



Ranthambhore

Location and History



Often described as a “secluded ecological island surrounded by fields and over-grazed plains”, the Ranthambhore tiger reserve lies at the intersection of the Aravalis and the Vindhyan hill systems covered by Northern tropical dry deciduous forests.

The reserve lies in Rajasthan’s eastern districts of Sawai Madhopur and Karauli with the Chambal river forming its eastern boundary. The river Banas, a tributary of Chambal, flows through the reserve from the north-west to the south- east, dividing the reserve into two equal halves-the Kela Devi Sanctuary and other parts of the Reserve. Once part of the royal state of Karauli, Kela Devi Sanctuary (670 sq km) is almost half as big as the entire reserve but has little wildlife to offer as most of it is a dry “table top” plateau.

Location



The other half of the reserve lies to the southwest of the river Banas, almost totally in the Sawai Madhopur district. These mainly include the Ranthambhore National Park (282 sq km), Sawai Madhopur Sanctuary (131 sq km) and the Sawai Man Singh Sanctuary (113 sq km) and the Kuwalji closed area. Almost all these forests were a part of the Jaipur state before independence. Till 20th century there was excellent forest cover almost all over India and exploitation of forests to fulfil local needs had a negligible impact.

The forests of Ranthambhore were the private and exclusive hunting reserves of the Jaipur and Karauli royal family, managed by a separate Shikar Khana (Hunting Department).



By the end of the first quarter of the 20th century, the need for conservation of forests was being felt all over India. The population was growing rapidly and forests in most parts of India were coming under pressure. In Ranthambhore, the system of “royalty permits” for commercial felling (mainly for firewood and charcoal) of entire blocks of forests was taking its toll on the habitat. In 1925, the Jaipur state created a post of Superintendent of Forests and in 1939 the Jaipur Forest Act was enacted – the first few steps taken for conservation of Ranthambhore.

The Rajasthan Forest Act was enacted in 1953, giving these forests more legal protection. In 1955, these forests were declared as Sawai Madhopur Sanctuary and the practice of sale of forest produce through royalty permits came to an end. This was when the forests received their first “real” protection. However, legal hunting continued till 1973 and by then the tiger population and the habitat was almost totally decimated.

History



In 1973, part of this sanctuary came under the Project Tiger Scheme, initiated by the Govt. of India and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). It was one of the first nine Tiger reserve areas taken up in the country under Project Tiger. At that time there were 16 villages inside the sanctuary but between 1976 and 1979, 12 of these villages were shifted outside the sanctuary. In 1980 an area of 282 sq km of the inner part of Sawai Madhopur Sanctuary was declared as a National Park. Since then the Rajasthan State Government stopped collection of any forest produce from the sanctuary and human activity within the national park was reduced to a bare minimum.

In the year 1983, 647 sq km of forests lying to the north of the national park were declared as the Keladevi Sanctuary and included in the Ranthambhore Tiger Project. Similarly, in 1984, 130 sq km of forest on the south of the National park was declared as Sawai Mansingh Sanctuary and included in Project Tiger, Ranthambhore.



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During the 1970s, tiger sightings were extremely rare in Ranthambhore but as a result of the decade long protection given to the forests, by the mid-80s, Ranthambhore National Park became the best place in the world to see wild tigers. Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve attained notoriety for illegal poaching of tigers in 1991-1992, when a large number of tigers were poached and some tiger skins were recovered from local people. Since then, the forest authorities became very strict and the tiger population gradually recovered. By 2001, the Park boasted nearly 40 tigers, a density of nearly 10 tigers per 100 sq km - which was at that time one of the highest in the world.

Between 2003 and 2004, the demand for tiger skin and parts from China and Tibet shot up and poachers, once again, again hit Ranthambhore. A large number of tigers were killed but by the middle of 2005, the state police with the help of a handful of local volunteers, managed to control this threat and arrest a number of tiger poachers. Poaching has not been a serious threat in these forests since then and with the birth of several tiger cubs, the tiger population recovered once again. Between 2008 and 2018, the four remaining villages within the national park were shifted out which further increased habitat suitable for tigers. Right now, Ranthambhore has nearly 70 tigers – the highest that it has ever had since it was declared as a tiger reserve.





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