers;
- Level of professional competence of tiger survey staff;
- Level of public understanding of, and support for, tiger conservation;
- Availability and utility of research information on tigers;
- National tiger conservation art competition organized;
- Audio music cassette for tiger conservation recorded and distributed.