

Tigers Vanish from Rathambore too- Sunny Sebastian, Hindu , 15th Mar 2005

JAIPUR, MARCH 14. After Sariska, the Project Tiger sanctuary in Rajasthan, where now it is almost official that the wild tigers are completely missing, there is no good news from Ranthambhore, the State's conservation flagship, either.

A Special Committee, set up by the Rajasthan Government, which visited the Ranthambhore National Park from March 12 for assessing the status of wild tigers there, has now declared a red alert and sought an "emergency" in the Park. Its recommendations include sealing of the Park against intruders and deployment of 100 extra home guards.

"There is a definite decline in tiger sightings between October 2004 and March 2005, both by the Forest Department staff as well as tourists," a brief note from the committee, headed by the Member of Parliament from Bhilwara, V.P. Singh, said.

The committee has sought intensified patrolling, particularly on foot as well as night patrols, raids on suspected camps of poachers and allocation of secret funds for intelligence gathering and cancellation of leave of the Park staff. The committee has decided to supervise a detailed tiger census both in Ranthambhore and Sariska in May 2005.

The members of the committee, set up by the Rajasthan Government last month after the outcry over the missing tigers in Sariska include, wildlife experts, Valmik Thapar and Belinda Wright, Chief Wildlife Warden of Rajasthan, Arun Sen, who is the member secretary, and Rajpal Singh, author and honorary Wildlife Warden of Jaipur.

The Committee has been asked to look into the immediate problems in the two tiger sanctuaries in Rajasthan and the issue of water in Keoladeo Ghana National Park and submit a report in three months.

"The information from Sariska that some of the poaching gangs there had connections to others camped in Ranthambhore is enough reason to warrant immediate action so that Ranthambhore can never go the Sariska way," the committee noted. "The Sariska connection of the gangs in the neighbourhood of Ranthambhore is very alarming," a committee member noted.

The members who held their first meeting on February 26 made several visits to Sariska thereafter. Even while there is no official acceptance of the total absence in the Project Tiger sanctuary of Sariska, the committee noted: "It is quite clear from our site visits to Sariska and subsequent arrests and interrogations that the tigers in the area have been completely wiped out by poachers".

The committee has already asked for protection of Sariska sanctuary as well as its periphery, control of grazing and the complete stoppage of lopping with immediate effect. There was a need to make the present habitat safe for leopards, lesser cats and all

the ungulates, the committee noted.

<http://www.hindu.com/2005/03/15/stories/2005031510250500.htm>