

Live Baiting in Tiger Reserves

Posted at: 20/05/2025

Live Baiting in Tiger Reserves: Conservation or Interference?

A 23-month-old tigress named **Kankati** in **Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve** killed two people within a month. Experts link this to her being raised on **live bait**, which led to her **habituation to humans** and a loss of natural fear—making her and her siblings potential threats to forest staff and tourists.

What is Live Baiting?

Live baiting involves **offering live prey (like goats or calves) to a predator**.

Historical Context:

- **Colonial Era:** Used by British hunters to lure tigers for shooting.
- **Post-Independence Tourism:** Popular in tiger reserves (e.g., Sariska) to attract tigers for tourists.
- **Ban:** Banned for tourism use in **1982** by PM **Indira Gandhi**.

Current Use:

- Still used in:
 - **Conflict scenarios** (e.g., capturing problematic leopards).
 - **Feeding injured, old, or orphaned tigers**, especially those unable to hunt.
- **Not banned** for medical/emergency use under **NTCA SOPs**, though "**not advisable**."

NTCA's Standard Operating Procedure (SOP):

- **Conservation Principle:** *Minimal human intervention.*
 - Emphasizes “**survival of the fittest**” — feeding disrupts **natural selection**.
 - Baiting should be **limited, emergency-based**, and **strictly time-bound**.
-

Risks of Live Baiting & Over-Intervention:

Issue	Impact
Habituation to Humans	Increases risk of tiger attacks on people and livestock
Loss of Hunting Skills	Tigers raised on bait struggle in the wild (e.g., Simba, Guda cubs)
Unnatural Survival	Weaker/older tigers live longer, increasing competition and conflict
Dependency Culture	Encourages tourists to demand aid for every limping or injured tiger
Interference in Natural Order	Undermines core wildlife ethics; nature's course is altered unnaturally

Case Studies:

- **Guda Cubs (2008):**
Orphaned cubs fed with bait — **male (T36)** killed by rival; **female (T37)** survived.
 - **Simba:**
Raised on bait, died from injuries after failed hunting attempt — lacked survival instincts.
 - **Machhli (Ranthambhore Icon):**
Fed with bait for **7 years** — lived unnaturally long. Sparked debate: **compassion vs conservation**.
-

Emerging Culture of Over-Intervention

Intervention	Examples
Trucking in prey animals	To feed aging/injured tigers
Creating artificial water holes	Corbett, Bandipur, Kanha, Pench during dry seasons
Tourist pressure	Demand for medical attention to limping tigers
Frequent tranquilisation	For minor injuries; stresses the animals

Expert Opinion: “Protect, Don’t Pamper”

- **Goal of conservation** is to **maintain natural ecosystems**, not simulate sanctuaries.
- **Compassion**, if unchecked, leads to **dependency**, **unnatural survival**, and **increased conflict**.
- Best approach:
 - **Preserve natural habitats**,
 - **Ensure prey abundance**,
 - **Allow nature to regulate populations**.

Conclusion

While **live baiting may be justified in emergencies**, its **unregulated or emotional use undermines conservation ethics**. The focus must shift from **short-term sympathy to long-term sustainability** — ensuring that India's iconic species like the tiger thrive **as wild animals**, not **as dependent subjects** of human intervention.

