

NEWSLETTER

(02/08/2021)

Two Brothers

Tiger P234-31 and P234-32

(by - Team of Panna Tiger Reserve)

PART -1

1. Introduction:

Panna Tiger Reserve (PTR) located in the State of Madhya Pradesh is a success story of tiger reintroduction after it was declared to be locally extinct in the year 2009. Reintroduction by translocating seven tigers to PTR, six from the other three Tiger Reserves of MP and one from Bhopal Forest division, between the year 2009 and 2014, under 'Species Recovery and Reintroduction Project' has led to establishing a healthy tiger population in PTR within 10 years. 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.

This is the story of two male tigers, P234-31 and P234-32, brothers, who are now having a fame of superstars with tourists, always enticing tourists with their charming appearances. Born in November 2019 to Tigress P234 in her third litter, these two brothers are now more than 20 months old. They were born in Akola Buffer area of Panna Tiger Reserve, an area till few years back was a cattle camp during rainy season and was burdened with lots biotic pressures.



May 2020



May 2021

Picture 1: Two Brothers

Towards the West, Akola Buffer is in continuity with the Core area of PTR while towards East it is surrounded by villages. Panna-Damoh State Highway bisects this Buffer area in to two parts. Efforts from Park Authorities along with the support of locals led to area developing into a good tiger habitat. Though the area is small, of around 7000 ha, it can now boast of having at least 2 breeding tigresses viz. P234-22 and P234-23, and a third tigress P234 breeding, just at the edge of this Buffer, in the Core area.

These two brothers were also having one sister, Tigress P234-33. But in an unfortunate road accident on 14 November 2020, Diwali day, she died. They were nearly one year old

then. It came as a shock to PTR Authority as tiger are not known to meet road accidents. Later few steps like constructing road breakers and trying to limit speed at night, were taken. Though trauma of tiger family cannot be gauged by us humans, it should have been grave as mother P234 was seen making 'searching calls' in the night for next few days as reported by field staff.



Picture 2: Two Brothers with Sister P234-33

2. Radio Collaring P234-31:

It was sometime in October 2020 when NTCA and State Government had just given permission to Radio Collar 14 tigers in 'Panna Landscape' (a term used to cover an area of around 15000 sq Km, entirely located in Vindhyan ranges which starts from district Lalitpur, UP and district Sagar, MP and extends through district Chhatarpur, Damoh, Panna and Satna in MP and ends at Chitrakoot, UP. A parallel of this habitat emanates from Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary, MP, moves through district Damoh and then enters district Panna): 4 tigers moving in Core-Buffer boundary, 4 moving in Buffer area and 6 tigers spread in Landscape; total 14 tigers. This is a research project to be conducted with Wildlife Institute of India (WII) which will generate data regarding movement and spread of tigers in Panna Landscape and reveal corridors used by tigers to spread in Panna Landscape, it's outer limits and final destinations. We will also get information regarding age of tiger at which movement starts and seasons of movement.

Collaring is done by tranquilizing the tiger. PTR has transformed the tiger tranquilization process from an enigmatic science to a regular managerial instrument. Starting from 22/09/2011, 60 times tiger tranquilization procedures have been performed on 30 individual tigers in PTR till now. Few tigers have been tranquilized more than once (5 times for tiger P111) at different age. These tranquilizations were mainly for radio-collaring/ de-collaring (28 tigers), treatment of serious injuries, and transportation purposes.

Coming back to two brothers, being male tigers, they have to look for the territory, their own separate territory, where they can rule without fear and have at least a mating partner. Life in the wild is no less challenging. As per the understanding of behavior of male tiger, it was predicted that these two brothers will be moving out of PTR, in to the Panna Landscape, as there is no possible territory for them in PTR. Akola Buffer is already occupied by three strong male tigers, namely T7, P111 and P234-21. It cannot hold any more male tigers. Either two brothers will have to displace existing male tigers or they need to embark

on journey in the landscape. Considering this, in December 2020, it was decided to radio collar these two brothers under the research project and one of them, Tiger P234-31 was successfully collared on 06/01/2021. It was quite difficult to collar him as he was with his brother all the time and both of them were still with their mother at that time. The other brother P234-32 was also tried for collaring on 11th and 26th January 2021 but both attempts were unsuccessful as both brothers could not be separated even after putting lots of effort in separating them. It was then decided not to make further effort for collaring P234-32.



Picture 3: Radio Collaring P234-31

3. Two brothers became tourists' favorites:

Radio collaring of P234-32 opened the flood gates of information regarding not only his movement but also of his brother as both remained always together. Both brothers aged nearly 13 months, were still with the mother in December 2020. It was in mid-January 2021 when for the first time PTR Authority found these two alone, separated from mother on the West side of State Highway while their mother P234 was in Eastern side of Highway for more than 15 days with male Tiger T7, probably for mating. It was such a unique experience to see these two brothers, first time kept away from their mother for around 15 days. They had not started hunting independently by then. Both of them remained absolutely together, following same daily routine and perhaps without food (some staff say that mother P234 came in between for a day and made a kill for them and then again left). One part of the daily routine was coming on the edge of the State Highway in the late evening at around 7:30 PM and remaining there for next two hours. As news of their daily appearance spread, people from nearby areas including from Panna city, thronged to see two tigers and everybody could see them. On a lighter note, it seems these two brothers also started liking for 'to be watched' since that time. Senior officers who could not locate tiger inside the Core of PTR, were told about this and they waited till late evening to see two brothers.



Tiger P234-31

Tiger P234-32

Picture 4: Two Brothers (Pictures Taken by Tourists)

Mother P234 returned back to them in the first week of February 2021 and they were together again. But by now mother started leaving them alone for long durations. They had also started hunting independently soon after this incident. Both of them were now regularly seen in Akola Buffer area. Tourists looking for tigers came running to Akola Buffer and this area which was opened for tourism nearly a year back but was having very poor tourist footfalls, suddenly became a tourist hotspot. Tourists found both the tigers very smart, attractive, photogenic and tourist friendly. They would regularly come out on tourism roads in the morning or evening, give delightful photo shoot to all present and entertain tourists in their own ways. They were lovingly given new names by locals: 'Heera' and 'Panna', a clear indication of identifying two brothers with identity of the city of Panna. More tourists meant more employment for local people, whether as guides or drivers; or hotel owners. 'Buffer Main Safar' program which is based on the idea of promoting tourism in Buffer areas of Tiger Reserves became an instant success in PTR. From no tourism to excess tourism in Buffer of PTR happened only in three to four months. Though we cannot discount the efforts put up by PTR Authorities in developing and streamlining tourism here in such a short period, real credit goes to two brothers, Tiger P234-31 and Tiger P234-32 whose ratings as superstars remained supremely high during whole summer season.

4. Increasing numbers of tigers in Akola Buffer:

In the mean-time, there were more newborns. Tigress P234-22 gave birth to 2 cubs and Tigress P234-23 gave birth to 3 cubs in the month of January 2021 in the Akola Buffer. The older mother P234 also gave birth to 2 cubs just at the edge of Akola Buffer on the western side in the month of May-June 2021. Suddenly number of tiger cubs swelled to seven in six months in this area. Tigresses P234-22 and P234-23 along with cubs were sighted by tourists since April 2021 though not regularly but only frequently. These sightings became added attractions in Akola Buffer and tourist number jumped here in June and July 2021. On one hand, it is very pleasing to have more and more tigers in tourism area which improves

sightings of tigers for tourists drastically; on the other hand, it throws lots of management challenges to PTR Authorities. There are villages at the periphery and Buffer area is used by villagers for their bona fide needs from forest. There is movement of people on village roads passing through Buffer area. There are frequent instances of cattle kill by tigers in and around the villages. Too many tigers, that too lots of cubs in them, pose a great challenge for co-existence.

5. Separation:

By the end of June 2021, Akola Buffer became the famed destination in PTR for Tiger watchers. 'If you want to see tigers (not only one but two) come to Akola Buffer', became the tag line. Both the brothers P234-31 & 32 became the star attraction and both always obliged visitors by their superstar like appearance and style. In June 2021 when tourism in Core area of PTR was open after remaining closed for one and half month due to COVID 19 lockdown, more tourist came to Akola Buffer than Core. Locals along with Hotelwallas and Tour Operators were happy seeing upswing in tourist numbers after a lull during lockdown period. Though tourism activities in Core area of PTR was closed down from 1st July, tourism in Akola Buffer flourished. By mid-July, weekends tourism surpassed all previous records.

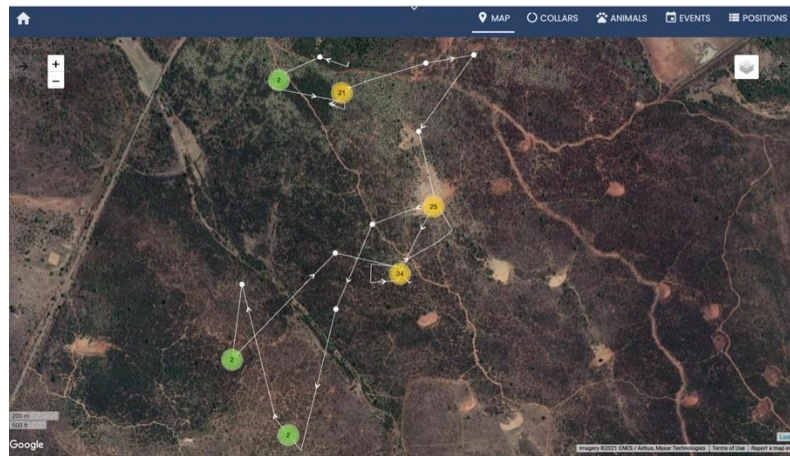
Both brothers now nearing 20 months of age, there were still together for last nearly 7 months on their own. It is rare to see such long association of two male tigers in the wild, even though they are brothers. It was expected that sooner rather than later, separation will come. But separation will come in what form: it was unclear. Whether both will go out, or only one will go out, or both will remain here and force older male tigers T7 and P111 out, it remained unclear. With experience of tiger behavior, PTR Authorities were predicting both the male to embark on journey in Panna landscape. Which tiger will move in which direction was not clear.

On 23rd July, P234-31 movements towards East were observed. He was seen alone. On 24th July, he was outside the boundary of Akola Buffer and had entered the forest of North Forest division. Other brother P234-32 was not seen with him. As P234-32 was not collared, his location could not be gathered. He was also not seen in tourism area of Akola from 23rd July. It was clear. The separation had come. It seems both have decided to go separate ways. It was natural and as predicted, but still it was heart breaking. And it was heart breaking not only for Field Staff who was monitoring them day and night, but also for locals and tourists. Both brothers not seen in tourism area is a setback for growing tourism. And it got reflected in next few days as footfalls dropped. P234-31 movements are tracked by satellite collar and it is showing continuous movements towards East away from boundaries of PTR. This movement is what as researcher we were looking for, important and valuable data of tiger movements which will help in identifying wildlife Corridors. This was the purpose for which radio collaring was done. But still, it was painful to see P234-31 moving out of the PTR.

6. Big Brother Always Watching:

We as Reserve managers feel and believe that P234-31 doesn't understand the Collar he is wearing neither knows that somebody is continuously watching him. We are playing 'Big

Brother’: “Big Brother always watching”. We will continue to track him through satellite as he moves in to newer territories and use these valuable inputs in better management of PTR.



Picture 5: Movement recorded by Satellite Collar of P234-31 (11-12 July 2021)

For his brother P234-32, his location is still unknown. Efforts are on to track him and now as he is moving alone, to radio collar him also, to observe his movement. Also collaring gives extra protection as staff of the respective areas of movement can be alerted.

With regard to tourism in Akola Buffer, the new ones of Tigresses P234-22 & P234-23 are now ready to take place which has been vacated by Two Brothers.
