

Bengal Tiger (Panthera tigris tigris) in Bangladesh.

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The Bengal Tiger is popularly called Royal Bengal Tiger by the people of Bangladesh because of its Majestic Manner and gesture. In the remote past, it used to occur in all kinds of forests of the country, however, its main population is at present confined in the Sundarbans. A very small population of the species is reported to be in the forests of Chittagong Hill Tracts.

The Sundarbans is the largest of the Mangrove forests in the world, and it covers an area of about 10000 km<sup>2</sup> of land and water, of which the eastern portion covering about 5,960 km<sup>2</sup> lies in the south-west corner of Bangladesh. It faces the Bay of Bengal in the south. In the north and east it is bounded by human habitations and agricultural lands. The whole Sundarbans is intersected by an intricate network of interconnecting waterways (rivers, canals and creeks), of which the larger ones, often a mile or more in width and run generally in north-south direction.

The major plant species of Sundarbans are Sundri (Heretiera fomes), Gewa (Excoecaria agallocha), Goran (Cariops decandra), Keora (Sonneratia apetala), Golpata (Nypa fruficans), Henthal (Phoenix paludosa) etc. and these species form a mosaic forest cover very suitable for wildlife especially mammals including tiger.

A total of about 425 species of wildlife which includes amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals, are found in the Sundarbans. There are about 178 fin-fishes, 24 shrimps, 7 crabs and several species of molluscs in the Sundarbans.

### Bengal Tiger in Sundarbans.

#### Population

Tigers are found throughout Sundarbans. 362 individuals of tiger were estimated based on pugmarks in Sundarbans (Bangladesh part) in a study conducted in 1993 under a study project sponsored by FAO. The study was conducted in two sites in the south and in the north respectively covering 350 and 414 km<sup>2</sup>. In the south site which includes the wildlife sanctuaries, 33 individuals of tiger were estimated and in the north, 36 individuals were estimated. The sex-age composition was 6 males, 13 females and 14 juveniles and cubs in the south; and 6 males, 16 females and 14 juveniles and cubs in the north. The crude estimate was 1 tiger per 10.9 km<sup>2</sup>.

The other various estimates of tiger for Sundarbans are :-

Mountfort (1969)	:	50-100 individuals
Sarker(1982)	:	425 "
Gittins & Akonda	:	430-450 "
Hendrich(1975)	:	350 "

#### Behaviour

Tiger mainly preys on wild boar, spotted deer and Rhesus Macaque, and sometimes the tiger has been reported to prey on crabs and fishes. Population status of the above prey species of tiger in Sundarbans are good. However, their numbers are known to be low in the northern region adjacent to the human habitations.

No study has yet been conducted on the reproductive behaviour of tiger in Sunderbans. However, during pugmark studies for population estimate in 1993 in most instances a female with two cubs were encountered.

Man-killing habit of tiger in Sunderbans is known for centuries. Indications of man-killing by tigers in Sunderbans are found in the travellers' reports made in the early seventeenth century. In a recent report annual average number of men/workers killed by tigers has been calculated at 24.4 persons from 1948 to 1971 and 22.7 persons from 1975 to 1992 .

Chakrabarty(1984) stated that salinity and salt tolerance capacity of tigers, their osmoregulatory mechanism, if any, adaptation to constant fluctuation to salinity level, effect of salt water to kidney, liver and the physiological system are thought to be the factors responsible for aggressive behaviour in tigers.

Tigers in Sunderbans have been found to be a good swimmer. It is often reported that tiger can swim across a very wide river and it has an insisting character that it must reach straight the target point to the opposite bank at any cost. There are several stories and incidents about crossing of rivers by tigers in Sunderbans.

Information about the population of tiger in the forests of Chittagong Hill Tracts is very scarce. In 1978, <sup>pugmark</sup> tiger were noticed by a forest personnel in the Kassalong reserve forest and in 1985 an incident of killing and wounding of men by a tiger <sup>was reported</sup> from Kassalong reserve forests, by the local Forest Officer. From these two records, tigers are supposed have a small population in the forests of Chittagong Hill Tracts.

### Legal Status of tiger

Tiger is a protected species under the Bangladesh Wildlife (Preservation) Order, 1973. So it can not be hunted, killed or captured. However, there are provisions in the above order to capture or to kill man-eaters.

### Natural deaths and killing of tigers

No record is available on natural deaths of tiger; 270 tigers were killed in Sunderbans from 1948 to 1971; 13 to 14 tigers have been reported to be poached from 1975 to 1991; and 9 tigers were killed by a tidal cyclone in 1988. Other than Sunderbans, two tigers, one each at Sylhet and Chittagong Hill Tracts were killed in the eighties.

### Trade on tiger products

There is no record of commercial trade of tiger products from Bangladesh. However, tiger skins are sometimes, detected in the possession of people who do not possess valid possession documents under the existing law. One skin was recovered by Forest staff of Sunderbans Forest in the month of January, 1997. There is no recent record of tiger poaching in Sunderbans. So, it is suspected that skins of tigers, sometimes, are brought to Bangladesh from the neighbouring country.

### Management Activities for Tiger conservation in Bangladesh.

Three Wildlife sanctuaries have been established in the Sunderbans covering 1396.99 km<sup>2</sup>. One wildlife sanctuary covering 415.82 km<sup>2</sup> has been established in the forests of Chittagong Hill Tracts where tiger has been known to occur.

Eight centre and stations have been constructed in the wildlife sanctuaries of Sundarbans. These stations and centres have been constructed exclusively for protection of wildlife including tigers. 121 protection staff have ~~been working~~ <sup>during the</sup> there for last 4 years. There are also several forest stations and offices in Sundarbans and the staff deployed in these offices are empowered legally to protect wildlife in their respective jurisdictions. In the wildlife sanctuary of Chittagong Hill Tracts, Forest Department has also offices for protection of wildlife.

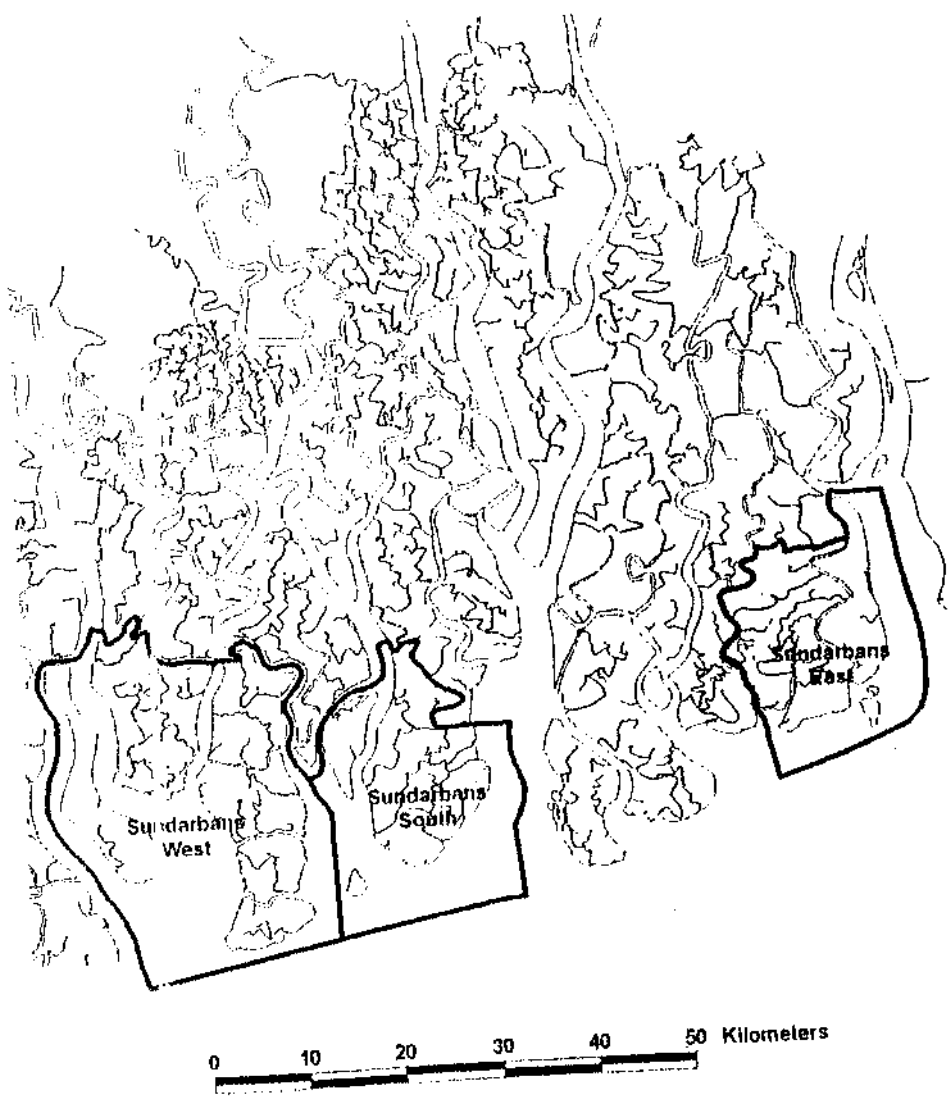
The Sundarbans has been designated in the list of Ramsar site; and the Sundarbans west wildlife sanctuary covering 715.02 km<sup>2</sup> has been <sup>included in</sup> the World Heritage List.

#### Recommendation

The Sundarbans has never been studied for wildlife vis-a-vis tiger in the past. For this reason, Bangladesh is not in a position to undertake and to implement a development project leading to wildlife conservation of the forest. In this circumstance, it <sup>is</sup> urged to the concerned organizations for extending their assistance for conservation of wildlife in Sundarbans focusing tiger as starship species.

A map of Sundarbans showing the wildlife sanctuaries is enclosed.

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