

Tiger Watch

ANNUAL REPORT

2025-26





Tiger Watch Annual Report 2025–26

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CREDITS

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Tiger Watch Annual Report 2025–26

TWENTY-NINE UNBROKEN YEARS
IN A SINGLE LANDSCAPE



The Aravalli–Vindhyan tiger landscape of eastern Rajasthan is spread across nearly 5,000 sq km in four reserves.

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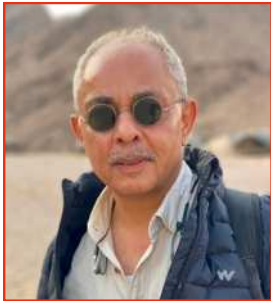




The Aravalli-Vindhyan landscape Tiger Watch has worked in without a break since 1997.

Chapter 01

Message from the Chairman



ISKANDER LALLJEE
CHAIRMAN, TIGER WATCH

Tiger Watch enters its thirtieth year. Twenty-nine unbroken years in a single landscape is a milestone we take deeply seriously. It is the reason a Mogya family will speak with us, why a forest guard calls us in the middle of the night, and why our longitudinal data stret-

-ches back far enough to show genuine ecological change rather than mere snapshots. Longevity, in this line of work, is not about sentiment — it is about building institutional capacity.

When Fateh Singh Rathore founded this organisation in 1997, his conviction was unfashionable for its era. He believed that tigers could not be saved by fences and patrols alone; rather, in a country of over a billion people, their future would be decided by the communities living at the forest's edge. Every programme we run today descends directly from that core belief.

The Mogya Education Programme recently completed its twentieth year, marking the milestone by opening a new centre at Bhedola for thirty families who chose to relocate out of Ranthambhore. On the very first day, twenty-four children gathered on mats under the trees. There were no walls or classrooms, but a teacher was ready, and the children arrived. Over the years, we have learned that this is exactly the order in which meaningful change begins.

Meanwhile, our Baagh Pari and Vanya Sakhi initiatives continue to empower young women from Mogya and relocated communities with skills, independent income, and household standing — opportunities that did not exist a decade ago. Furthermore, our Digital Education Programme now reaches some 1,500 students across three districts, and the Bagh Mitra Programme concluded its initial three-year phase in March. Having reached over 25,000 children across 135 schools, it launched its second phase in July, extending directly into Dholpur.

Science and protection remain the backbone of our efforts. Project Caracal — launched in April by the

Wildlife Institute of India-SACON alongside the Rajasthan Forest Department and Tiger Watch — validated a decade-long stance we took when few others were looking for this elusive cat. Our researchers recently described a species new to science from the Thar, added 93 new records to the state's reptile list, and maintained the tiger monitoring in Dholpur-Karauli that now serves as the primary source of data for that young reserve.

Concurrently, our Cattle Compensation Fund settled 93 claims across two landscapes, reaching families quickly enough to mitigate retaliatory conflict. In March, we also hosted the 14th Fateh Singh Rathore Memorial Lecture and Awards, honoring twelve individuals whose critical grassroots work rarely reaches an audience beyond the districts they serve.

None of this impact would be possible without our dedicated supporters. I want to record my deepest gratitude to: **The Gutmann family**, *whose association with us is now approaching two decades* **Jaisal and Anjali Singh and SUJÁN, Petronet LNG Limited, Abercrombie & Kent Philanthropy, Nina Rao and Saving Wild Tigers Margot Raggett and Remembering Wildlife**, The many individual well-wishers whose trust in our grassroots model allows us to scale up without losing our footing on the ground

The landscape ahead of us is expanding. New reserves, emerging wildlife corridors, and returning tigers will shape the coming decade. Our mandate is not merely to witness these transformations, but to ensure that local communities remain active partners rather than passive bystanders. Conservation only succeeds when people and wildlife thrive together.

To every supporter, colleague, volunteer, and community member who has walked this path with us — thank you. Fateh Singh's legacy is not a static memory; it is a living commitment we work to fulfill every single day.

Yours truly,

Iskander Lalljee

Chairman, Tiger Watch

Chapter 02

Message from the Secretary

Dear Friends,

This November, Tiger Watch enters its thirtieth year. Although we began with a clear vision and the conviction to create an organisation dedicated to protecting tigers and wildlife in Ranthambhore, I never imagined that Tiger Watch would attain the scale and reach it has today.



ASHUTOSH MAHADEVIA
CO-FOUNDER AND SECRETARY

We did, however, always believe that Ranthambhore could serve as a pilot project and that our work would eventually extend to other parts of the country. Over the years, that vision has gradually become a reality. Our work now extends across six reserves within the larger Ranthambhore landscape, and I am certain that Fatehji would have been ecstatic to witness these developments. None of this would have been possible without the dedication and hard work of an able team led by our dear Dr Dharmendra Khandal.

The *Moghiya* Rehabilitation Programme was Tiger Watch's first endeavour, taking root even while the organisation itself was still being formed. Despite reports from the police forces of three states describing the *Mogiyas* as a community that could never be reformed, one man firmly believed that change was possible: Fateh Singh Rathore.

The initial plan was simple. We would bring together *Moghiya* families in a village that we would help establish, providing them with homes, cultivable land, a school where their children could be educated, and a temple where they could gather as a community. The settlement would also enable us to remain closely engaged with the community and support its transition.

Fatehji brought me together with a group of *Moghiyas* and, along with the Forest Department, we set out in search of suitable land.

Unfortunately, the plan could not proceed because the Government was unable to provide productive land on which this traditionally nomadic community could be settled.

Years later, Fatehji, Dharam and I revisited the idea. We began by establishing a hostel for boys attending a local school. That modest beginning eventually evolved into our *Moghiya* Education Programme, which completes twenty years this year. It is undoubtedly the project of which I am proudest, for it remains one of the most distinctive and sustainable initiatives that any conservation organisation could undertake.

It is remarkable how much depth the *Moghiya* Rehabilitation Programme has brought to our conservation efforts while simultaneously helping transform the lives of a community, some members of which had historically been associated with the systematic poaching of tigers in Rajasthan. Education and alternative livelihood opportunities helped us earn the trust of *Moghiya* families. At the same time, the medical assistance provided by Sevika enabled Dharam to engage more closely with this traditionally private and little-understood community and to develop a database that offered valuable insight into its social structure and dynamics.

As this programme gained momentum, we realised that an effective system of field-level wildlife monitoring was equally necessary. This became a reality through the Village Wildlife Volunteer Programme, so ably led by Dharmendra. The volunteers' monitoring across the landscape, and more recently in the young Dholpur–Karauli reserve, has become a principal source of information through which Tiger Watch keeps a close watch on the health of the region's tiger and wildlife populations.

Our Cattle Compensation Fund settled ninety-three claims across two landscapes this year,

reaching affected families quickly enough to help prevent the retaliation that unaddressed losses can provoke. Our anti-poaching work also continues, as it has since 2005—largely unseen, but entirely essential. My thanks to Jaisal and Anjali Singh and SUJÁN, and to Abercrombie & Kent Philanthropy, for standing behind this vital work.

As I mentioned earlier, Tiger Watch is a unique organisation because it brings much more than enforcement to the conservation table. It seeks to bring about change through compassion by working closely with the communities that live in and around the tiger landscape.

The Baagh Pari and Vanya Sakhi programmes are important examples of this approach. Together, they now support ninety-one girls and twenty-seven young women. Both programmes took an important step forward this year, progressing from hand-operated machines to professional equipment and participating in a five-day spinning workshop arranged by Divya Khandal. Shri Sachidananda travelled from Mysore to conduct the workshop.

I was never sceptical about the potential of this initiative. If khadi spinning could play such an important role in India's freedom movement, why could it not also play a meaningful role in empowering these women? I had the opportunity to meet Sachidananda personally, and I was struck by how closely our views resonated.

My sincere thanks to CMAI; Anjali Patel Mehta and Verandah; Divya Khandal and Dhonk Craft; and Süd-Chemie India for making this initiative possible.

Our Digital Education Programme clearly demonstrates how Tiger Watch has broadened and redefined the concept of conservation, creating an approach that is both comprehensive and inclusive. What began modestly through Divya's efforts now reaches approximately fifteen hundred students across three districts, with around six hundred students having earned certificates of completion.

My thanks to Ms Margot Raggett, Ms Nina Rao, and Punit Lalbhai and the Arvind Foundation,

whose mobile education van carries one hundred and fifteen laptops into villages that previously had none. This is truly a pioneering initiative.

The Bagh Mitra Programme concluded its first three-year phase in March, having reached more than twenty-five thousand children across one hundred and thirty-five schools. My heartfelt thanks to Dieter and Liz Gutmann, whose association with Tiger Watch is approaching two decades, and to Petronet LNG Limited for supporting the programme's second phase and its expansion into a new district.

In April, Project Caracal was launched in collaboration with the Wildlife Institute of India—SACON and the Rajasthan Forest Department. Our team championed the cause of this elusive cat for nearly a decade, at a time when very few were paying attention. It is deeply satisfying to see that sustained advocacy develop into a formal programme that is now being keenly observed by leading scientists.

Above all, I must record my heartfelt gratitude to our Chairman, Iskander Laljee, and to Süd-Chemie India. Iskander's steadfast guidance and support in making crucial decisions have played an invaluable role in Tiger Watch's growth, while his company's sustained commitment has carried the organisation through every difficult phase of the past decade—all without any expectation of recognition or acknowledgement.

It remains deeply heartening that support continues to reach us from across India and around the world, often unsolicited. To me, this is the clearest indication that we are on the right path.

My heartfelt thanks to all our trustees, every donor, and every member of our field and executive teams. Tiger Watch's journey would not have been possible without your faith, commitment and determination.

Yours truly,

Ashutosh Mahadevia
Secretary, Tiger Watch



Fateh Singh Rathore, founder of Tiger Watch.

Chapter 03

Fateh Singh Rathore

1938 - 2011

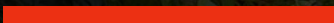
Founder of Tiger Watch

Ranthambhore brought the tiger to the world's consciousness, and it was Fateh Ji who brought Ranthambhore to the world.

He served as Field Director from 1978 to 1988, and it was under him that Ranthambhore became an internationally acclaimed forest with a healthy tiger population. He was instrumental in moving villages out of the park to make room for that recovery. He sat on the Cat Specialist Group of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, spoke for the tiger at international forums, and co-authored six books about it. Valmik Thapar, who called him his guru, was one of many who found their life's work by following him into the field.

But his most consequential conviction was the least fashionable of his era: that the tiger could not be saved by fences and patrols alone, and that in a country of over a billion people its future would be settled by the families living at the forest's edge. Tiger Watch was built to act on that belief. Nearly thirty years on, every Program in this report still descends from it.

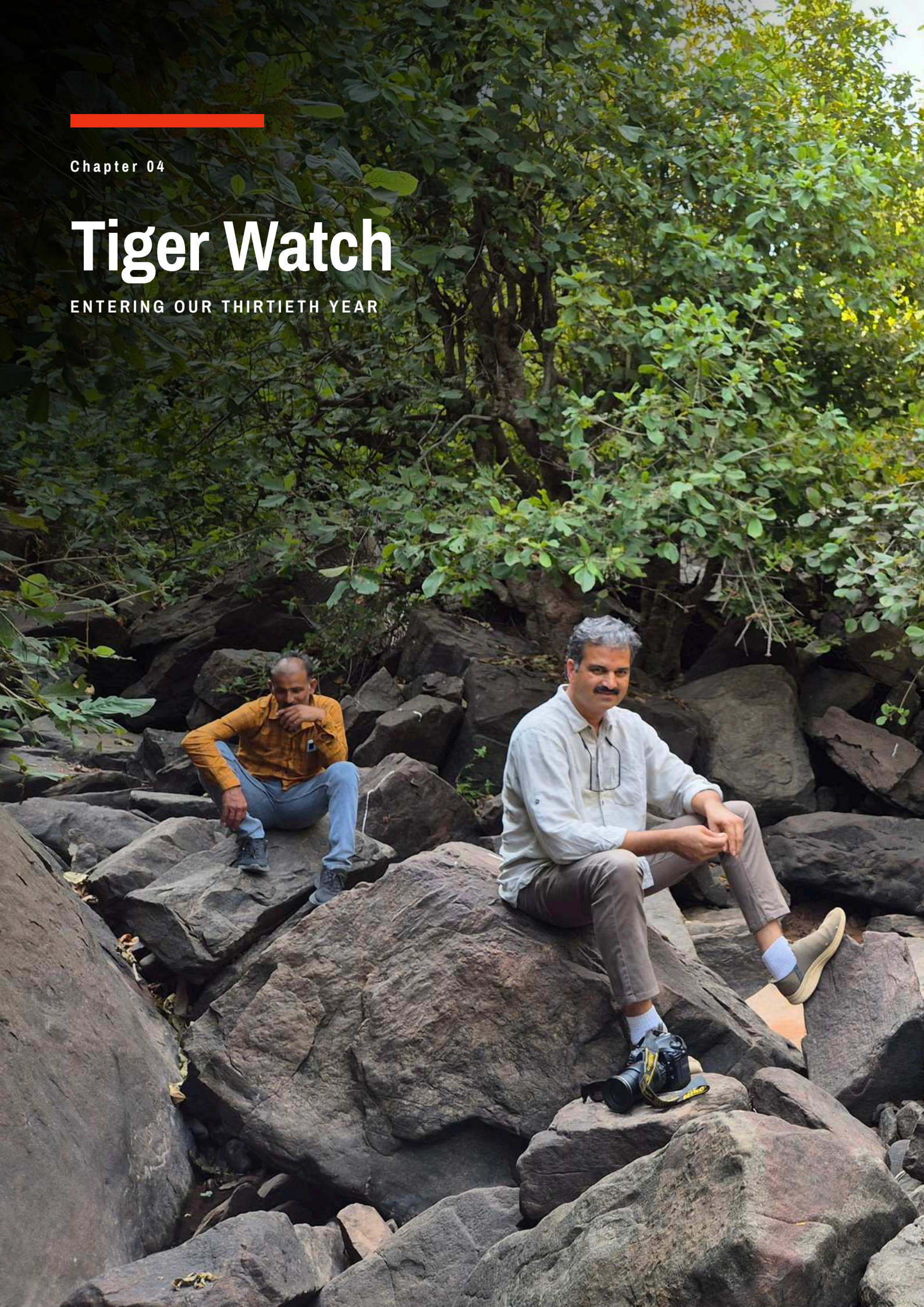
“I was only an instrument, nature was the conductor of the symphony.”



Chapter 04

Tiger Watch

ENTERING OUR THIRTIETH YEAR





Tiger Watch was registered on 18 November 1997 by Fateh Singh Rathore, together with his close friend Ashutosh Mahadevia, as a grassroots organisation working to protect tigers and their habitat in Rajasthan.

Its founding conviction has not changed: conservation holds only where the people living closest to the forest have reason to protect it. Tiger Watch works on that boundary — between the protected areas and the villages that ring them — as a working partner on the ground rather than a voice from outside.

Today we work across a 5,000 sq km area of the Greater Ranthambhore Ecosystem: Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve, Ramgarh Vishdhari Tiger Reserve, and the Dholpur–Karauli Tiger Reserve.

In November 2026, Tiger Watch enters its thirtieth year. Twenty-nine unbroken years in a single landscape is the organisation's greatest asset. It is why a Mogya family will talk to us. It is why a forest guard will call at night. And it is why our records reach back far enough to show what is actually changing, rather than what is merely being reported.

1997	5,000	3	250+
FOUNDED	SQ KM OF LANDSCAPE	TIGER RESERVES	INTELLIGENCE NETWORK

OUR APPROACH

- Protection through intelligence: a village-level information network that reaches where formal systems cannot.
- Monitoring through community: local trackers who read the landscape by inheritance, equipped with camera traps, GPS and smartphones.
- Prevention through education: schooling, digital skills and livelihoods for the communities most easily drawn into wildlife crime.
- Coexistence through rapid relief: compensation paid fast enough to prevent retaliation.
- Policy through evidence: research rigorous enough to change how a species is classified and protected.

MILESTONES · 1997–2013

- **1997** — Tiger Watch established under the guidance of Fateh Singh Rathore and Ashutosh Mahadevia.
- **1998** — An insurance Program initiated for Forest Department frontline staff, and protection strengthened through the provision of vehicles, motorcycles, binoculars, uniforms and training.
- **1999** — The first photo-trapping survey in Ranthambhore, conducted in collaboration with Dr Ullas Karanth. Punit Lalbhai, then 17, also participated.
- **2000** — Drought relief supported through the supply of pumps and resources during a severe three-year drought.
- **2003** — Dharmendra Khandal joined Tiger Watch as conservation biologist. Tiger monitoring work begins amid declining tiger numbers.
- **2004** — A detailed monitoring report on Ranthambhore's tigers and their territories, supported by photographic evidence. Its finding of 26 tigers in May 2004 was reiterated the following May by the State Task Force chaired by Mr V. P. Singh.
- **2005** — First coordinated anti-poaching operation conducted with the support of the Forest Department; several further operations that year with the Rajasthan Police. Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje gave the Rajasthan Police a green signal to crack down on poaching; officers Ajit Singh, Alok Vasisth and Samir Singh led the effort. The operation led to the arrest of 70 poachers and the seizure of 37 leopard skins and some tiger body parts.
- **2005–06** — Notorious poaching gangs operating in Ranthambhore exposed and dismantled.
- **2006** — Mogya Education Program (MEP) started with 9 children, in premises provided by a Forest Ranger, in the Phalodi Range of the Sawai Mansingh Sanctuary, with the Ranthambhore Forest Department and supporters including Madhu Bhatnagar, Shefali Bajaj, Sharmin Panthanky, Shrirang Purohit, Jeff Caudix and the Shri Ram School. The Fateh Conservation Awards were instituted by Sh. Fateh Singh Rathore.
- **2007** — Dieter and Liz Gutmann's association with Tiger Watch began.

- **2008** — John Singh of Anokhi joined as Chairman, strengthening management and expanding community-focused Programs through his leadership.
- **2011** — The death of our founder, Fateh Singh Rathore. Tiger Watch resolved to continue the awards Program as part of his legacy. Dr Dharmendra Khandal became Executive Director.
- **2012** — A memorial lecture was added to the Fateh Conservation Awards.
- **2013** — The Village Wildlife Volunteers Program formalised with the Rajasthan Forest Department, under Dr Dharmendra Khandal and Mr Y. K. Sahu.
- **2014–15** — Mr Vinaykumar Nerurkar left Tiger Watch a legacy of ₹1.70 crore, laying the foundation for the organisation to carry on its work uninterrupted.
- **2015** — On 30 September the Chief Minister of Rajasthan, Smt Vasundhara Raje, visited Sawai Madhopur and Tiger Watch's projects, including the Mogya hostel and the Village Wildlife Volunteers Program, and called for the VWV Program to be strengthened further.
- **2017** — Shri Iskander Lalljee joined as Chairman.
- **2020** — On 1 March, the Rajasthan Biodiversity Network launched and the Bagh Mitra School Development Programs were formalised.
- **2021** — On 6 January, following Tiger Watch's caracal distribution study, the National Board for Wildlife approved the addition of the Caracal to India's list of critically endangered species — the twenty-second species on that list. The decision was announced by the Union Minister for Environment and Forests.
- **2022** — The Bagh Mitra Tiger Conservation Awareness Program began operating in Sawai Madhopur. Baagh Pari launched on 14 November with the support of Studio Verandah and Dhonk Crafts.
- **2023** — Bagh Mitra expanded to Bundi and Karauli districts with the support of Petronet LNG Ltd.
- **2024** — The first Digital Education Centre opened at Ramsinghpura, and the Cattle Compensation Program began at Dholpur–Karauli Tiger Reserve, both in August. Vanya Sakhi launched at Anandipura on 1 December.
- **2025** — Cattle Compensation extended to Kailadevi Wildlife Sanctuary in Karauli in March. Digital Education Centres opened at Anandipura and Jhiri in May. The HP-CLAP Digital Education Van launched in July. Vanya Sakhi added centres at Girirajpura and Jhiri in December, and the Clean Ranthambhore Initiative began on 5 December.
- **2026** — Bagh Mitra extended to Dholpur district, with the Bundi chapter concluded.

Twenty-nine unbroken years in a single landscape is the organisation's greatest asset.



Chapter 05

Landscape & Conservation Impact

WHERE THE ARAVALLI AND VINDHYAN HILLS
CONVERGE





The tiger landscape of eastern Rajasthan is one of the most unique and critical wildlife regions in India. Here the Aravalli and Vindhyan hills converge, creating a mosaic of forests, rivers, ravines and grasslands that support an astonishing diversity of life. At the heart of this landscape stands the tiger, but alongside it thrive the gharial, wolf, caracal, pangolin, four-horned antelope and the Gangetic dolphin.

The extreme climatic conditions of the region make survival challenging for tigers. The habitat is slow to recover and highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

Ranthambhore and its northern division at Kailadevi, the young Dholpur–Karauli Tiger Reserve, the vast stretches of Ramgarh Vishdhari and the rewilding landscapes of Mukundara Hills — together these reserves form the Aravalli–Vindhyan Tiger Landscape, covering nearly 5,000 sq. km. It is here that Rajasthan's tiger comeback story is being written.

THE FOUR RESERVES

RESERVE	SQ KM	TIGERS
Ranthambhore 1973	1,700.22	70+
Ramgarh Vishdhari 2022	1,501.89	8
Mukundara Hills	1,135.79	7
Dholpur–Karauli 2023	1,057.88	10

RANTHAMBHORE TIGER RESERVE

Declared a Tiger Reserve in 1973 under Project Tiger, Ranthambhore spans 1,700.22 sq. km across four districts and is today home to over 70 tigers. Since 1997 Tiger Watch has played a supporting role here — not directly engaged in core-area monitoring, but vigilant in reporting illegal activity and lending support to the Forest Department.

DHOLPUR–KARAU LI TIGER RESERVE

Notified in October 2023, Dholpur–Karauli is ecologically important and before tigers colonized the landscape it had been the domain of leopards and wolves. Tigers have arrived as dispersal from the Ranthambhore, and communities living inside and adjacent to the reserve are encountering an apex predator, in many cases, for the first time. Dholpur–

Karauli Tiger Reserve holds 10 tigers including cubs. Tiger Watch has been watching this landscape since 2015 and maintains a field team of nine trackers here

RAMGARH VISHDHARI AND MUKUNDARA HILLS

Further west, the Ramgarh Vishdhari Tiger Reserve was declared in 2022. Spanning 1,501.89 sq. km, it strengthens the ecological link between Ranthambhore and Mukundara Hills, allowing tigers and other wildlife to move across the landscape. The reserve holds eight tigers. In March 2026, Tiger Watch concluded its Bagh Mitra Program in the schools along the periphery of the reserve in Bundi district.

The Mukundara Hills Tiger Reserve is a story of restoration. Spread across 1,135.787 sq. km, it has seen determined efforts to reintroduce tigers to its forests. There are seven tigers, including one cub, in the reserve, and with two males and four females the forest is about to see a slow rise in numbers soon.

A CONNECTED LANDSCAPE

Viewed together, these reserves are no longer isolated pockets of wilderness. They are becoming a single connected ecosystem: a landscape where tigers can disperse, wolves can roam, and rivers like the Chambal and Banas can go on nurturing gharials and dolphins. That has not happened overnight, and it has not happened by itself. It is the result of years of collaboration between the Forest Department, conservationists, communities and organisations like Tiger Watch.

For Tiger Watch this expanding canvas brings a corresponding responsibility: to keep close watch on emerging reserves like Dholpur–Karauli, to nurture awareness in Ramgarh Vishdhari, and to stand beside the authorities in Ranthambhore and Mukundara Hills. Most of all, it means continuing to work as a bridge between people and wildlife, so that the growth in tiger numbers goes hand in hand with the wellbeing of the communities who live alongside them.



A connected ecosystem: rivers that go on nurturing gharials and dolphins.

Chapter 06

Mogya Education Program

CLASSROOMS INSTEAD OF CRIME — TWENTY YEARS ON







TIGER WATCH

MOGYA EDUCATION PROGRAM

(an initiative of Tiger Watch)

EMPOWERING CHILDREN. TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES.



Supported by: **Sul Chemia Pvt Ltd.**



- Best Education & Literacy for Mogya children
- Preventing Youth from Crime through Constructive Learning
- Building Confidence & Opportunities for a better future

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EDUCATION AS A PATH TO HOPE & CONSERVATION



WHY THIS PROGRAM EXISTS

The Mogya are a semi-nomadic community whose identity has been bound to hunting for centuries. They tracked and trapped for local rulers, and they guarded the crops of villages that had no other defence against wild animals. It was skilled work, and it was lawful.

The Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 ended that. A profession became a crime, and a community with no formal education and no second trade was left holding the one skill the new law had outlawed. What followed was predictable. The Mogya were drawn into organised wildlife crime by people who never set foot in a forest, and it was the Mogya who were arrested for it.

Ranthambhore's rise as a globally significant tiger reserve placed the community at the sharpest edge of that conflict. The consequences were severe for the tigers, and severe for the Mogya — repeated criminalisation, social stigma, and no way out. No schooling. No alternative income. No route to dignity.

Tiger Watch recognised early that no amount of enforcement could substitute for addressing this. Education delivered inside the community, in familiar settings, by teachers the families trusted, was the only intervention likely to outlast us. The Mogya Education Program began in 2006 with nine children, under the guidance of Fateh Singh Rathore. Our then chairman John Singh put it plainly at the time:

“This will be a long journey, and we must remain committed if we wish to achieve our goal.”

OBJECTIVES

- Empower Mogya youth to stand shoulder to shoulder with their peers and gain acceptance in mainstream society.
- Provide quality education that opens pathways to employment, dignity and opportunity.
- Foster social awareness within the community and bridge long-standing gaps of exclusion.
- Reduce dependence on hunting and poaching by offering children a new identity and a future.
- Drive generational change, so that impact cascades naturally to the next generation.

20

YEARS OF THE
PROGRAMME

200

STUDENTS

91

GIRLS

9

VILLAGE
CENTRES

THIS YEAR: A NEW CENTRE AT BHEDOLA

Thirty Mogya families from Bhedola and Andoli once lived at Hindwad, inside Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve. They chose to move. They accepted cash compensation, bought land at Bhedola in Chauth Ka Barwada, and started again at the forest's edge.

Relocation settles a question for the forest. It opens several for the family, and the first of them is what happens to the children.

Our Program coordinator, Meetha Lal Gurjar, went to Bhedola and sat with the families under a thatched shelter. He talked with parents, spent time with the children, explained what schooling could do for them and listened to what worried them. That took time, and it was the part that mattered. The families agreed.

On 1 June 2025 the Bhedola centre opened. Twenty-four children came on the first day — eleven girls and thirteen boys.

It began as an open-air classroom: mats on the ground, books in hand, shade from the trees above. No walls. But there was a teacher, there was intent, and there were children who showed up.

THE PROGRAM TODAY

The Mogya Education Program now supports 200 students across nine village centres, 91 of them girls, taught by eight teachers. Each centre runs a two-hour learning session in the village itself every day. That single design choice removes the travel that used to end most Mogya children's schooling before it started.

Centres:

Hindwad, Halonda, Mui Khedli, Kemlya, Patpadi, Kyarda Kalan, Kuredi, Bhedola and Kailashpuri.

THE MODEL, AND WHY IT CHANGED

For its first fourteen years the Program ran from a premises in Phalodi Range, then from a hostel at Sherpur. It worked — but it could hold around forty children, and it could hold almost no girls. Mogya parents would not send daughters to live away from home, and for years we could not get around it.

COVID-19 forced the hostel to close in 2020, and teachers began travelling to the settlements instead. The emergency measure turned out to be the better Program. Enrolment rose from 45 to 95 within a year, and girls could attend for the first time, because attending no longer meant leaving home. Ninety-one of our 200 students are now girls.

What began as an adaptation is now simply how the Program works.

Teaching and curriculum

- Literacy and numeracy.
- Hygiene and daily personal care, tracked as a core part of each child's progress.
- Life skills and environmental awareness.
- Progression from foundational learning towards structured, school-aligned study.

This year we also formalised teacher development. Teachers are now groomed through two training sessions a month.

Monitoring and family engagement

The Program's monitoring goes well beyond attendance:

- Regular student evaluations, including hygiene scorecards.
- Monthly teacher performance reviews.
- Learning journals kept by every teacher.
- Household mapping — we know each student's family, visit regularly, and stay close enough to see when a household comes under pressure and to respond before a child drops out.

TWENTY YEARS OF CHANGE

Dilkush Bawariya

Dilkush came to us as a boy of class six, who drew. His father, Bhajan Lal, is a reformed poacher who enrolled both his sons in the programme. In 2019, on

Divya Khandal's suggestion, we arranged six months of classes for him at the Ranthambore School of Art to further develop his drawing skills. In August 2024 we enrolled him on the Bachelor of Visual Art (Sculpture) course at the Rajasthan School of Arts in Jaipur, where he is now reading for his degree. Tiger Watch meets his course fees and living costs for its duration.



He joined this programme as a class 6 student. He is now studying sculpture in Jaipur.

Mogya Education Program is
Supported by Süd-Chemie India Pvt. Ltd.



Growth of Mogya Children Enrolment

Mogya Education Program | 2014–15 to 2025–26



The programme evolved from hostel-based education to home schooling and village-based learning centres.



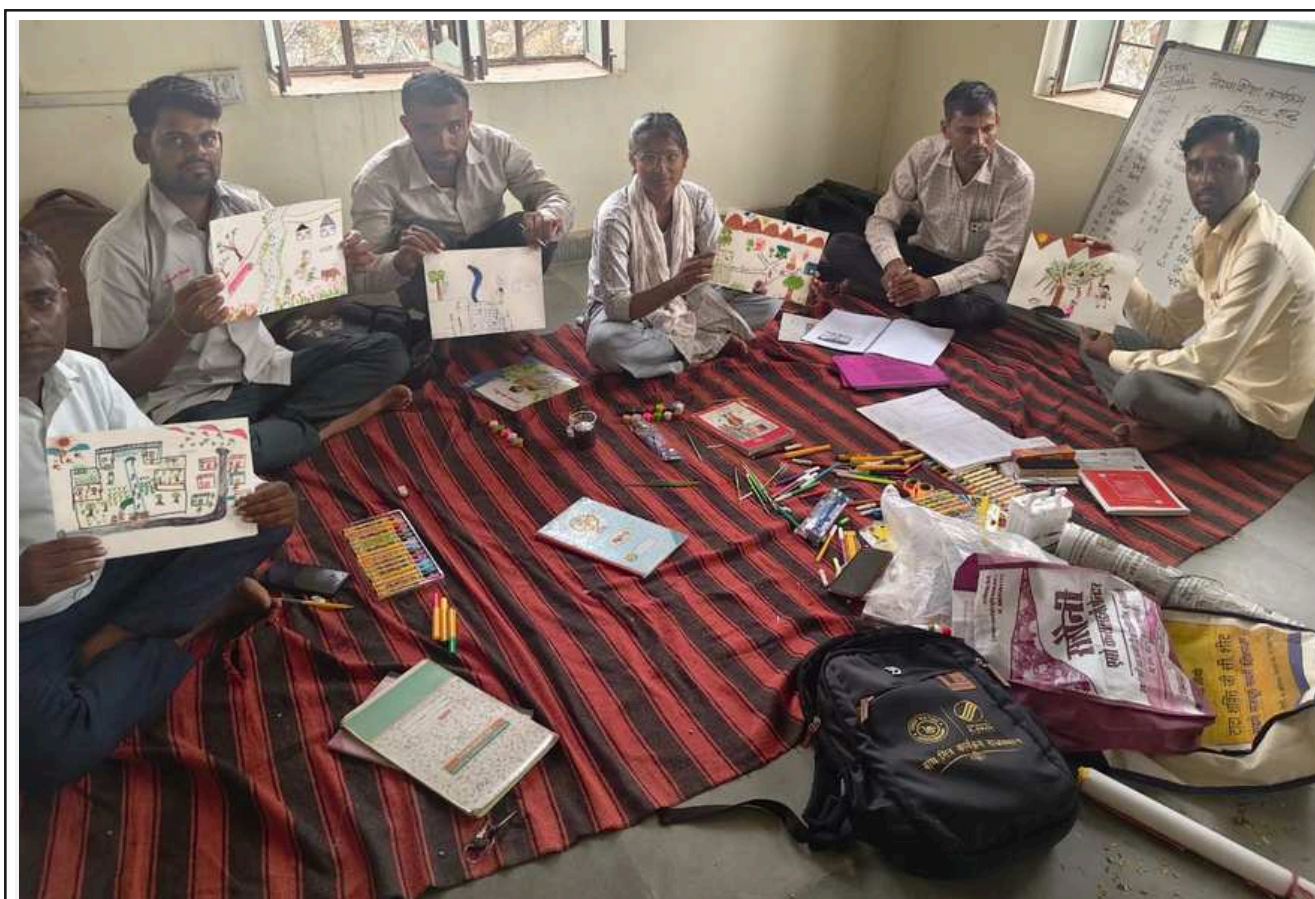
Mogya Children from classroom session



the first day at Bhedola Mogya Education Center, June 2025 (left), Meethalal during his visit to Bhedola village for awareness (right)



Trainer Sh Shailendra Singh during one of the activity sessions



Teachers during the training session

LIVELIHOOD SUPPORT

Education changes a household over years. It does nothing about the pressure on that household this month — and the families most likely to go back to the forest are the ones with no income now.

So alongside the classrooms we have begun backing small enterprises a family can own and run itself. For older boys who have finished school that has meant vocational training in electrical work and motorcycle repair. This year it also meant poultry.

On 13 April fourteen Mogya men and women came to the Tiger Watch office, and each was given a poultry cage. On 1 August, 150 birds were distributed among them and the units began operating.

- Mukesh (Mui Khedli)
- Pradhan and Rahul (Roshanpura)
- Hiralal (Kemlya)
- Murari and Bharat Lal (Hindwad)
- Lakhan and Prem Bai (Halonda)
- Kishore (Kailashpuri)
- Lala and Srijan (Kuredi)
- Sugnya (Kyarda Kalan)
- Kapil (Laxmipura)

A poultry unit will not make a family prosperous. It will put eggs and a small income into a house that had neither, and it does that without anyone leaving the village or going into the forest. That is the entire argument.

Supported by Süd-Chemie India.



On 1 August, 150 birds were distributed among the Mogya Community and the units began operating.



Chapter 07

Baagh Pari

EMPOWERING MOGYA GIRLS THROUGH
EDUCATION AND LIVELIHOOD SKILLS





WHY BAAGH PARI EXISTS

For years Mogya girls were simply absent from our education work. Not turned away — structurally excluded. The Mogya Education Programme ran from a hostel, and Mogya parents would not send daughters to live away from home. It was not a position we could argue them out of. It was a fact we could not get past.

The pandemic broke the deadlock. When the hostel closed in 2020 and teaching moved into the settlements, girls could learn without leaving home. They enrolled at once.

Baagh Pari was created in 2021 to make sure that opening did not close again — to ensure that girls did not merely enter education, but stayed in it, and came out of it with something in their hands. It was founded and funded by Anjali Patel Mehta of Verandah, who secured the money for it independently and has sustained it every year since.

Five years, in short

- **2021** — Baagh Pari established as a named initiative, with specialised training for the mobile teachers who reach the girls in their villages.
- **November 2022** — Vocational training begins. Thirty girls take part and fifteen sewing machines are distributed, with Verandah, Dhonk Craft and the Clothing Manufacturers Association of India.

- **2023–24** — Eighty girls enrolled across ten villages. CMAI donates twenty-three more machines. Meera Bairwa, a teacher on the programme, is recognised at the Fateh Singh Rathore Memorial Lecture.
- **2024–25** — The training is linked explicitly to the green economy of the Ranthambhore landscape: skills that earn a living without drawing on the forest.
- **2025–26** — Ninety-one girls in education across ten villages, thirty-two of them in intensive livelihood training. The charkha arrives, and Dhonk becomes a fixture of the calendar.

91

GIRLS IN EDUCATION

10

VILLAGES

41

 IN LIVELIHOOD
TRAINING

THE PROGRAMME TODAY

Ninety-one Mogya girls are now in education across ten villages. Within that group, forty-one have been selected for intensive livelihood training on the basis of their own interest in learning a trade — twenty-three at Mui Kherli, and eighteen at Hindwad. Each receives regular hands-on instruction with daily practice at her village centre.



Baagh Pari girls in livelihood training at Mui Kherli with Coordinator Meethal Gurjar and trainer Meera Bairwa

THIS YEAR: THE CHARKHA

In February we ran a five-day spinning workshop with Divya Khandal of Dhonk Craft, for girls from the Mogya community and from families relocated out of Ranthambhore. It was taught by Shri Sachidanand — Sachu — who travelled from Mysore to lead it.

We began sceptical. It was not obvious to us that work this slow could produce a living. Sachu argued otherwise, and over five days he made the case convincingly: that a simple Gandhian craft can become a dignified and sustainable source of income. He is a communicator, artist, painter, philosopher and film actor by turns, and he is difficult to disagree with for long.

The girls learned to spin yarn on peti charkhas — the folding box wheel. It is cheap, it is portable, and it works in a house with no machinery and no room to spare. Spinning turned out to be calm, absorbing work that can be picked up in whatever hours a day leaves free, which matters in households where nobody has a clear morning.

It is also a step up the chain. Until now the girls have worked with thread that somebody else produced. On the charkha they make it.

Patience, skill and self-reliance are not a bad set of things for a girl from these villages to be given. We think this craft suits these households, and that it can carry confidence and income into them.



The five-day spinning workshop — girls at the peti charkha

THIS YEAR: THE ROAD TO DHONK

Training at Dhonk also became regular. Twice a month our instructor collects the girls from their villages, travels with them to the Dhonk Craft Centre for a full working day alongside Dhonk's artisans, and takes them home again. Between those visits the same instructor works with them at their village centres, so what they learn at Dhonk is practised daily rather than twice a month.

The escort is not a logistical footnote. The reason Mogya girls could not join this programme for fourteen years was that their families would not let daughters travel away from home unaccompanied. Twice a month we now solve that problem rather than argue with it — and the girls get a full day inside a working craft enterprise, where local women earn their living from the skills the girls are being taught.



On the charkha the girls learn to make the thread with Sacchidananda KJ

They are no longer being told there is a livelihood at the end of this. Twice a month, they go and stand in one.

SKILLS TAUGHT

Spinning — hand spinning on the peti charkha, introduced this year.

Embroidery — hand embroidery, cushion covers, handkerchiefs, stoles, fish stitch, chain stitch and dhooli thread work.

Tailoring — salwar suits, lehenga, blouses, frocks, shorts, gowns, plazo, scrunchies, children's clothes and carry bags. New participants begin with basic stitching, small kurtis, carry bags, and cushion covers with embroidery work.

WHAT HAS CHANGED

Skill — most girls can now independently stitch a range of garments and household items, and are learning to produce the yarn as well.

Income — girls stitch for themselves and their families, saving what a household would otherwise pay a tailor, and some have begun taking in sewing work from neighbours for a modest income of their own.

Confidence — visible in how they speak, how they participate in training, and how reliably they turn up.

Care — the girls keep their own clothes well, and press their younger siblings to do the same.

Each of these is small on its own. Together they describe a girl who has something her family values — in a community where that has rarely been said of daughters — and a household with one more reason not to go back to the forest.

Supported by Verandah and Anjali Patel Mehta, the Clothing Manufacturers Association of India, Dhonk Craft and Süd-Chemie India. Training led by Divya Khandal of Dhonk; taught at the village centres by Meera Bairwa. The spinning workshop was supported by Süd-Chemie India Pvt. Ltd.



Twice a month the girls stand inside a working craft enterprise.



Baagh Pari girls with their finished work

Vanya Sakhi

SKILLS, CONFIDENCE AND LIVELIHOODS FOR
GIRLS FROM RELOCATED FAMILIES





WHY VANYA SAKHI EXISTS

Moving a village out of a tiger reserve is a conservation success. It is also, for the families who move, the loss of a house, a landscape and a way of making a living, all at once. They accept compensation and begin again somewhere they did not choose. The forest gains. The household pays.

Young women carry that cost in a particular way. Displacement narrows their world before it widens it — a new village, no network of their own, and few of the openings that might have come with staying put. Isolation is the usual result, and it is rarely undone by time alone.

Vanya Sakhi began in 2024 at Anandipura, in Tonk, as our answer to that. It rests on a straightforward principle: the families who gave up ground for Ranthambhore's tigers should not be the ones left worst off by having done so.

THE PROGRAMME TODAY

Twenty-seven young women from relocated villages are enrolled. They are taught stitching, sewing, embroidery and craftwork by the artisans of Dhonk Craft, who provide the technical instruction, and their progress is reviewed and mentored by Divya Khandal.

Anandipura also holds one of our three digital learning centres, where the first cohort completed ten months of study and received certificates of qualification in March. Two routes into paid work now run through a single relocated village.

27

YOUNG WOMEN
ENROLLED

3

VILLAGE CENTRES

2024

LAUNCHED AT
ANANDIPURA

THIS YEAR: FROM HAND MACHINES TO PROFESSIONAL ONES

The women began on simple hand-held machines. In October, selected participants were given professional sewing equipment — the machines they would use in a workshop rather than the ones they could manage at a kitchen table. That sounds like a procurement note. It is not. Moving someone onto a professional machine is a judgement that she is good enough to need one, and it is understood that way by the person receiving it. What the equipment records is confidence, in both directions.

THIS YEAR: EVERY FORTNIGHT AT DHONK

Since November the women have travelled to the Dhonk workshop every fifteen days, to learn, make and refine their work alongside people who do it for a living. Between visits they practise what they have learned at home.

A workshop is not a classroom. Nobody there is being taught for the sake of being taught — the room is producing goods that are sold, by women from these same villages, and the standard is set by what a customer will accept. That is a more useful thing to be measured against than a syllabus.

THIS YEAR: THE CHARKHA

In February the Vanya Sakhi women joined the Mogya girls of Baagh Pari for a five-day spinning workshop, taught by Shri Sachidanand of Mysore, who introduced hand spinning on the peti charkha. The full account of the workshop appears in the Baagh Pari section.

What is worth recording here is who sat in that room. One group's families hunted the wildlife of Ranthambhore for generations. The other's gave up their homes so that wildlife would have somewhere to go. They spent five days learning the same craft, on the same wheels, from the same teacher.

Every stitch is a step toward rebuilding a life that conservation asked these families to interrupt.

OBJECTIVES

- Equip displaced women with practical, income-generating skills.
- Provide vocational training in stitching, sewing and craftwork capable of leading to stable livelihoods and self-employment.
- Strengthen the economic resilience of relocated families, and reduce their dependence on the forest.
- Ensure that displacement does not translate into disempowerment, by building confidence alongside skill.
- Encourage community-based self-reliance through local skill networks that support conservation-linked development.

- Align livelihood opportunity with the wider goal of reducing human–wildlife conflict and forest dependency.

WHAT HAS CHANGED

Skill — the women have moved from hand-held machines to professional equipment, and from basic stitching to embroidery and craftwork.

Standard — fortnightly work inside a functioning enterprise means their output is judged against what sells, not against what is expected of a trainee.

Independence — a woman with a machine and the skill to use it has an income that does not depend on land, and does not depend on the forest.

Dignity — for families who lost a great deal in moving, a daughter earning is not only money. It is evidence that the move did not cost her a future.

Supported by Süd-Chemie India Pvt. Ltd., with technical support and craft expertise from Dhonk Craft. Mentored by Divya Khandal.



Dignity — for families who lost a great deal in moving, a daughter earning is not only money.



A woman with a machine and the skill to use it has an income that does not depend on the forest.

Bagh Mitra Digital Education Program

BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE, ONE VILLAGE AT A TIME

Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached !

- Swami Vivekananda





ed Learning Access Project



In the villages around Ranthambhore, digital literacy has become as fundamental as reading and writing — and just as unevenly distributed. Most children on the forest edge grow up without ever touching a keyboard. They will nonetheless sit examinations, apply for jobs and fill government forms in a world that assumes they have. The Digital Education Program exists to close that gap before it hardens into disadvantage.

What began in 2024 with eight computers in a single village room has become, over time, a programme of three learning centres and a mobile classroom working across three districts. Enrolment now stands at approximately 1,500 students, and around 600 have been awarded certificates of completion.

WHERE WE WORK

Ramsinghpura, Sawai Madhopur — the programme's first centre, on the periphery of Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve, established in partnership with the Gram Panchayat of Ramsinghpura. It opened with fifteen students from a nearby government school and eight computers; it has since trained well over two hundred and ten.

Anandipura, Tonk — a village relocated out of Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve, where families gave up their homes so that tigers might have undisturbed habitat. A digital centre here is a small return on a large sacrifice. The centre runs eight computers.

The Dholpur–Karauli centre — Jhiri, Sevar Pali, and now Sarmathura. This centre travels with the landscape it serves. It began at Jhiri, deep inside the Dholpur–Karauli Tiger Reserve, where the villages are remote and the number of children in any one of them is small. Rather than run half-empty classes, the centre taught a full session, saw its students through to certification, and then moved on to the next cluster at Sevar Pali and did the same. On 19 August 2026 it was inaugurated at Sarmathura — a town rather than a hamlet, with the student numbers to justify a longer stay — where it now operates with ten computers.

Three communities have had a complete course of instruction from one set of equipment.

1,500

STUDENTS
ENROLLED

600

CERTIFICATES
AWARDED

115

LAPTOPS IN THE VAN

190

GRADUATED THE 90-
DAY COURSE

THE MOBILE CLASSROOM: HP CLAP

The most dynamic part of the programme travels daily. Under HP CLAP — Creating Learning and Advancement Possibilities, HP India's rural digital education initiative — a vehicle fitted with 115 laptops, internet access, printers and e-learning tools functions as a fully mobile computer laboratory, driving the digital world to children who had never seen one.

The van covers five villages — Nayapura, Madhosinghpura, Khilchipur, Kutalpura and Sherpur — running two two-hour sessions daily for Classes 7 to 10, covering computer basics, internet use, cyber safety and digital communication. This year it completed its first full 90-day course, from which 190 students graduated.

For forest-edge communities, the van is more than a classroom. It is a moving gateway to opportunity.

IMPACT

Learning centres	3 — Ramsinghpura, Anandipura, Sarmathura
Districts covered	3 — Sawai Madhopur, Tonk, Dholpur
Villages served by the mobile classroom (HP-CLAP)	5
Students currently enrolled	~1,500
Certificates of completion awarded	~600 across all centres

OBJECTIVES

- Provide rural children in forest-edge villages with access to modern education tools and digital learning.
- Build technology confidence among first-generation learners, preparing them for higher education and future careers.
- Create pathways to employment and self-reliance through essential computer and internet skills.
- Foster curiosity, self-learning and problem-solving through e-learning tools and digital platforms.
- Bridge the divide between rural and urban students, ensuring equal opportunity in an increasingly digital world.

WHY IT MATTERS

A child in Ranthambhore's buffer villages competes for the same college seats and the same jobs as a child in Jaipur, and does so without the equipment to prepare. The consequences are not abstract: they show up as narrowed options, and narrowed options are what push families back towards the forest for a living. Digital literacy is conservation work at one remove — it widens the range of futures available to young people whose alternatives would otherwise run through the tiger reserve.

The programme owes its beginnings to Ms Divya Khandal, whose early efforts established the first centre, and to the supporters who have carried it since. BTS Strategy Alignment and Execution Pvt. Ltd. funded the founding centre at Ramsinghpura, in partnership with the village Gram Panchayat. Ms Nina Rao of Saving Wild Tigers supports the centre at Anandipura, and Ms Margot Raggett, through the Remembering Wildlife book series, has supported the Dholpur–Karauli centre through every one of its moves. The mobile classroom exists because Sh. Punit Lalbhai and the Arvind Foundation helped us acquire the van, Süd-Chemie India sustains its logistics, and HP, through the CLAP initiative, made it a working laboratory. We are grateful to all of them.

Supported by BTS Strategy Alignment and Execution Pvt. Ltd. at Ramsinghpura. Ms Nina Rao and Saving Wild Tigers at Anandipura. Ms Margot Raggett through Remembering Wildlife Book Series at DholpurKarauli Center. The Mobile Van is supported by Sh Punit Lalbhai and Arvind Foundation.



Certificate distributed among the qualified students of Digital Education Centre, Anandipura, Tonk



A HP-CLAP basics of computer session at Mahatma Gandhi Senior Secondary School, Khilchipur



The HP CLAP mobile classroom on the road



Girls collecting laptops from the HP-CLAP van before the classroom session



The Sarmathura centre, inaugurated 19 August 2026

Chapter 10

Bagh Mitra Program

THE TIGER CONSERVATION AWARENESS
EDUCATION PROGRAMME





In March 2026 the Bagh Mitra Program completed its first full three-year phase. Across Sawai Madhopur, Karauli and Bundi, in 135 government schools serving forest-fringe villages, at least 25,000 children went through it. In July a new three-year phase began, with one district exchanged for another and a single funder carrying the whole.

Why the programme exists

Anthropogenic pressure is the primary long-term threat to tigers and their habitat, and the villages that ring a reserve are where it is generated. Children growing up in those villages tend to encounter wildlife first through fear or loss — a crop destroyed, a goat taken, a rumour about a leopard — and rarely through any reliable ecological understanding. Where that gap is left unfilled, mistrust hardens into resistance by the time the child is an adult.

Sensitising children before negative perceptions set is therefore not a soft complement to protection work. It is the cheapest and most durable protection available.

When children understand their forests, coexistence becomes possible.

Where it came from

Conceived by Dr Dharmendra Khandal, the Bagh Mitra Program is Tiger Watch's conservation education initiative for high-conflict zones. It takes environmental education directly into classrooms, and out into the field through nature clubs and village activities, connecting children to the landscape they live in and preparing them to take part in protecting it.

It began in Sawai Madhopur in 2022, supported by Dieter and Liz Gutmann as the core pillar of the Dieter & Liz Gutmann Tiger Conservation Program. In 2023 Petronet LNG Limited joined, and the programme expanded into Karauli and Bundi.

How it was delivered

Bagh Mitra runs as a mobile intervention. Villages were prioritised at the outset by anthropogenic pressure and proximity to forest, so that resources went where conservation education was most urgently absent. Educators were recruited locally and trained on a curriculum developed by Tiger Watch, then equipped with portable projectors and purpose-built material: awareness posters, an activity-based student workbook, photographic posters of faunal diversity, and a teachers' handbook, *Rajasthan Ke Baghon Ka Sansar*.

Teachers visited each school three times a month — regular and predictable, without disrupting academic routine. Sessions ran in batches, with depth and method adapted to class level from middle to senior secondary.

The engagement pathway was deliberate: awareness, then understanding, then ownership, then stewardship. Conservation attitudes are not produced by a single assembly. They are produced by turning up for three years.



A Bagh Mitra class in a government school

GROWING ROOTS OF CONSERVATION

135

SCHOOLS

115

VILLAGES

25,000+

STUDENTS

3

DISTRICTS

1,500

SQ KM

- Started 2022 in Sawai Madhopur · Chapters: 3
- 15 thematic classroom modules, delivered repeatedly across three years
- Core components: classroom modules; nature trails; storytelling and quizzes; art, essay and slogan contests; clubs; melas; end-line assessments and awards

PROGRAM UPDATES: 2025–26
18 January — Fourth Annual Mandana Art Competition

The fourth edition concluded with more than 3,500 students from three districts participating in the first round. Twenty finalists were invited to Dhonk for a day-long drawing and conversation session, where art became a bridge between forests, local communities and tigers. The top four received cash prizes worth Rs 20,000, the remaining finalists consolation prizes, and all participants certificates of appreciation. Selected artworks were displayed at the Sawai Madhopur Foundation Day celebrations at Dussehra Ground, inviting the public to engage with a living cultural heritage. The competition is organised annually with Dhonk Craft.

31 January — Sawai Madhopur Utsav

Bagh Mitra took part in the Sawai Madhopur Utsav marking 263 years of the district, with a photo exhibition, ‘Re-Discovering Ranthambhore’, live Mandana art, and a photography competition carrying prizes worth Rs 36,000. Students of Gurukul School, Bahrawanda Khurd came dressed as Forest Guards and Village Wildlife Volunteers, with a message that needed no elaboration: *Jangal Surakshit, Toh Hum Surakshit*.

March — Phase concluded

The 2023–2026 phase closed in March, having reached 135 schools across 115 villages in Sawai Madhopur, Karauli and Bundi districts, and engaged at least 25,000 students.

12 May — Phase II launched

The new phase was launched at Mahatma Gandhi Vidyalaya, Ranthambhore, with 350 children from five schools taking part in a quiz competition, a photo exhibition and a Bagh Mela. From understanding why tigers matter to learning about the rare caracal, the children asked the best questions of the day — which is exactly the point.

19–20 July — Annual Bagh Mitra Workshop

Bagh Mitra teachers, principals and school heads from government schools across Sawai Madhopur gathered with members of Bagh Mitra Clubs from Bundi, Karauli and Dholpur to open the new phase. Over two days, participants examined the ecological importance of tigers and how healthy forests underpin water security, agriculture, biodiversity and climate resilience, and covered Rajasthan's snake diversity, safe snake management and snakebite prevention. The group visited the Regional Museum of Natural History and were introduced to bird identification using the Merlin Bird ID app. The renewed programme places greater emphasis on hands-on learning, participation and field experience alongside classroom teaching. Sessions were conducted by Dr Dharmendra Khandal, Praveen Singh, Dharm Singh Gurjar and Forest Guard Jaypal.

The 2023–2026 phase closed in March, having reached 135 schools across 115 villages in Sawai Madhopur, Karauli and Bundi districts, and engaged at least 25,000 students.

THE NEXT PHASE: WHAT CHANGES

	2023–2026	2026–2029
Districts	Sawai Madhopur, Karauli, Bundi	Sawai Madhopur, Karauli, Dholpur
Funding	Petronet LNG (Bundi, Karauli); Dieter & Liz Gutmann (Sawai Madhopur)	Integrated under Petronet LNG support
Landscape	Ranthambhore, Kailadevi, Ramgarh Vishdhari	Ranthambhore and Dholpur–Karauli Tiger Reserves

When a child learns the story of the tiger, the forest gains a friend for life.



Why Dholpur

The exchange is a judgement about where the risk now sits, and it is worth setting out plainly.

Dholpur has recently been notified as part of a new tiger reserve, and its tiger population is growing naturally through dispersal rather than translocation. That is an unusual and demanding situation: communities there have little or no prior experience of living alongside large carnivores, and the animals are arriving anyway. Early awareness, preparedness and trust-building are urgent in a way they are not elsewhere, because the alternative is that the first thing a village learns about tigers is that one has taken its buffalo.

Conservation education is most valuable before it is obviously needed. Dholpur is at that moment now; Bundi has passed through it.

The Bagh Mitra Program 2023–2026 was supported by Petronet LNG Limited in Bundi and Karauli, enabled by Sh. Sundeep Bhutoria, and by the Dieter & Liz Gutmann Tiger Conservation Program in Sawai Madhopur.



Plantation drive on the occasion of world environment day

Pictures from the Bagh Mitra Tiger Conservation Awareness Program's Annual Workshop



Dr Dharmendra Khandal taking a session on snake diversity & snakebite management



Teachers during the training session



Dhram Singh shows tiger skull to teachers at Natural History Museum



Museum Curator introduces the museum to the teachers



Jaypal (forest guard) talking about venomous snakes of Rajasthan



Dhram Singh taking a review of the Workshop



Praveen Singh illustrating the use of Merlin Bird ID app to the group



Teachers practising the Merlin Bird ID app in field

Pictures from the Bagh Mela and other activities of the Program



Dhram Singh during a talk at Bagh Mela, Khilchipur



Awards for the competitions organised at the Bagh Mela



Students being taught animal behaviour and natural history through photo exhibition in a Bagh Mela



Learning through playful activities



Seeds are collected and developed into plants at home nursery and planted later



Drawing competition on environmental themes



Snake diversity and snakebite awareness through custom board games

Pictures from the Bagh Mitra Tiger Conservation Awareness Program's Annual Mandana Competition



Girls at annual Mandana Drawing Competition, ready to draw the art



After the Mandana Drawing - group photo with Ms Divya Dhandal and Bagh Mitra Teachers



Winners of the competition



Chapter 11

Bagh Mitra School Development

BECAUSE A CHILD SITTING IN A BROKEN
CLASSROOM CANNOT MEANINGFULLY ENGAGE
WITH CONSERVATION





A simple realisation

The Bagh Mitra Conservation Education Programme sends trained teachers into government schools around Ranthambhore and Ramgarh Vishdhari. Over several years of doing that, one thing became difficult to ignore.

The schools themselves were struggling. Children sat on cracked floors in dark rooms under exposed wiring, with no drinking water and no working toilet, and were then asked to think about biodiversity. It does not work, and it was never going to.

Before awareness comes dignity. Before conservation comes trust. Improving these schools is not charity — it is strategy.

Where the programme came from

Bagh Mitra School Development was founded on the premise that long-term conservation outcomes are inseparable from the attitudes of the communities living closest to protected areas, and particularly from those of the next generation.

In its earliest form the programme delivered learning material to schools around Ranthambhore. It became clear that one-time material support was not enough. The school development component grew — a recognition that the buildings themselves had to be fit for what was being taught inside them.

KHILCHIPUR: MAHATMA GANDHI GOVERNMENT SCHOOL

₹9.43L

INVESTED IN PHASE
1

70

DUAL DESKS
INSTALLED

30

SEAT LIBRARY
CREATED

How we found it

The team arrived at Mahatma Gandhi Government School during an outreach visit of the HP CLAP Digital Education Van, which takes mobile computer education into rural schools. What they found was striking not because it was rare, but because of where it was.

The school sits minutes from the main safari entrance to Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve, one of the most visited wildlife destinations in India. It had decent enrolment and had been comprehensively neglected. The building was peeling and damp. Students sat on cracked floors in poorly lit classrooms with exposed

and unsafe wiring. There was no functional drinking water. The boys' toilet block had collapsed into disuse. There was no library, no reading space and no organised storage for books.

Planning

Nothing was assumed. Tiger Watch ran structured consultations with the principal, Shri Siyaram Meena, and with teaching staff, and built the works list from verified and prioritised need. Dr Dharmendra Khandal and Mr Upmanyu Raju of A&K India conducted a detailed site inspection with the principal and school staff before any work began.

Seven needs were identified: an unsafe electrical system; severely deteriorated building fabric; no reliable drinking water; a non-functional boys' toilet block; no student seating of any kind; no library or reading space; and a deteriorated principal's and staff room.

SHERPUR: A LONG RELATIONSHIP CONTINUES

₹4.10L

INVESTED IN
DEVELOPMENT

Development work was also undertaken this year at the government school in Sherpur, supported by Dieter and Liz Gutmann.

Our relationship with this school is among the longest we have. An inverter was provided in 2018–19 so that lessons could continue through power cuts. Boundary wall repairs followed in 2024–25. This year's work continues that sequence. Each step has rested on the same conviction: that investing in children is investing in tigers.

Bagh Mitra School Development is supported by Abercrombie & Kent Philanthropy and by Dieter and Liz Gutmann.

A&K PHILANTHROPY



Dr Dharmendra Khandal, Mr. Upmanyu Raju and School principal Mr Siyaram Meena conduct a detailed site inspection of the school building alongside school staff. Every intervention in Phase 1 was grounded in direct, consultative assessment — not assumption.



Before and After pictures of the Mahatma Gandhi Senior Secondary School, Khilchipur



The school's drinking water area — a broken concrete ledge with no functional taps, offering students no reliable access to clean water throughout the school day.



The repaired toilet interior — clean, structurally sound, with functional fittings installed. Sanitation that was a barrier to attendance has been restored to basic operational standard.



The same block following Phase 1 work — freshly painted, clean, and maintained. The staircase has been repaired, and the surrounding area cleared and levelled.



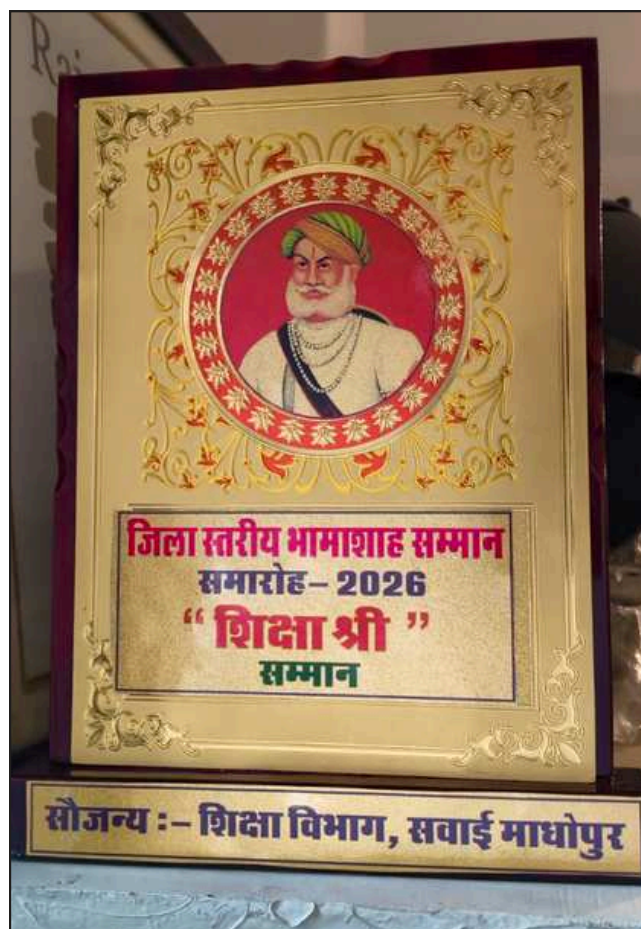
The completed water facility — a new tiled counter with multiple taps, properly plumbed and functional, serving as the school's primary handwashing and drinking water point.



RECOGNITION

On 30 June, Tiger Watch was conferred the title of **Shiksha Shri** at the 30th District Level Bhamashah Samman Samaroh in Sawai Madhopur, the annual ceremony at which the District Education Department honours individuals and organisations supporting the development of government schools. The award recognised the development of the government school at Khilchipur, and was received on behalf of Tiger Watch by Man Singh. The ceremony, presided over by the Additional District Collector Sh. Sanjay Sharma, brought together 24 Bhamashahs and 9 Preraks who had contributed to strengthening government school infrastructure during the year.

For us the recognition carries meaning beyond a single award. Working at the edge of the Greater Ranthambhore Ecosystem has taught us that the future of this landscape is inseparable from the future of the children growing up alongside it. A stronger school at Khilchipur is a stronger foundation — for the students in it now, and for the conservationists, naturalists and informed citizens some of them will become.



Man Singh receiving the Shiksha Shree Award for the developments works by Tiger Watch

Chapter 12

Tiger Monitoring Program

WHERE COMMUNITIES, TOURISM, THE
GOVERNMENT AND NGOS WORK HAND IN HAND
FOR CONSERVATION





In 2004, fieldwork by the Tiger Watch team revealed the alarming decline of Ranthambhore's tiger population. What began as an urgent conservation effort has since grown into a programme that today forms the backbone of tiger monitoring in eastern Rajasthan.

Nearly a decade later, in 2013, this work was formalised into the Village Wildlife Volunteers (VWV) Programme, launched by Tiger Watch in collaboration with the Rajasthan Forest Department under the vision of Dr Dharmendra Khandal and Mr Y. K. Sahu, then Field Director of Ranthambhore. It has been supported without interruption by Jaisal Singh and Anjali Singh of SUJÁN, making it a rare instance of an NGO, local communities, a tourism business and a state government working the same ground toward the same end.

Although known as volunteers, these men receive modest honorariums. We continue to call them volunteers because what they contribute goes beyond what any honorarium covers: they monitor conflict tigers when required, gather intelligence on dangerous poachers, and bring traditional ecological knowledge that cannot easily be measured or paid for.

A network of guardians

The network now stands at over 250 volunteers and auxiliary members (sahyogis), drawn largely from village youth and pastoral families living along reser-

-ve boundaries. These are not outsiders. They are local people with an intimate understanding of terrain, weather and wildlife movement, equipped with smartphones, GPS devices, camera traps and motorcycles. They monitor the forests day and night, often stepping in where formal systems cannot respond quickly.

How it works

- A regional coordinator leads the overall monitoring programme; each coordinator handles a team of five to six volunteers.
- Volunteers work peripheral and buffer areas, entering the core zone only at the request of the Forest Department.
- Training covers camera trapping, GPS logging, sign and species identification, pugmark casting and real-time digital reporting.
- Every morning camera traps are checked and geotagged images transmitted by smartphone. Photographs are verified against the Tiger Watch tiger image database, movements mapped, and the result relayed to coordinators and forest officials for timely action.

The design point is speed. A tiger that steps outside the reserve at dawn should be located on a map, identified by individual, and reported to the Range Officer before the morning is out.



Capturing a pugmark during daily monitoring patrol.



DHOLPUR-KARAULI TIGER RESERVE: OUR SPOTLIGHT

We have been monitoring the Dholpur–Karauli landscape since before its official designation as a tiger reserve in October 2023. Tigers had already reclaimed the ravines. What 2025–26 added was the apparatus of a functioning protected area — a continuous monitoring record for every individual, a compensation register that closes claims in days rather than years, and, by the end of December, joint patrols with the District Collector and the Superintendent of Police walking the same nalas as our trackers.

However, the tracking is not as smooth as it appears, and the landscape has its own issues. The community is hostile to the tigers, there is illegal mining, and a Forest Guard was killed on duty by an illegal mining tractor in January. Camera traps were stolen, switched off and vandalised. An armed poacher was photographed inside the reserve.

7		3		11	
TIGERS ON THE REGISTER	ON THE YEAR	LITTERS / CONFIRMED	CUBS	TRACKERS COVERING KM	280 SQ KM

The population, and how it changed

The year opened with four monitored tigers and closed with seven individuals on the register. A male dispersed in from Kailadevi, a resident tigress gave birth, a female already known to us from the Mandrayal territorial forest was formally added, and a correction to one animal's recorded sex changed the reserve's sex ratio without changing its count.

A new male arrives — T-2503

On 4 August 2025 the Dholpur field team documented a new tiger in the landscape: T-2503, a male cub of tigress T-135 from Kailadevi, and the first confirmed record of this individual in Dholpur. Two days later the Office of the Deputy Conservator of Forests (Wildlife), National Chambal Sanctuary, constituted a seven-member team to monitor him, with Forest Range Officer Shri Devendra Singh as team leader, four forest guards, and Tiger Watch trackers Shri Rakesh and Shri Dheeraj Gurjar.

Through August and September no deputed forest guard accompanied our trackers on a single day, and the whole burden of tracking a newly dispersed male fell on the Tiger Watch team. Participation began in October, and by January and February joint tracking with the DFO, ACF and Rangers was often observed. We record the early gap and the later correction with equal emphasis: it is the clearest illustration in this report of how quickly institutional ownership can be built where it is deliberately pursued.

Breeding — two females with dependent young

On 14 and 15 January 2026 tigress DKT-02 / T-117 (Sado) was camera-trapped with a newly born cub near Gadi Plantation, confirming her third litter. The cub's pugmark was recorded on 26 January and the cub photographed again on 14 February. Separately, tigress T-2303 — an animal we have monitored since 2023 — was camera-trapped with a cub on 22 and 29 December 2025 and again on 10 and 11 February 2026, in the Mandrayal territorial forest. Two females with dependent young, in a reserve notified twenty-seven months earlier, is the most consequential result of the year.



Camera trap picture of DKT-02, Sado with cub from its third litter in January 2026

Absence and return — DKT-2502F

DKT-2502F was not camera-trapped at any point in January 2026, her last photographic record dated 24 December. The monitoring team assessed sustained human presence and livestock grazing in Dhamoh Khoh as the probable cause. On 19 February, Army firing activity displaced the temporary cattle camps — roughly fifteen people with 200 to 250 buffaloes — down into the lower ravines. The tigress reappeared on camera in Damoh Khoh within days.

The interruption, 20 March to 12 May 2026

Monitoring in Dholpur–Karauli was suspended on 20 March 2026 owing to administrative and technical matters on the Department's side, and resumed on 12 May 2026.

The consequence is worth stating plainly. In a reserve with no radio-collared animals, where every detection depends on a tracker walking ground and a camera being serviced, seven weeks without monitoring is seven weeks in which the location, condition and breeding status of every individual is unknown.

DISTURBANCE AND THE MONITORING SYSTEM

The dominant pressure on tigers in DKTR this year was not prey or habitat. It was *khirkari* — temporary cattle camps established inside the reserve — and the grazing that comes with them. Camps were recorded month after month, with seasonal pressure from Marwar-side graziers moving thousands of sheep, camels and buffaloes into tiger-use zones from September onward.

The mechanism is straightforward: high cattle density restricts natural ranging, pushes animals into suboptimal or conflict-prone zones, and reduces wild prey through competition for grazing. Depredation rises, and with it the risk of retaliation. The year produced a controlled demonstration of the whole chain — DKT-2502F vanished under sustained camp pressure and returned within days of those camps being displaced.

The monitoring system itself was attacked. Five camera traps were stolen and others vandalised. On 12 January a camera at Bachhera Nala was deliberately switched off. Four further units were disabled by sloth bear. Camera security is not a peripheral logistics matter here; it is the load-bearing element of the entire monitoring record.

TIGERS MONITORED, 2025–26

- DKT-01 / T-116 (Dhaval)
- DKT-02 / T-117 (Sado)
- DKT-2501F
- DKT-2502F
- T-2503 / RBT-2503
- T-2303
- Cub of T-117

Tiger monitoring in the Dholpur–Karauli Tiger Reserve is supported by Sh. Jaisal Singh and Ms Anjali Singh through SUJÁN & SNS Foundation.

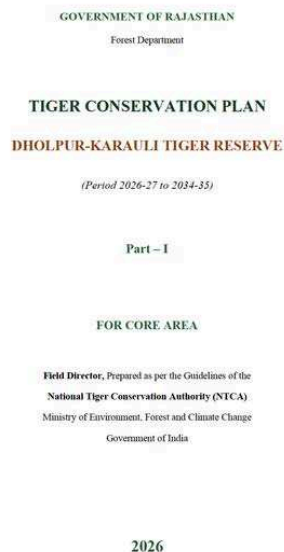
S U J Á N



Tiger Monitoring team Coordinator Hari Mohan Gurjar shows a recently captured tiger picture to Dholpur Collector Sheenidhi B and Dholpur Wildlife DCF Ashish Vyas.

DRAFTING THE TIGER CONSERVATION PLAN

In November 2025, the Field Director of Dholpur-Karauli Tiger Reserve entrusted Tiger Watch with preparing the draft Tiger Conservation Plan for the reserve — the statutory document that will guide its management for the plan period ahead. It was a task that drew on everything our teams had built up in this landscape: years of camera-trap and field monitoring, village and livestock census data across the reserve's 137 settlements, conflict records, and an on-ground familiarity with the ravine country that no secondary source could supply. Over the following months the plan was compiled across its core, buffer and corridor components, and the draft — running to some 500 pages — was submitted to the reserve management on 14 April 2026.



Dr Dharmendra Khandal in conversation with the field team



HERBAL POACHING

Not all extraction from these forests involves wildlife. Shatavari (*Asparagus racemosus*), a climber whose tuberous roots carry steady value in the herbal trade, is dug out of the Dholpur–Karauli ravines through much of the year. The collectors come across the border from Madhya Pradesh and establish temporary camps inside the forest, working outward from them until the surrounding patches are exhausted. Because the harvest is of the root, the plant does not recover — each collection is a permanent subtraction from the landscape's medicinal flora, and the camps themselves bring fire, dogs and disturbance into parts of the reserve that are otherwise little visited.

Over the reporting year our Dholpur team reported multiple such incidents to the Forest Department and took part in joint raids on these camps. The pattern is now well enough understood that detection has become routine rather than incidental — a direct return on keeping trained eyes permanently in the field.



REPORTS OF THE AUXILIARY NETWORK FROM ACROSS THE LANDSCAPE

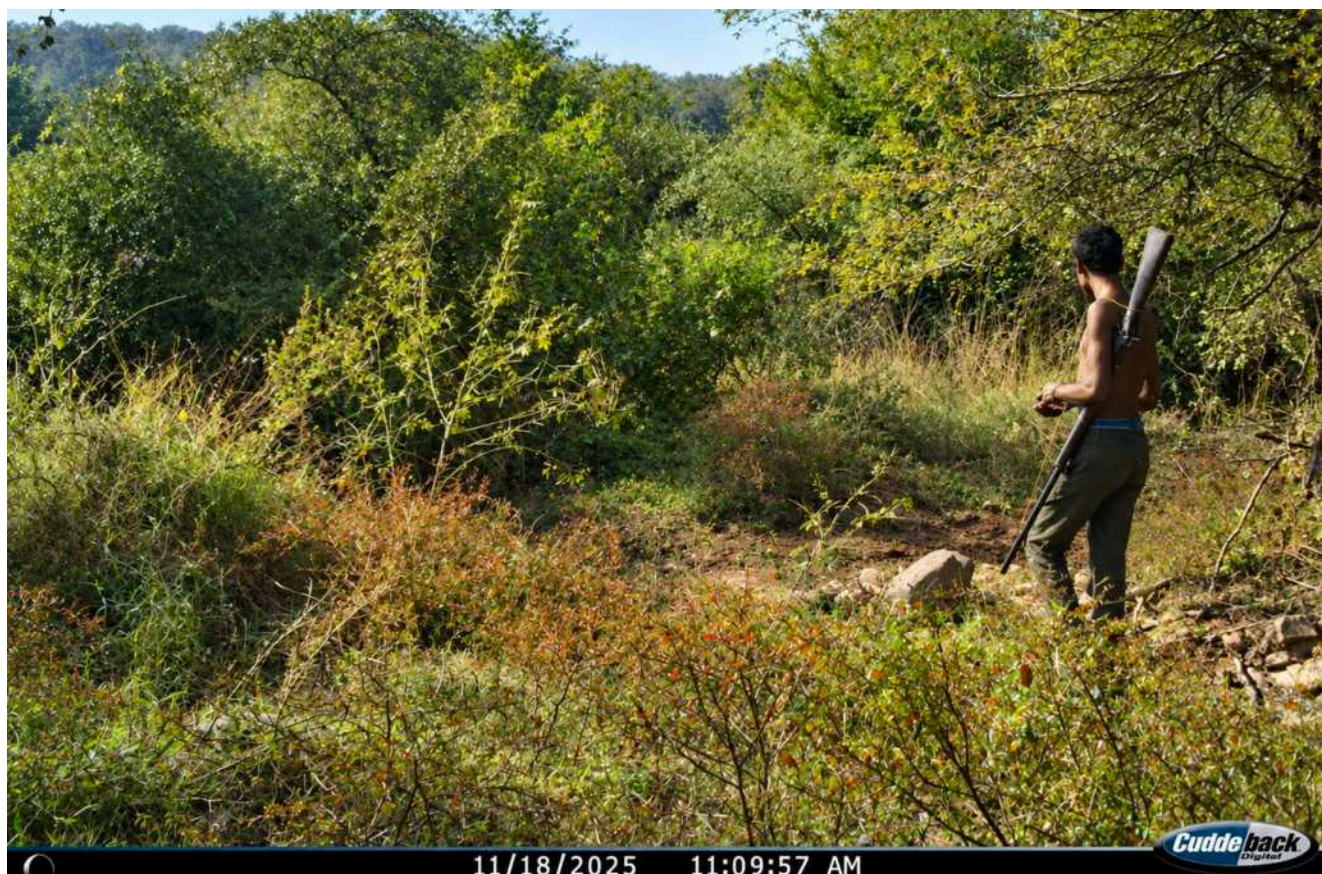
Our role in Ranthambhore is different in kind. We are not directly engaged in core-area tiger monitoring, which is the Forest Department's work. What we maintain here is an auxiliary network of local community members, together with a small number of daily trackers working the peripheral villages, who report what they see on ground the department cannot cover continuously.

It is an unglamorous arrangement and a productive one. What follows is the year's reporting from that network — poaching, crude explosives, encroachment and human injury on the periphery of the reserve.

All five incidents involve the same individual, and all five occurred while he was engaged as a crop guard. This is the pattern our reports have described since 2018–19: crop protection work providing both the presence and the pretext for bush-meat poaching. It is recorded here as a single case rather than five, because that is what it is.

POACHING REPORTED BY THE AUXILIARY NETWORK

DATE	INCIDENT	LOCATION
16 Aug 2025	Krishna Gopal Mogya killed a wild boar with a gun while guarding an agricultural field	Dharkhori, Maharro village
30 Aug 2025	Krishna Gopal Mogya killed a bluebull with a gun while guarding an agricultural field	Near Hanumanji, Maharro village
01 Sep 2025	Krishna Gopal Mogya killed a wild boar while guarding an agricultural field	Babda Nala, Piparada Khet, Maharro village
18 Sep 2025	Krishna Gopal Mogya killed a bluebull	Dharkhori, Maharro village
08 Oct 2025	Krishna Gopal Mogya killed a wild boar with a gun and moved the carcass by motorcycle through Aruda and Bhagirathpura to Dundipura	Maharro village



A trespasser with a gun captured in one of the camera trap deployed in Dholpur-karauli Tiger Reserve

CRUDE GUNPOWDER EXPLOSIVES (GOLAS)

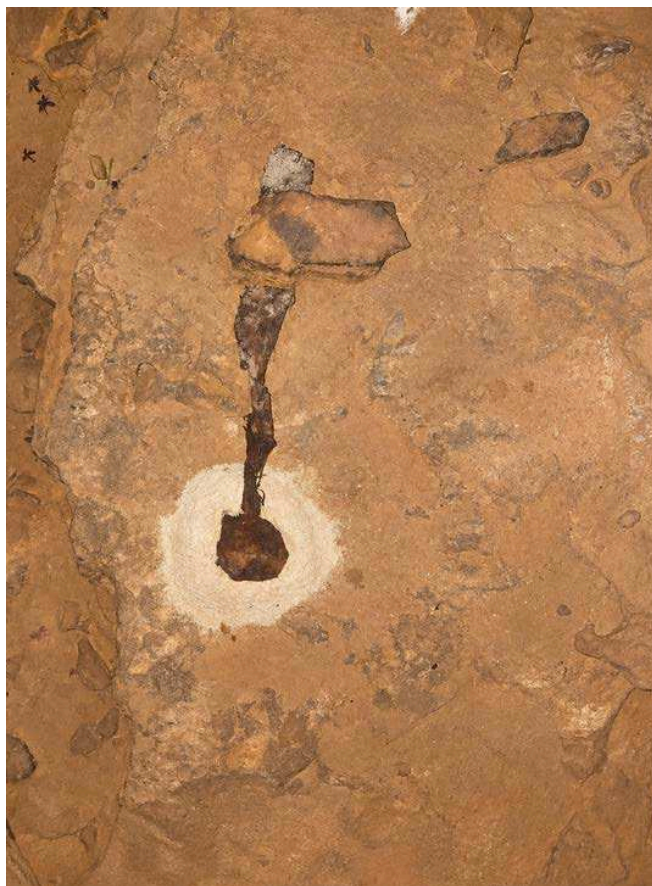
Golas remain the most indiscriminate threat on the periphery. Two of the four incidents this year injured

livestock, and one injured the person carrying it. Nothing about this weapon distinguishes between a wild boar, a buffalo and a child.

DATE	INCIDENT	LOCATION
03 Nov 2025	A buffalo was injured after biting into a gola. Those who placed it are suspected to be from Vinoba Basti.	Near Sangrampur village
10 Dec 2025	A gola was found beside a pond in the plantation above the ghati	Motipura, Range Nainyaki, Naka Dungari
15 Dec 2025	Surgyan, son of Badri Mogya, was taken to hospital after a gola exploded in his hand	Hindwad village
17 Apr 2026	A buffalo's mouth was torn open after biting into a gola while grazing; the animal belonged to Dharm Singh Gurjar of Matoriyaki	Akshaygarh Singor Kala, Naka Akoda, Range Baler

HABITAT OFFENCES

DATE	INCIDENT	LOCATION
15 Sep 2025	A JCB machine was being used to cut a track through the riverbed for loading stone	Kundali Nadi, Bodal Naka, Berna village area
18 Oct 2025	Forest closure area towards Ajeetpura Dam encroached for agriculture using JCB machines	Sawaiganj area, Naka Bodal, Range Phalodi



A gola was found beside a pond in the plantation above the ghati on 10.12.2025



A buffalo was injured after biting into a gola on 03.11.2025

Nothing about this weapon distinguishes between a wild boar, a buffalo and a child.

HUMAN-WILDLIFE CONFLICT ON THE PERIPHERY

Jagdish Gurjar's death is recorded here because it belongs in the same account as the tigers we monitor. Conflict on this periphery is not an abstraction, and a report that lists depredation payments without listing the people injured and killed is not describing the landscape honestly.

Tiger monitoring and Auxiliary Team in the Landscape is supported by Sh. Jaisal Singh and Ms Anjali Singh through SUJÁN & SNS Foundation.

S U J Á N



DATE	INCIDENT	OUTCOME
17 Aug 2025	Ramphool Gurjar was attacked by an unidentified wild animal near Kudi Nala, Bajoli Khirkari	Reported by the team
15 Feb 2026	Jagdish Gurjar of Bajoli village was severely injured by a sloth bear. Dharm Singh Gurjar assisted in moving him to hospital in Sawai Madhopur and then to Jaipur.	He died on 4 March 2026 at SMS Hospital, Jaipur
14 Mar 2026	A wolf attacked a woman, Priyanka, and her son Ankush near Daulatpura village; the same animal later attacked Giriraj Gurjar of Banglaki village inside his home	Reported by the team



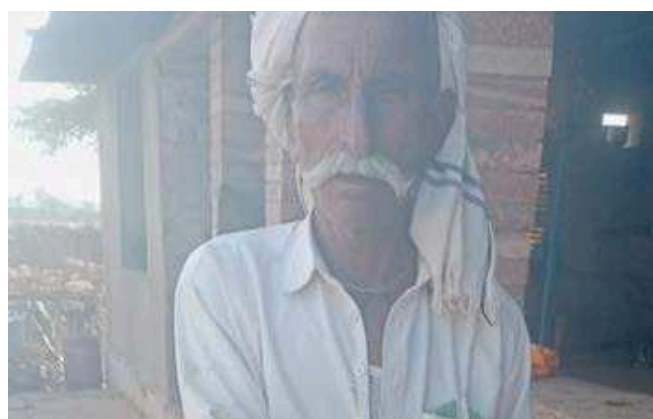
Jagdish Gurjar from Bajoli village attacked by a sloth bear



a woman injured by wolf attack on 14.03.2026

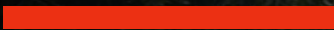


a child attacked by the wolf near Daulatpura village



A wolf attacked an old man from Bangalki village.

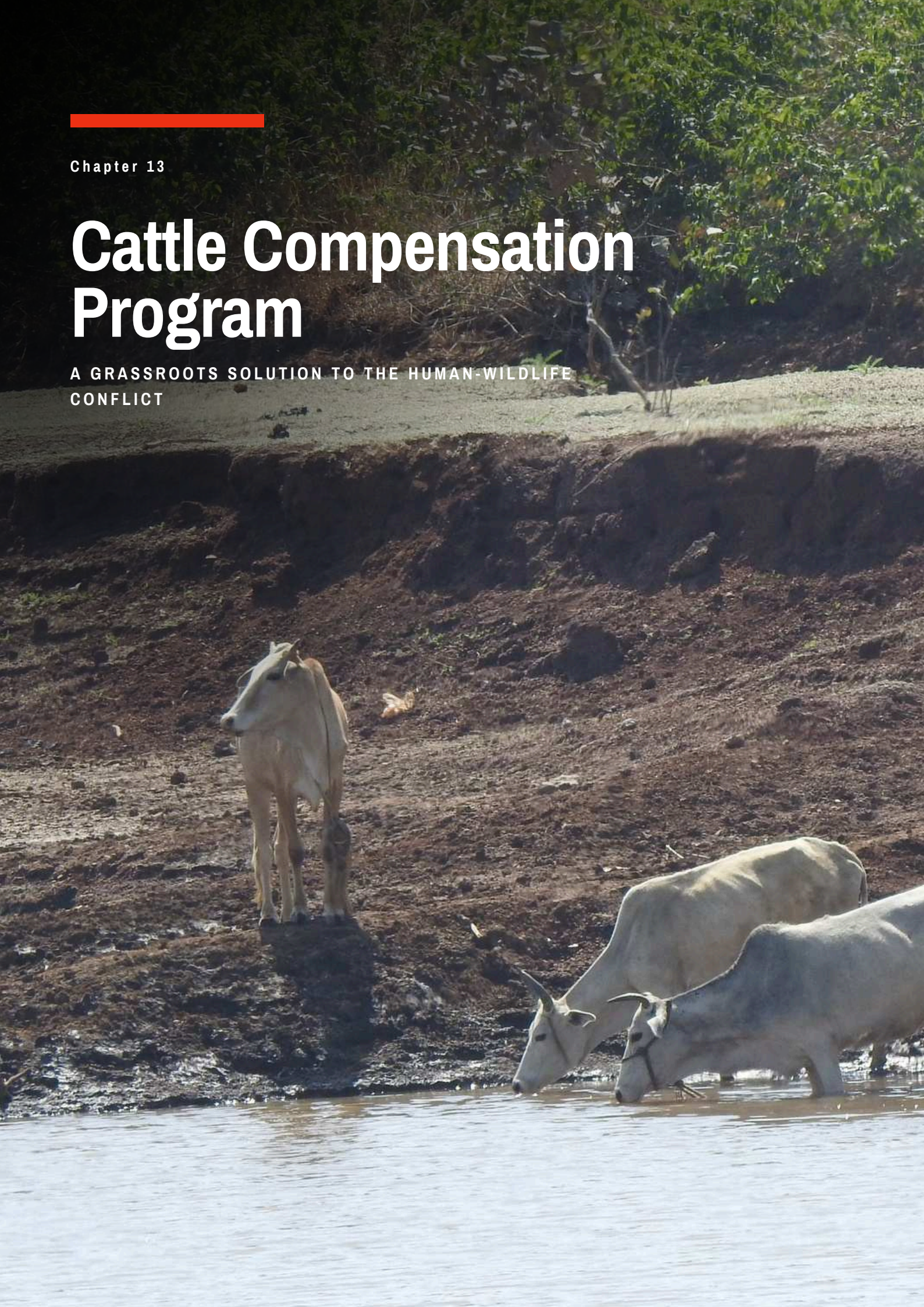
Nothing about this weapon distinguishes between a wild boar, a buffalo and a child.



Chapter 13

Cattle Compensation Program

A GRASSROOTS SOLUTION TO THE HUMAN-WILDLIFE
CONFLICT





In tiger habitats where dense human populations share space with thriving wildlife, conflict is not an exception — it is inevitable. A tiger taking a buffalo or a leopard raiding a goat pen is more than an economic loss. For forest-edge families it is disruptive, frightening, and expensive in a way that a household living close to the margin cannot easily absorb.

What follows such a loss matters enormously. A herder who is compensated quickly returns to his livelihood. A herder who waits months, fills forms he cannot read, and is finally told his claim is still pending draws a different conclusion — that the forest and its animals are a cost imposed on him by people who will not answer for it. Since 2010, at least three tigers in this landscape have been poisoned in retaliation. The Cattle Compensation Fund exists to make that arithmetic come out differently.

HOW WE GOT HERE

The work began not with money but with attention. From 2013, our Village Wildlife Volunteers began investigating and reporting livestock kills across the Ranthambhore periphery, establishing which predator was responsible and notifying the Forest Department the same day — as much to pacify angry herders as to file paperwork. Belonging to the same communities they served, the VWVs became the bridge between a grieving family and an office that family had no idea how to approach.

That work uncovered the problem it was meant to solve. Analysing VWV data for his master's thesis, Mr Aristo Mendis found a wide gap between the number of livestock actually killed and the number of owners who ever received compensation. Losses were real; relief was not reaching them.

In April 2017, when a technical failure left the Forest Department temporarily unable to disburse funds, Tiger Watch paid the families itself — ₹10,000 each to Premraj Yogi and Rajesh Kumar for cattle taken by a tiger, and ₹2,000 to Pradeep Kumar for a goat taken by a leopard. It was a stopgap, but it demonstrated the principle: money in hand, quickly, at the moment the anger is hottest.

In August 2024, that principle became a programme. The Cattle Compensation Fund was formally launched in the Dholpur–Karauli Tiger Reserve with the support of Süd-Chemie India Pvt. Ltd., and in March 2025 it expanded into the Kailadevi Wildlife Sanctuary with the support of Abercrombie & Kent India. This is the fund's first full reporting year across both landscapes.

HOW IT WORKS

A loss is reported to the Village Wildlife Volunteer covering that beat, who reaches the household, establishes which predator was responsible and confirms the claim with the local sarpanch. Once the case is verified, compensation is paid within twenty-four hours.



A Cattle Compensation claim being settled in a village

That single fact is the whole design. A government claim in this landscape can remain pending for a year or more; ours is settled the day after a volunteer confirms it. Relief arrives while the loss is still raw, which is precisely when it changes what a family decides to do next.

Rates are fixed at approximately half the government-approved rate, which is in addition to what the government owes for the loss. Ours program doesn't exist as replacement of the current mechanism, it is an add-on for quick relief, and knowing the figure beforehand removes argument from an already difficult conversation:

ANIMAL LOST	COMPENSATION
Goat or sheep	₹1,000
Calf or buffalo calf	₹2,000
Cow or bull	₹5,000
Buffalo	₹10,000

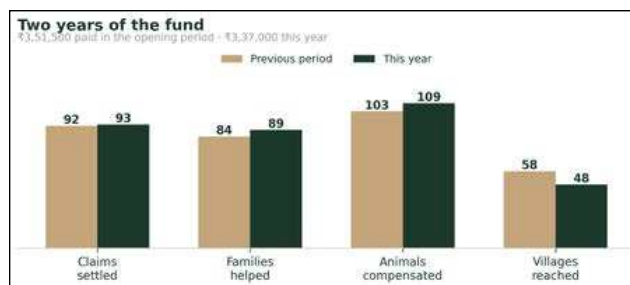
The fund does not attempt to replace what was lost. It attempts to reach the family before resentment hardens — and to make plain that the loss was seen, recorded, and answered.

THIS YEAR IN NUMBERS

The fund settled 93 claims this year across the two landscapes, compensating 89 families for the loss of 109 animals at a total of ₹3,37,000. Since the fund began in August 2024 it has settled 185 claims and paid out ₹6,88,500 to 161 families across 88 villages.

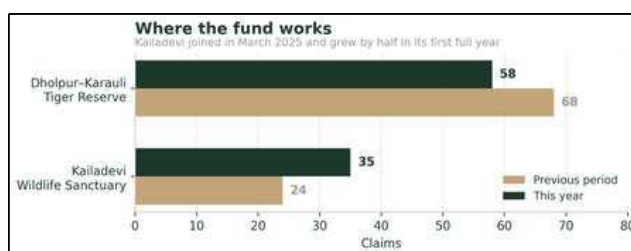
	PREVIOUS	THIS YEAR	SINCE START
Claims settled	92	93	185
Families compensated	84	89	161
Animals compensated	103	109	212
Villages reached	58	48	88
Total paid	₹3,51,500	₹3,37,000	₹6,88,500

The two years are strikingly level. Very nearly the same number of claims, the same money, the same order of families — which is what a mature scheme looks like once word of it has travelled. What has changed is where the claims come from and, in one landscape, which animal is causing them.



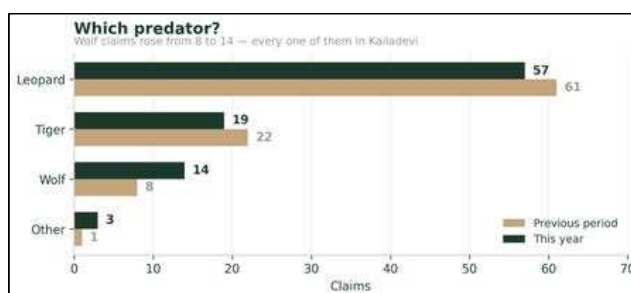
TWO LANDSCAPES

The Dholpur-Karauli Tiger Reserve remains the fund's centre of gravity, accounting for 58 of this year's 93 claims and ₹2,62,000 of the money — almost exactly what it accounted for last year. The Kailadevi Wildlife Sanctuary, which joined only in March 2025, has grown by nearly half in its first full year, from 24 claims to 35. Word of a working fund travels along the same paths that grievance does.



WHICH PREDATOR

The leopard is the animal our neighbours actually live with. It accounted for 57 of this year's claims — more than the tiger and the wolf combined — and for 118 of the 185 claims the fund has ever settled. Tigers accounted for 19 claims but a far larger share of the money, because a tiger takes cattle and buffalo where a leopard takes goats. Three claims name the individual tiger responsible: T-80, T-116, and T-2503 on two separate occasions.



The year's clearest shift is the wolf. Wolf claims rose from 8 to 14, and every one of the 22 wolf claims the fund has ever paid came from Kailadevi — not one from Dholpur. Wolves are among the most persecuted predators in Rajasthan precisely because they take small stock from poor households and rarely attract the sympathy that big cats do. A compensation fund that covers them without argument is doing quiet work that little else in the state is doing.

Beyond Tiger s and Leopards

A **cheetah** in Dholpur. Form TW-118 compensated Suwati Meena ₹2,000 for a goat taken by a cheetah — an animal that had ranged out of Kuno National Park and into the Dholpur landscape. To our knowledge this is the first livestock loss to a cheetah compensated anywhere in Rajasthan.

A **crocodile** in the Chambal. A buffalo taken by a crocodile at Jhiri, in the Sarmathura range. Conflict in this landscape is not only a matter of cats, and a fund that recognises only cats would leave the families beside the river to bear their losses alone

Month by month

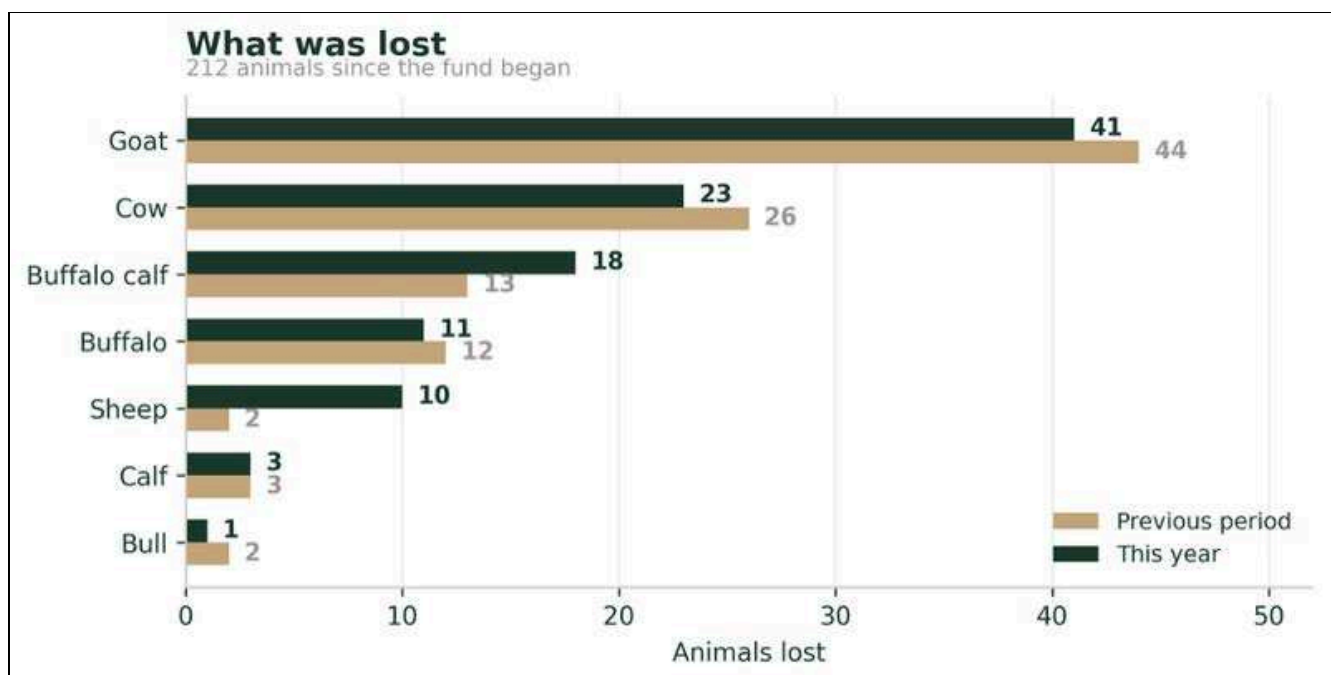
Claims peak in the post-monsoon months, when livestock range furthest and cover is thickest, and fall

away in the dry heat of February. The pattern is consistent across both years and useful for planning where volunteers should be concentrated.

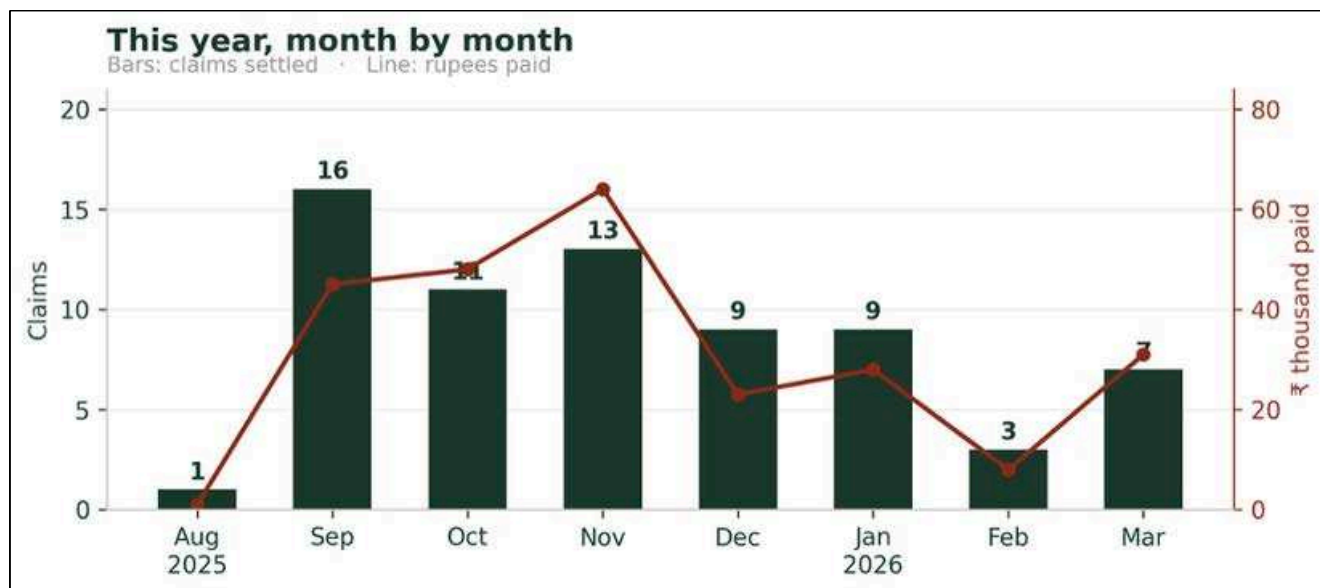
WHY IT MATTERS

- It prevents retaliatory killing of big cats and wolves at the moment of greatest risk.
- It builds trust by responding fast, in person, through a neighbour rather than an office.
- It covers the whole predator guild — wolf, crocodile, cheetah — not only the charismatic few.
- It relieves pressure on understaffed government teams rather than competing with them.
- It gives the Forest Department a community that reports kills instead of concealing them.

We are grateful to Süd-Chemie India Pvt. Ltd., which has supported the fund in Dholpur–Karauli since its launch, and to Abercrombie & Kent India, whose support brought the fund into the Kailadevi Wildlife Sanctuary.



“Every buffalo compensated, every tiger tracked, and every rescue done safely is a step towards coexistence.”



Images (By Tiger Watch Team): Field verification in practice — Tiger Watch volunteers document each carcass with location, date, and photographic evidence before a claim is approved.

Sheep herding: Pastoralist households move their flocks between village and forest — the livelihood at the heart of the conflict this program seeks to ease. (Image by Tiger Watch)



Sheep flock grazing: Sheep forage along scrubland at the forest edge, where ambush cover favours leopards and wolves. (Image by Tiger Watch)



Gallery: Camera traps placed near fresh kills confirm predator identity, a key step in Tiger Watch's verification process. The image at the bottom shows a single night's loss to a leopard inside a goat pen, a scenario that historically triggers retaliation.





Chapter 14

Clean Ranthambhore Initiative

KEEPING PLASTIC OUT OF THE FOREST



CLEAN
RANTHAMBHORE
INITIATIVE



BY
TIGER WATCH



FOR WILDLIFE • FOR COMMUNITY • FOR FUTURE

Sponsored by: Tamil Nadu Sahitya Akademi

ENSOL

WHY THIS IS A CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

Litter on a road looks like an aesthetic problem. In Ranthambhore it is not.

Our own reports have twice recorded the mechanism: roadside and household garbage sustains feral dog populations, and feral dogs kill wildlife. The Village Wildlife Volunteers log those kills every year — bluebull, chital, sambar, hare, peafowl — taken by dog packs on the periphery of the reserve. Waste at the roadside feeds the animals that kill the animals the reserve exists to protect.

The pressure on this particular road is considerable. Our 2018 survey of religious sites inside the Ranthambhore division found that 21,31,560 pilgrims and 1,83,598 vehicles enter the forest area every year, and recorded non-biodegradable waste at 108 of the 427 sites we surveyed. A great deal of that traffic travels Ranthambhore Road before it reaches the gate.

WHAT WE DID

On 5 December we engaged twenty local women to clean, by hand, the five-kilometre stretch of Ranthambhore Road running from the National Park entry gate to Saras Dairy.

In twenty days they collected 4,750 kilograms of waste along the road that thousands of visitors travel each year believing it to be the approach to a national park.

The waste was segregated with the support of the Rajasthan Forest Department, so that what came off the road was disposed of responsibly rather than moved somewhere less visible.

4,750

KG OF WASTE
COLLECTED

5

KM OF ROAD

3

PERMANENT JOBS
CREATED

THE VEHICLE, AND WHAT IT CHANGES

On 30 December the initiative was formally launched with a dedicated garbage collection vehicle, flagged off from the Collectorate in Sawai Madhopur by Sh. Gaurav Budania, Chief Executive Officer of the District Development Council.

The vehicle is the difference between a clean-up and a service. Collection now runs regularly along both sides of the same five-kilometre stretch. The road stays clean rather than being cleaned.

Three permanent jobs came with it — two women on the collection team and a driver — so the work that keeps this stretch clear is now somebody's employment rather than everybody's goodwill.

TWELVE YEARS OF DOING THIS THE HARD WAY

This is not a new concern, only a newly resourced one.

In 2014 we funded the rebuilding of drains, street lights and a cleaning drive at Madhosinghpura. We distributed 3,210 cloth bags at the Ganesh Mela in 2016, and 5,000 the following year under a “Clean Ganesha, Green Ganesha” campaign. Thirty Village Wildlife Volunteers worked the three-day Ganesh Chaturthi festival in September 2018, discouraging littering, keeping pilgrims clear of water sources, and clearing the forest route afterwards. In 2019 we backed Mission Beat Plastic. We have twice honoured people for this work at the Memorial Lecture — Roop Singh Meena for his sanitation drives across the district, and Nathu, a sanitation worker in Ranthambhore.

A drive ends when the volunteers go home. A route does not.

What changed this year is not the intention. It is that the work now has a vehicle, a route and a payroll.

Supported by Süd-Chemie India Pvt. Ltd.

Pictures from the launch event to initial intensive cleaning and daily clean-ups



Launch of the vehicle at Zila Parishad office



The Vehicle



The initial 20-days intensive cleanup drive along the Ranthambhore Road



The Daily Collection and transportation



Disposal at the dumping ground



Other Highlights

RECOGNITION, PARTNERSHIP AND PUBLIC
ENGAGEMENT



263 YEARS OF SAWAI MADHOPUR

31 January · Dussehra Ground, Sawai Madhopur

Tiger Watch took part in the Sawai Madhopur Utsav, marking 263 years of the town, with a showcase built around the bond between people, forests and wildlife. “Re-Discovering Ranthambhore”, a photo exhibition of the forest's less familiar face, ran alongside a live Mandana art demonstration and the results of a photography competition carrying cash prizes worth ₹36,000. Selected entries from the Mandana Art Competition were displayed here for the public. Over its two days the exhibition was seen by more than 15,000 visitors.



Innaugration of the event by District Collector Sh Kana Ram

The image that stayed with us was not one of ours. Students of Gurukul School, Bahrawanda Khurd came dressed as Forest Guards and Village Wildlife Volunteers, and made the argument more plainly than any exhibition panel could: *Jangal Surakshit, Toh Hum Surakshit* — if the forest is safe, so are we.

The exhibition was mounted in collaboration with Dhonk Craft and supported by Süd-Chemie India Pvt. Ltd. and the Dieter & Liz Gutmann Tiger Conservation Awareness Program.



Sh. Kana Ram visits the “Re-Discovering Ranthambhore” exhibition at the event



Live Mandana Drawing Organised by Tiger Watch in collaboration with Dhonk Crafts



Ms Divya Khandal visits the live Mandana Drawing at the Foundation Day Event



District Collector Sh Kana Ram, & Tourism Director Sh Madhusudan Singh at the Mandana Drawing

A large group of people, including children in animal costumes, are gathered in a town square. They are holding protest signs. Some of the visible text on the signs includes: "मिलकर संभालें खन, सुरक्षित रहे भी", "ऊज्जला से रसाईं बदलें, जंगल सुरक्षित रहा", "गाँव की भागीदारी, EDC", "नेचर गाइड-प्रकृति का सही परिचर", "जल से विकास", "संरक्षण से भविष्य- EDC", "संरक्षण ही मनुष्य विकास का रास्ता है", "गाँव जुड़ना, जंगल बचाना", "संरक्षण ही मनुष्य विकास का रास्ता है", "गाँव जुड़ना, जंगल बचाना", "हम कौन, महिला, गाँव और", "वाइल्डलाइफ वॉच", "जंगल-साथ ऊज्जला", "मार की पहचान", "शला योजना", "सतकः, सुरक्षित जंगल", "संरक्षण भी, समाधान भी- EDC", "सुदूर गाँव, भूत जंगल". The background shows a town with buildings and a hill in the distance.



SEVENTY FRONTLINE STAFF TRAINED AT DHOLPUR-KARAULI

24–25 January · DKTR Headquarters

Tiger Watch and the Dholpur–Karauli Tiger Reserve administration jointly ran a two-day capacity-building workshop for around seventy frontline personnel, conducted under the guidance of Shri P. Kathirvel, Chief Conservator of Forests, and Dr Ashish Vyas, Deputy Conservator of Forests.

Sessions covered tiger ecology and behaviour; why tigers and the ecosystems around them matter; wildlife crime prevention, the legal framework and correct procedure; and human–wildlife conflict management and mitigation. The teaching was led by Dr Dharmendra Khandal and Shri Raju Singh Rajput of the Special Tiger Strike Force, Madhya Pradesh, who brought practical insight from extensive field experience.

Training alone does not change what happens at three in the morning when a call comes in, so the workshop also equipped the staff who take those calls. Tiger Watch distributed Y-sticks and snake tongs for safe rescue, copies of the Wildlife (Protection) Act booklet, and the book *Rajasthan Ke Baghon Ka Sansar*. The workshop was also attended by DCF Sh. Chethan and ACF Sh. Chetram Meena of the Dholpur (Territorial) Division.

We record with thanks the work of our own team in running it — Harimohan Gurjar, Dharm Singh Gurjar Maharro, Lakhan, Bihari Singh Rajput and Nirmal — whose planning and handling made two days with seventy participants pass without a hitch.

The training was supported by the Dieter & Liz Gutmann Tiger Conservation Awareness Program.



The two-day workshop in session at DKTR headquarters



Y-sticks and snake tongs handed to the frontline staff

TRAINING THE NEWLY RECRUITED NATURE GUIDES OF RANTHAMBHORE

Dr Dharmendra Khandal conducted six training sessions for over a hundred newly inducted nature guides for Ranthambhore, covering the flora and fauna of the reserve, its wider biodiversity, conduct in the field and with visitors, and what it takes to develop as a guide over a working life.

All of them belong to local communities — the very people who have made immense sacrifices for the development of the park. Among them are family members of tiger fatality victims, relocated families, and residents of Eco-Development Committee (EDC) villages.

They are smart, eager to learn, and deeply rooted in the landscape they will help protect.

Our sincere thanks to the local forest department and the Field Director for making this initiative possible. The guides are expected to join Ranthambhore officially in October, where they will serve not only as wildlife guides but as ambassadors of conservation.

This new force carries the mission of saving the tiger forward, with renewed strength and local pride.



FOUR OF THE FIELD TEAM HONOURED

26 March · Ranthambhore

News18 Rajasthan convened a live panel discussion on “Save Tiger and Livelihood” at Ranthambhore. On that occasion four members of our field team were honoured by Sh. Manas Singh, Deputy Field Director, Ranthambhore, Sh. Sanjeev Sharma, Tourism DFO, and Sh. Amit Bhatt, Editor of News18 Rajasthan.

Vakil Mohammed — for his relentless work in anti-poaching operations.

Harimohan Gurjar — for his commitment to tiger monitoring and tracking.

Dharm Singh Gurjar Maharro — for spreading conservation awareness among school children.

Meetha Lal Gurjar — for educating Mogya children and supporting livelihood and skill development for relocated families.

These are the four names that appear throughout this report, on almost every page that describes something actually happening on the ground. It matters that they were recognised in public, by the officers they work alongside, and on a platform their families could watch.



Vakil Mohammed — for his relentless work in anti-poaching operations.



Harimohan Gurjar — for his commitment to tiger monitoring and tracking.



Dharm Singh Gurjar Maharro — for spreading conservation awareness among school children.



Meetha Lal Gurjar — for educating Mogya children and supporting livelihood and skill development for relocated families.

TWO MOTORCYCLES FOR THE FIELD

16 November

Two motorcycles were purchased for the field teams and handed to the two people who most needed them: the tracker leading tiger monitoring in the newly notified Dholpur–Karauli Tiger Reserve, and the coordinator running the Cattle Compensation Programme across the Kailadevi landscape.

Kailadevi is a critical buffer that carries the spillover from Ranthambhore's tiger population, and both roles depend on reaching a place quickly — a kill site before the evidence goes, a grieving household before the anger sets. Mobility is not a convenience in this work. It is the difference between a report filed and a report missed.

With sincere thanks to Ms Nina Rao and Lifeyoga Private Limited, whose support made these purchases possible. Tiger monitoring in Dholpur–Karauli is supported by SUJÁN Luxury; the Cattle Compensation Programme in Kailadevi by Abercrombie & Kent.



The two motorcycles handed over to the field teams

14th Fateh Singh Rathore Memorial Lecture and Awards

MEMORIAL LECTURE AND AWARDS CEREMONY,
2026



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ds



The award ceremony was initiated by Fateh Ji himself in 2006. It was his way of providing a platform to recognise the outstanding work done by people locally and in other parts of India to further the cause of wildlife conservation. After his passing in 2011, we chose to continue the award programme as part of his abiding legacy, seizing the occasion each year to honour those who protect the wildlife of this state.

Dr Dharmendra Khandal opened the proceedings of the 14th edition by introducing Tiger Watch and setting out what the Memorial Lecture and Awards exist to do: to honour individuals and teams who carry forward the legacy of ethical, field-based conservation.

Remembering two friends

The evening's most affecting passage was the homage to Valmik Thapar, and to what he and Fateh Singh Rathore built between them. Sh. Y. K. Sahu accompanied it with a presentation of old Ranthambhore photographs — the reserve as the two of them found it, and as they left it.

The Memorial Lecture

The Memorial Lecture was delivered by Sh. Harkirat Singh Sangha, the ornithologist from Jaipur, who spoke on his journey with birds and with conservation.

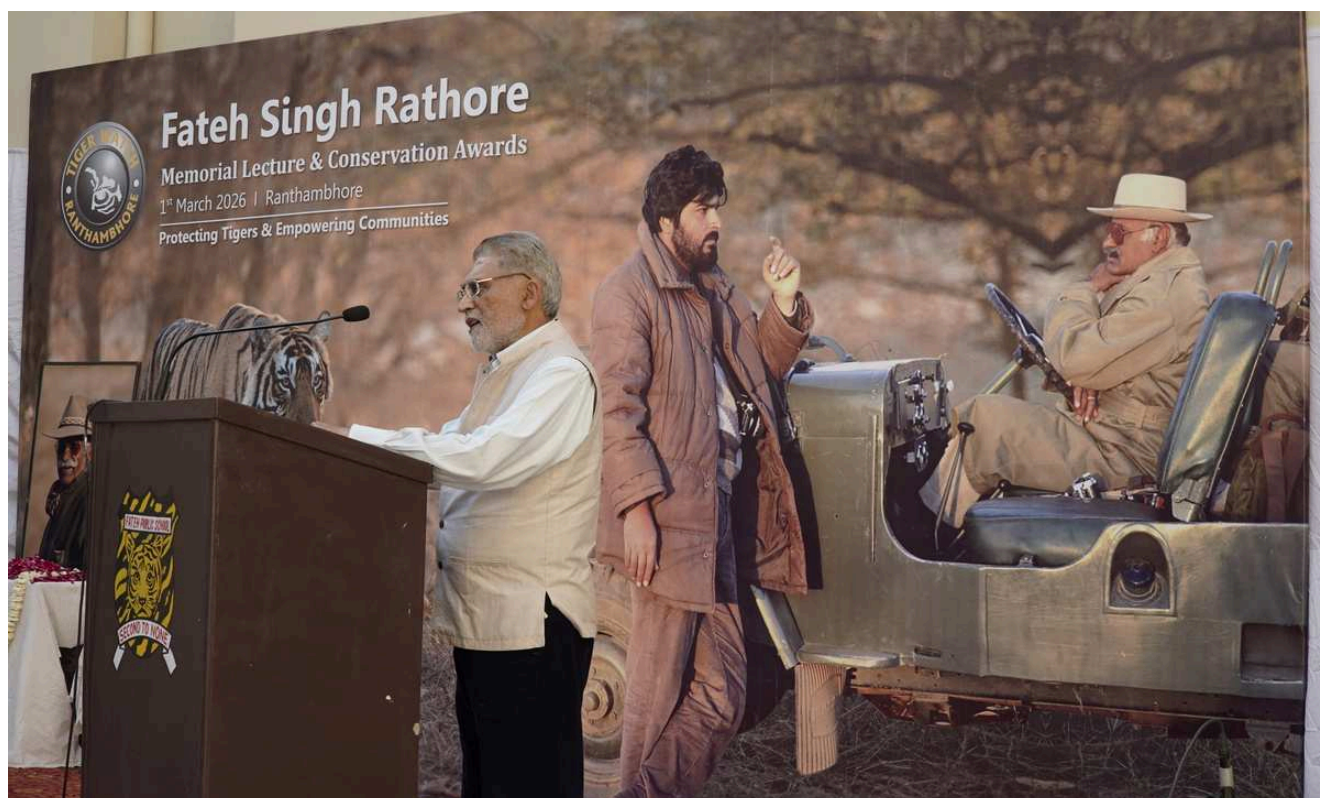
Books launched

The ceremony marked the launch of *Raptors of Rajasthan* by Nirav Bhatt, the latest title in the Rajasthan Biodiversity Series — the first comprehensive treatment of the state's birds of prey, and a continuation of the Series' purpose of putting authoritative, accessible material on Rajasthan's wildlife into the hands of students, forest staff and naturalists.

Dr Satish Sharma also presented his book on forest fire types and management to Sh. Sharda Pratap Singh, Field Director of Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve — a working text for a problem this landscape faces every summer.

THE AWARDS, 2026

Twelve awards were presented, carrying honoraria totalling ₹2,55,000. The recipients came from across Rajasthan and beyond it — a lifetime ornithologist from Jaipur, environmental activists from Churu and Kota, a serving forest officer from Karauli, five members of Madhya Pradesh's Special Tiger Strike Force, two veteran forest staff of Sawai Madhopur, and a young wildlife enthusiast from Pratapgarh. Each received a memento alongside the honorarium.



The Memorial Lecture — Sh. Harkirat Sangha sharing his lifetime of work in Avian Diversity and conservation.

Services to Wildlife — Lifetime Achievement Award

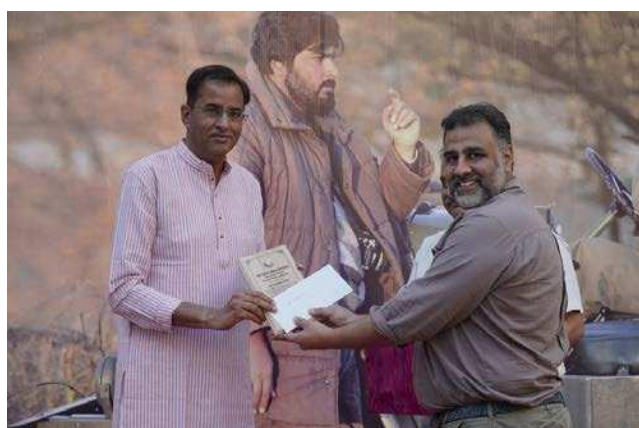


Sh. Harkirat Singh Sangha · Ornithologist, Jaipur · ₹1,00,000

Presented by Sh Sharda Pratap Singh, Field Director, Ranthambhore, Sh. Iskander Lalljee, Chairman, Tiger Watch, and Dr Goverdhan Singh Rathore, Vice-Chairman, Tiger Watch

Harkirat Singh Sangha has spent a lifetime documenting the birds of Rajasthan and of India, publishing extensively in the *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* and in *Indian Birds*, and self-publishing *Waders of the Indian Subcontinent*. He has added two species to the Indian list, and was among those who recorded the Puff-throated Babbler in the Phulwari Ki Nal Wildlife Sanctuary — the first appearance of that species in Rajasthan. His work has been done quietly and over decades, alongside a career, which is precisely the kind of persistence this award exists to recognise.

Services to Wildlife — People & Nature Awards



Sh. Arvind Chotia · Environmental Activist, Churu · ₹25,000

Presented by Sh. Punit Lalbhai, Executive Director, Arvind Ltd. & Member, Tiger Watch

Arvind Chotia has been an instrumental force in the fight for the Shahabad forest.

Wildlife Conservation Awards



Sh. Chetram Meena · Assistant Conservator of Forests, Karauli · ₹25,000

Presented by Dr Ashish Vyas, Deputy Conservator of Forests & Sh Bhuvnesh Suthar

Illegal mining in Dholpur's ravine forests has long defeated conventional patrolling. Sh. Chetram Meena changed that by deploying drones to detect active mining and acting on the footage — detection first, then seizure. The forests he has protected adjoin the Dholpur–Karauli Tiger Reserve, and ground lost to a quarry does not come back.

Services to Wildlife — People & Nature Awards



Sh. Mahavir Prasad Jain & Sh. Narayan Lal Kumawat · Veteran Forest Staff, Sawai Madhopur · ₹10,000 each

Honouring the veterans of the Ranthambhore forest establishment is a thread that runs through this ceremony's history. In 2018 we honoured Fateh Ji's driver Sh. Saeed Mirza and Forest Guard Sh. Ramesh Sharma; in 2023 his old group of guards and drivers. These are the people who did the work when there was no recognition in it, and no certainty that any of it would succeed.

Arvind Chotia has been an instrumental force in the fight for the Shahabad forest.

Wildlife Conservation Awards

The Special Tiger Strike Force, Madhya Pradesh Forest Department

Five members of Madhya Pradesh's Special Tiger Strike Force were recognised for courage and frontline protection. The award reflects a working partnership rather than a courtesy: the STSF has been our counterpart in cross-border anti-poaching operations, including the seizure of leopard body parts and the arrest of poachers carrying sambar antlers. Ranger Raju Singh Rajput also travelled to Dholpur–Karauli in January to co-deliver the frontline capacity building workshop for some seventy of the reserve's staff, sharing practical insight drawn from extensive field experience.

Recipients (Pictures in sequences in middle row)

- Sh. Raju Singh Rajput (Ranger),
- Sh. Rajkumar Sharma,
- Sh. Brijesh Singh Rajput,
- Sh. Vikas Khatri and
- Sh. Kamal Singh Senvar.

A tiger crossing the Chambal does not change jurisdiction in its own mind. Protection on this frontier only works if it is shared, and this award says so.



FATEH SINGH RATHORE WILDLIFE CONSERVATION AWARDS 2026

#	RECIPIENT	POSITION / CONTRIBUTION	AWARD	₹
1	Sh. Harkirat Singh Sangha	Ornithologist, Jaipur	Services to Wildlife, Lifetime Achievement	1,00,000
2	Sh. Arvind Chotia	Environmental Activist, Churu	Services to Wildlife, People & Nature	25,000
3	Sh. Chetram Meena	Assistant Conservator of Forests, Karauli	Wildlife Conservation Award	25,000
4	Sh. Chetan Dwivedi	Environmental Activist, Kota	Services to Wildlife, People & Nature	25,000
5	Sh. Raju Singh Rajput	Ranger, STSF, Madhya Pradesh Forest	Wildlife Conservation Award	10,000
6	Sh. Rajkumar Sharma	Member, STSF, Madhya Pradesh Forest	Wildlife Conservation Award	10,000
7	Sh. Brijesh Singh Rajput	Member, STSF, Madhya Pradesh Forest	Wildlife Conservation Award	10,000
8	Sh. Vikas Khatri	Member, STSF, Madhya Pradesh Forest	Wildlife Conservation Award	10,000
9	Sh. Kamal Singh Sengar	Member, STSF, Madhya Pradesh Forest	Wildlife Conservation Award	10,000
10	Sh. Love Kumar Jain	Wildlife Enthusiast, Pratapgarh	Young Wildlife Conservationist	10,000
11	Sh. Mahavir Prasad Jain	Veteran Forest Staff, Sawai Madhopur	Services to Wildlife, People & Nature	10,000
12	Sh. Narayan Lal Kumawat	Veteran Forest Staff, Sawai Madhopur	Services to Wildlife, People & Nature	10,000
Total				2,55,000

Distinguished guests

Tiger Watch's board was present in strength, with Sh. Iskander Lalljee, Chairman; Dr Goverdhan Singh Rathore, Vice-Chairman, accompanied by Smt. Padmini Rathore and family; Sh. Ashutosh Mahadevia, Secretary; Smt. Soonoo B. Taraporewala, Treasurer; and Sh. Punit Lalbhai. They were joined by Sh. Sharda Pratap Singh, Field Director, Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve, who received Dr Satish Sharma's book, and Sh. Y. K. Sahu, IFS (Retd.), who presented the archival photographs, together with Sh. Manas Singh, Deputy Field Director, Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve; Sh. Chethan, Deputy Conservator of Forests, Dholpur; and Sh. Ashish Vyas, Deputy Conservator of Forests, National Chambal Sanctuary. We were also glad to welcome Dr Shomita Mukherjee, Principal Scientist at the Sálim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, whose work on small cats has direct bearing on our own.

The programme

A special student performance featured in the evening's programme by the Fateh Public School band — ten students led by their teacher.

MORE THAN A CEREMONY

The Fateh Singh Rathore Memorial Lecture and Awards are not simply an annual event. They are a living reminder of Fateh Ji's legacy, and a platform where unsung conservation heroes are celebrated. When we honour those who protect the wild, we honour the wild itself.

Our thanks to the Tiger Watch team for organising the event, to Fateh Public School for graciously hosting the venue, and to all our supporters and board members for their continued encouragement and commitment to conservation.

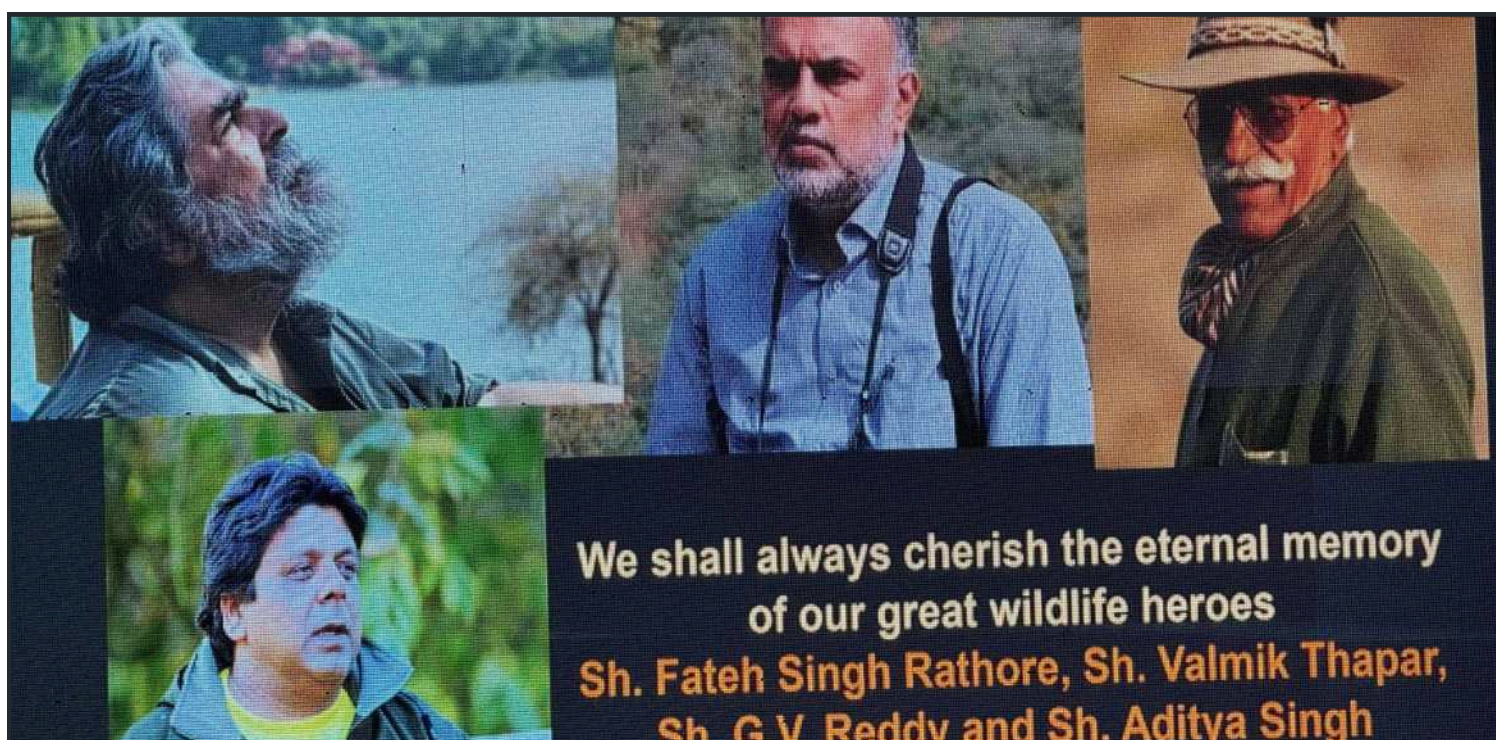
Remembering

FATEH SINGH RATHORE



HOMAGE TO VALMIK THAPAR





Beyond the memorial lecture, the day opened out into shorter talks and shared experience. Sh. Sharda Pratap Singh, Field Director, RTR, and Sh. Manas, Deputy Field Director, RTR, spoke from the reserve Fateh Singh Rathore gave his life's work to; Dr. Ashish Vyas, DFO, Dholpur Wildlife & NCS, and Sh. Chetram Meena, ACF, Dholpur Territorial, carried it into the Dholpur–Karauli landscape, where tigers are returning to ravine country. Sh. Tapeswar Singh Bhati spoke for the citizen's side of conservation, and Sh. Raju Singh Rajput, Ranger, STSF, Madhya Pradesh, on protection across the state border. Together they made one point in several voices — a tiger's future here is decided less in the forest than at its edge.



Sh. Sharda Pratap Singh, Field Director, RTR



Sh. Manas, Deputy Field Director, RTR



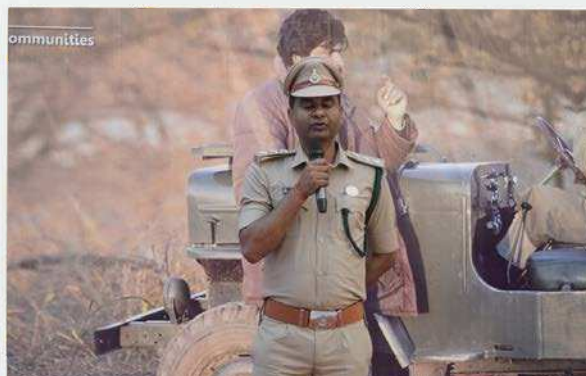
Dr. Ashish Vyas, DFO, Dholpur Wildlife & NCS



Sh. Chetram Meena, ACF Dholpur Territorial



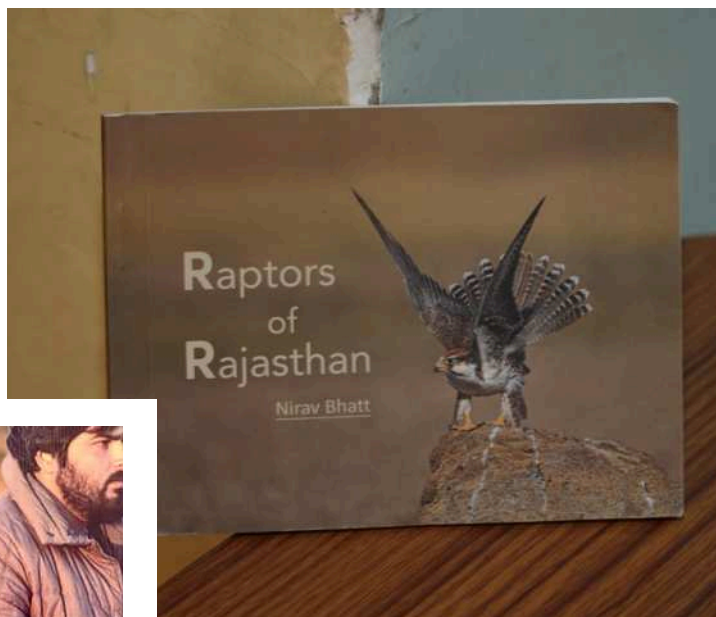
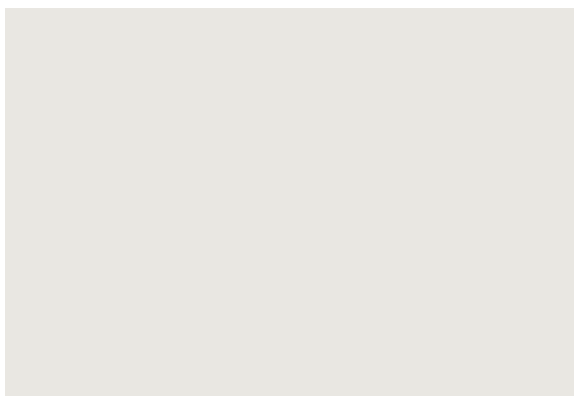
Sh. Tapeswar Singh Bhati, Environmental Activist



Sh. Raju Singh Rajput, Ranger, STSF, MP

RAPTORS OF RAJASTHAN

BOOK LAUNCH



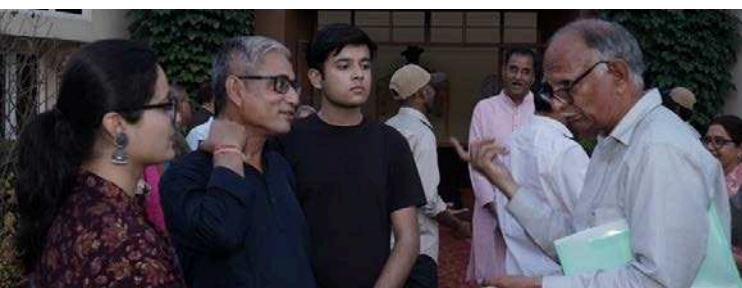
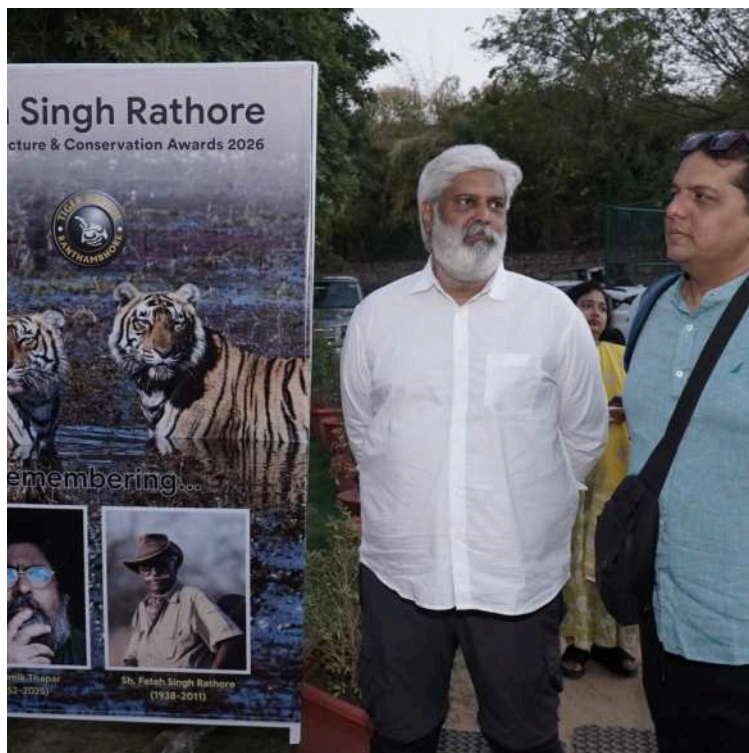
MUSICAL PERFORMANCE

BY FATEH PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS



MEMBERS AT THE EVENT



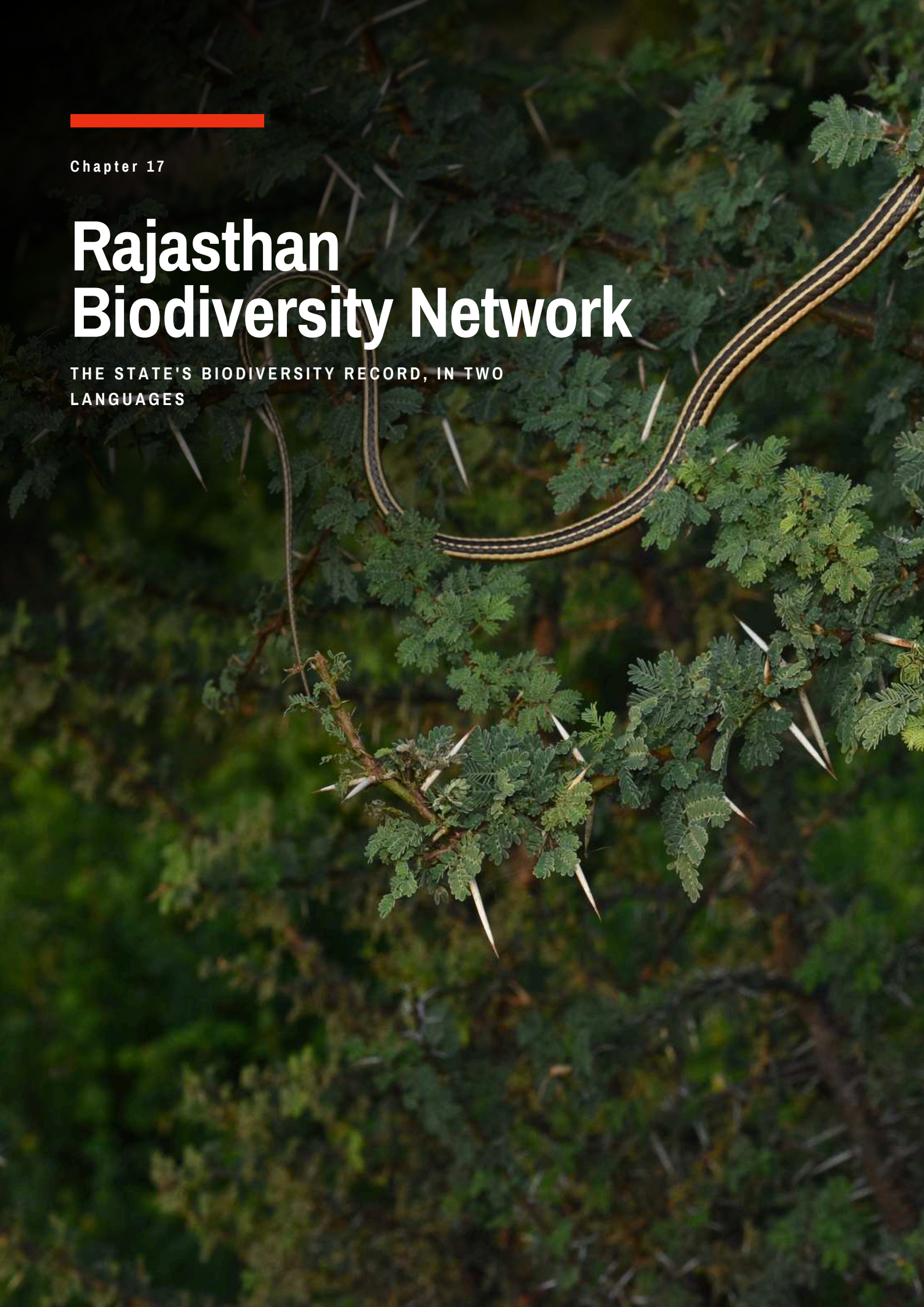




Chapter 17

Rajasthan Biodiversity Network

THE STATE'S BIODIVERSITY RECORD, IN TWO
LANGUAGES





WHAT IT IS

The Rajasthan Biodiversity Network is a pan-Rajasthan platform implemented by Tiger Watch and supported since its founding by Sh. Abhimanyu Golcha and the Golcha Foundation. It was built on the premise that Rajasthan's biodiversity was well studied in places and almost undocumented in others, and that no single accessible record of it existed. Its three pillars remain conservation, exploration and awareness.

A REFERENCE LIBRARY FOR THE STATE

Six species checklists are now published and freely available: the bats of Rajasthan, the amphibians of Rajasthan, the lizards of Rajasthan, the turtles of Rajasthan, a birds checklist, and the common grasses of Hadoti.

Individually these are modest documents. Together they are something Rajasthan has not previously had — a single place where a forest officer, a student or a visiting researcher can establish what is known to occur in the state, without institutional access or a library card.

WHERE NEW SPECIES ARE EXPLAINED

In July the Network published an account of *Langelurillus udaipurensis*, a jumping spider new to science, described this year from Sajjangerh Wildlife Sanctuary in Udaipur. It is the first record of the genus *Langelurillus* from Rajasthan; the species is four to five millimetres long, dark-bodied under fine white and pale-yellow hairs, active by day among rocks and leaf litter. Only the male has been found. The female remains unknown.

The species was described by a team of arachnologists in *Zootaxa*, not by us. What matters here is who wrote the article: Hemlata Koli, one of the describing authors, explaining her own discovery to a general readership, in both Hindi and English, within weeks of formal publication.

That is the Network working exactly as intended. Scientific description is slow, expensive and largely invisible to the public that funds it. A platform that lets the describing author explain the animal in the language of the place it was found closes a gap that journals cannot.

Our own findings this year, the lizard *Mesalina bishnoi* and the first Indian record of the Sistan Sand Boa, are described in the Scientific Research section, and reach the public through the same route.

SUBJECTS THAT ARE NOT COMFORTABLE

The Network has increasingly taken on questions the sector prefers to leave alone.

This year it published a factual account of village displacement from Rajasthan's tiger reserves — a subject on which Tiger Watch is an interested party, not a neutral observer, since we work with families who have made that move. It published a piece offering a different reading of the rising leopard–human conflict in Jaipur. It published on vulture safe zones, and on a death from snakebite caused by superstition rather than venom.

None of these make anyone look good, including us. They are on the platform because a biodiversity record that only carries good news is a brochure.



A species of blind snake, undescribed, possibly new to science.

ANNALS OF HISTORY

The Network's history section has become a genuine speciality, and there is nothing comparable for the state. Additions range across dinosaur discoveries in Rajasthan, the last cheetah of Rajasthan, the Mewar Bhil Corps, and a falconry anecdote involving a police chief's francolin.

Ecological history is not a diversion from conservation. Knowing what a landscape held two centuries ago is how you judge what it has lost.

PHOTO STORIES, LANDSCAPES AND THE GALLERY

Alongside the written work, the Network carries photo essays — egrets roosting in a mango tree in spring, the pollination of an *Epipactis* orchid, an otter's dealings with a crocodile, a mongoose relieving a cobra of its meal, the remarkable *Portia* jumping spiders — and profiles of landscapes including the Ramgarh crater, Kadam Talab and the butterfly park at Amberi. The weekly photograph, contributed by readers, continues.

280

ARTICLES PUBLISHED

48

AUTHORS

280

ARTICLES PUBLISHED

REACH

To date the Network has published 280 articles by 48 authors, drawn from forest officers, academics, independent researchers, photographers and — increasingly — students writing for publication for the first time.

The Rajasthan Biodiversity Network is implemented by Tiger Watch and supported by Sh. Abhimanyu Golcha and the Golcha Foundation.



Golcha Group



the Indian Smooth Snake *Wallophis brachyura*, Pratapgarh



Chapter 18

Scientific Research and Studies

THE YEAR WE NAMED A SPECIES



Mesalina bishnoi in the Thar



Supported By



SÜD-CHEMIE
CREATING PERFORMANCE TECHNOLOGY



WHY WE DO THIS

Tiger Watch has published more than sixty studies over the years, and the reason is not academic. Research is how a conservation argument stops being an opinion. Our caracal distribution paper changed a species' legal status in India. Our religious sites survey gave the Forest Department numbers where it had only impressions. Fieldwork that never becomes evidence protects nothing.

This year that principle produced more than it has in any previous year: a species new to science, a snake new to India, two snakes new to Rajasthan, and a national conservation programme built on a paper we published six years ago.

PROJECT CARACAL

On 15 April, Project Caracal was formally launched in the Greater Ranthambhore landscape by the Wildlife Institute of India–SACON, in collaboration with the Rajasthan Forest Department and Tiger Watch.

The line to this point runs through our own back catalogue. In December 2020, Dr Dharmendra Khandal, Ishan Dhar and the late Dr G. V. Reddy published the first quantification of the caracal's range loss in India. Within a month the National Board for Wildlife added the species to India's critically endangered list. A book followed in 2024. The caracal entered the Government of India's Species Recovery Programme. And now there is a funded, structured, eighteen-month project to do something about it.

Dr Shomita Mukherjee, Principal Scientist at WII-SACON, leads the project as Principal Investigator. Dr Dharmendra Khandal, our Executive Director, and Dr Ayan Sadhu of NTCA-WII are Co-Investigators. The vision for the project was driven by Sh. Arijit Banerjee, and shaped into a programme by Dr Mukherjee, Dr Sadhu and Dr Khandal.

Over eighteen months the project will establish the caracal's current status, study its ecology and habitat use, examine local perceptions of the animal, and build community engagement — working towards a comprehensive conservation action plan for one of India's least understood wild cats.

The launch workshop was chaired by Dr G. S. Bhardwaj, Director of the Wildlife Institute of India, with Mr K. C. A. Arun Prasad, Chief Wildlife Warden of Rajasthan, as guest of honour. The Field Directors of Ranthambhore, Ramgarh Vishdhari, Mukundara and Sariska attended, with Deputy Directors from every tiger reserve in the state and members of the State Wildlife Board.

That room is worth noting. A species that almost nobody was looking for in 2020 now has the attention of every tiger reserve in Rajasthan.

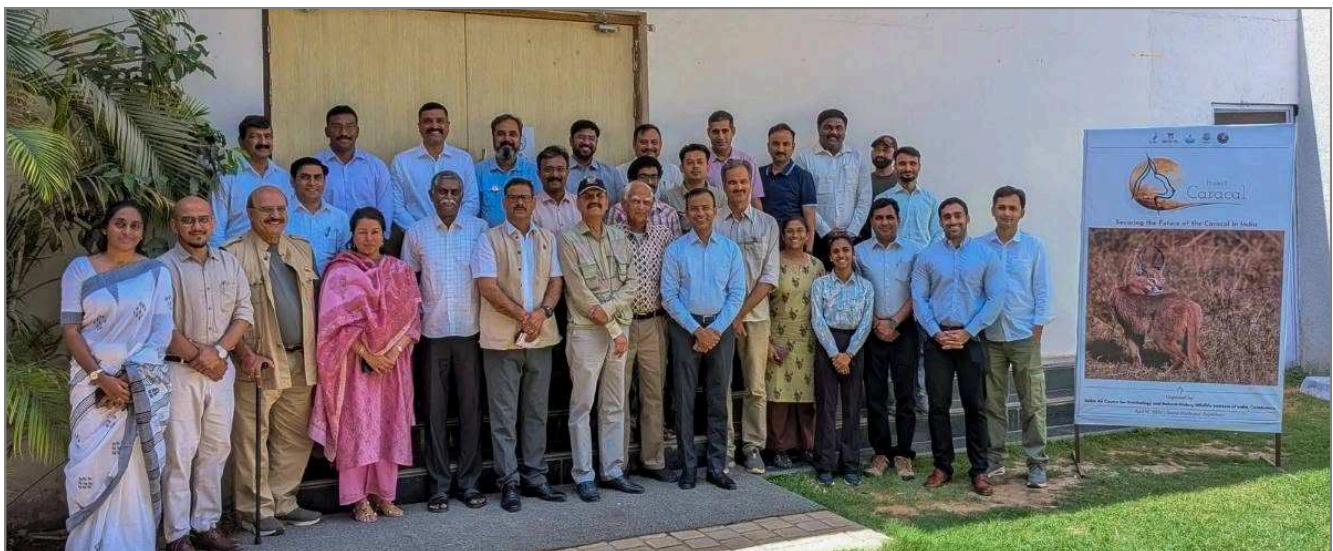
A SPECIES NEW TO SCIENCE: *MESALINA BISHNOI*

In August 2025 we planned a survey of the Gajner forest area in Bikaner. The DCF, Shri Sandeep Chhalani, kindly arranged for a forest guard to accompany us. We stopped for tea on the way.

The lizard was at the roadside shop, before we had reached the forest at all.

We were sceptical of it ourselves. It took detailed morphological examination and genetic work, carried out with the Zoological Survey of India team, to establish what we had. On 1 June 2026 it was formally described as a species new to science: *Mesalina bishnoi*, from within the *Mesalina watsonana* complex — a small lizard, some 39 mm from snout to vent, greyish to olive-brown, from the open semi-desert of the Thar.

It is a double first. Not only a species previously unknown, but the first confirmed record of the genus *Mesalina* anywhere in India.



Project Caracal launch event

Vivek Sharma contributed at every stage and carried the identification through to publication. We are grateful to him, and to Shri Sandeep Chhalani for the arrangements that took us to Bikaner in the first place.

ON THE NAME

We named the species for the Bishnoi community of north-western India.

The Bishnoi have practised environmental protection as religious obligation for five centuries, at a cost few conservation organisations have ever been asked to pay — a history our own Hindi volume, *Rajasthan ke Baghon ka Sansar*, tells through the sacrifice of Amrita Devi at Khejarli. A scientific name is permanent in a way that awards and citations are not. This one will carry their name in the taxonomic literature for as long as the species is recognised.

A SNAKE NEW TO INDIA: THE SISTAN SAND BOA

For nearly twenty years this animal was a puzzle. Dr Khandal had been photographing it since 2003, aware that it was not quite the Red Sand Boa but unable to say what it was instead — the available name, *Eryx johnii persicus*, was a taxonomically invalid arrangement. In 2020 Iranian herpetologists restudied the same population and described it as a full species, *Eryx sistanensis*, named for the Sistan region.

That gave the animal a stable identity. It did not establish that it occurred in India.

In 2025 we surveyed potential habitat across Sikar district and obtained three live individuals. Detailed morphological examination confirmed them as *Eryx sistanensis*: the first confirmed record of the species from India, published in the *Journal of Threatened Taxa* in 2026. The Indian localities lie in Churu and Sikar districts, and the paper suggests a wider presence across the low-rainfall belt of Rajasthan, Haryana and Punjab.

This is only the fourth boa species recorded from India. It closely resembles the Red Sand Boa, which is precisely why identification matters: the Red Sand Boa is among the most heavily trafficked snakes in the country, taken on the strength of myths about its value. A species that cannot be told apart from a trafficked one cannot be protected from the same trade.

Documenting it legally and without harm to the animals took repeated journeys and considerable care. Vivek Sharma established the identity, and the work is his as much as ours.



The Sistan Sand Boa - *Eryx sistanensis* - from Churu.

TWO SNAKES NEW TO RAJASTHAN

In December 2025 we published the addition of two species to the reptile fauna of the state: the Indian Smooth Snake *Wallophis brachyura* and the Slender Coral Snake *Calliophis melanurus*, both from Pratapgarh district.

The paper argues something beyond the records themselves — that Rajasthan's eastern dry deciduous landscapes have strong biogeographic links with central India, and are considerably less arid in character than the state's reputation suggests. Baseline knowledge of this kind is unglamorous and indispensable; conservation planning for a landscape begins with knowing what lives in it.

The study was supported through the Dattaram Nerurkar Student Grant.

CONTINUING WORK

Several long-running projects carried on through the year: the pan-Rajasthan survey of the endangered White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis*; continued documentation of the state's snake

diversity; Indian Wolf *Canis lupus* population monitoring across Dholpur and Karauli districts; and ongoing recording of threatened and declining flora.



the Indian Smooth Snake *Wallophis brachyura*, Pratapgarh



the Slender Coral Snake *Calliophis melanurus*, Pratapgarh

PUBLICATIONS

On 19 February the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Rajasthan, Shri Bhajan Lal Sharma, launched our volume *Rediscovering Ranthambhore* in the presence of Sawai Madhopur Collector Shri Kanaram. Government-published, it documents the region's history, monuments, wildlife and craft traditions in a single reference, and is available at the Tourism Office, Sawai Madhopur.

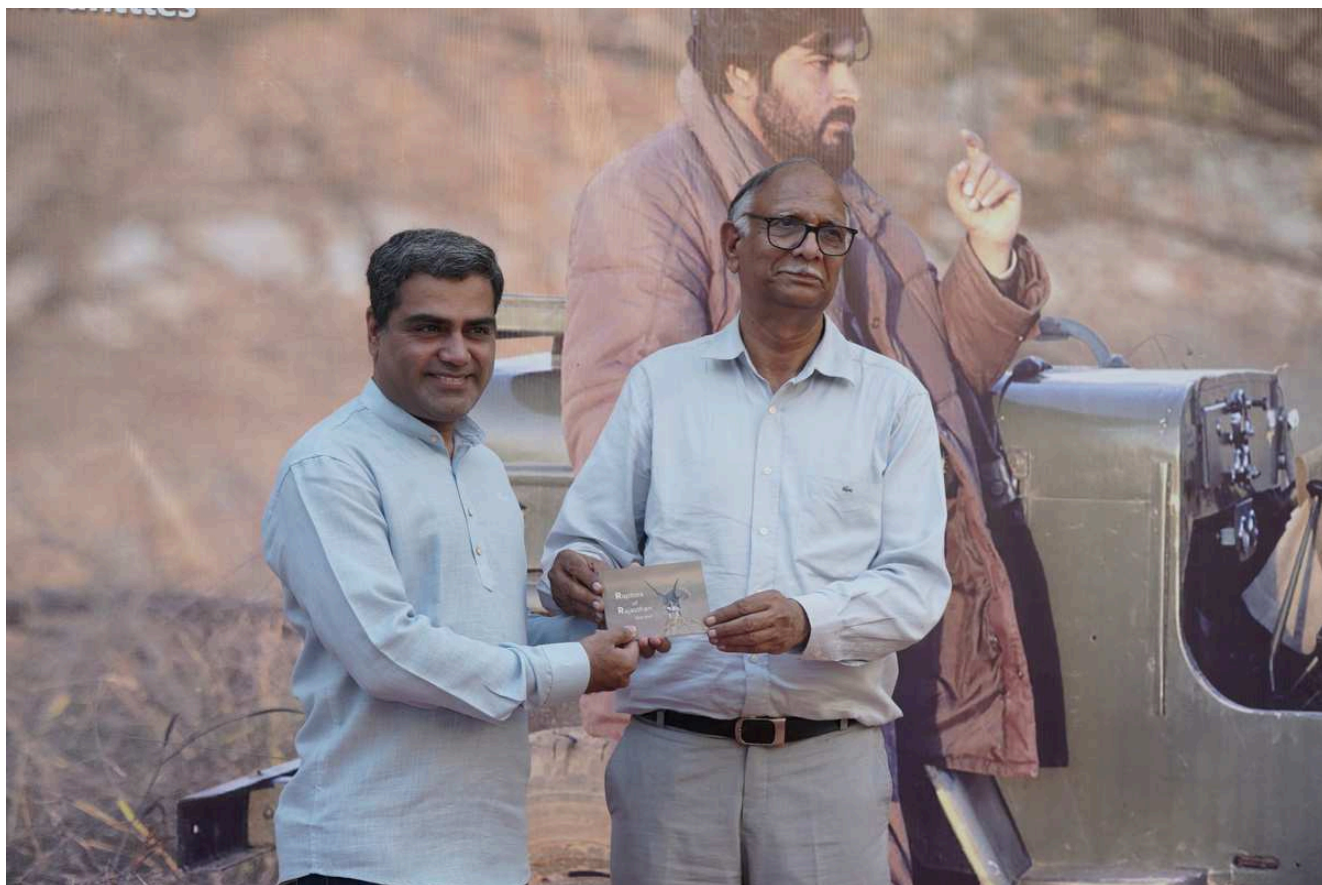


the launch of *Rediscovering Ranthambhore*, 19 February



the launch of digital copy of *Rediscovering Ranthambhore*, at collectors' office

Raptors of Rajasthan by Nirav Bhatt was launched at the Fateh Singh Rathore Memorial Lecture on 1 March, the latest title in the Rajasthan Biodiversity Series.



Raptors of Rajasthan launched at the Memorial Lecture

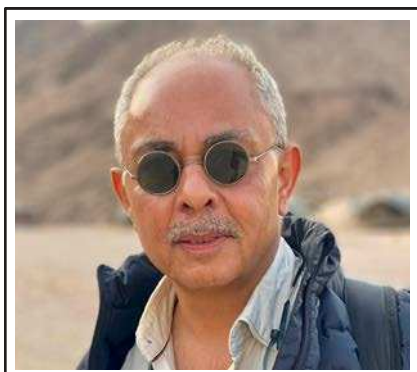
Chapter 19

Board Members

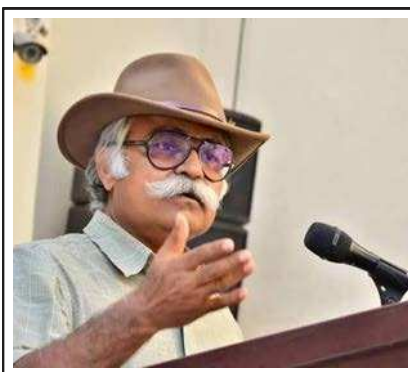
THE PEOPLE WHO HOLD THE ORGANISATION



Tiger Watch is governed by a board of twelve. Between them they have given the organisation its funding, its scientific direction, its standing with government, and — in several cases — three decades of unbroken attention to a single landscape.



ISKANDER LALLJEE



G. S. RATHORE



ASHUTOSH MAHADEVIA



SOONOO B. TARAPOREWALA



SACHIN RAI



RISHAD NAOROJI



AJAY VEER KHURANA



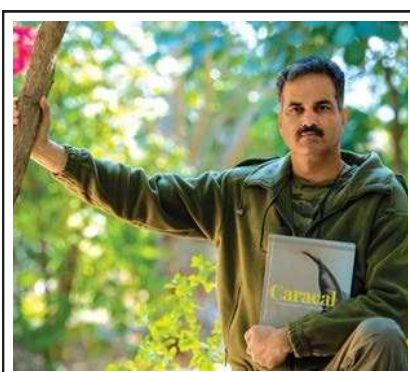
ANJALI PATEL MEHTA



PUNIT LALBHAI



ABHIMANYU GOLCHA



DHARMENDRA KHANDAL



ISHAN DHAR

ISKANDER LALLJEE · CHAIRMAN

A thorough gentleman who firmly believes in giving back to the planet and humanity. Fondly referred to as Isky Sir, he is the main financial supporter of the organisation and has played a pivotal role in shaping the Mogya Education Programme. He is based out of Gurugram but keenly monitors operations on the ground.

DR GOVERDHAN SINGH RATHORE · VICE-CHAIRMAN

An artist by heart, a medical practitioner by training and a conservationist by passion, he is the founder of the largest non-government organisation of the district, the Prakratik Society, which employs 200 people. A state-of-the-art hospital and a school are two examples of his exemplary work. He is a leading philanthropist in the area, who has received several international and national awards, and also successfully runs a boutique hotel, Khem Villas, at Ranthambhore.

ASHUTOSH MAHADEVIA · SECRETARY

He is the main founder of Tiger Watch. Fateh Ji used to say that he actually made Tiger Watch materialise and created a board for this organisation. He is a businessman based in Mumbai, but his heart is always in Ranthambhore. He single-handedly raises funds, supports and manages the administrative work for the organisation.

SOONOO B. TARAPOREWALA · TREASURER

Retired from the British Council Library, Soonoo Taraporewala has been a regular visitor to Ranthambhore for the last thirty years. She has written a biography on the life of Fateh Singh Rathore and followed his passion as a disciple of the wild. Her bond with Ranthambhore continues to blossom, and she has always stood by Tiger Watch's side, both in times of strength and in crisis.

SACHIN RAI · JOINT SECRETARY

One of the finest photographers in the country. Sachin Rai is engaged in the business of travel. Also a multimedia expert, he has turned his expertise to our work several times — in making films, building our website, and producing our documents.

RISHAD NAOROJI · MEMBER

Rishad Naoroji was not only a friend and supporter of Fateh Singh Ji, but also a guide in propagating and supporting species other than tigers, especially raptors.

DR AJAY VEER KHURANA · MEMBER

Ajay is a surgeon of fine repute. Based in Jaipur, he advocates for Tiger Watch in the political and bureaucratic corridors of Rajasthan, ensuring positive manoeuvring and image building for the organisation.

ANJALI PATEL MEHTA · MEMBER

Former investment banker at Goldman Sachs and Deutsche Bank and mother of two, Anjali Patel Mehta began her creative journey in 2012 when she founded her ready-to-wear label, Studio Verandah. A chance encounter with the tiger T-91 in Ranthambhore National Park inspired her to start a collection themed around this most interesting of tigers. The collection was the first of its kind and brought the nuances surrounding tigers in Ranthambhore, and the new realities of wildlife conservation, to a whole new audience. Anjali founded and has consistently supported Baagh Pari, a pioneering and first-of-its-kind initiative to empower Mogya girls.

PUNIT LALBHAI · MEMBER

Executive Director of Arvind Ltd., Punit is no stranger to Ranthambhore nor to wildlife conservation. As a prodigious lad of seventeen, and with the encouragement of our late founder Fateh Singh Rathore, Punit participated in Ranthambhore's first ever camera-trap-based tiger census in 1999 under the supervision of Dr Ullas Karanth. Punit spearheads initiatives in sustainability and strongly supports Tiger Watch's work in community-based conservation.

ABHIMANYU GOLCHA · MEMBER

Abhimanyu Golcha has been Director of the Golcha Group since 1994, leading a group of industries engaged in mining, cosmetics, cinemas and banking. A wildlife and nature lover and outdoor enthusiast with a soft spot for wildlife photography, art and local indigenous cultures, his love for Ranthambhore and his support for Tiger Watch-led initiatives came about very naturally. Abhimanyu founded and has consistently supported Rajasthan Biodiversity, an online portal focusing on pan-Rajasthan conservation issues, allowing for the development of a consolidated approach to wildlife conservation in the state for the very first time.

Rishad Naoroji was not only a friend and supporter of Fateh Singh Ji, but also a guide in propagating and supporting species other than tigers, especially raptors.

DR DHARMENDRA KHANDAL · MEMBER

Dr Dharmendra Khandal has been a conservation biologist with Tiger Watch since 2003 and has led the organisation as Executive Director since 2011. His work has involved proactive anti-poaching, wildlife monitoring and groundbreaking conservation research. He has forged new frontiers in community-based conservation through his interventions in the Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve and beyond. Dr Khandal is also Editor-in-Chief of Rajasthan Biodiversity.

ISHAN DHAR · MEMBER

Ishan Dhar became associated with Tiger Watch when the tiger monitoring team first expanded in 2015, and has actively participated in Tiger Watch interventions ever since. Since April 2021 he has looked after the organisation's research, development and communications. He has served on the Board of Directors since 2017, the youngest individual to do so. He has co-authored two books and multiple research articles in journals and in the electronic and print media. Ishan is also a Net Zero fellow, an exclusive programme for 100 emerging Indian political and public leaders curated by the School of Policy & Governance.

Three decades of unbroken attention to a single landscape.



Chapter 20

Field Team

THE PEOPLE THE WORK RESTS ON



FIELD TEAM · SALARIED STAFF

1.	Dr Dharmendra Khandal
2.	Praveen Singh
3.	Vakil Mohammad
4.	Harimohan Gurjar
5.	Man Singh Rajpoot
6.	Dhram Singh Gurjar
7.	Meethalal Gurjar
8.	Ravindra Saini
9.	Jagdish Saini
10.	Naresh Tatwal
11.	Mukesh Gurjar
12.	Roop Singh Gurjar
13.	Battilal Gurjar
14.	Lakhan Gurjar
15.	Harisingh Gurjar
16.	Bihari Singh Jadoun
17.	Malkhan Jatav
18.	Ramnath Gurjar
19.	Laxman Gurjar
20.	Rakesh Gurjar
21.	Dheeraj Gurjar
22.	Giriraj Gurjar
23.	Phool Bai
24.	Meera Bairwa
25.	Anjali Saini
26.	Anita Gurjar
27.	Nawal Gurjar
28.	Anwar Khan
29.	Ramkesh Saini
30.	Ajeet Gurjar
31.	Saurabh Vyas
32.	Shailendra Rajawat
33.	Amaraj Kevat
34.	Sushil Gurjar
35.	Ajay Bairwa
36.	Ramdhan

In addition to the salaried staff above, Tiger Watch have a wider network of auxiliary team.

Chapter 21

Main Supporters

THOSE WHO STAND BEHIND THE WORK







Dieter & Liz Gutmann

A LASTING PARTNERSHIP FOR TIGER CONSERVATION

Dieter and Liz Gutmann's association with Tiger Watch began in 2007. Nearly two decades later, this remarkable German couple has become an integral part of the organisation's journey. They first came to Rajasthan as tourists, but their connection with its wildlife and people grew into a lasting commitment to protecting its tigers.

What began as a visit has developed into one of the most valuable partnerships in Tiger Watch's history. Having travelled to more than 150 countries, Dieter and Liz bring a broad understanding of geography, economics and conservation. Their involvement in wildlife protection in Africa adds another perspective to their engagement in Rajasthan. They combine generosity with careful thought, practical questions and a sincere desire to understand where their support can make the greatest difference.

The late Fateh Singh Rathore deeply appreciated their concern for wildlife and their commitment to Tiger Watch. Their relationship with the organisation has always rested on more than financial assistance. It is built on friendship, trust and a shared belief in sustained work on the ground.

Dr. Dharmendra Khandal regards Dieter as a trusted guide and a source of steadfast support. Their association has helped him strengthen his management skills, develop programmes more thoughtfully and plan with a longer-term perspective. Dieter's guidance encourages him to look beyond immediate needs, set clear priorities and consider how today's decisions can shape Tiger Watch's future. His foresight and practical advice have been valuable in turning conservation ideas into well-planned programmes with lasting purpose.

Although they have supported Tiger Watch for many years, their contribution has become especially significant over the past five years. They are now con-

-tributing approximately one-third of its overall funding. Their assistance extends across all 15 major programmes rather than being confined to one or two projects. This breadth of support helps sustain the organisation as a whole, including work whose value depends on continuity and patient engagement.

Their contribution is particularly important as Tiger Watch expands its work across four tiger reserves. Its strongest field presence remains in Ranthambhore and Dholpur-Karauli Tiger Reserves, while its engagement elsewhere continues to develop. Dieter and Liz's long-term commitment gives the team greater confidence to plan this growth and strengthen its work. Their particular interest in science and climate change also encourages Tiger Watch to give these subjects greater attention in its programmes.

Education has been an important part of their support. The Dieter & Liz Gutmann Tiger Conservation Program helped launch the Bagh Mitra Programme in Sawai Madhopur in 2022, introducing wildlife and conservation awareness to thousands of schoolchildren. Their assistance supported its early development, after which Petronet took over as its sole funder.

Among these educational initiatives is the Mandana Art Competition, now in its fourth edition. By encouraging children to practise a traditional local art form, the competition connects conservation awareness with Rajasthan's cultural heritage. Around 5,000–6,000 children participate, helping bring Mandana art into the lives of a new generation. Their work is displayed at district-level events on special occasions, and participating children have been felicitated by state government ministers.

Dieter and Liz have also supported improvements to educational facilities. This year, their assistance has helped strengthen resources at the government school in Sherpur, benefiting several hundred students. Their contributions to institutions in Sawai Madhopur include establishing a computer laboratory at Mainpuri Girls' B.Ed. College, helping make digital learning resources more accessible to its students.

Their concern for people is equally personal. Dieter maintains close ties with Mogya families and directly supports their wellbeing. These relationships reflect an understanding that conservation is closely connected to the lives, opportunities and aspirations of communities living around wildlife habitats.

During their annual visits, Dieter and Liz spend time in the field, meet the people involved and see the work for themselves. They ask thoughtful questions, examine progress and discuss what could be improved. Their visits give the team an opportunity to reflect on its work and plan more carefully for the year ahead.

Dieter and Liz bring together generosity, foresight and a willingness to remain closely involved. From supporting field programmes and community relationships to strengthening education, their contribution reaches across Tiger Watch's work. The tourists who arrived in 2007 have become trusted friends and committed partners in protecting Rajasthan's wildlife and supporting the people who share its landscapes.

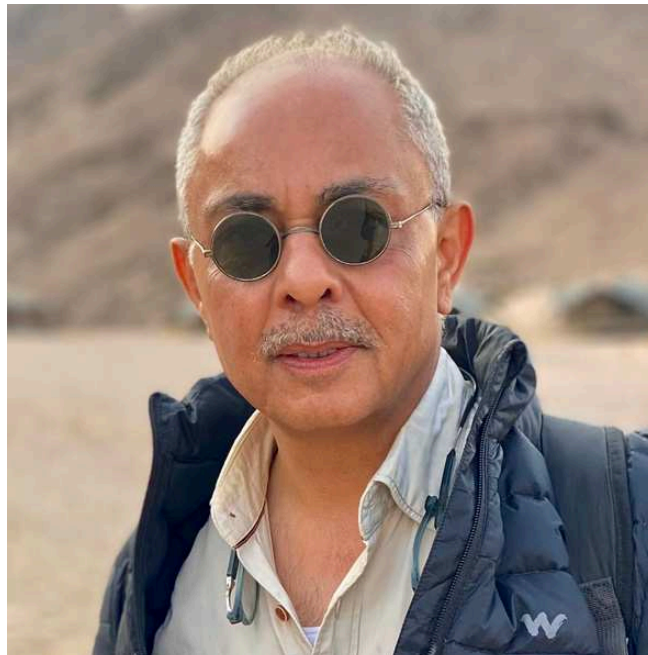
Dieter & Liz Gutmann with ex-poacher and mogya community members Nawab, Lakhan, Prem Bai and Rampyari (from left to right)



ISKANDER LALLJEE AND FAMILY

As Chairman of Tiger Watch since 2017, Iskander Lalljee has been one of our strongest pillars of support. Through Süd-Chemie India, and its CSR initiatives, he has backed the programmes that carry the greatest weight and attract the least attention — the Mogya Education Programme, now twenty years old; Vanya Sakhi; Baagh Pari; the Clean Ranthambhore Initiative, launched this year; and the logistics that keep the HP CLAP digital van on the road.

He takes a close and continuing interest in the running of the organisation, encourages us to work in coordination with the Forest Department and government agencies rather than around them, and consistently pushes us towards innovation rather than repetition. His insistence on transparency, on truth, and on partnerships built to last has been central to Tiger Watch's growth and to whatever credibility we have earned over three decades.



JAISAL SINGH AND ANJALI SINGH

While successfully running their hospitality company, SUJÁN, Jaisal and Anjali Singh have always kept their hearts firmly in conservation. Since 2017 they have been continuous supporters of Tiger Watch, particularly in anti-poaching, tiger monitoring, wildlife rescue and frontline training. As members of Valmik Thapar's family, their bond with Ranthambhore is both personal and profound.

Their support carries the salaries of the Village Wildlife Volunteer team and the vehicles that team depends on, and it is SUJÁN that stands behind our tiger monitoring in the Dholpur–Karauli Tiger Reserve — the work that has made our field team the principal source of information on that young reserve. They have been among the leading supporters from the region, and their CSR initiatives through the SNS Foundation have strengthened our work in many further ways. Their appetite for new conservation ideas has repeatedly pushed us to aim higher than we would have on our own.



PETRONET LNG LIMITED

Petronet LNG Limited came to Tiger Watch in 2023, and the effect on our conservation education work was immediate. Their CSR support took the Bagh Mitra Programme out of Sawai Madhopur and into Karauli and Bundi, turning a district initiative into a landscape one. Over the three years that followed, the programme reached more than 25,000 students across 135 schools.

When that first phase concluded in March, Petronet renewed for a second — 2026 to 2029 — which has extended the programme into Dholpur, where tigers are returning to a landscape whose communities have not lived alongside them in living memory. It is precisely the kind of place where conservation education has to arrive before the conflict does. We are grateful to Petronet LNG Limited, and to Sh. Sundeep Bhutoria, who has facilitated this partnership throughout.



PETRONET
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LIMITED

A forest is kept by the people who watch it, and by the people who make the watching possible.



Supporters of Tiger Watch

1 APRIL 2025 TO 31 MARCH 2026, IN INDIAN RUPEES



#	NAME OF DONOR	AMOUNT
1	Mr Dieter Erich Gutmann	35,21,579
2	Süd-Chemie India Pvt. Ltd.	35,00,000
3	Petronet LNG Limited	16,14,812
4	Abercrombie & Kent India Pvt. Ltd.	9,50,000
5	Ms Margot Raggett MBE	8,48,750
6	Ms Anvita M Bahel	4,40,000
7	Studio APM Private Limited	3,00,000
8	Lifeyoga Pvt. Ltd.	1,35,715
9	Roli Books Pvt. Ltd.	50,000
10	The Oberoi Vanyavilas	45,390
11	Mr Irfan Andreas Quader	36,000
12	Mr Arun Srinivasan	25,008
13	Mr Tristan Lanfrey	13,371
14	Mr Nilanjan Prosad Coomber	10,000
15	Vostro	10,000
16	Mr Sanir Khalif	1,002
17	Mr Gangadhar Gavisiddappa	819
18	Other donations	11,185
Total		1,15,13,631
SNS foundation (Jaisal Singh & Anjali Singh - SUJÁN - Sherbagh) worth 23,73,000 support		

To every supporter named here, and to those who asked not to be — thank you.



Tiger Watch

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