

# Introduction

The Tiger Task Force was set up because of a crisis — the knowledge that the nation had lost its tigers from the protected reserve of Sariska in Rajasthan. But the Tiger Task Force was also set up to look beyond this immediate provocation: there were lessons to be learnt from this tragedy, lessons the nation needed to learn so that the survival of the tiger could be guaranteed. Sariska, then, was not only a crisis but also became an opportunity. Clearly, the time had come to review the past and also to secure the future.

It is evident that all is not well with the Indian tiger. It is this concern that led the Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, to review conservation efforts at the National Board for Wildlife meeting held in March 2005, to later visit the tiger reserve of Ranthambhore in Rajasthan to assess the situation on the ground and to meet with the chief wildlife wardens of different states. The Prime Minister also asked for the Tiger Task Force to be set up, with a mandate to review tiger conservation and to suggest a new paradigm that shares the concerns of conservation with the public at large. It is clear to us that his concern is a shared one: how we must save the tiger and how we must do that in the particular circumstances of India, where forests are not wilderness areas but also where people live.

This was our objective as we began work. We knew we had to find what has to be done, urgently and effectively, to safeguard the tiger's future. We knew also we were not the first to engage in such a task. India has had a long history of conserving the tiger, in which many have been involved. And much has already been done.

The Tiger Task Force started its work by seeking answers. It organised four consultations: two in Delhi, concerning issues related to conservation and poaching and on the methodology of tiger estimation; one in Nagpur, where tribal activists and non-governmental organisations working on collaborative conservation put forth their opinion; and one in Bangalore, to meet researchers and scientists working on different aspects of habitat and species research.

The Tiger task Force also visited tiger reserves — Periyar in Kerala, Pench in Maharashtra, Pench and Kanha in Madhya Pradesh and Sariska and

Ranthambhore in Rajasthan. In each visit, field managers, foresters and guards told us about their efforts to protect and what they believed had to be done in the future. We also visited villages located within the reserves and outside.

In all, it was an enormous learning experience, most of which we have tried to encapsulate in the report. But even beyond what we have learnt and sought to explain, we can say with confidence the tiger is not alone. When we began our work, we had an initial list of tiger experts, knowledgeable about tiger conservation and involved in its protection. But as we went about our work, we found the constituency of the tiger to be truly widespread. People across the country sent us their views and comments. In these three months, we received information from over 120 people. We met over 200 people on our visits and more than 100 attended consultations.

We would like to thank them all. We cannot, obviously, include all the suggestions, but all have been heard carefully; this has helped us devise our strategy for the future. It is clear that one problem of the tiger has been its 'exclusive' constituency; our hope is that this report will provide ways in which this group of supporters is enlarged and gets included in the future efforts for tiger conservation. The tiger needs all these friends, and more.

We thank the Union ministry of environment and forests for their cooperation; in particular, Dr Rajesh Gopal, director, Project Tiger, for giving time to the Tiger Task Force. We learnt a lot from him and we hope our report will help him and his colleagues, working on tiger conservation, in their efforts as well.

No report *per se* brings change. It is people, who believe in the report and its ideas, who are the change-makers. We hope our report will find believers as well. We hope that the agenda for tiger conservation will be secured, so that the future of the tiger can be secured. It will need seriousness. It will need commitment. But it can be done.

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