

Naxalism hits tiger breeding project in Chhattisgarh

Anuja Jaiswal, TNN Mar 13, 2013, 05.22AM IST

RAIPUR: The ambitious breeding project of [the National](#) Tiger Conservation Authority of India (NTCA) has failed to take off in the Udanti-Sitanandi wildlife sanctuaries of [Chhattisgarh](#) due to the threat posed by Naxalites.

Though both these sanctuaries are located less than 175km from the state capital, [Raipur](#), work on the Save Tiger project has failed to commence due to the threat of strikes from Naxals. State forest department officials claim that some ground work, which includes deployment of local force for patrolling and surveillance, has started but are candid about the fact that the in situ (literally means 'in place' when translated from Latin) breeding of tigers, a key to the success for the conservation and growth of this endangered species is yet to start.

Admitting that Naxal threat is proving detrimental to the project, Rakesh Chaturvedi, field director, Udanti-Sitanadi Tiger Reserve, said, "The construction and earmarking of the 'in situ' area is not possible with the risks involved in it". He said that they were finding it difficult to enter the area for selection of 'in situ' site with the Naxal threat looming large.

Elaborating, the field director said 'in situ' breeding requires identification and fencing of about 700 to 1000 acres of land within the reserve. Once that is done, a tiger and two tigresses are kept confined in the fenced area for the entire breeding season and the gestation period, which lasts about three to three and half months.

Chaturvedi said that once the cubs are born, their growth is constantly monitored for a few weeks and then they are released into the open with radio collars around their necks to keep track of their progress and well being. However, with the Naxal threat looming large, they are finding it immensely difficult to start the work for preparing the site.

He said that ground work, under the centrally sponsored scheme of ministry of environment and forest which include deployment of local work force for patrolling, surveillance of water holes, manning of barriers round the year, weed eradication and development of grass meadows has started. He said the state government has asked for additional funds from the NTCA to complete the assigned tasks as the earlier sanctioned money was inadequate.

Chaturvedi said as per some sightings and pugmarks, the Udanti reserve has about four to five tigers. He said the prints of the pugmarks have been sent for DNA mapping to Wild Life Institute, [Dehradun](#), for sex determination. He said if the numbers of tigresses are less, they would get more from the other reserves, as and when the project takes off.