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## Eye of the tiger: A reality check ahead of 'Global Tiger Day'

A differentiated strategy is required for future conservation of the endangered big cat

Written by [Vaishali Dar](#)

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In reality, there's a need for more awareness and future conservation of the endangered species as we celebrate Global Tiger Day on July 29.

This month, the world's oldest tiger in captivity, Raja (25 years), who survived a crocodile attack 14 years ago, passed away in a north Bengal rescue centre of Jaldapara. Raja's successful survival is a great example of conservation away from natural location. While such rescue centres protect tigers, the survival of the species is largely dependent on countrywide conservation and management efforts through critical corridors. In reality, there's a need for more awareness and future conservation of the endangered species as we celebrate Global Tiger Day on July 29.

According to WWF's Impact on Tiger Recovery 2010-2022 report, the decline in tiger population in the past years has been an indicator for ecosystems in crisis and on the brink of collapse. It draws attention to the fact that the development philosophy is needed to find a balance between economy and nature. Some of the causes responsible for the country's declining tiger population are urbanisation and fragmentation of wildlife corridors, climate change and illegal wildlife trade which have proved to be a major threat to their survival.

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A simpler way to protect the tiger population is to plant trees and restore forests in and around popular tiger habitats. Says Bikrant Tiwary, CEO of Grow-Trees.com, a non-governmental tree-planting group that planted over 8 lakh trees to expand and protect tiger habitats across India at Pench Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra, and over 6 lakh trees alongside the Kanha-Pench corridor in Madhya Pradesh, "All plantation projects generate employment for local and tribal populations, and educating the population about the importance of planting trees and discourage them from poaching by providing them with a steady source of income from the forest produce can help." He added that they have carried out plantation drives to connect wildlife corridors such as the one between Simlipal National Park and Satkosia Tiger reserve, both in Odisha, as the former is home to the only known habitat of the melanistic black tigers, a rare colour variant of the tiger. Forest cover in the buffer zone provides a natural habitat for tigers to find their new territories and reduce human-animal conflict. Besides tigers, the group has initiated over 10 afforestation projects to rehabilitate different species like giant squirrels, sloth bears, elephants, migratory birds.

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However, the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), a statutory body under the ministry of environment, forests and climate change, has set up a committee to review the criteria on management effectiveness of tiger reserves in India. This year, the 20th meeting of NTCA was held in Pakke tiger reserve in Arunachal Pradesh under the chairmanship of Union minister for environment, forest & climate change, Bhupender Yadav. The minister said to promote tiger reserves while at the same time ensuring the livelihoods of people dependent on forests, there must be active involvement of locals for conservation and better development of forest area and tiger reserves.

Taking a larger perspective of tiger conservation, which is at diverse stages in various habitats across India, Pranav Chanchani, national lead for tiger conservation, WWF India, feels in some areas, primarily well-established protected areas like Corbett, Nagarhole and Kaziranga, conservation efforts (especially since the establishment of Project Tiger started in 1973 to promote conservation of the tiger) have been immensely successful. Elsewhere, particularly in large blocks of habitats eastern and north east India, both in protected areas in reserve forests, tiger conservation is still nascent, and populations are small or even locally extinct.

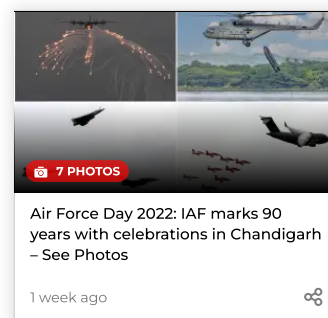
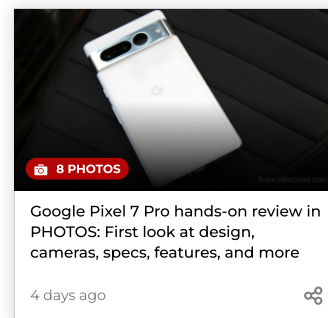
"The future of tiger conservation will depend on how well we are able to implement a differentiated strategy to maintain tiger habitat. In areas where populations are thriving, there is a need to strengthen management to speedily mitigate conflict ensuing in shared space by humans and tigers. Protection efficacy will need to be improved both within these areas, and in surrounding habitats, where the species may be vulnerable to poaching. In areas where the tiger populations are depleted, interventions to create enabling conditions for recovery will be needed," says Chanchani. Their future can only be secured if structural and functional connectivity between habitats is maintained. "If corridors are eroded by infrastructure development and land use changes that further fragments tiger conservation landscapes, populations will increasingly be at risk of local extinction, driven in part by the deleterious effects of inbreeding and the loss of genetic heterozygosity.

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Recovery efforts will become increasingly complicated, expensive if natural dispersal processes are disrupted,” he says.

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