



## Project Tiger

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There has been international concern for the tiger ever since the General Assembly of the IUCN in New Delhi in 1969. It was clear that the Indian race *Panthera tigris tigris* was the most likely out of the seven existing ones\* to survive, subject to human beings giving it the protection it deserved; most of the others have gone too far on the road to extinction to make the effort worthwhile, though some members of the SSC deprecate this defeatist attitude and feel that last-ditch efforts must be made for every geographical race of a species while there is a pair left. To concentrate on saving the nominate Indian race at any rate, Guy Mountfort went to India in the middle of April to find out if India, Bangladesh and Nepal were ready to join in Project Tiger, and take the necessary steps to save this animal, of which only 2000 now remain in these three countries. His talks with Mrs Indira Gandhi and Sheikh Mujib ur Rahman were most encouraging and Mrs Gandhi in fact, acting with characteristic speed, was instrumental in the appointment of a Task Force, under the chairmanship of Dr Karan Singh, the Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation and Chairman of India's Board for Wildlife. The first meeting of the Task Force was held on April 26th, and the second one, in which Colin Holloway, of the SSC participated, on May 26th. A decision was taken to select two or three of the best tiger areas in India, to protect them adequately against human and cattle pressures, and manage the habitat primarily in the interest of the tiger. Preliminary surveys indicate that the Melghat area in Maharashtra, the Betla Sanctuary in Bihar (together with areas of

\*Caspian *Panthera tigris virgata*, Amur *P.t. altaica*, Javan *P.t. sondaica*, Chinese *P.t. amoyensis*, Bali *P.t. balica* (probably extinct). Sumatran *P.t. sumatrae*.

adjoining reserved forest), and Kaziranga, in Assam, are likely to be selected. It will be recalled that the IUCN, under the inspiration of Paul Leyhausen, then Chairman of the Cat Group of the SSC, issued a statement indicating that, if the tiger was to be saved, sanctuaries of 800 square miles with a population of at least 300 animals should be established. The best that can be done today is to set aside areas of about 500 square miles, each with a tiger population of 25 to 40. There is no reason to doubt that if these areas are stocked with the necessary prey species, the tigers will multiply.

The World Wildlife Fund has assumed a heavy responsibility in coming out with a statement that it will provide a million dollars for Project Tiger if the Indian Government will take the necessary conservation measures. The Government of India seems to be playing its part, and the WWF must start its fund-raising campaign in earnest.

## Tiger Census—How it was Done

*Richard Waller*

In April-May this year the Indian Forest Service held the first-ever tiger census. Hitherto all assessments of tiger numbers had been based on estimates from the 17 or 18 States which still hold tigers. The Indian Government and the Forest Service are to be highly commended for setting up this difficult operation, for the task of counting this largely nocturnal, forest-dwelling solitary animal over the vast area of India is a formidable one. To achieve reasonable accuracy there is no substitute for the man living in the tiger's own forest environment, who will have acquired over the years a knowledge of tiger movements in his area (perhaps 10 to 20 square miles) and can distinguish one tiger from another, partly by sighting but more often by the pattern of the pug mark. This pointed to the Indian Forest Service as the men to do the job, and moreover the work could be done in the normal course of duty.

The pug mark and the placing of the feet on the ground are of paramount importance in identifying tigers. Much work has been done on this by S.R. Choudhury, Senior Research Officer and Head of the Wildlife Education Courses at Dehra Dun, and K.S. Sankhala, who recently completed his two-year study of the tiger. It seems that the pug mark of the hind foot is more likely to be seen clearly (the dust it kicks up can partly obscure the pug mark of the fore foot). So Choudhury, who conducted the census-training courses, decided that the pug mark of the left hind foot should, wherever possible, be the one drawn for comparison and identification, using the 'tiger-tracer', which he invented. A 6 in. x 8 in. piece of thin, clear, framed glass with four adjustable short legs in the corners of the frame, is placed horizontally over the pug mark, nearly touching it. The shape of the pug mark is traced on to the glass, re-traced on to paper, and then dated and numbered for the record and for comparison with other tracings to identify individual tigers.

For Choudhury's courses, some of which I attended, DFOs or Assistant Conservators from neighbouring States were deputed by the