

Chhattisgarh's new tiger reserve, at heart of animal's contiguous home

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EARLIER THIS month, the Chhattisgarh government notified the Guru Ghasidas-Tamor Pingla in the state as India's 56th tiger reserve.

The reserve is expected to help Chhattisgarh improve its tiger population, which has been dwindling in recent years.

What do we know about the reserve?

Guru Ghasidas-Tamor Pingla is the fourth tiger reserve in Chhattisgarh after Achanakmar, Indravati, and Udanti Sitanadi. With an area of 2,829 sq km, it is the third largest tiger reserve in India.

The reserve is spread across four districts in northern Chhattisgarh's Sarguja region: Manendragarh-Chirmiri-Bharatpur (MCB), Korea, Surajpur, and Balrampur.

It falls between two other tiger reserves: Bandhavgarh in Madhya Pradesh

and Palamau in Jharkhand. The Sanjay Dubri Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh is nearby as well. This makes the new tiger reserve a part of the biggest contiguous home for the country's national animal.

Apart from tigers, the reserve comprises a wide range of wildlife species such as elephants, sloth bears, vultures, peacocks,

wolves, leopards, otters, chitals, jackals, nilgai, bison, hyenas, langurs, cobras etc.

The reserve is also rich in flora, with *sal*, *saja*, *dhavda*, and *kusum* providing the bulk

of the tree cover. It comprises hills, plateaus, valleys, and a river system which create a diverse habitat for its rich wildlife.

What is Chhattisgarh's current tiger population?

Currently, there are 30 tigers, including three sub-adults and two cubs, in the state, according to Sudhir Kumar Agrawal, Chief Wildlife Warden (CWLW), Chhattisgarh. The Guru Ghasidas-Tamor Pingla Tiger



With an area of 2,829 sq km, the Guru Ghasidas-Tamor Pingla Tiger Reserve is the third largest in India. *Chhattisgarh Forest Department*

Reserve boasts five to six tigers at present.

The state's tiger population fell from 46 in 2014 to 17 in 2022, the last official tiger status report by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), released in 2023, revealed.

How does Chhattisgarh plan to boost its tiger population?

Agrawal told *The Indian Express* that to increase the tiger population "we are proposing to bring a few tigresses [to the new tiger reserve] from Madhya Pradesh's

Bandhavgarh and Sanjay Dubri to meet the proportion of male tigers."

He also said that several other measures are being implemented. These include creating rapid response teams, building a good rapport with villagers, developing informer-based wildlife protection/prevention, and deploying full-time guards.

How are authorities preparing for tiger conservation?

Authorities are preparing a comprehensive Tiger Conservation Plan (TCP), which will tackle different challenges that tiger conservation at the reserve may face. This includes:

- Developing a robust road and wireless connectivity to help patrol the hilly terrain, which forms more than 50% of the reserve.

- Increasing the prey base for tigers. To do so, in the past few years, authorities have been developing grasslands and water bodies. They have also translocated hundreds of cheetah and wild boars to the reserve from other places in the state.

- Strengthening the wildlife corridors

with MP which have seen an increase in tiger population recently. Saurabh Singh Thakur, director of Guru Ghasidas National Park, told *The Indian Express*, "As the population of tigers in MP is increasing, the young and sub-adult tigers will be in search of a new territory and we have already witnessed tiger migration from MP. So, the forest department's initiatives will be focused upon grassland development, water resource availability, prey base management and mitigating human-wildlife conflict for the two corridors from Sanjay and Bandhavgarh Tiger reserves to enable a natural transition for them."

- Creating awareness among villagers to avoid possible animal-human conflict. The reserve consists of 42 sparsely populated villages and the residents will have the option to relocate voluntarily. They will also be given priority for jobs related to the reserve. Authorities will train residents to run tourism-related businesses such as tour guides, homestays, boating, and handicrafts, among others.

