

Conservation value of the Palamau Wildlife Sanctuary

The Palamau Tiger Reserve was notified in 1974 as one of India's first nine tiger reserves established under Project Tiger. It is located in the western part of the Chhotanagpur Plateau and spans an area of 1129.93 km² comprising the Palamau Wildlife Sanctuary (979.27 km²) and Betla National Park (226.32 km²) is spread over the districts of Latehar and Garhwa in Jharkhand. It is bounded by River North Koel on its west and River Auranga on its north. The reserve's immediate adjoining landscape includes the forest of Mahuadanr Range including Mahuadanr Wolf Sanctuary and the forests of Bhandaria and Ranka East ranges of Garhwa Forest Division which are contiguous with the Sarguja Forest Division of Chhattisgarh. The forest of Latehar Forest Division is on the western side. There is also connectivity with forests of Medininagar Forest Division on the north-eastern part of the reserve.

Palamau Tiger Reserve has been classed within the Central Indian Landscape Complex—the largest tiger landscape in India as described by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII). On its western side, the contiguity of habitat from Palamau extends into the Sanjay-Dubri Tiger Reserve, through Guru Ghasidas National Park, all the way to Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve. This makes it part of the 25,000 km² of Bandhavgarh-Sanjay-Guru Ghasidas-Palamau Landscape. Palamau Tiger Reserve is also connected to the Achanakmar-Kanha Tiger Landscape through the Jashpur and Mahan Forests of Chhattisgarh. To its north-east, Palamau Tiger Reserve is weakly connected to the Gautam Buddha Wildlife Sanctuary and Koderma Wildlife Sanctuary along the border with Bihar through the Lawalong Wildlife Sanctuary in Chatra district as well as the Hazaribag Wildlife Sanctuary. Towards the south, it is connected to the Saranda/Odisha landscape through forests of Simdega and Palkot Wildlife Sanctuary in the Gumla District near Jashpur region of Chhattisgarh.

This area could form one of the largest contiguous tiger habitats in Central India and Palamau has the potential to be revived into a source population that supports a stable meta-population of tigers across adjoining landscapes and revitalizes them with tigers and other wildlife in future.

It has very diverse forest composition forming the prime habitat of diverse wildlife. The Northern Tropical Dry Deciduous Sal (*Shorea robusta*) forest and its associates primarily dominate the habitat. Smaller patches of Northern tropical Moist Deciduous forests also exist apart from five sub-types, i.e., (i) Moist peninsular Sal, (ii) Dry Peninsular Sal (iii) Northern Dry Mixed Deciduous

(iv) Algae and (v) Dry Bamboo Brake. *Phoenix sylvestris* is noted growing along smaller streams. These forests may occasionally be associated with *Butea*, *Carissa*, *Capparis* and *Salvadora*.

The PTR has the unique ecology. The altitude increases from 200m to 1000m while traversing from north to south. This changes the habitat diversity and biodiversity of the reserve. The higher elevation is the home of Sloth Bear and Wolf breeding dens apart from other wildlife. This part has the unique distribution of Orchids. 10 out of 11 species of *Dendrobium* and the only species of *Pholidota* are found (Kumar and Rawat, 2008). Some keystone and principal species found in the area include tiger (*Pantheru tigris*), Asiatic elephant (*Elephas maximus*), Leopard (*Panthera pardus*), Grey wolf (*Canis lupus pullipes*), Wild dog (*Cuon alpinus*), Gaur (*Bos gaurus*). Sloth bear (*Melursus ursinus*), Four horned antelope (*Tetracerus quadricornis*), Indian Ratel, Indian otter etc. In total, documented species include 39 species of mammal, 205 species of birds, 28 species of amphibians and reptiles. The diversity of arthropod is yet to be documented fully but 21 families of insects, 36 species of spiders are recorded. The animal diversity is very high. .

The recorded plant diversity includes 97 species of seed bearing plant, 49 species of shrubs and herbs, 30 species of climbers, semi-parasites and orchid, and 18 species of grasses, The 114 species of medicinal plants recorded to be used by local tribal communities. The flora is diverse and unique and found to be mixture of endemic, common with terrain and north east (Kumar & Rawat, 2008).

The area falls under sub-catchment of River North Koel and catchment of River Son forming the major tributaries of River Ganga. The major Rivers North Koel, Burha and Auranga as well as their major streams like Kohborwa, Aksi, Pandra, Panchnadia, Satnadia, Jawa etc, form a network of drainages in the area. Palamau division falls under drought prone area. The forests of PTR control the ecology, rainfall and climate of the division. The PTR area is the home of some most primitive Dravidian tribes of India such as Korwa, Birjia, Nagesia and Parahia who still retain the affinity with forests. Their customs, rituals, festivals and life style is forest based and worship tree.

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