

## 4

## Reviving the Tiger in Sariska

### 4.1 Background

In the past several decades, habitats of several large mammalian species have been fragmented into smaller units. The tiger is one of the species most affected by this fragmentation and now survives in a few isolated, small, and possibly unviable populations. Fragmentation of habitat makes small isolated tiger populations very unstable. The slightest disturbance in the ecosystem or increase in mortality rates either due to increased poaching or disease will have a pronounced effect on the stability of these tiger populations. This instability reduces the chances of survival. Management of PAs *inter-alia* involves protecting a biological system, which is highly dynamic and functional. This process requires constant monitoring. With increasing anthropogenic and developmental pressures these highly sensitive ecosystems cannot be saved using the old *laissez-faire* approach, which prescribes “*let nature take its own course*”.

The current situation demands intensive monitoring of the system, restoration of habitats where it is necessary through appropriate management interventions. The bottom-line is to keep the functionality of the ecosystem intact. Therefore alert management systems responsive to the needs of wildlife populations are essential.

## 4.2 Why re-introduce tigers in Sariska?

The recent disappearance of tigers in Sariska because of poaching exemplifies the threat that exists to tiger populations in many parts of the state and across the country.

The recent local extinction of tigers in STR has been deliberated upon by the SEC in order to outline the future course of action to be adopted. The SEC strongly endorses the need for re-introducing tigers in STR. Sariska is the western most limit of tiger in India and maintaining its viable population is imperative both for forest and wildlife conservation. However, along with the initiatives to re-introduce tiger in Sariska, it is critically important to remove/ minimize biotic pressures which are degrading the habitat and affecting the abundance of wild prey populations. The SEC is of the view that a carefully conceived re-introduction plan should be able to establish self-sustaining populations of tigers with high reproductive fitness in the wild environment and ample genetic diversity.

One of the basic requirement for a re-introduction programme is a high level of commitment of wildlife managers and all other stake holders. Re-introduction of the tiger will be a long term and ongoing project and therefore commitment from the State must continue till the tiger population in Sariska is well established and secured.

Usually the introduction of large carnivores to an area from where it has been missing for a long time is not welcomed by local communities. Fortunately, this is not the case in Sariska and therefore, it is highly recommended; *the sooner the re-introduction takes place the easier it would be to bring the local communities into agreement with new conservation efforts.*

## 4.3 Recommendations

The SEC recommends that:-

1. *A well conceived 'Tiger Re-introduction Plan' plan needs to be prepared involving experts, park managers, public and civil society representatives.*
2. *The sanctum-sanctorum of the park needs to be kept free from all kinds of disturbances. For this purpose, it is necessary to rehabilitate villages located Core I of STR.*
3. *To begin with, the tiger population to be re-introduced needs to be identified from the identical/similar habitats. Most suitable Tiger Reserves are Ranthambhore and Kanha (MP) and it would be advisable to have a mix of population from these reserves. Considering the stress conditions and threats to the tiger habitats it is necessary to regularly exchange animals from these parks in the future.*
4. *Handling of animals during transportation needs to be done with care and under the adequate guidance of experts in this field.*
5. *After re-introducing the animals, continuous tracking and monitoring needs to be done. For this purpose it is necessary to radio-collar these animals, and follow them 24 hours a day.*
6. *A detailed budget and plan of action should be prepared in consultation with WII and other experts.*
7. *The guiding principles, which have been taken into account in many successful re-introduction programmes globally, should form the framework of the 'Tiger Re-introduction Plan'*

## 4.4 Guiding Principles for Successful Re-introduction Programmes

Some **Guiding Principles** which were included in many successful re-introduction programmes around the world are as follows:

1. First and foremost the objective of the re-introduction programme needs to be understood. It should be very clearly stated and must include **“what constitutes the end point of the re-introduction?”**. This is important so that progress can be monitored and priorities modified at any point of time.

2. **Clearly stated goals** – e. g. successful establishment of three female breeding territories within the next five years. Steps to be taken to exchange animals from the stock of different populations inhabiting similar habitats (eg. Madhya Pradesh) to overcome inbreeding.
3. **Emphasis must be on the population** as a whole rather on the release individuals.
4. Re-introduction programmes are complex and expensive – **“you get what you pay”**. Therefore a high level of commitment from both State and Central governments is a must. Guaranteed and open-ended funding is absolutely essential.
5. **“To catch the rabbit, first think like rabbit”** – an understanding of ecology and biology is essential and must be incorporated in the programme at the inception. Intensive monitoring of the released animals will be required.
6. **Create one multi disciplinary team** for the entire re-introduction programme for the planning, the monitoring and implementation of prescriptions.
7. Detailed **“road map to recovery”** which details all possible actions, goals, teams and costs. The acceptance of possible setbacks and unanticipated ‘hic-ups’ is imperative.
8. **Building public relations and perception**, both locally and nationally, for support of the programme.
9. **Preparation of site** – mitigation of problems identified for the loss of tigers from Sariska.
10. **Plan for soft and hard** release and subsequent releases.
11. **A detailed cost-benefit analysis** including capital and operating costs. e.g. capital cost can include the cost of tigers (founder population), veterinary monitoring, soft release site, introduction, monitoring equipment, veterinary equipment, fencing and public relations; operating cost can include cost of monitoring staff, monitoring expenses, maintenance, insurance, breakout/retrieval and social programmes.