

VOL. 3 / ISSUE 2 / MARCH - APRIL 2026 / ₹150

Big Cats

A magazine by IBCA on wildlife conservation

P 12

Living with Indian
Leopards in Tea Gardens

+

P 22

Survival Skills of a
Jaguar in Brazil



Irbis on the
The Fragile Snow Leopard in Russia
Edge

Prey Spotting

Two lions appear to be tracking a Cape buffalo herd, staying low and hidden amidst the tree branches. The herd (not visible in the picture) formed a defensive wall of horns. The lions know the risk of ambushing protective adults. But perched on a tree they have a better chance to grab a calf that may slip out of the protective ring. Patience is a strategy.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **MAYANK JAISWAL**

NAKURU NATIONAL PARK, KENYA





Heroes and Warriors in the Big Cats World



What's in a name? Lots, many wildlife research observers would say. Big cats' names like Tural and Ousado feature in this issue. They are heroes to local people, warriors to conservationists, as they combat habitat fragmentation and threats of poaching and disasters like forest fires. Tural (a snow leopard in Russia) means 'invincible' and is the protagonist of an award-winning film documenting the survival challenges of snow leopards in Russia. Russia has barely 90-100 snow leopards today. Suitable habitats for these majestic cats have been shrinking. Tural is a cub, and his survival is critical to the snow leopard population's long-term preservation.

Ousado (means warrior), a rescued jaguar in Brazil, who features in our photo story, is recovering from a forest fire. These fires have resulted in terrible consequences for the predator population. For many, Ousado's recovery from the fire is a miracle.

The reasons to name the big cats appear multiple – it could be a collared animal, connected to local legends, associated with myths and cultural heritage or simply identifying a personality type. This naming is the natural act of connection to the big cat. It is the first step towards commitment to conservation.

In India, the spread of leopard population across landscapes continues. They can be found anywhere – housing complexes, sugarcane fields and even tea gardens. Our special story captures the unique lifestyle of leopards in India's tea gardens. Here, they are often revered as garden protectors. Many may have names.

Protection and conservation of big cats has enhanced after technology stepped in. By integrating GPS, sensors, and sophisticated data platforms, conservationists across diverse landscapes are building a digital sentinel for the big cats. A giant leap to ensure communities can help the big cats thrive.

This issue brings rare visuals from parks and reserves across the globe: Nairobi National Park, Nakuru National Park and Maasai Mara National Reserve in Kenya and Pench National Park in India. Each image speaks a thousand words. Hopefully, these words will be heard more and more. 🐾

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Cover Image: Snow leopard Akkai in Altai Mountains. Photo courtesy Volunteers Project 'In the Footsteps of the Snow Leopard'

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06 Cover Story: Irbis on the Edge : The Fragile Snow Leopard in Russia

12 Special Story: Tea-Time with the Rosettes

18 In Focus: Eye on the Big Cats

22 From the Field: Warrior Ousado : Survival Story of a Rescued Jaguar

26 From the Field: Small and Beautiful Nairobi National Park

30 Wild World News

33 Book Review Elephant - The Divine Mystery

36 IBCA Update





Dr Daria Petrova
pg 06
Dr Daria Petrova is the Director of Interregional Association 'Centre

for Study and Preservation of Snow Leopard (Irbis), the Russian Federation. She has been engaged for more than nine years in the study and preservation of snow leopard population. She co-authored the first all-Russia accounting of snow leopards in 2025. She has been a member of snow leopard expeditions to India (Spiti Valley), Mongolia (Gobi Desert and Ubsunur hollow), and Altai (Sailugemsky National Park, Russia).



Dr Gobind Sagar Bhardwaj
pg 26
Dr Gobind Sagar Bhardwaj is Director, Wildlife Institute

of India. He has served in different protected areas managing some marquee tiger reserves of India. As a scientist, he has done extensive surveys on avian fauna in trans-Himalayan region and the Lesser Florican in western India. He also headed Project Great Indian Bustard aimed at protecting the endangered bustard in India. An avid wildlife photographer, he has been on expeditions to the Arctic and Antarctic peninsula.



Ramesh K Pandey
pg 26
Ramesh K Pandey is Additional Director General of Forests (Wildlife) and Director,

Wildlife Preservation, at the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change with the government of India. He was awarded the WWF-PATA Award and the UNEP Asian Environmental Enforcement Award (2019) for his contribution to wildlife conservation. He began his professional journey as an officer with the Indian Forest Service and has worked as Inspector General (Forests) Project Tiger, and Director Project Elephant (2021-2025).



Dr Aritra Kshetry
pg 12

Dr Aritra Kshetry is a conservation ecologist and the National Lead for Elephant Conservation at WWF-India. Over the past decade, he has worked extensively on co-adaptations between people and large wildlife, such as leopards and elephants, in shared spaces. He has also worked on National Guidelines for Human Leopard Conflict Management for India. His research has been published in reputed international journals.

Our Contributors for this Issue



Mariza Freitas pg 22
Mariza Freitas is a wildlife photographer focussed on using her art to raise awareness about importance of environment and wildlife conservation. She has won several national and international photo contests in recent years. Many of her visual explorations focus on

the beauty and strengths of the Brazilian jaguar that survive in Pantanal of Mato Grosso. Based in Rio de Janeiro, Mariza donates part of the profits of her work to NGOs in Brazil and Africa.



Dr Antony J Lynam
pg 18
Dr Antony Lynam works for the Allen Institute for Artificial Intelligence (AI2) designing conservation solutions and managing partnerships

for EarthRanger, Asia/ Oceania. He previously worked for the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). Based in Australia, he has 30 years of experience conducting research and using evidence-based approaches to advise wildlife conservation projects and initiatives in Australia, the United States, Africa and Asia. He has been a member of the IUCN Cat Specialist Group since 2004. He has designed and conducted surveys for Indochinese tigers that led to the creation of the national tiger action plan for Myanmar. He has written for peer-reviewed publications on tiger status and distribution.



Mayank Jaiswal, pg 02
Mayank Jaiswal is an engineer-turned-wildlife photographer known for powerful visual storytelling from India's forests and Africa's savannahs. His work blends artistic minimalism with authentic animal behaviour. Mayank loves to explore and document the personalities of animals he photographs in diverse landscapes. He promotes ethical wildlife photography and conservation awareness.



Avijan Saha, pg 12
Avijan Saha is a freelance conservation photographer based in West Bengal, India. His research focus has been on elephants and big cats, while attempting to transform the narrative of conflict into one of coexistence through ground-level documentation and youth education. Avijan works with schoolchildren of forest-fringe communities, fostering an emotional connection to wildlife for future conservation in India. His works have featured in the *National Geographic*, *Sanctuary Asia* and *Science Reporter*. He has also authored a identification book, on solitary bull elephants.



Anosh Koppikar, pg 17
Anosh Koppikar is a finance professional who has been in love with wildlife since childhood. While facing the daily rigours of global and local financial markets, Anosh manages to indulge in his passion for wildlife photography. He also runs an experiential wildlife safari that aims to make people witness the true beauty of nature and be inspired to conserve wildlife.

Snow leopard Chara in
Sailyugemsky National
Park, Russia



IRBIS ON THE EDGE

A recent estimate spotlights the conservation challenges
for snow leopards in the Russian Federation

BY DARIA PETROVA

Close to 90-100 Irbises (snow leopard in Russian) roam the southern Siberian range in the Russian Federation today. This number, based on a 2024 estimate, is considered critical by conservationists to preserve the species for the long-term. The 2024 estimate identified the snow leopards in Southern Siberia. The snow leopard (*Panthera uncia*) inhabits parts of 12 countries: Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Suitable habitats for these majestic cats have been shrinking, leading to the snow leopard being named on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Vulnerable species.

In recent years, illegal hunting for its stunning pelt and other body parts has posed a significant threat to the viability of the predator population. The black market offers a high price for its fur and other body parts. The TRAFFIC organisation claims 221 to 450 snow leopards are killed by humans every year. Experts say the figures are likely to be more. Equally disturbing are the cruel methods used to kill the snow leopard – they are ensnared in wire loops meant for other species, resulting in injury and

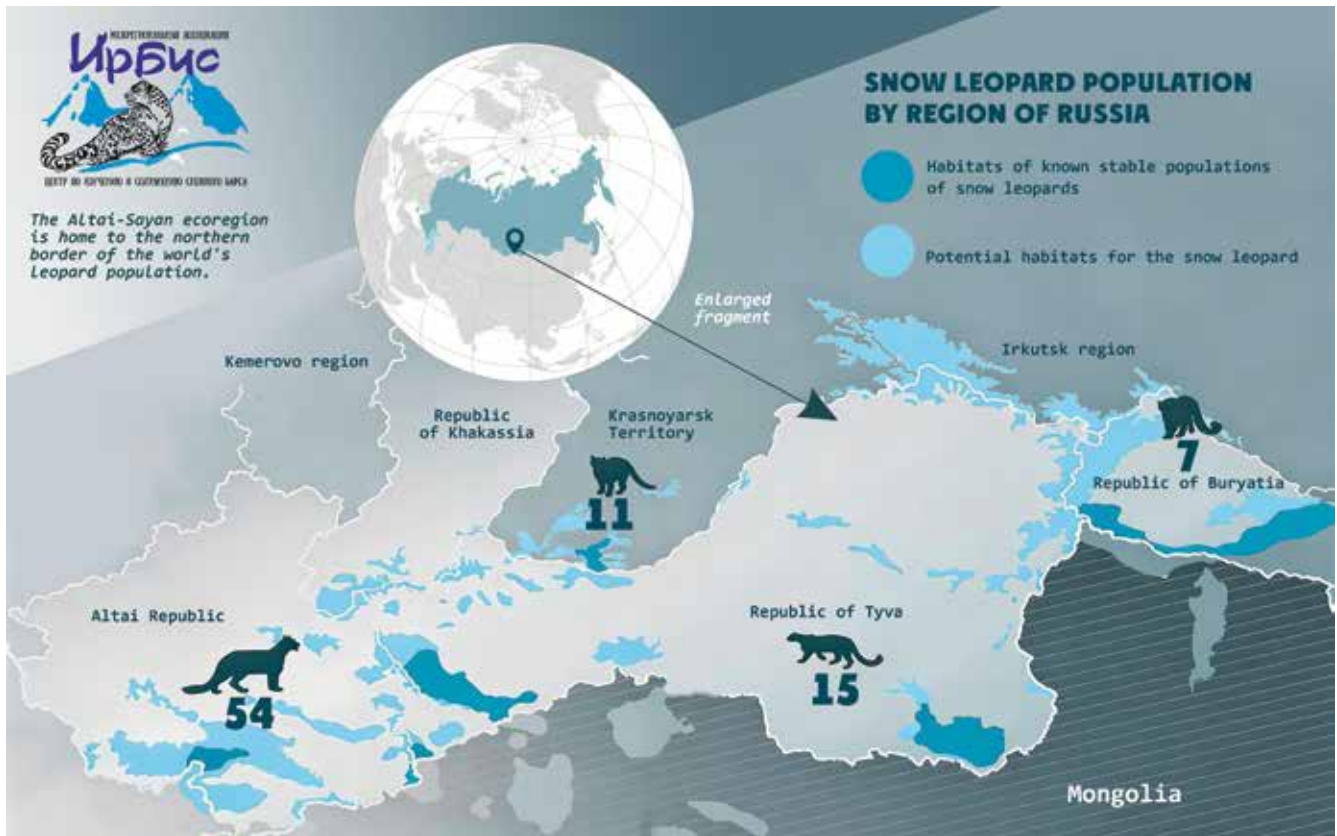
sometimes instant death. Snare-hunting significantly threatens the snow leopard. Conservationists believe the big cat appears more vulnerable because of its predictable behaviour: they follow similar paths and therefore can be easily detected by poachers and get trapped.

Some snow leopards are also killed in retaliation for livestock losses. Snow leopards often attack livestock that pasture in the big cat's habitat and/or the population of wild ungulates (the snow leopard's main prey base) is noticeably reduced due to poaching. They often attack goats and sheep and larger animals like yaks and horses. They even attack corrals and can kill or injure multiple inside the corral. Hunting has also reduced the number of ungulates – Ibexes and rams, the primary prey of the snow leopard. Increased human activity, and climate change are further threatening the species.

Critical Habitat

In Russia, snow leopards can only be found within the boundaries of the Altai-Sayan ecoregion, the unique and fragile ecosystem, formally divided by the borders of Russia, Mongolia, Kazakhstan and China. Altai-Sayan is a globally significant, biodiversity-rich

Snow Leopard Population by Region in Russia



Source: Irbis Association

mountainous area. Its scarcely populated territory remains a gigantic, practically pristine landscape. It contains two UNESCO World Heritage Sites, thousands of vascular plant species, hundreds of birds. It is a critical habitat for endangered species like the snow leopard, Argali sheep, and Mongolian saiga, etc.

These countries host significantly larger snow leopard populations than Russia: China has the largest snow leopard population of about 4,500-5,000, over 60% of the global total. Mongolia hosts minimum 900 individuals and there are about 190 snow leopards in Kazakhstan. Russia has about 2% of global snow leopard population.

Robust datasets are often missing for snow leopards. Lack of data limits the ability to innovate and curb wildlife trafficking. Therefore, the 2024 estimate data assumes more significance, as the snow leopards were counted in all four regions of its habitat: the Altai Republic, the Tyva Republic, Buryatia and the south of Krasnoyarsk Krai.

Today the Government of Russia monitors the results of the snow leopard census and provides the resources, including human resources, for the survey. The government nature-conservation organisations are the key actors in the field of snow leopard conservation with the help of charity foundations and volunteers. The protected areas, such as Sailugemsky National Park in Altai

Rangers and scientists work in harsh, high-altitude terrain, trekking daily 10 km across steep rocky slopes and snowfields

Republic in the snow leopard habitat has been established to protect the rare predator.

In 2013, the government toughened the penalties for the illegal harvesting and trafficking of endangered species. Altai Republic's local government banned the Siberian ibex hunting for two years temporarily to ensure enough prey for Irbis in one of the key snow leopard key habitat in Russia.

The snow leopard estimate, conducted by an NGO Irbis Association, took place in the harsh terrain of the mountain

steppe at the border with Mongolia. This scientific estimate was perfectly scheduled to Argali (Altai mountain sheep) mating season when female and male herds come together in November-December. It makes survey process easier and harder at the same time. It's easier to count the wild sheep as they all come together and the flocks are close to each other, not scattered across the habitat. At the same time, the temperature in the mountains usually drops down to -20°C with strong freezing wind and heavy snow. Rangers and scientists have to work in harsh, high-altitude terrain, involving daily treks of 10 km across steep, rocky slopes and snowfields. Working in the Altai-Sayan border region, teams face extreme weather to monitor the endangered sheep using camera traps, scat analyses and other tools.

Among many local people, snow leopard continues to be worshipped as a force of nature. The nature conservation organisations have implemented and tested different projects and approaches of involving local people into snow leopard conservation: assisting with camera trapping, monitoring prey, and participating in anti-poaching initiatives, etc. Programmes to mitigate human-wildlife conflict, have provided local people with the alternative income sources, and compensation scheme to reduce retaliatory killings.

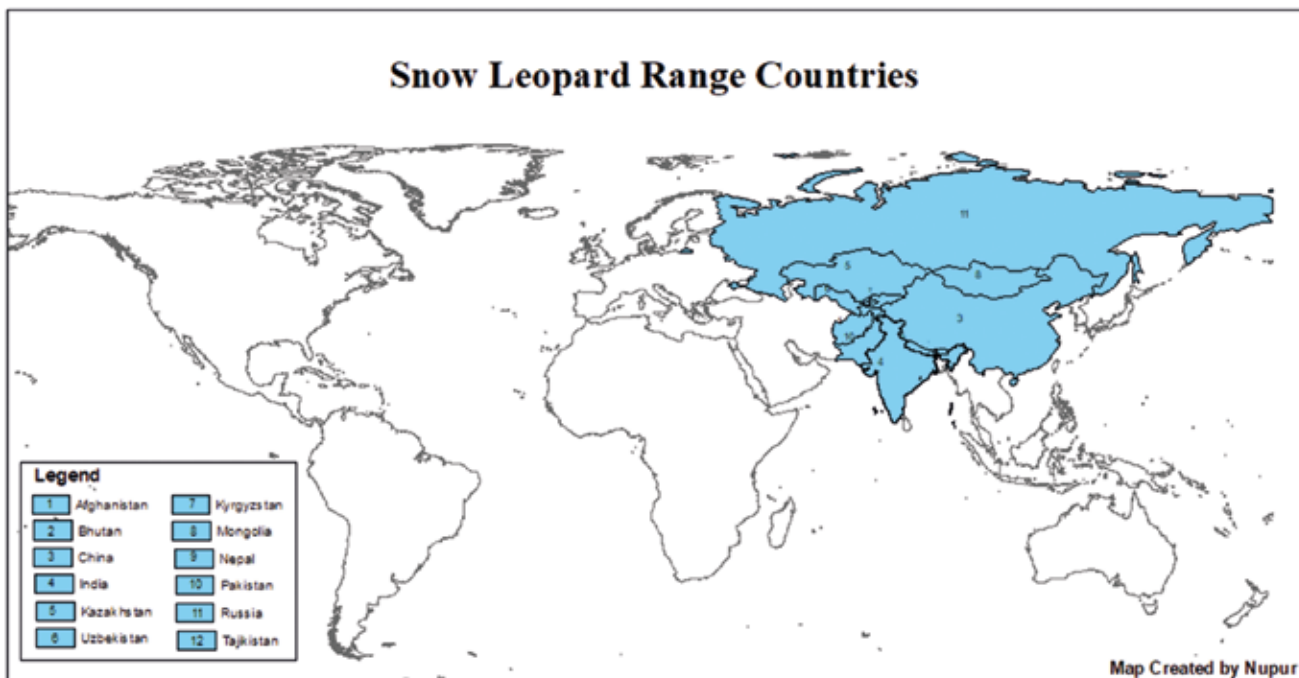
The first significant snow leopard survey, including



Tural, the iconic snow leopard that featured in the film *Master of the Altai Mountains*



Researchers set up equipment to monitor behavioural habits of the snow leopards



Source: Irbis Association

the first large-scale census was conducted in Russia in 2014 in the Altai, Tyva, and Buryatia regions, identifying roughly 65 individuals. The experts followed key snow leopard survey methodology and the unified approach. The findings of this survey and the following censuses became the baseline data for the first officially standardised estimate. As the the Sailugemsky National Park was established to protect the snow leopard in key kabitat, the economic situation gradually started improving for local communities who used to live on natural resources. The government also toughened laws on illegal hunting and trafficking. So, a nation-wide monitoring programme for the endangered snow was approved in 2021 by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of Russian Federation.

Irbis and GSLEP

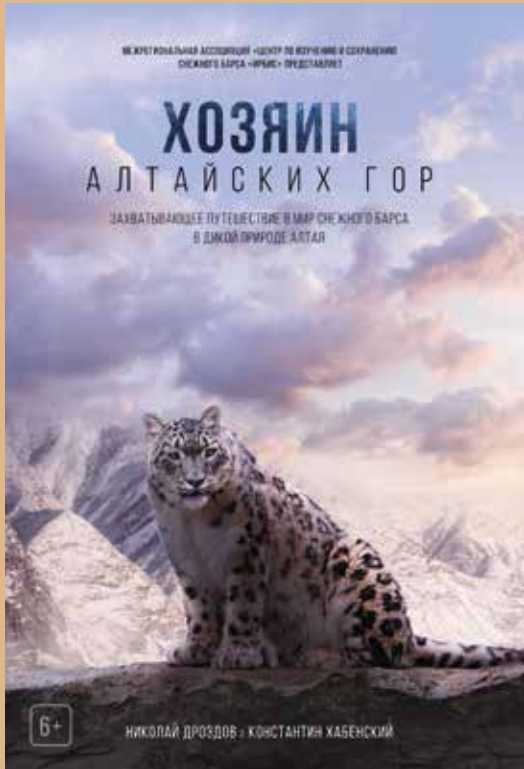
Established in 2021 through the initiative of its founder Ali Uzdenov, Irbis Association started working as a small conservation partner of Sailugemsky National Park in the Republic of Altai, the region that hosts the majority of the snow leopards of Russia. Minimum 54 snow leopards inhabit the Altai mountains at the very crossroads of the Russia, Mongolia, China and Kazakhstan. The Association works on the principle that snow leopard conservation in Russia requires international cooperation in order to ensure genes exchange, healthy future and secure the future for the rare cat species.

Five years later, finding itself as a member of Global Snow Leopard Ecosystem Programme (GSLEP), among the most successful conservation organisations of the world, Irbis Association supports the conservation of the Altai Argali, Pallas cat (manul), musk deer and the Altai Saker falcon, scientific



(Top) Irbis Founder Ali Uzdenov and (Above) Irbis Association members address the October conference

The Invincible Tural of Altai Mountains



Poster of the film *The Master of the Altai Mountains*

Master of the Altai Mountains, a documentary film was conceived by Ali Uzdenov, Irbis Association's founder. This survey-film tells the heartbreaking story of a snow leopard family and the little cub called Tural (the Invincible, in local Altai language) who overcomes difficulties with the help of conservationists.

The film documents how the snow leopard survives, finds shelter, and interacts with other animals. It also traces the difficult work of wildlife experts and what are the dangers that put species of animals to the brink of extinction. The film was commissioned with two purposes: to raise awareness about the decline in snow leopard population and to advocate for the conservation of the species within our nation.

The film, directed by Vadim Vitovtsev and Ilya Tsyganov, captures the breathtaking beauty of the Altai Mountains while narrating the tale of Tural to raise awareness about the decline in snow leopard population and to advocate for the conservation of the species within Russia.

It took three years to film the story in the harsh environments of the mountain trying to spot the elusive snow leopard. The film is an impressive and engaging account of the beauty of the snow leopard landscapes as well as its habitat. The numerous national, local and international awards of the film proved its creative and awareness value for the people with kind hearts and love for wildlife.

Last year, Irbis Association and the film crew announced the filming of the second part of the film called *People and snow leopards*. This international documentary film project is dedicated to the conservation of the snow leopard in the wild. It tells the story of the interaction between the human and animal worlds.

research, anti-poaching initiatives, environmental education, and major educational and international projects. It provides financial support for PAs and other nature conservation experts and organisations or organises workshops and conferences to bring experts together to share experience and build capacity.

In 2025, Irbis Association organised the snow leopard conservation and scientific conference which was attended by the representatives of all 12 countries of the snow leopard world range. This conference focused on study and conservation of the snow leopard in the world and provided the opportunity for worldwide conservation experience sharing and decision-making.

In 2025, Irbis Association started systematic monitoring of the Altai Argali population in the transboundary area of Russia and Mongolia. The population of Argali in Russia has surpassed its numbers in the neighboring Mongolia, with a total count of 4,074 individuals in Russia, as compared to 3,904 in Mongolia.

Another environmental education tool, that Irbis Association is very proud of is the 'Snow leopards of Russia' catalogue. The country's first ever complete catalogue has data about snow leopards in the wild and those who live in zoos of Russia. This catalogue serves as a tool for both scientists and wider audience.

Conservationists in Russia for many years appeared to have limited information on critical aspects of the animal's life and behaviour - seasonal migrations, diet and hunting habits. Recent studies and surveys have strengthened the resolve of many to use data to support protection programmes for the big cat. While the last estimate has revealed that the population has almost doubled since 2014, more efforts have to be made to ensure that the snow leopard does not continue to lead a fragile existence. 🐾

Dr Daria Petrova is the Director of Irbis Centre for the Study and Conservation of the Snow Leopard Interregional Association.

Inside Gungaram Tea Garden in West Bengal a leopard may meet you during a morning jog

A person in a dark jacket with 'GARDEN' written on the back is jogging away from the camera on a dirt path. The path is flanked by dense green tea bushes. In the background, a leopard is visible on the path, looking towards the jogger. The scene is set in a lush, green tea garden with tall trees in the distance.

Tea-time with the Rosettes

In parts of India, leopards are tea estate residents. **Aritra Kshetry** reports how the humans and the big cats coexist

Photographs by **Avijan Saha**

The Indian leopard (*Panthera pardus fusca*) is the most widespread of all big cats in the country. There is hardly any ecosystem in India devoid of the rosettes, barring the mangroves and the islands. Today, they appear to colonise and even thrive in secondary habitats, such as tea-plantations, sugarcane fields, and

even in peri-urban spaces.

The leopard story is a remarkable tale of people and the big cat. And such a story comes alive every day in landscapes like the tea estates of West Bengal, a state in eastern India. West Bengal's tea estates are known for producing tea that has a distinctive flavour and aroma and fetch attractive prices in the global market.

Narratives of *bagan ka bagh* (resident tea-estate leopard) are common among tea-plantation workers in West Bengal. In shared landscapes, leopards seem to have adapted to humans by changing their own behaviour to avoid being seen and even adjusting their own diet based on easily available and accessible prey.

The tea-plantations, set up in the late



Female leopard
Akira spotted near
a bungalow in a tea
estate

" In shared landscapes, leopards seem to have adapted to humans by changing their own behaviour to avoid being seen "

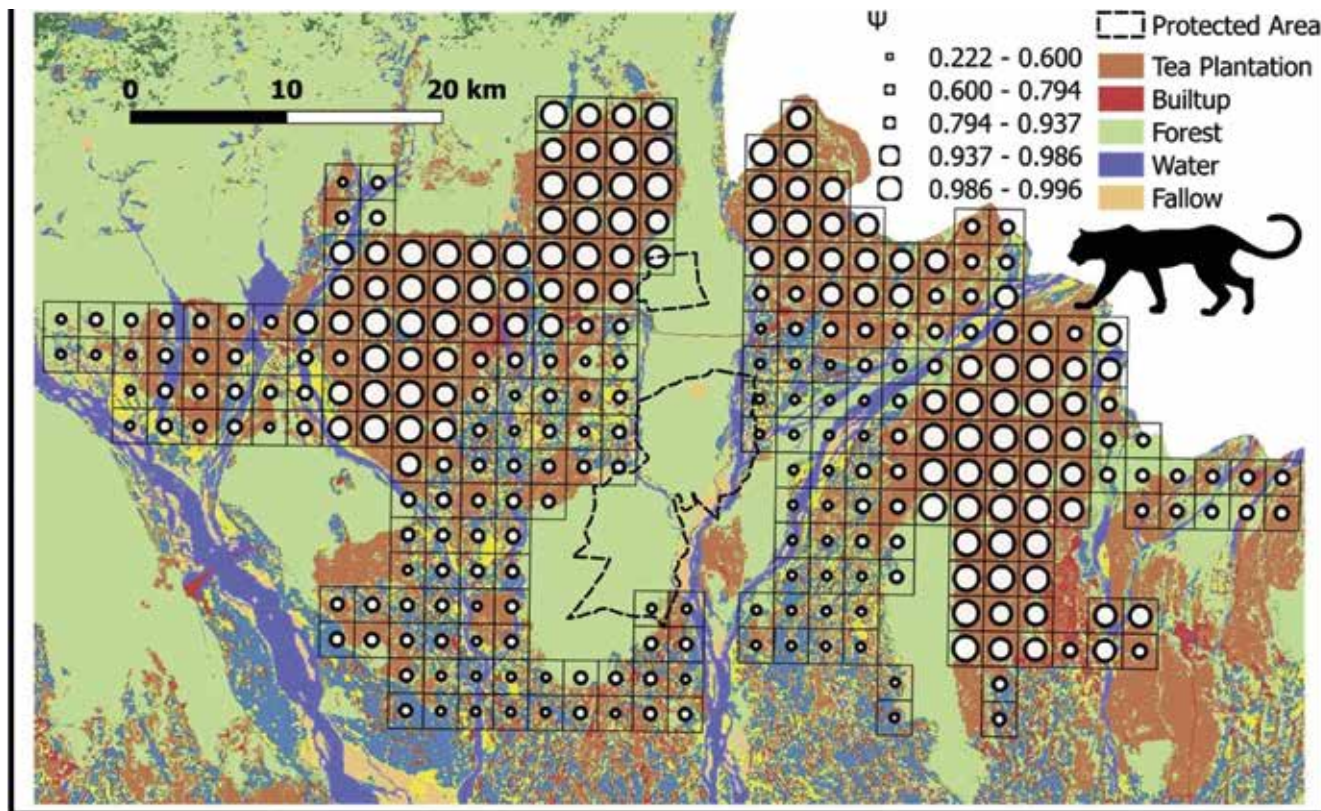
1800s during the British colonisation of India, fragmented primary moist deciduous forests, creating a complex mosaic of tea, agriculture land, human settlements, and remnant forest patches. An ethnic melting pot of indigenous and settled communities with an average population density of 700 people per km², the North Bengal landscape, as it is

commonly called, is an uncanny seat for regular interactions between people and leopards. For starters, the region is home to a high density of people of diverse communities including settled tribes, and non-tribal folk from Bengal, Bihar and Nepal, a border country. The region has witnessed extreme deforestation in the 1900s and was also a popular hunting

ground for the British and Indian royals. Despite the odds, the leopards not only persisted, but also thrived in this landscape, assisted partly, by the absence of tigers and a high abundance of herbivores, both wild and domestic.

With a wild herbivore density ranging between 20 and 50 individuals per km², the landscapes also feature a high livestock

Presence of Leopards in West Bengal



Source: Global Ecology and Conservation, Volume 22, 2020, e00905, ISSN 2351-9894, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gecco.2020.e00905>

density of ~350 animals per km². The leopards in the region have also adjusted their feeding habits to match the high availability of livestock as cattle and goats comprises ~65% of the diet of the leopards in the landscape. Among wild prey, rhesus macaques are most frequently preyed as other large herbivores such as gaur and sambar are too big for leopards to kill. Spotted deer and barking deer, ideal prey size for leopards, are not too abundant in the forested areas and are inconspicuous in the tea-plantations leaving little wild prey options for leopards.

Despite the high dependence on livestock for food, the local communities rarely retaliate with hardly any reports of leopard deaths in the landscape in the past decade. The vulnerable communities who lose livestock are extremely marginalised, landless and work in the tea-plantations on meagre wages. Livestock holdings per household is low with an average of three to four heads of goat per households

(mean=3.46, Standard Error=0.22), and two to three heads of cattle (mean=2.51, Standard Error=0.15). This translates to a low probability of leopard-attributed loss per household (44% chance of goat predation and 27% chance of cattle predation by leopards per household) and an even lower probability of recurrent losses faced by the same households. In other words, the losses are distributed over a large population leading to a negligible per-capita loss.

The additional factor going in favour of the leopards is that the livestock in this region are all-low value breeds kept only as an insurance for a sudden requirement of cash as animal husbandry does not constitute the mainstay of the local economy. Additionally, better husbandry practices including active guarding and predator-proof corrals can safeguard livestock in this region and over time, can also help bring down the high leopard population in the tea plantations.

The leopard densities in the tea-plantations of Jalpaiguri District in North Bengal (11.53 per 100 km², Standard Error: 2.72) are nearly three times that of adjacent forest areas comprising of Gorumara National Park and Jalpaiguri Reserve Forests (4.67 per 100 km², Standard Error: 2.07). The density of leopards in the tea-plantations of North Bengal is comparable to leopard densities in some of the best managed Protected Areas in India. A high density of leopards is not without challenges to local lives, and this is nowhere more pronounced than in the tea-plantations of West Bengal that witness more than 100 human injuries attributed to leopards each year.

Human injuries by Leopards

The tea-plantations of northern West Bengal witness some of the highest frequency of carnivore-attributed human

LEOPARDS ARE A PLENTY

» India has one of the largest populations of leopards. A recent national estimate, covering 70% leopard habitat, placed the population at 13,874 individuals. There has been a 1.08% annum growth in leopard numbers.

» The Indian leopard is found in a variety of forested habitats, including tropical rainforests, dry deciduous forests, temperate and coniferous forests excluding mangrove forests and desert habitats. Central India and Eastern Ghats landscape have the largest number of leopards.

» From the sugarcane fields of Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, to the tea plantations of West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, and the hills of Himachal Pradesh, leopards are found everywhere. One of the most widely distributed felids, leopards often inhabit human-dominated landscapes. Leopards are known for their prolific breeding rates and faster life history traits compared to tigers.

» Urbanisation and agricultural expansion have reduced the leopard's natural habitat, forcing it to adapt to food sources closer to human settlements. This has led to frequent attack on livestock and humans. Poaching and road accidents pose additional threats to leopard population.



A boy holds the sketch of a leopard that attacked him



A leopard cage installed in Darjeeling terai landscape

injuries anywhere in the world. Since the outcomes are almost entirely non-fatal, resulting in minor injuries, the issue hardly captures attention in the conservation discourse. For instance, Gorumara Wild Life Division in the landscape reported 522 leopard attributed human injuries and five deaths between 2009 and 2018 with a fatality rate of 0.01. The fatal cases reported from this division involved children picked up by leopards while playing outside their homes or in the tea-bushes within the plantations. The injuries occur while leopards rest within the tea-bushes during the day. As tea-plantation workers start their work, accidental and sudden encounters result in injuries to

people as the leopards try to escape from the area. Early planters minimised the chance of these accidental encounters by making loud noise before they start any plantation work and keeping three sides free for leopards to escape and by initiating work from one side of the plantation only. Revival of these simple steps have reduced accidents drastically in some estates which earlier witnessed a high frequency of such incidents.

Preventing accidental encounters between tea-plantation workers and leopards is a complex management challenge. The costs of these encounters are still largely borne by the workers. Loss of pay due to injuries is a major



Leopards are worshipped by local residents as tea garden protectors. Leopards often feature in popular festival tableaux

problem and current provisions of ex-gratia payment covering loss of pay faces several implementation challenges. The cost of treatment for victims is covered by the Forest Department but additional ex-gratia/compensation requires documentation from the hospitals. The doctors in government hospitals as well as the families of the victims are largely ignorant of such provisions which delay claims. Additionally, there is no incentive for tea-plantation authorities to establish safeguards for its workers and to promote leopard conservation in these areas despite the immense conservation potential of these landscapes.

The future of leopard persistence in these landscapes largely hinges on the acceptance of local communities and their ability to withstand risks and costs posed by leopards. With recent emphasis by the government on tigers outside tiger reserves (TOTR), similar schemes also need to be extended to leopards and budgetary allocations through appropriate schemes are required

Early planters minimised the chance of accidental encounters by making loud noise before they began plantation work

to address the safety of leopards as well as the communities sharing space with these big cats in production landscapes.

A Human-Wildlife Co-existence cess could be one avenue similar to Compensatory Afforestation Fund (CAMPA) or appropriate apportioning from CAMPA could be used to deal with wildlife-attributed damages. The private sector can also play a crucial role by including biodiversity metrics in certified wildlife-friendly products that can fetch higher price in the global markets. Increased revenue from such certified products can then feed back into conserving leopards and providing safer

working conditions for the workers in these plantations. For instance, part of the additional revenue of such products may be used to fund safeguards within plantations such as livestock insurance premiums, predator-proof corrals, and dedicated trained staff to enable safer shared spaces between people and leopards. Balancing economic and ecological security for a rapidly developing nation needs proactive and out-of-the box ideas. India needs to seek urgent and durable solutions. 🐾

Dr Aritra Kshetty is currently the National Lead for Elephant Conservation at WWF-India.

Motherly Love

One early morning, a lioness gently carries her cub away from the playful but boisterous older cubs that are part of the large pride.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **ANOSH KOPPIKAR**

LOCATION: MAASAI MARA, KENYA



Eye on the Big Cat

GPS, sensors and data platforms are building a digital shield to protect the magnificent big cats

BY ANTONY J LYNAM

A puma in Chile's Patagonia



Photo courtesy Nicolas Lagos

Conservationists often speak of the apex predator paradox. On one hand, big cats like lions, tigers, and jaguars are the essential top predators of our ecosystems. They regulate prey populations, prevent overgrazing, and help maintain the carbon-sequestering health of forests and grasslands. On the other hand, for a rural herder in Mongolia's Southern Gobi or a farmer in the Costa Rican rainforest, these same animals represent an existential threat to their livelihoods. When a leopard takes a goat or a jaguar kills a prized calf, the response is almost always retaliatory.

For decades, the approach to this conflict was stubbornly reactive. A carcass was found, the loss documented, and perhaps compensation was offered—too little, too late. But the tide is turning. We are moving from a post-mortem model of conservation to a proactive, real-time strategy. By integrating GPS, sensors, and

sophisticated data platforms, we are building a digital infrastructure for these magnificent predators. This isn't just about saving wildlife; it's about creating a world where data fosters coexistence, ensuring that the next generation of big cats—and the communities that live alongside them—can both thrive.

The Core Technology Stack

The digital infrastructure relies on a sophisticated stack of hardware and software that has evolved at a breakneck pace. When my colleagues and I published our assessment of integrated conservation technology in 2016 we were looking at a landscape of emerging tools that were often siloed or technically cumbersome. Today, those tools have matured into an integrated, state-of-the-art ecosystem like:

♦ **GPS Collars:** These are the “eyes” in the field. Modern collars are no longer just heavy batteries strapped to a neck; they are smart devices with satellite connectivity and drop-off mechanisms that fall away once their mission is complete.

♦ **Geofencing and Alerts:** We can now draw virtual boundaries—geofences—around the boundaries of forests, villages or livestock pens. Using cluster analyzers we can identify a puma spending time at its den. Using proximity alerts we can know which individuals are moving together. If a collared cat crosses that invisible line, the system triggers an automated SMS or WhatsApp alert. It is a digital early-warning system that gives people time to move their stock or secure their homes.

♦ **Connected Camera Traps:** These have evolved from simple flash and film devices into AI-enabled sentinels. Using edge computing, these cameras can sort through images to identify a specific species or human intruder in real-time and transmit that data via GSM or satellite networks. Placing a camera-trap in front of a den we have an “eye” on what the cats are doing, when they leave to disperse, and better understand what is driving mortality.

♦ **The Integrated Management Platform:** If the sensors are the eyes and ears, EarthRanger is the nerve centre, an organisation that uses AI, sensors, and satellite imagery to monitor wildlife. From humble beginnings as a tracking tool for monitoring human-elephant conflict in East Africa, EarthRanger has evolved as a platform that visualises every data point it can—patrol tracks, collar locations, and camera alerts—onto a single,



Photo courtesy Wildlife Protection Solutions

live map. It allows managers to make evidence-based decisions in seconds, not weeks.

Lions and an early warning system in the **Bouba Ndjidda-Sena Oura Complex**

One of the most compelling examples of this digital infrastructure in action is in the binational Bouba Ndjidda-Sena Oura Protected Area Complex, spanning the borders of Cameroon and Chad. Here, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) manages a landscape where African lions (*Panthera leo*) frequently roam into

Arabian leopards in Sharaan Nature Reserve



Photo courtesy Royal Commission for AlUla

Photo: Behzad J. Larry



A camera trap photograph of a snow leopard in Ladakh, India

community grazing zones. In the past, this was a recipe for disaster. By tracking GPS-collared lions within EarthRanger, monitoring teams and managers now receive immediate geofence alerts when a lion approaches a human-use area. Instead of keeping this data locked away in a government office, the information is shared. Schools, markets, and herders are warned before the encounter happens. The result? Retaliatory killings have plummeted. Perhaps more importantly, the psychological landscape has shifted. Communities are no longer victims of a hidden threat; they are partners in a monitoring network, empowered by the knowledge of exactly where the lions are.

For too long, conservation data was a privilege of the state. Technology is democratising that power

Tracking the ghosts of the Tost Mountains

In the rugged Tost Mountains of Mongolia, the challenge is different. Tracking the snow leopard (*Panthera uncia*)—the ‘Ghost of the Mountains’—is notoriously difficult. These cats inhabit terrain where traditional foot patrols can only cover a fraction of the habitat. Working with the Snow Leopard Trust, we created a platform to visualise the movements of GPS-collared animals moving across a vast desert landscape. This isn't just about knowing where one cat is; it's about understanding the spatial ecology of both leopards and ungulate prey species (ibex, Marco Polo sheep and gazelles). This evidence allowed local conservationists to confirm that the Tost Mountains were not just a series of disconnected peaks but a critical biological corridor. That data was instrumental in influencing the Mongolian government to cancel mining concessions and designate the Tost Nature

Reserve. By training local volunteer rangers to contribute field data to this tech system, the project has ensured that the protection of snow leopards is led by the people who share its home.

Empowering the Leopard Rangers of AIUla

In the Sharaan Nature Reserve, the recovery of the Arabian leopard is as much a social triumph as a technical one. By putting tech in the hands of the local Leopard Rangers, the partnership between the Royal Commission for AIUla (RCU), Panthera, and EarthRanger has democratised conservation data, shifting power to the people who share the leopard's ancestral range. Now, community rangers access real-time feeds from AI-integrated camera traps and sensor networks. This transparency transforms rangers from traditional observers into data-driven decision-makers, capable of monitoring habitat health and prey populations with professional precision. Access to this intelligence fosters a sense of local ownership over the recovery process, proving that technology is not a replacement for indigenous knowledge, but a powerful amplifier of it. By providing the tools to mitigate human-wildlife conflict before it starts, the digital infrastructure empowers AIUla's communities to lead the charge in safeguarding their own natural heritage.

In the last decade, the most significant advancement in conservation technology hasn't just been in the hardware; it's been in what we can call the politics of knowledge. Conservation

data no longer can be controlled by the state. Technology is democratising that power. When a local community has the same real-time data as a park warden, they gain the power to protect their own lives and livelihoods.

We must remember that technology is a tool, not a panacea. The digital infrastructure is only as strong as the human relationships it supports. But as we look towards the global "30x30" goal, these digital infrastructures offer our best hope for a future where big cats aren't just surviving in shrinking pockets of wilderness, but coexisting in a shared, data-informed landscape. 🐾

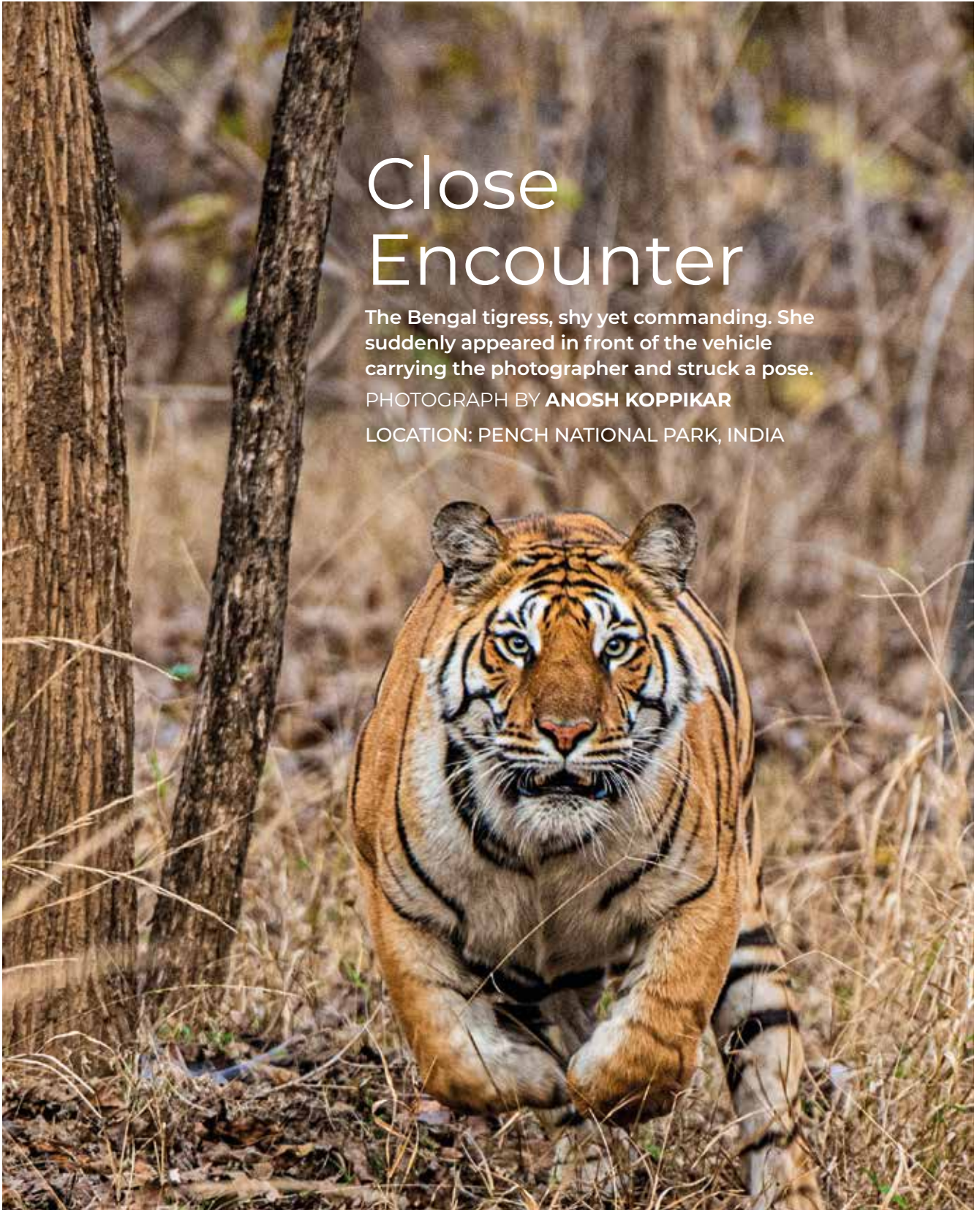
Dr Antony J Lynam is Conservation Solutions Architect and Partnerships Manager - Asia-Oceania, EarthRanger.

Close Encounter

The Bengal tigress, shy yet commanding. She suddenly appeared in front of the vehicle carrying the photographer and struck a pose.

PHOTOGRAPH BY **ANOSH KOPPIKAR**

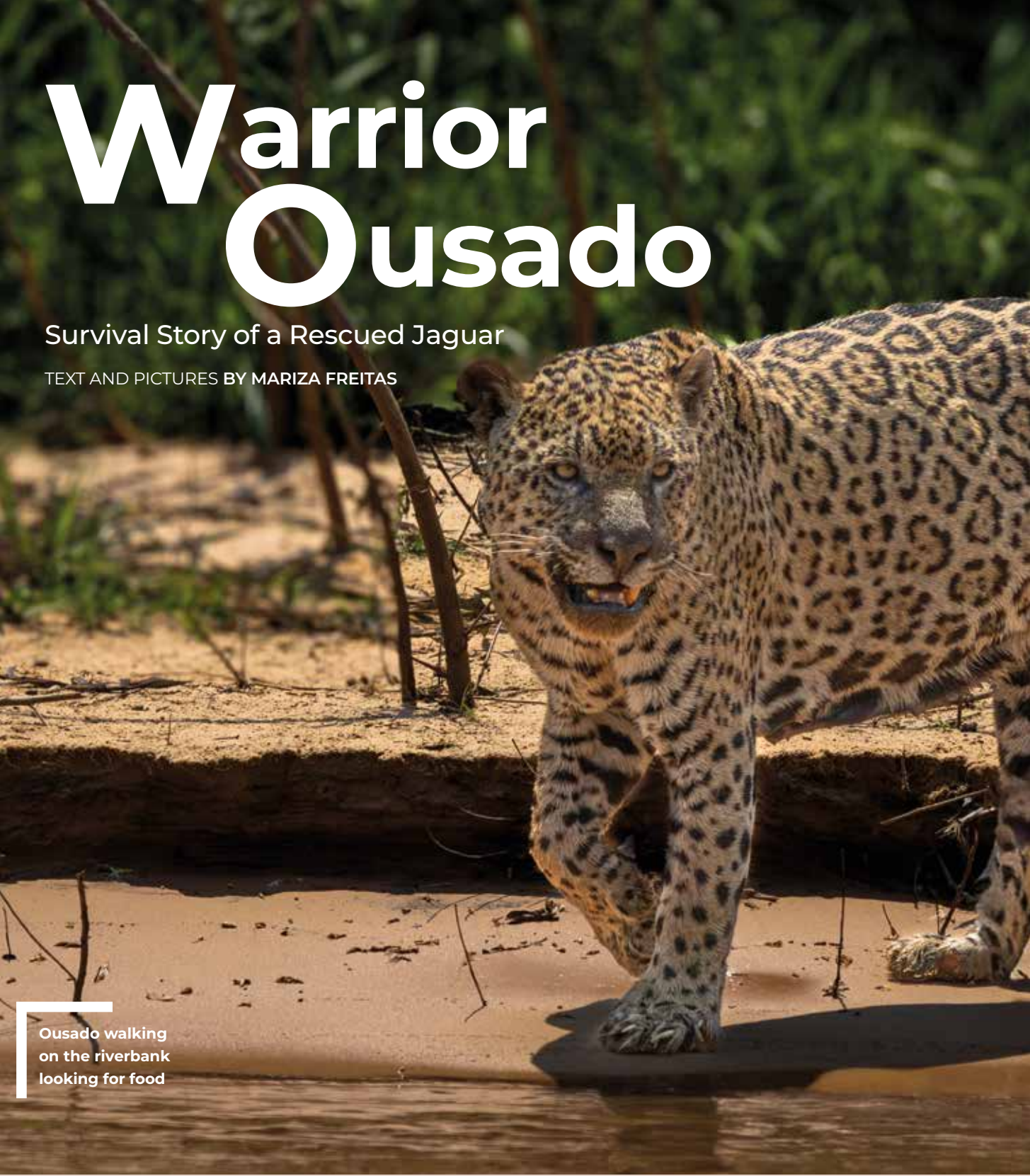
LOCATION: PENCH NATIONAL PARK, INDIA



Warrior Ousado

Survival Story of a Rescued Jaguar

TEXT AND PICTURES BY MARIZA FREITAS

A close-up photograph of a jaguar walking on a sandy riverbank. The jaguar is facing the camera, with its mouth slightly open, showing its teeth. It has a golden-brown coat with dark, irregular spots and stripes. The background is a blurred green forest. The jaguar is walking on a sandy bank that meets a body of water in the foreground.

Ousado walking
on the riverbank
looking for food



O

n 17 September 2020, Ousado, a male jaguar, was rescued from the great fires in the Pantanal, Mato Grosso, Brazil. He was five years old when he was rescued. At that time, he showed signs of weakness and had several burns on his body, especially on his paws, which prevented him from moving, hunting, and feeding. At the time of his capture, he was highly stressed and extremely thin, weighing only 75 kg, a very low weight for adult jaguars in the Pantanal.

Given the severity of his case, he was taken to the No Extinction Institute (NEX), a non-governmental organisation dedicated to the care of large felines. Here, he got high-level veterinary care, including laser therapy sessions, ozone therapy, and stem cell treatment to recover from his injuries. Appropriate management protocols were adopted to preserve his natural behaviours, so that he could return to the wild. On 20 October, 2020, he returned to the Porto Jofre area, Northern Pantanal in Mato Grosso.

Since then, to the delight of tourists and researchers, Ousado has been regularly sighted in the region. Strong and intelligent, he has developed a unique and

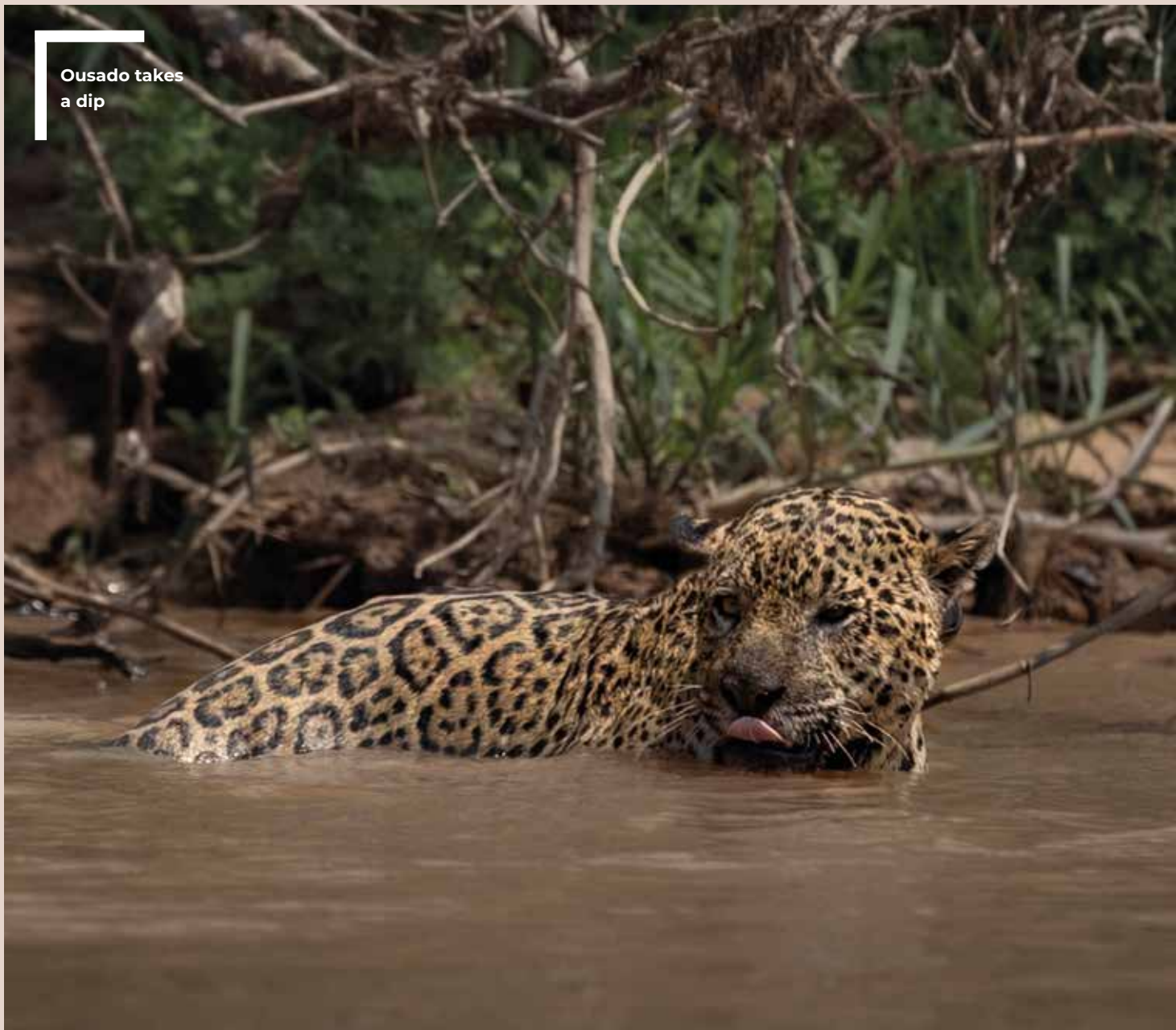


(Above) Sunset at Cuiaba River, north Pantanal, Mato Grosso

(Right) Entrance to the Northern Pantanal, considered one of the world's largest tropical wetland. Home to capybaras, caimans and hundreds of bird species besides jaguars



Ousado takes
a dip



differentiated technique for "underwater" alligator hunting, in which he dives and surprises his prey underwater, unlike other individuals of his species who jump straight from the bank into the river.

Ousado appears to be around 10-12 years old. Signs of ageing are already evident in his thinness and the lack of some

teeth, which has hampered his feeding. Due to health risks, veterinarians and researchers decided not to remove his monitoring collar, even though it has not been working for some time.

Recent videos and photos show the difficulties he has been facing in hunting and surviving, as these ones taken

in October 2025, but Ousado is definitely an icon of resilience and a living proof of the importance of the work done by institutions like NEX.

Not only do they take care of preserving wildlife but also contribute to maintaining the bio-diversity and ecological balance of the Pantanal biome. 🐾

Small and Beautiful Nairobi National Park

Gobind Sagar Bhardwaj and **Ramesh Pandey** step inside one of Kenya's smallest but wildlife-rich parks in the world

With over 1,000 bird species and 350 mammals, Kenya ranks second in Africa for wildlife richness. It is the famous home of Big Five: lions, leopards, elephants, rhinos, and buffaloes. The richness of species comes from diverse habitats, ranging from lowland forests to rolling savannah ridges to semi-arid zones to alpine moorlands on Mount Kenya.

Kenya's smallest but wildlife-rich Nairobi National Park represents such delightful diversity. Located around 7 km from Nairobi city, it is the only national park set on the outskirts of a city. Last year, on our trip to Kenya to discuss cheetah relocation possibilities, we spent some time inside the park. We entered the park close to dusk, when the golden light added to the majestic beauty of the savannah grasslands. The three-hour jeep safari was quite exciting as



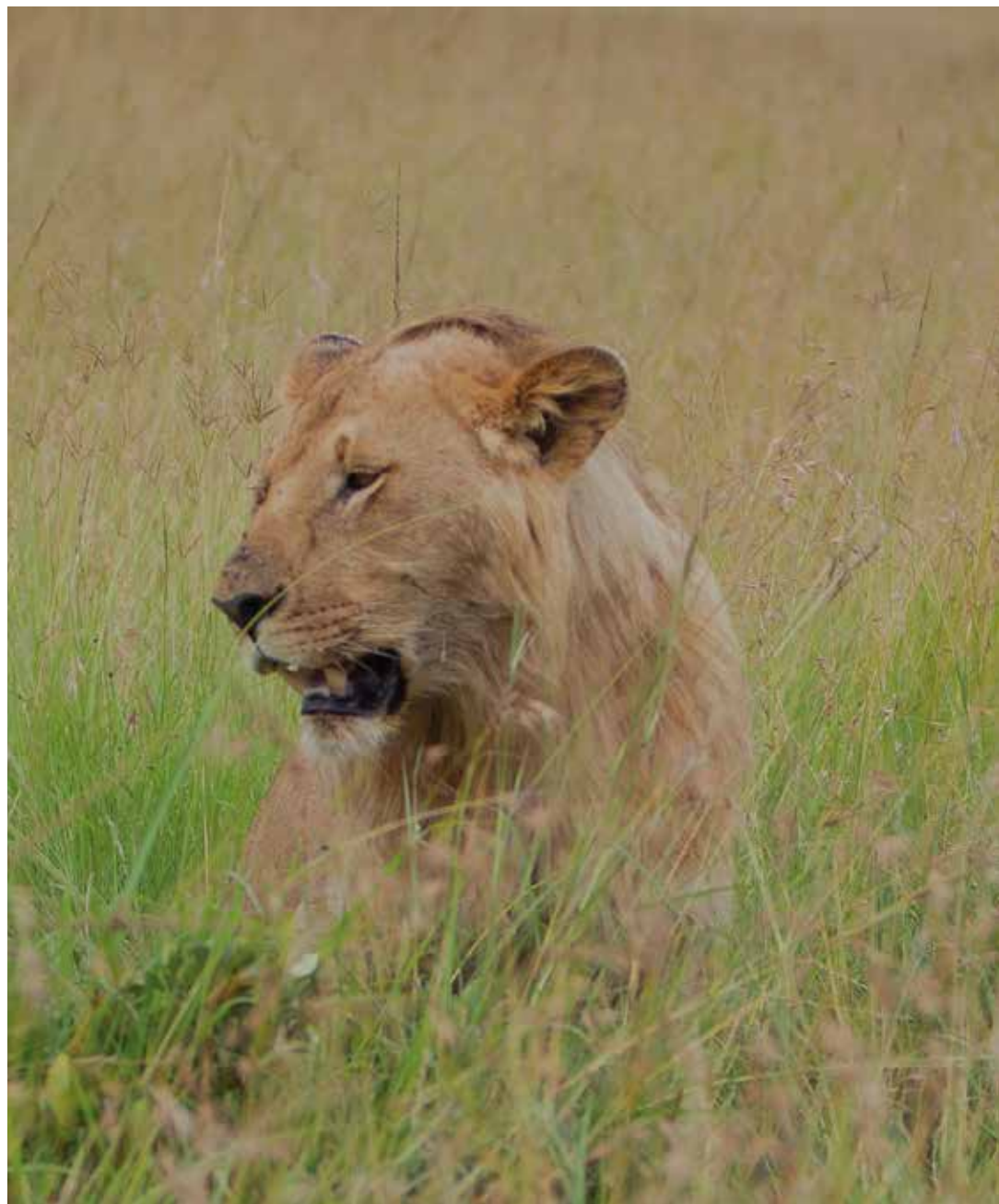
(Above) A railway line with an elevated corridor passes through Nairobi National Park

(Right) Lions are a rare sight, but a magnificent one

we could sight many ungulates including white rhinoceros, Thomson gazelle, impala, Topi, and hartebeest.

The park claims to possess close to 400 birds. We spotted quite a few, including the Egyptian goose, grey crowned cranes, blacksmith lapwings and back-headed heron. Most birds were seen foraging or roosting, seemingly unaware of the presence of safari vehicles. The red-billed oxpeckers could be seen feeding on insects, including ticks from the skin of ungulates.

We sighted the lions rather early. It is the image of the lone hartebeest from the passage under the elevated railway bridge, a 5 plus km viaduct designed to allow wildlife movement beneath it, that stayed with us. A praiseworthy effort of how a railway line was made on an elevated corridor passing through a reserve, demonstrating an excellent example of effective mitigation measures while creating linear infrastructure passing through wildlife areas. 🐾



FROM THE FIELD

Thomsons Gazelle



Red-billed
Oxpecker



Windmills adjacent to Nairobi
National Park overlooking the
Great Rift Valley



White-browed Robin Chat



Superb Starling



Spur Winged Lapwing

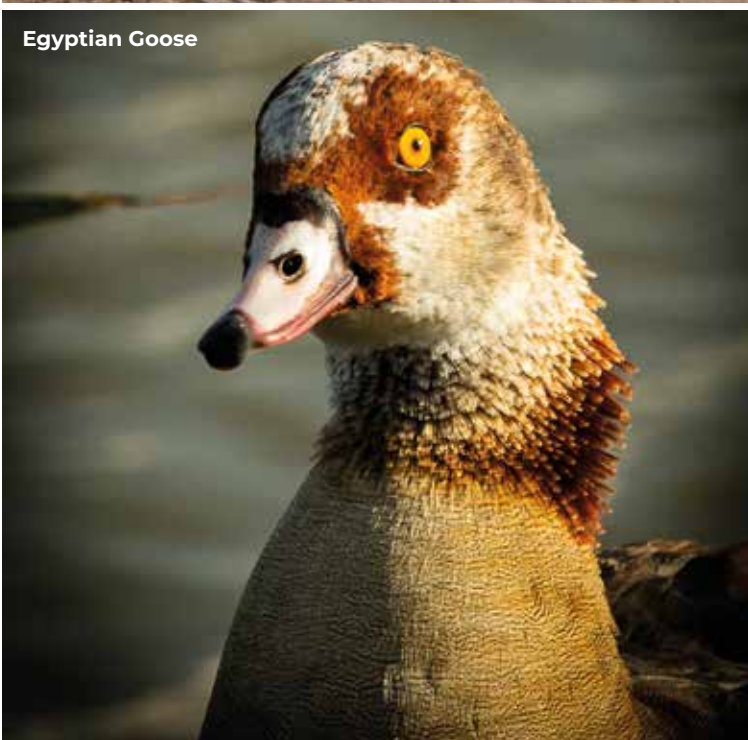
Lark



Crane



Egyptian Goose



Wild



World News

Africa's Ecosystems Losing Their Ecological Strength

Africa's ecosystems are now functioning with far less animal-driven energy than in the past. A study published in *Nature* estimates that energy flowing through the continent's birds and mammals has dropped to about two-thirds of historical levels. The decline is largely linked to the loss of megafauna such as elephants, rhinos and large carnivores.

Researchers analysed more than 3,000 species to calculate how much food energy they consume and how that supports ecological processes like grazing, seed dispersal, predation and nutrient cycling. Energy flow through large herbivores has fallen by roughly 72 percent, with the steepest losses occurring outside protected areas. Smaller species, including rodents and songbirds, now account for a greater share of remaining energy use.

Read more: <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-025-09660-1>

Jaguar in Pantanal Wetlands,
Mato Grosso, Brazil



Photo: Wikimedia commons

Not All Jaguar Habitats are Equal

Jaguar conservation across the Americas has long relied on broad distribution maps showing where the species may occur. A continental-scale analysis published in *Scientific Reports* refines that picture using real movement data, offering a clearer view of where jaguars are most likely to persist.

Researchers analysed GPS tracking data from 172 jaguars across eight countries and modelled habitat suitability from Mexico to Argentina. The results reveal consistent patterns: jaguars favour dense forests and wetlands near rivers, and avoid landscapes heavily shaped by agriculture, livestock and human settlement. While the Amazon and the Mayan Forest remain major strongholds, the modelling also highlights the Pantanal, Cerrado and Gran Chaco as landscapes of high conservation value.

Habitat suitability differed sharply across ecoregions, underscoring that conservation cannot follow a uniform strategy. Areas that appear connected on broad maps may vary greatly in their capacity to support jaguars. By grounding priorities in real movement data, the analysis provides a more reliable basis for securing corridors and closing protection gaps across the species' range.

Read more: <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-025-30512-5>



Photo: Wikimedia commons

Emperor
penguins in
Antarctic snow

Emperor Penguins Declining Faster than Expected

Emperor penguins in parts of Antarctica are declining far more rapidly than earlier projections suggested. Satellite analysis of 16 colonies between 2009 and 2023 shows a likely 22% drop in adult numbers in the sector spanning 0° to 90°W, an annual decline of about 1.6%. The probability of a 30% decline over three generations is estimated at 91%.

The findings, published in *Communications Earth & Environment*, extend previous global assessments and capture the recent years of record-low sea ice. While climate models had already forecast steep declines under high-emission scenarios, the observed drop in this region exceeds those projections.

The losses are closely linked to changing sea-ice conditions. Emperor penguins breed on stable fast ice during winter. Early break-up, extreme sea-ice loss and shifting environmental conditions reduce breeding success and can trigger colony collapse or relocation.

Researchers caution that this sector represents only a third of the global population.

Read more: <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43247-025-023457>

Malaysia Imposes Heavy Fine in Tiger Skin Case

Malaysia has delivered one of its strongest judicial responses to wildlife crime, sentencing a businessman to two years' imprisonment and fining him RM300,000, about US\$75,000, for illegally possessing a complete tiger skin. If the fine is not paid, he will serve an additional 12 months in jail. The conviction, handed down by the Sessions Court in Kuala Lumpur under the Wildlife Conservation Act 2010, followed a full trial after the accused pleaded not guilty.

In delivering the sentence, Judge Mohd Zaki Mohd Salleh noted that the true victim was "voiceless", with no body left and only skin remaining. His remarks underscored the purpose of wildlife laws: to protect species that cannot defend themselves. The ruling sends a direct deterrent message to traffickers, collectors and organised crime networks operating within Southeast Asia's illegal wildlife trade.

The case comes at a critical time for the Malayan tiger (*Panthera tigris jacksoni*), found only in Malaysia and listed as Critically Endangered. The first National Tiger Survey, conducted between 2016 and 2020 by the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP/ PERHILITAN) and partners, estimated fewer than

200 individuals remaining in the wild. The findings prompted Malaysia to declare a national crisis in 2021 and adopt nine strategic actions overseen by a high-level National Tiger Conservation Task Force.

Since then, enforcement has intensified. In 2022, a Wildlife Crime Bureau was established under the Royal Malaysian Police to strengthen intelligence and inter-agency coordination. More than 2,500 Community Rangers now patrol protected areas, removing snares and securing habitats within the Central Forest Spine. Integrated enforcement operations between 2021 and 2024 led to hundreds of arrests and major asset seizures. Amendments to the Wildlife Conservation Act increased penalties for offences involving totally protected species to fines of up to RM1 million and prison terms of up to 15 years.

Within this strengthened framework, the RM300,000 fine reflects a judiciary prepared to apply enhanced penalties firmly. In a region where illegal trade continues to threaten dwindling tiger populations, decisive courtroom action reinforces that exploiting a national emblem now carries serious consequences.

—By Dr Sivananthan Elagupillay

A one-horned rhinoceros walking through the Kaziranga wetlands



Photo: Wikimedia commons

Ancient Monsoons and Megafauna Shaped India's Kaziranga

In northeast India's Kaziranga National Park, famed for its greater one-horned rhinoceroses, today's sweeping grasslands were once dense evergreen forests. Evidence published in the journal *Catena* reconstructs 3,000 years of ecological change in the Brahmaputra valley, revealing how climate variability and large herbivores transformed the landscape.

Sediment cores analysed for fossil pollen and dung-related fungal spores show that between 3,300 and 1,700 years ago the region was dominated by humid forests. Over time, forest cover declined while grasses expanded. At the same time, indicators of large grazing animals increased, suggesting rising megaherbivore activity. The findings point to a reinforcing cycle in which monsoon shifts altered vegetation, while sustained grazing helped maintain open grasslands.

The record also indicates that wider environmental pressures and human activity elsewhere in the Indian subcontinent may have pushed large herbivores eastward into the Brahmaputra valley, intensifying grazing in Kaziranga. Rather than a static wilderness, the park's iconic grasslands appear to be the outcome of long-term climate shifts and herbivore dynamics.

Read more: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.catena.2025.109762>

**View of Panama's
rich forests**

Photo: Randreu/Wikicommons



Kudos to Panama for Jaguar Conservation

Panama has once again received international recognition for its efforts in wildlife conservation. For the second consecutive year, a "very satisfactory" rating was given in the 2024 progress report of the Global Wildlife Programme (GWP) for jaguar conservation.

This achievement corresponds to the GEF 7 Jaguars Panama Project, an initiative supported by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and coordinated by the Ministry of Environment (Miambiente), in collaboration with the Yaguará Panama Foundation, the Global Wildlife Programme (GWP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

The GWP report evaluated 50 conservation projects in 38 countries across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Of these, only 71% received a "satisfactory" rating. Panama, however, managed to maintain the system's highest rating, "very satisfactory," a distinction few projects have achieved and sustained over the years.

For Mr Ricardo Moreno, President of the Yaguará Panamá Foundation, an NGO, this achievement highlights the country's ongoing commitment to protecting its ecosystems and endangered species. The GEF 7 Jaguars Panama Project has as its central objective the conservation of the jaguar and other feline species, through the creation of biological corridors, the monitoring of populations and the reduction of conflicts between human communities and these big cats.

Since its inception, the project has worked on the restoration of key habitats and the strengthening of ecological connectivity between important protected areas, such as Chagres National Park and Darien National Park.

The project currently operates on 859 hectares

distributed across 10 cattle ranches located between the provinces of Darién and Chepo. It has also promoted improvements in production systems on these ranches, providing technical training to farmers to achieve a more balanced coexistence with wildlife.

One of the project's most significant achievements has been the implementation of a rigorous monitoring system. To date, eight jaguars and one puma have been captured and fitted with GPS collars to study their movement patterns. The data obtained show that jaguars roam territories that vary between 3,500 and 13,000 hectares, depending on their sex, while the puma has displaced an area

of at least 90,000 hectares.

The project has also used camera traps to record the presence of jaguars in the region, having documented 17 individuals so far, including females with cubs, which shows evidence of the active reproduction of the species, even in livestock areas.

Among the most significant advances is the geospatial analysis of nearly three million hectares in central Panama, which has allowed for the evaluation of land use and its evolution between 2018 and 2022. In addition, the first phase of the national jaguar census has been completed, covering 141,000 hectares with 794 camera traps. The data obtained from the 87,644 videos analysed have allowed for an estimated density of approximately 370 jaguars in the eastern region of the country.

Mr Moreno announced that the project will move forward to a second phase of the census, which will extend to the western part of the country, with the goal of obtaining a more accurate estimate of the jaguar population nationwide.

Furthermore, the construction of Panama's first conservation and research centre for wild cats is planned, which will further strengthen efforts to protect these species. In total, Panama is home to six species of wild cats, all of which are listed in some category of threat.

The GEF 7 Jaguars Panama Project continues to demonstrate its excellence as a model for the conservation of endangered species and the protection of natural ecosystems.

This article first appeared in La Prensa in January 2026.

—By **Aleida Samaniego C**

Elephant - The Divine Mystery

AUTHOR RAJESH BEDI

Few animals evoke as much awe, reverence, and emotional connection as the elephant. In *Elephant — The Divine Mystery*, published by Wild Collection, celebrated wildlife photographer from India and naturalist Rajesh Bedi brings together over five decades of observation, photography, and storytelling to present an intimate portrait of one of Earth's most intelligent and enigmatic species.

This remarkable book is more than a photographic collection — it is a deeply personal tribute to the Asian elephant and a reflection on the delicate relationship between humans, wildlife, and landscapes. Through a combination of striking imagery, field anecdotes, and natural history insights, Rajesh invites readers into the secretive world of elephant societies and their ancient ecological rhythms.

Released in September 2025, this book is a timely reminder of what is at stake regarding elephant conservation in India. Human-wildlife conflict in recent years has resulted in both high human casualties and elephant deaths. Coexistence appears difficult in many landscapes with elephants often straying into human settlements and clashing with humans. However, the powerful visuals in this book force us to rethink conservation strategies for these gentle giants.

Rajesh Bedi's fascination with wildlife began early. Growing up exploring forests with his father, renowned naturalist Ramesh Bedi, he developed an enduring bond with India's wilderness. Over decades of fieldwork across the forests and grasslands of the Indian subcontinent, elephants emerged as one of his greatest inspirations.

The photographs in *Elephant — The Divine Mystery* reflect the patience and dedication of a lifetime spent in the wild. Rajesh captures rare and intimate moments: newborn calves sheltered within protective herds, matriarchs

guiding family groups through dense forests, playful interactions between young elephants, and the silent communication that governs herd life.

These images reveal elephants not merely as majestic animals but as deeply social beings, capable of empathy, memory, and complex communication.

One of the book's greatest strengths lies in its exploration of elephant behaviour. Rajesh moves beyond visual storytelling to examine the subtle dynamics that define elephant society: maternal care, herd leadership, emotional intelligence, and communication through touch, posture, and low-frequency vocalisations.

Readers gain insight into rarely documented behaviours, including how elephants sleep, their intricate mating rituals, and their extraordinary capacity for memory and navigation across vast landscapes.

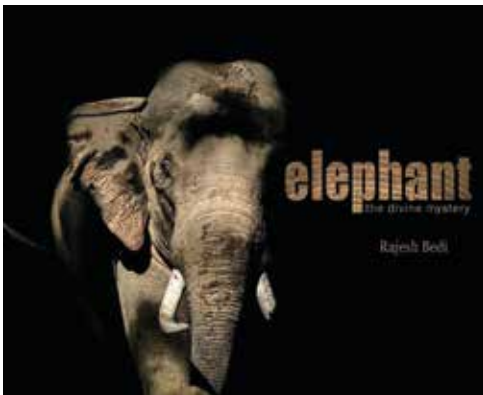
Such observations remind us that elephants are not simply wildlife icons; they are keystone species whose presence shapes ecosystems. Their movements create forest clearings, disperse seeds, and maintain the ecological balance of the landscapes they inhabit.

Culture, Conservation, and Coexistence

Elephants hold a unique place in the cultural consciousness of South Asia. Revered in mythology, art, and religion, they symbolize wisdom, strength, and continuity. Yet, despite this deep cultural respect, elephants today face mounting conservation challenges.

Habitat fragmentation, expanding infrastructure, and increasing human-elephant conflict threaten the long-term survival of elephant populations across Asia. Rajesh's work gently but firmly highlights these realities, reminding readers that conservation is not merely about protecting animals but about safeguarding landscapes and coexistence.

In this sense, the book is both a celebration and a call to action. 🐘



“

Readers gain insight into rarely documented behaviours, including how elephants sleep, their intricate mating rituals, and their extraordinary capacity for memory

”

Reviewers **Dr Kausik Banerjee** and **Dr Tamali Mandal**

Rally for Big Cats 2026



All photos courtesy IBCA

1. The Rally for Big Cats was flagged off from IBCA headquarters on 27 January 2026.
2,3,4. Climpsees of the rally in differents cities of India

A 30-day Rally for Big Cats was flagged off from the International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) Headquarters in New Delhi on 27 January 2026 by Dr SP Yadav, Director General IBCA, and Mr Sanjay Kumar, Former Director General Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC). The rally covered more than 7,000 km across 10 states, connecting key landscapes that support some of

the world's most iconic big cat species including cheetahs, jaguars, leopards, lions, pumas, snow leopards, and tigers.

Organised by IBCA and Dharti International Foundation, in collaboration with the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Indian Regional Association for Landscape Ecology (IRALE) and EIACP India, the rally aimed to promote awareness on habitat protection, community participation,

and the importance of landscape-level conservation. The journey connected major wildlife landscapes across the country, travelling from New Delhi through Jim Corbett, Jawai, Kuno, Gir, Satpura, Pench, Nagarjunsagar, Bandipur, Mudumalai, Kalakkad, and culminating at Periyar Tiger Reserve in Kerala.

The initiative highlighted India's leadership in big cat conservation while



Dr KP Acharya, DG, SAWEN and DG, IBCA, Dr SP Yadav, pose after signing an MoU to strengthen cooperation against wildlife crime

building momentum towards the Global Big Cats Summit 2026, which will bring together range countries to strengthen international cooperation for the protection of these iconic species.

IBCA and SAWEN Strengthen Cooperation

IBCA and the South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network (SAWEN) signed an MoU on 22 January 2026 to reinforce regional collaboration in combating wildlife crime and strengthening conservation efforts across South Asia. The partnership seeks to enhance information sharing, enforcement coordination, and collective action against illegal wildlife trade.

This collaboration represents an important step towards enhancing coordinated action against wildlife crime across South Asia, a region that is home to several globally significant populations of big cats and other threatened wildlife species.

The partnership aims to promote closer cooperation among enforcement agencies, conservation organisations, and governments in the region to address the growing challenges posed by illegal wildlife trade, poaching, and transboundary wildlife crimes.

Through this MoU, IBCA and SAWEN will work together to strengthen intelligence sharing, improve capacity building for frontline enforcement personnel, and facilitate knowledge exchange on best practices in wildlife protection and investigation. The collaboration also seeks to improve regional coordination in monitoring wildlife trafficking networks and in supporting joint initiatives that contribute to safeguarding biodiversity

and critical habitats across South Asia.

By aligning their efforts, IBCA and SAWEN reaffirm their shared commitment to strengthening regional mechanisms for wildlife law enforcement and advancing collective action for the conservation of big cats and other wildlife species that depend on secure and well-protected ecosystems.

Alwar Tiger Marathon

The Alwar Tiger Marathon brought together fitness enthusiasts, conservation supporters, and local communities in a unique initiative that combined sports with environmental awareness. The event was attended by Mr Bhupender Yadav, Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Ms Diya Kumari, Deputy Chief Minister of Rajasthan, Dr SP Yadav, Director General IBCA, and Mr Randeep Hooda, actor and wildlife enthusiast, among other dignitaries.

The marathon witnessed enthusiastic participation across several categories:

- ◆ 21 km – International Half Marathon
- ◆ 10 km – Challenge Run
- ◆ 5 km – Community Run
- ◆ 2 km – Para Marathon

The event highlighted the importance of public engagement in wildlife conservation and demonstrated how community-driven initiatives can strengthen awareness and support for



Participants at the Alwar Tiger Marathon 2026 promoting wildlife conservation and public awareness



Welcome session of the IRALE 2026 Conference held from 26-28 February 2026. IBCA also signed a Memorandum of Understanding with IRALE

IBCA at IRALE 2026 Conference

The Indian Regional Association for Landscape Ecology (IRALE) 2026 Conference marked an important step in strengthening collaboration between IBCA and the IRALE with the signing of a MoU between the two organisations. The partnership aims to promote cooperation in wildlife conservation, biodiversity protection, and sustainable landscape management.

IBCA also hosted a special session on Big Cat Conservation on 28 February 2026, bringing together leading experts, researchers, and practitioners to discuss emerging priorities and collaborative approaches.

The session opened with welcome remarks by Dr Kausik Banerjee, Lead Specialist IBCA, followed by insights from Dr Justus Joshua (Chair IRALE), Dr PV Karunakaran (President IRALE), and Dr Ramesh Krishnamurthy (Founding Secretary IRALE). A video message from Dr SP

Yadav, Director General IBCA, emphasised the importance of landscape-level conservation for the long-term survival of big cats, while Dr Amit Mallick, Director International Cooperation IBCA, presented the future vision of the Alliance. The session was moderated by Dr Tamali Mondal, Programme Associate IBCA.

Technical Session I featured a keynote address by Dr Sivananthan Elagupillay, Tiger Lead Specialist IBCA, focusing on collaborative approaches to big cat conservation. This was followed by student presentations by Dr Priyamvada Bagariya, Ms Harshita Prajapati, and Mr Vishal Patel on socially inclusive tiger corridor management in Central India, livelihood challenges and tiger recovery in the Sahyadri landscape, and community attitudes toward leopards in the Greater Gir landscape.

Technical Session II included a keynote address by Dr Paul

Funston, Executive Director African Lion Conservation, who shared insights on management strategies for lions and other big cats in Africa. A panel discussion on Imperatives for Recovery and Conservation of Big Cats and Institutionalising Conservation Standards followed, moderated by Dr Madhu Verma with panelists Dr HS Negi, Dr P Pugazhendhi, Dr Sivananthan Elagupillay, Dr Paul Funston, Dr Ramesh Krishnamurthy, and Dr Joydeep Bose.

Among the student presentations, Mr Vishal Patel received the Best Presentation Award along with a cash prize from IBCA. The main theme of the conference was 'Social Inclusivity towards Landscape Integrity and Resilience'.

The conference also focussed on conservation that was AI-powered, ecosystem services valuation and community-based conservation initiatives.



IBCA and India Foundation signed an MoU to promote sustainable development and big cat conservation

protecting big cats and their habitats.

IBCA and Himachal Pradesh Forest Department Sign MoU

The Himachal Pradesh Forest Department and IBCA signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on 21 January 2026 for the establishment of the Tsarap Chu Conservation Reserve in Himachal Pradesh. The partnership aims to strengthen snow leopard conservation in the region through a holistic, landscape-based approach that integrates biodiversity protection, community engagement, and sustainable management of fragile Himalayan ecosystems.

IBCA and India Foundation Sign MoU

On 12 February 2026, the IBCA and the India Foundation signed a MoU to strengthen collaboration on sustainable development practices linked to big cat conservation and local communities living in these landscapes. The partnership aims to promote research, dialogue, and knowledge exchange that supports conservation while improving the well-being of surrounding populations.

Big Cats Diplomacy in Action

The importance of global cooperation



Dr SP Yadav addresses delegates at the fourth GSYDF

in wildlife conservation was highlighted during the 4th Global South Young Diplomats Forum (GSYDF) held at the Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service, New Delhi, on 17 February 2026. Addressing the gathering, Dr SP Yadav, Director General IBCA, emphasised the need for initiatives such as the IBCA to strengthen multilateral partnerships and shared responsibility in securing the future of big cats.

The session brought together 41 diplomats representing 41 countries from Africa, Asia, Central and South America, the Caribbean, Europe, and Oceania. The interaction provided a platform to discuss IBCA's vision and its role in advancing international cooperation, knowledge exchange, and coordinated conservation efforts for big cats across their range countries.

Executive Course on Capacity Building for Wildlife Conservation

As part of India's continued leadership in global wildlife conservation and capacity building, the International Big Cat Alliance

(IBCA), in collaboration with Ministry of External Affairs, Karnataka Forest Department, National Tiger Conservation Authority and the Wildlife Institute of India successfully conducted the 2nd Executive Course on Capacity Building for 'Wildlife and Conservation Practitioners' from 9–13 February, 2026 in Karnataka, South India.

The inaugural function was attended by senior officials of the Karnataka

Forest Department, IBCA, delegates, civil society organisations, mediapersons etc. A technical session on Role of Indian Industries in Biodiversity and Big Cat Conservation/ was delivered by the Senior Counsellor, Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), highlighting the private sector's role in advancing conservation efforts.

The Capacity Building programme was conducted by IBCA under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) initiative of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, which is a flagship platform for sharing India's development experience, best practices, and institutional strengths with partner countries of the Global South. Through ITEC, India promotes long-term cooperation, mutual learning, and people-to-people linkages across diverse sectors, including environment and biodiversity conservation. 🐾

Compiled by **Dr Tamali Mondal**,
Programme Associate, IBCA



Group photograph of all participants at the 2nd ITEC Executive Course for Wildlife Practitioners

South Asia's Major Ramsar Sites

Wetland near Dudhwa Tiger Reserve, India

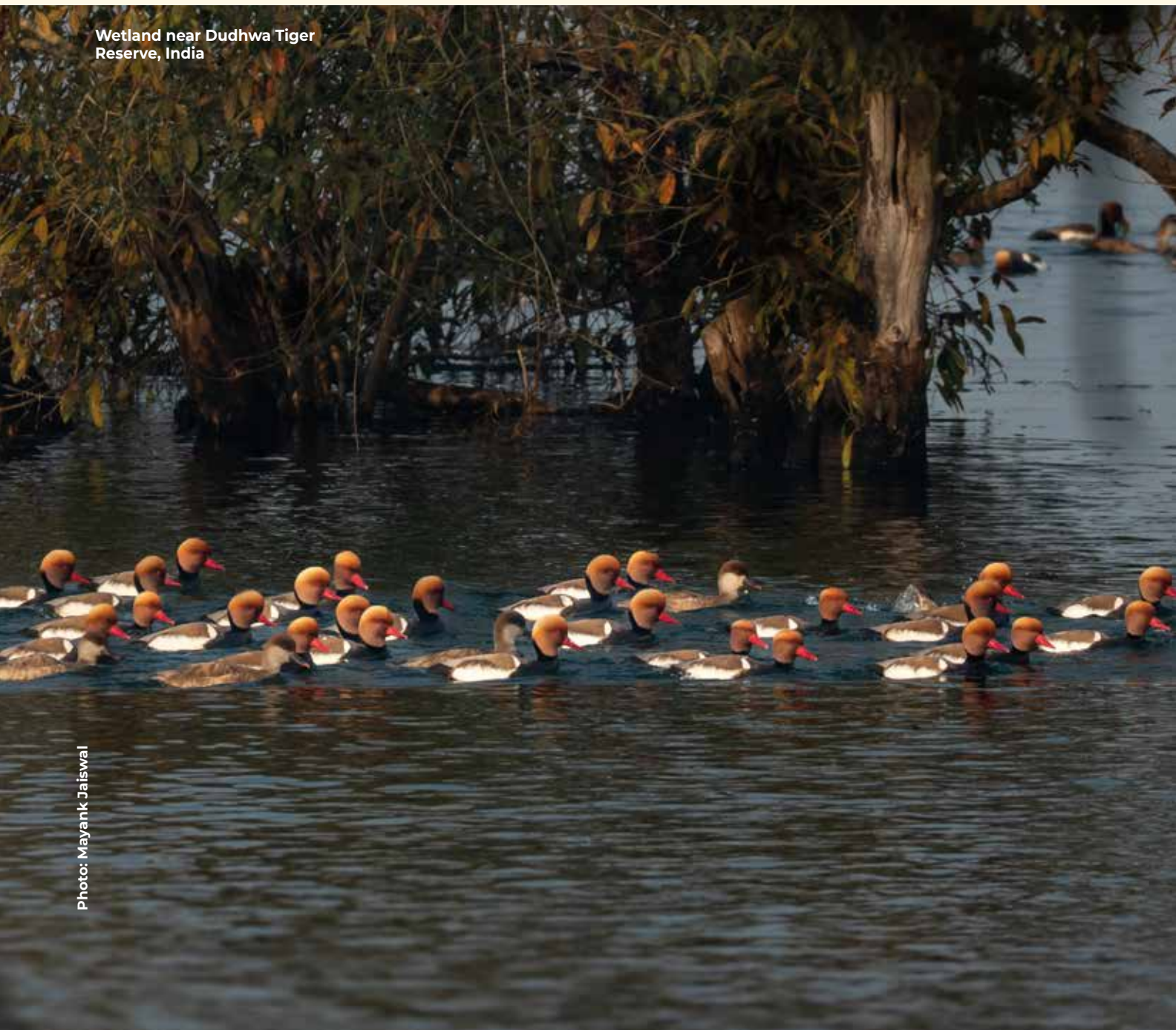


Photo: Mayank Jaiswal

A Ramsar Site is a wetland designated under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (1971) for its international importance in conserving biodiversity and maintaining ecological balance.

More than 170 countries are signatories to the Convention, protecting thousands of wetlands worldwide.

In South Asia, several major wetlands, particularly riverine and mangrove systems, overlap with critical tiger landscapes.

India currently has 98 Ramsar Sites, spanning mangrove deltas, river floodplains, lagoons and coastal ecosystems.



Why These Wetlands Are Important

- ◆ Regulate floods
- ◆ Recharge groundwater
- ◆ Store and sequester carbon
- ◆ Support fisheries and agriculture
- ◆ Provide habitat for migratory birds and endangered species

India

- ◆ Sundarban Wetland
- ◆ Kazhuveli Bird Sanctuary
- ◆ Vembanad-Kol Wetland
- ◆ Chilika Lake
- ◆ Satkosia Gorge
- ◆ Kolleru Lake
- ◆ Bhitarkanika Mangroves

Bangladesh

- ◆ Sundarbans Reserved Forest

Nepal

- ◆ Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve

Bhutan

- ◆ Khotokha Wetland

Why Wetlands Matter for Tigers

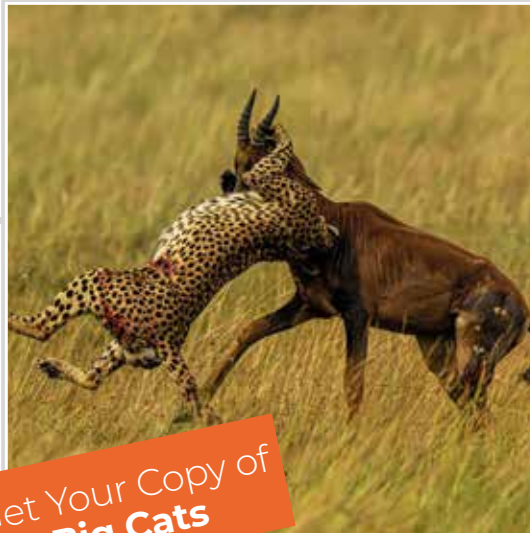
- ◆ Concentrate prey in floodplains
- ◆ Maintain perennial water sources
- ◆ Support dense herbivore populations
- ◆ Shape territorial boundaries

In the Sundarbans delta, shared by India and Bangladesh, the world's only mangrove-adapted tiger population survives within one of the largest Ramsar wetlands on Earth.



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