

Two young Ranthambhor tigers found dead

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JAIPUR: When the whole country is crying itself hoarse over the drop in the numbers of big cats, in a shocking incident two young tigers from Ranthambhor National Park were found dead -- probably poisoned by villagers -- on Sunday in the ravines of the Banas river in an area bordering Karauli and Sawai Madhopur districts.

The tigers, aged between 22-24 months, had strayed out of the tiger reserve a few weeks back and the forest authorities were on their trail.

Four more tigers are said to be still wandering in the neighbourhood of the park -- in a range of 15-150 km from it -- in the Kota-Baran area and near Bund Baretha in Bharatpur-Dholpur districts, perhaps awaiting the same fate.

The carcasses of the tiger siblings, born to the Chitroli tigress, were found around 10 a.m. at Talawara village, some 15 km from the Park. The authorities, who disclosed the presence of carcasses of two goats near the spot, said poi-

soning could be the reason for the deaths as there were also signs of vomits by the tigers in the vicinity. The theory of human involvement gets strengthened by the fact that one goat was partly eaten and its left-over was on the ground while the other goat carcass was found hanging from a tree.

Chief Wildlife Warden R.N. Mehrotra, who confirmed the deaths, termed the incident as "very sad": "We could not save these young tigers when each tiger is so precious for the world now." The post-mortem report indicated that the deaths had occurred in the past 48 hours. The carcasses had maggots on them and decay probably caused hair loss on the bodies.

Probe ordered

Rajasthan Minister for Forest and Environment Ram Lal Jat when contacted said a three-member committee comprising Divisional Commissioner, Bharatpur, Collector of Sawai Madhopur and the Chief Conservator of Forests would probe the deaths and submit a report in three days.

While distraught Forest officials are left to express their helplessness over overcrowding of tigers in Ranthambhor National Park, wildlife experts blame the "so-called experts" in Delhi who have been blocking the re-location of more tigers from there to the Sariska Tiger Reserve.

"Four tigers from Ranthambhor have died in the past two years. Every attempt to re-locate more tigers to Sariska in the past one year has been frustrated by the tourism lobby of Sawai Madhopur who could prevail upon the Ministry and Environment and Forest against sourcing more tigers from Ranthambhor," noted Rajap Singh, wildlife expert who was part of the team which carried out the successful re-location of three tigers from the park to Sariska.

"When corridors between the sanctuaries do not exist, the connectivity has to be by road or by air," Mr. Singh said asserting the need to shift the tigers from Ranthambhor to newer locations to ease overcrowding and reduce fights over territory.