Tiger Population Rebounds in Parsa, Nepal, Instilling Hope for the Species

Remarkable Recovery Shows Rigorous Anti-Poaching Efforts & Monitoring Key to Tigers’ Resurgence

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In a rare victory for a species on the brink of extinction throughout much of its range, a scientific camera trap survey has revealed a marked increase in the tiger population of Nepal’s Parsa Wildlife Reserve. This news comes on International Tiger Day, a day dedicated to recognizing the plight of tigers around the world.

The Government of Nepal’s Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC), National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC), Panthera, the global wild cat conservation organization, and the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) collaborated to carry out the 2016 population survey in Parsa as part of their ongoing partnership to protect and monitor tigers throughout the lowlands of Nepal.

Nepal’s Director General of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Krishna Acharya said, “The tiger population in Parsa Wildlife Reserve has significantly increased since the last census. This is fantastic news for tigers and it demonstrates that Nepal’s dedicated conservation efforts are delivering clear results. Nepal has committed to doubling its tiger population by 2022 and encouraging results like these show that we are on track to achieve that.”

Panthera Senior Tiger Program Director, Dr. John Goodrich, stated, “The impressive rise in Parsa’s tiger numbers has been fuelled by the natural movement of animals from neighboring Chitwan as conditions in Parsa have improved over the past three years. This is a testament to how law enforcement and strong government leadership can change the game for tigers. At a time when poachers are waging an all-out war against wildlife, Nepal serves as a beacon of hope for the tiger.”

ZSL’s Conservation Programmes Director, Prof. Jonathan Baillie said “Success for tiger conservation requires viable habitats, stringent protection, effective monitoring and community engagement and when those conditions are in place, tiger numbers will flourish as Parsa has demonstrated very clearly. Nepal’s exemplary track record in conserving its iconic wildlife makes it a conservation leader in the South Asian region.”

Today, just 3,900 wild tigers remain in all of Asia, largely due to poaching for the illegal wildlife trade. Nepal is estimated to support 163-235 tigers, according to a 2013 population survey. The 2016 survey confirms that Parsa specifically has seen around a 45% annual increase in its tiger population.

Nepal’s tremendous commitment to increasing coordinated law enforcement activities, harsh prosecution for poachers, and wildlife monitoring sets the nation apart from many other tiger range states. Hundreds of dedicated personnel from the Nepal Army and DNPWC jointly patrol Parsa Wildlife Reserve and other protected areas, preventing poaching of Nepal’s iconic wildlife, from the tiger to the greater one-horned rhinoceros. Yet there is still much work to be done.

Parsa’s tiger rebound can also be attributed to the empowerment of the country’s National Park and Wildlife Reserve Wardens, who maintain the authority to arrest, convict and sentence poachers. This model is in stark contrast to many
tiger range states where poachers often escape with little to no jail time or fines, even after sentencing.

The success of these stringent anti-poaching efforts is especially evident in neighboring Chitwan National Park. Acting as a source population for Parsa, tigers from Chitwan have moved into the adjoining landscape, accelerating population recovery, and ultimately creating a larger more viable population that extends across both protected areas.

Since 2014, Panthera and ZSL have collaborated in Parsa Wildlife Reserve to monitor tigers and their prey using camera traps, and provide training for effective law enforcement and use of SMART, a computer-based platform that improves the effectiveness of wildlife patrols.

Parsa is also a trial site for innovative conservation technologies, which have been effectively deployed to provide valuable information to park managers. This includes ZSL's seismic and magnetic sensors and Panthera's PoacherCam – a remote camera that distinguishes people from wildlife and can transmit images to law enforcement, to stop poaching before it happens.

ZSL in partnership with DNPWC has also recently equipped and supported the deployment of a state of the art Rapid Response Patrol team in Parsa, which further strengthens the capacity of the park management to prevent tiger poaching before it takes place.

Over the next few years Panthera and ZSL plan to expand their efforts to support the Government of Nepal in its tiger conservation initiatives across three other protected areas that are home to tigers in the lowlands of Nepal.

About Panthera
Panthera, founded in 2006, is devoted exclusively to preserving wild cats and their critical role in the world's ecosystems. Panthera's team of leading biologists, law enforcement experts and wild cat advocates develop innovative strategies based on the best available science to protect cheetahs, jaguars, leopards, lions, pumas, snow leopards and tigers and their vast landscapes. In 50 countries around the world, Panthera works with a wide variety of stakeholders to reduce or eliminate the most pressing threats to wild cats—securing their future, and ours. Visit panthera.org

About ZSL
Founded in 1826, the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) is an international scientific, conservation and educational charity whose mission is to promote and achieve the worldwide conservation of animals and their habitats. Our mission is realised through our ground-breaking science, our active conservation projects in more than 50 countries and our two Zoos, ZSL London Zoo and ZSL Whipsnade Zoo. For more information visit www.zsl.org