

ASSESSMENT OF THE STATUS OF TIGERS IN THE KINGDOM OF NEPAL

Between December 1994 and December 1996 surveys were conducted in the lowland parks and reserves where tigers occur. Chitwan was surveyed in 1994, Parsa and Bardia in 1995, and the proposed Bardia extension and Suklaphanta in 1996. These surveys were carried out by teams composed of Wildlife Technicians from the International Trust for Nature Conservation (ITNC) and Nepal Conservation and Research Training Center (NCRTC), and Game Scouts from the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC).

The figures given below are of resident tigers. This refers to (1) adults maintaining exclusive home ranges (territories) with respect to others of their own sex, and (2) subadults approaching breeding age that have already settled and maintain exclusive home ranges.

1. CHITWAN AND FARSA

	AF	AM	SAF	SAM	Total
RCNP	27	10	2	1	40
PWR	4	2	2	0	8
Total	31	12	4	1	48

2. BARDIA AND BANKE

RBNP	18	10	4	0	32
Pro Ext	3	1	0	0	4
Total	21	11	4	0	36

3. SUKLA PHANTA

Total	62	29	8	1	100
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Resident Females = 70

Resident Males = 30

These figures can be considered a reasonably accurate estimate based on field surveys.

Non-territorial subadults and cubs are not included. Both these age classes are bound to be under-enumerated during field surveys. It is more accurate to estimate the total population (all age classes) by using a formula based on the number of adult females. If we estimate, for example, the total number of tigers in Suklaphanta by this means we arrive at a figure of 40. whereas the number actually counted was only 31, 16 adults and 15 subadults and cubs, both the latter being under-enumerated. If we use the same formula to estimate the total tigers of all age classes in the protected areas of Nepal the result is 240. The formula is 2.4 subadults and cubs per adult female.

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As recognized by the International Field Assessment Workshop held at RCNP March 15-21, protected areas may not be large enough to conserve tigers at the population level. An eco-system approach to tiger conservation is required. Now we have to go beyond the confines of protected areas to establish the limits of populations.

1. THE CHITWAN-PARSA-BARA-VALMIKI POPULATION

We have surveyed that part of the population in Chitwan and Parsa. Now it is essential to survey Bara and, in cooperation with the Indian authorities, Valmiki. At the same time we are doing a survey to estimate the number of tigers we plan to assess the relative abundance of prey by pellet counts, and to identify the nature and extent of human disturbance impacting these areas. Effective cooperation between the DNEWC and the Field Director of Valmiki Tiger Reserve needs to be established.

2. THE BARDIA-BANKE-WESTERMOST DEUKHURI POPULATION

We have carried out a rapid assessment of the Proposed Extension of RBNP. This should be repeated in greater depth, and should not be limited to the proposed extension, but should survey the area south of the Sapti River and the adjoining forests of India. On the west it appears that there is break between the tigers in RBNP and those in the interior of Kailali District, but this needs to be examined in greater detail. It is almost certain that there is no longer any connection between RBNP and Suklaphanta. All the surveys to determine the presence of absence of tigers will also assess the relative abundance of prey and the extent and nature of human disturbance.

3. THE SUKLA PHANTA-KISHANPUR POPULATION

It is essential to examine the corridor which extends south from RSPWR between boundary pillars Nos. 23-28 to connect with the Reserved Forests on the Indian side. Earlier this year Bengali refugees which had settled in this area, threatening the corridor, were removed by the Indian authorities, an excellent example of Nepal-India cooperation. The team which surveyed Suklaphanta in November and December 1996 recommended that priority be given to the removal of Audaiya, Haraiya, and Pataiya Villages since they are next to and impact the main dispersal corridor into the extension area. The possibility of a connection with the Indian forests via the Hirapur extension and westward along the foothills of the Churia should also be examined. In cooperation with the Indian authorities we should assess the status of tigers and their prey in the Kishanpur forest blocks.