

How Live Baiting Threatens India's Tigers and Conservation Ethics

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Live Baiting in Tiger Reserves Latest News

- Kankati, a 23-month-old tigress in Ranthambore, has killed two people within a month. She and her siblings were raised with live bait provided to their sick mother, Arrowhead.
- This exposure has made them lose their fear of humans. Experts worry this could make Kankati and her siblings a threat to forest staff and visitors.

Live Baiting

- Live baiting involves offering a live prey animal to a predator. Historically, British hunters used it to lure tigers for easy shooting from hidden perches.

Use in Tiger Tourism

- In post-Independence India, live baiting became common in tiger reserves for tourism.

- It allowed visitors to witness tigers feeding, especially in places like Sariska, until the practice was banned for tourism in 1982 by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.

Continued Use in Conflict Situations

- Despite the ban in tourism, live baiting still continues in conflict scenarios to trap big cats like leopards, using goats or dogs.

Present-Day Practice

- Today, live baiting is mainly used to feed injured or aging tigers that can no longer hunt, typically offering buffalo calves every week or ten days.

Live Baiting: Prohibited but Not Banned for Injured Tigers

- While live baiting for tiger sightings is banned, using it for old or injured tigers is not formally prohibited under NTCA's (National Tiger Conservation Authority) Standard Operating Procedure (SOP), though it is "not advisable."

NTCA's Conservation Principle: Minimal Human Intervention

- The SOP emphasizes minimal human involvement in managing wild tiger populations.
- Artificial feeding goes against the principle of "survival of the fittest," and interferes with natural selection.

Risks of Artificial Feeding

- Feeding wild tigers may lead to their habituation to humans, increasing the risk of conflict — including attacks on livestock or people.

Expert View: Use Only as Emergency

- Conservationists warn that baiting should only be a short-term, emergency strategy — for example, for injured tigresses with cubs.
- Even then, it should be limited to once every two weeks and not exceed three months, to prevent tigers from becoming fearless around humans.

Misplaced Kindness vs. Natural Order

- In the wild, death due to injury, starvation, or competition is natural. However, a wave of public sentiment — especially post-2005 Sariska crisis — led to increasing human intervention under the guise of compassion.
- Human-driven compassion, though well-intentioned, often disrupts natural wildlife dynamics — leading to dependency, loss of survival instincts, and greater risks for both tigers and humans.

The Case of the Guda Cubs: Raised But Not Wild

- Following the poisoning of the Guda tigress in 2008, her cubs were regularly baited with buffalo calves.
- Raised without learning to hunt, the male (T36) was later killed by a wild rival.
- His sister (T37) survived due to the lower threat female tigers face from rivals.

Simba's Story: Tragedy of Dependency

- Simba, another cub raised on bait after his mother's death, died from porcupine quill injuries after a failed hunt — a result of his lack of survival skills in the wild.

Geriatric Care for Tigers: Compassion or Interference

- By 2010, baiting extended to aged tigers like Machhli and Anantpura male (T2).
- T2 eventually died too weak to hunt, while Machhli lived unnaturally long in the wild — aided by human-supplied bait for seven years until 2016.

Beyond Feeding: A Culture of Over-Intervention

- While live baiting is limited to reserves like Ranthambhore and Tadoba, a broader culture of quick, emotional intervention is spreading across India's tiger reserves.
- Visible injuries or limps in tigers often spark tourist-driven demands for treatment, resulting in increased tranquilisation and medical attention for even minor issues.
- From trucking in prey animals to creating extra water holes during harsh summers, reserves like Corbett, Bandipur, Kanha, and Pench are increasingly altering natural conditions to sustain tiger populations unnaturally.
- Experts warn that excessive human care leads to unnatural survival of weaker tigers, increased competition, and higher chances of human-tiger conflict.

The Expert View: Protect, Don't Pamper

- Experts emphasize that wild tigers do not need pet-like care.
- The best conservation strategy is preserving natural habitats and prey — and letting nature take its course.

Live Baiting in Tiger Reserves FAQs

Q1. What is live baiting in tiger conservation?

Ans. Live baiting involves tying live animals to lure tigers for better photo or tracking opportunities in reserves.

Q2. Where has live baiting been reported recently?

Ans. Instances were reported in Ranthambore Tiger Reserve, Rajasthan, during attempts to locate missing tiger T-117.

Q3. Why is live baiting controversial in India?

Ans. It violates wildlife ethics, risks animal cruelty, and contradicts India's Wildlife Protection Act.

Q4. What are the conservation risks of live baiting?

Ans. It alters tiger behavior, increases dependency on human-provided prey, and disrupts natural hunting instincts.

Q5. What legal actions address live baiting?

Ans. Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, prohibits such practices; conservationists call for strict enforcement and transparency.

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