

NEWSLETTER

(29/05/2021)

Tigress P213-32, Cubs and Tiger P243

(written by- Team of Panna Tiger Reserve)

1. INTRODUCTION

Panna Tiger Reserve (PTR) has a famed history of tiger reintroduction. Out of 7 reintroduced tigers in year 2009 onwards, 5 are still surviving in wilderness of PTR. Tigress P213-32 is the second generation of panna progeny. It is the second cub of third litter of tigress P213 which in turn was the third cub of tigress T2. P213-32 was born in January 2016. She became mother in January 2019 when she gave birth to 4 cubs. Out of these 4 cubs, 2 are still surviving as 2 died after few months of their birth. As P213-32 was close to human habitation, regularly visiting nearby villages of Koni, Majholi and Gahadra, she was radio collared in February 2020 for better monitoring and protection. P213-32 gave birth second time sometime in September-October 2020. 4 healthy cubs were born. First photos of cubs were captured by camera trap setup in the area on 29th October 2020, when she was shifting the cubs from one place to another.



Picture 1: Tigress P213-32 Shifting Cubs- first Pics

P213-32 was raising the cubs very diligently. A male tiger P243 which was associated with P213-32 for a long time, surely more than 2 years, is considered the father of the cubs. P243 remains in the area and had occasionally been seen with P213-32 and cubs together.

2. SAD DEMISE OF P213-32

It was in the morning of 12/05/21 when tracking party monitoring tigress P213-32 reported something wrong with P213-32 as she was at the same place for quite a long time. In technical parlance, radio collar of P213-32 emitted 'Mortality signals' which prima facie is

a result of non-movement for about 5-6 hours. Tracking party tried to disturb her from distance so as she moves. She did move but was very slow and was looking quite dull. For closer observation, elephant search party was dispatched immediately and by the evening pictures taken by elephant search party showed swelling in the left fore-limb of P213-32. Matter was immediately brought to the notice of Park Authorities and an unanimous decision to administer Antibiotic and pain killer was taken involving all concerned including veterinary doctor working in the Tiger Reserve. Prior permission of Chief Wild Life Warden was taken and on 13/05/21 evening, first dose was administered through 2 injectables. Some reduction in swelling was seen next day and second dose was given on 14/05/21 evening in the same manner. The tigress P213-32 was looking quite dull and wasn't much active but surely swelling had come down. We were keeping our finger crossed but unfortunately on 15/05/21 morning, the news of P213-32 death came as a shock to all of us. A beautiful tigress and a caring mother, left behind her four cubs alone. Postmortem did not reveal anything clearly about the cause of death. Samples of blood and body parts were taken and sent to 3 different laboratories, namely Nanaji Deshmukh Veterinary Science University, Jabalpur, MP; Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI) Bareilly, UP and State Forensic science Laboratory, Sagar MP. She was cremated with full honor as practiced in Panna Tiger Reserve by giving handsome salute.



Picture 2: Sad Demise of Tigress P213-32

3. FOUR ORPHANED CUBS

Death of tigress P213-32 was itself heavy loss to bear but now the major worry was her four orphaned cubs. Last time, they were seen on 10/05/21 morning with her mother and before that on 8th and 9th May 2021 sharing kill with her. As reported then, all cubs were looking healthy. For searching these cubs, immediately search parties involving elephants were formed and dispatched. 5 elephants and nearly 50 personnel were involved in searching. In addition, 23 Trap Cameras were also used at probable locations.

On 17/05/2021 at around 4:30 in the evening, a search party of 25 personnel moving on foot, led by Amar Singh Dy Ranger, could locate all 4 cubs. All cubs looked healthy, active

and seemed not hungry or stressed, as reported. P243 was also found to be moving in very nearby area and kept at bay from ground search party by elephant party.

On 18/05/2021 evening and night, first camera trap pictures of all 4 cubs were received. All cubs looked healthy in pictures. About the cubs, they were by now at least 7 months old. If we assume that mother tigress shifts the cubs for the first time after birth after 3 weeks, then from the time when first picture of their shifting came on 29/10/2020, till now, they must be over 7 months. And before the death of their mother P213-32, all had started eating kills with the mother and seen moving in the area with mother.



Picture 3: Orphaned cubs of Tigress P213-32

4. P243- THE CARING FATHER

In the mean-time, behavior of male tiger P243, could not go un-noticed. As per the reported past behavior, P243 had remained together with P213-32 for more than 2 years. He was not seen with any other tigress. At present, he was seen at the cremation site of P213 32 within an hour after the cremation was over on 15/05/2021 evening. Next day on 16/05/2021, he was found sitting for long hours at the place where P213-32 died. The cubs were also assumed to be located in and around that place. It was also observed that P243 was giving small calls which were interpreted as calls to cubs. P243 was also seen with the cubs of first litter of P213 32 earlier. Behavior of tiger P 243 strengthened the belief that his presence means no harm to cubs. Instead, it showed lots of promise with regard to safety of cubs. As per the field experience of ground staff, behavior of P243 is a positive sign for survival of cubs in the wild.



Picture 4: Male Tiger P243

5. TIGER RESERVE MANAGEMENT AT WORK

All these information along with open and frank opinions of field staff and all concerned, helped in concluding that as male tiger P243 means no harm to cubs and instead cooperating with them and we should, for time being, not interfere in this natural process of upbringing of cubs by picking them from that area and keeping them in some safe enclosure and later try to rewild them. It was further decided that for future monitoring, P243 should be collared and if possible, one cub may also be collared. Prior permission of CWLW was taken for both collaring and on 20/05/2021 morning at around 11 am, P243 was successfully collared. As cubs could not be located in suitable location, no cub could be collared.

On 20/05/2021 evening, some meat was delivered to the cubs by placing it on the way of their movement in frequented places. It was completely eaten by cubs in the night itself. In the intervening night of 21 and 22nd May, P243 hunted a Sambhar deer near the location of cubs. In the morning, pug marks of cubs were also found along with P243 near the Sambhar carcass. Camera trap pictures also revealed cubs eating Sambhar meat. Also at around 6 am in the morning, an elephant search party located all 4 cubs with P243 together resting near the kill. Photographs and video were taken. All these events indicated strongly that P243 is taking care of cubs and P243 was sharing kill with the cubs.



Picture 5: Male Tiger P243 with Cubs

Collaring of cub was yet to be done. There are certain issues including technical issues with regard to collaring of cubs. All cubs were together and P243 was also moving in the area, put lots of problems of separating one cub from rest. Also as all cubs are in fast growing stage, it will be necessary to remove the collar within 2-4 months due to increase in neck size. Weighing all the options and need for the present, It was decided to postpone the collaring of cub till it becomes absolutely necessary.

6. CONCLUSION DRAWN

It is confirmed that Tiger P243 is moving in this area near the cubs regularly. Following important conclusions can be drawn from the whole narrative:

1. All 4 cubs are healthy, active and safe after death of their mother Tigress P213-32 at the same place where their mother was keeping them.
2. All cubs are under the protection of tiger P243.
3. P243 has not in any manner of behavior or otherwise, posed any threat to the cubs.
4. Behavior of cubs also shows that they don't feel threatened by tiger P243 and follow him sometimes.
5. Tiger P243 is not only providing protection to cubs but also sharing kill with them.

As per the gathered and known information, at present there is no female tigress in the territory of tiger P243. But satellite collar data received from P243 and tigress P213-63 who is also collared, revealed that on 25/05/2021 at around 2am in the night, both were having movement in the same area of Gahadara Beat in a close proximity.

7. FUTURE COURSE OF ACTION

Till the moment of writing this narrative, all seem to be quite favorable for the survival of cubs in natural way in the wild without much interference from Tiger Reserve management side. But keeping all factors in mind, if cubs are to left in the wild to survive on their own as they are at present, following future challenges of safety and management of cubs will be there, which will require attention of Tiger Reserve management:

1. Cubs are 7-8 months old at present. As per the information available regarding tiger behavior, tiger cub normally starts hunting after the age of 12-13 months. Considering this as the base line, for next 4-5 months, it is to be monitored that cubs are protected and properly fed. In adverse condition, suitable actions in this regard may be planned.
2. Monitoring the behavior of male tiger P243 towards cubs for at least next 4-5 months is absolutely necessary. If there is any change in behavior of P243 which endangers the life of the cubs, suitable course of action needs to be planned beforehand.
3. If male tiger P243 comes in contact of any other tigress then it will be necessary to monitor the behavior of both P243 and tigress towards cubs. If there is any threat due to pairing or cubs are abandoned by P243 in this situation, suitable course of action needs to be planned.

4. And finally, If cubs survive and become capable of hunting after few months from now, then also their monitoring on long term basis may be taken up.

The prevailing situation has posed new challenges and has given new insights of tiger behavior. The situation has also opened good opportunity to understand the behavior of orphaned cubs in wild along with their father and this will be really helpful in future for raising the orphaned cubs. Every day is a new learning for Tiger Reserve management and it holds further new insights and learning for future. Let's keep our finger crossed.



Picture 6: Few Latest Photograph of cubs of P213-32
