



The white tiger mystery

The sighting of a white tiger in Madhya Pradesh created a buzz in conservation and media circles recently. [Ashish Kothari](#) is the only one who has got the inside story



Finally, the mystery of the white tiger sighted in late-2009, has been solved. With his usual intrepid skills, the author has been able to piece together the whole story, presented here exclusively for the readers of the ***True Tiger Chronicles***.

Spotted in the forests of Rewa, Madhya Pradesh, several decades after the last one recorded there, the WT created quite a buzz in conservation circles. Over the last few weeks there has been widespread controversy about the veracity of the sighting, and much speculation on the origins of the WT. The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) convened an emergency meeting. The recently re-established (though still fragmented), corridor between it and the Ministry of Environment vs Forests was suddenly active, the NTCA director rapidly moving back and forth for a series of consultations with the minister.

The media had, expectedly, gone to town over the news. Not only was it on the front-page the day after it was sighted, it had even pushed down the news on the 445.322 point drop in the Sensex. As one tabloid put it, "when there's Shersex, who cares for Sensex?" It proceeded to tell a lurid tale, undoubtedly some young journalist's flight of fancy, about the WT being the offspring of a normal tiger crossed with a snow leopard. Other papers were more circumspect, preferring to let the experts speak for them ... or at least making readers believe so. ***The Chimes of India*** quoted Balmy Thappad as having thundered "this is all a hoax, and anyway if it is really there, it won't be for long, as all tigers are doomed". Another expert, Spittu Shergull, was less dismissive, and opined that the tiger's colour was a result of bleaching, proof of catastrophic climate change. A member of the Wild Crust of India (WCI), on condition of individual anonymity, appeared on the morning news on UndoTV, wondering whether by mistake the MoEF had reintroduced a WT instead of a cheetah, which is what WCI had recommended (the cheetah, not the WT). This was hotly denied by the Minister for Environment vs Forests, Sri Ram Ram Aish, who was quoted as claiming that the appearance of the WT was a vindication of his government's environment policies.

UndoTV did not report how the minister explained this connection, assuming he did. And, ever eager to appear bold and different, **Troubleka** had gone into the den of the Sieve Sena to find that its members were in disarray over whether their symbol should get a white paint-over.

In such an atmosphere, the NTCA meeting was naturally volatile. Its director Sri Raj Raj Aish (no relation of the minister), almost came to blows with Balmy Thappad over the latter's views (which had not changed since the **Chimes of India** interview). Fortunately for Raj Aish (for Mr Thappad is of no mean build), Ms Blinder-Right helped calm things down. She even injected a bit of humour in the meeting, by speculating, twinkle in eye, that perhaps this was a poached-but-not-killed tiger whose fur was taken to Tibet, but who managed to get it back, except it had meanwhile whitened in the snow. It was not an ideal solution, but the tiger had accepted it as this year all extra tiger skins had been sent to Sri Lanka as a relief measure from the Government of India. Other members who missed the eye-twinkle angrily dismissed this as purely speculative. And so the meeting had meandered aimlessly, much like the Pench (Maharashtra) tigress who was still being denied entry into Pench (Madhya Pradesh) (what, you missed that story? See <http://infochangeindia.org/200910267998/Human-Rights/Features/Tiger-boundaries.html>). It would have continued pointlessly, had it not been for Brittanica Sinhji suggesting that NTCA send a team to Rewa to investigate. The director approved, and added that the team's ToR would include tranquilising the WT if found, and bringing it back to HQ for grilling. All this was to be accomplished in three days, failing which the team would get an extension of three months, and if even then it had not succeeded, 30 years or a generation, whichever was shorter for the team members concerned. Mr Thappad's caustic comment that this sounded like the enquiry into the Babbar Sher Masjid's demolition, was ordered to be expunged from the minutes; the only reason the author can report it is because he is very friendly with RK Laxman's Common Man, who had been passing the meeting room door when the remark was made.

And so, a crack team of researchers and vets from the Wildlife Illusions of India (WII) was dispatched post-haste. (By the way, many people confuse this term to mean 'in a hurry'. Actually, in the tradition of equally confusing terms like post-modern, post-industrial, and postman, it actually means 'beyond hurry', which is liberally interpreted by government committees to mean 'take your own time'. But I tigress, sorry, digress.)

Unfortunately, the crack team split up even before reaching Rewa, and none of the splinter teamlets could find the WT. At that point tiger expert Ragi Chilled Dawat, familiar with the Rewa forests, had jumped in, located the WT, and tranquilised it before it could even say 'oh deer'.

The WT was brought to Bhopal with great fanfare. Crowds of such magnitude lined up to see it that the police had to let out the WT to make them disperse. Fortunately, a team from Guwahati Zoo, which is used to letting tigers loose and then catching them, was able to usher it back into the cage before it could do any damage, no doubt helped by the fact that the WT showed up very clearly against Bhopal's polluted backdrop. Later that evening, Mr Chilled Dawat and fellow tiger expert Khallas Current were requested to quiz the WT and extract its story. The NGO Cub-Vriksh (having changed its name from Club-Vriksh in yet another desperate attempt to move out of obscurity) had urged that a social scientist also be part of the team. It argued that since the WT may be suffering from trauma and may more easily reveal its family secrets to a social scientist, but this was firmly rejected by the NTCA.

The quizzing had been long, hard, and animated. Since no one else was allowed into the cage, and Mr Laxman's Common Man was too scared to venture anywhere near, there is no record of the conversation. Only some snatches were heard outside, like when the WT had roared out loud, "I believe in performance. Performance that can be measured". And another time when Mssrs Chilled Dawat and Current had exclaimed, in unison, "you must be joking!"

When they came out, the experts looked both angry and chastened. They refused to divulge the contents of the conversation, and only asked to immediately lead a team back to Rewa. And so a team led by the two intrepid, if rather quiet, explorers was equipped with GPS, radar, Blackberry, rope, torches, and masks (all specified by the experts on condition that they would keep the equipment after the expedition), and traipsed off to the jungles of Rewa.

It was there that the great mystery was finally solved. Following the precise directions given by the WT, the team entered a cave littered with bones, pieces of fur, and hundreds of tubes and bottles. The torchlight shone unmistakably on their labels: Fair and Handsome, Nivea for Men, Loreal White Activ, Garnier Men's White. There were even some tubes of Fair and Lovely (was there a WTress wandering around too, wondered the team). The WT had been using these creams for months, and they'd had their effect. This is, it was later revealed by Chilled Dawat and Current, exactly what the WT had told them, but they had refused to believe it. (The author finds this rather puzzling, for surely the tiger experts know that tigers don't lie. They may be evasive, but they don't lie). The WT had also told them he'd grown up near the tourist resort outside Bandhavgarh, and spent many nights watching TV through the windows. The ads had got him hooked. He wanted to be different, not the same boring red that all his ilk walked around in.

The NTCA, shocked by the finding, did not make the investigation team's report public

for some days. Mssrs Chilled Dawat and Current kept up a 'no comment' façade for some time, no doubt remembering the treatment meted out to them by the powers-that-be when they'd last revealed some embarrassing state secrets. But as the WT itself started changing back to its natural tawnyness, deprived of the creams, the truth could no longer be hidden. At a press conference, Minister Sri Ram Aish released the investigation report, and promised to take appropriate action against the companies concerned.

That was yesterday. As is to be expected, the media has gone to town again. All the papers have a picture of the 'before' and 'after' WT on the cover. The tabloid with the Shersex story has headlines screaming, 'Predator falls prey to racism'. The **Indian Express**, in a self-proclaimed ex-clusive, has printed an interview with the ex-WT, which is even more ex-rated than the Shersex story so is being ex-punged from this account. **Troubleka** quotes the Health Minister Mr Dawai-gulam Na Hai Azaad as stating that he was piqued at the minister for environment vs forests overstepping his jurisdiction, and that he had reliable reports from reputed scientists working for cosmetics companies that the creams were harmless. It also cites an angry retort from the Violently Healthy Association of India (VHAI), which claims that several of its volunteers acting as guinea pigs to test out the creams, have reported unusual symptoms of craving and American accents. **Troubleka** also tried to contact the president of the Fair, Lovely, and White Skin (FLAWS) association, but he was reportedly away in Mauritius, getting a tan.

In the midst of this media sensationalism, only the **True Tiger Chronicles** has stuck to the facts. It is learnt that the ex-WT is to be released back into the forests of Rewa. On several conditions. First, he is never to touch the offending creams again, and is to promptly report any tigress using them. Second, he is to drop his newly adopted name Sher-yuck Khan (he said he got it from the ads), though he was free to use a nickname some newspaper gave him in honour of his being free again, Roam Whit-tigger. Third, he is to start a local chapter of Tigers Against Racism (TAR). Apparently the NTCA has received an application from some Black Panthers that they want to join TAR, and has asked the ex-WT if it would mind a merger, resulting in a joint venture called Cats Against Racism (CAR). Some Jaguars, too, have shown interest. But wait, I'm already getting into another story. TATA.

Oh sorry, we forgot to mention Mr Chilled Dawat has been nominated for the Padma Sheri.

(Ashish Kothari belongs to the still-obscure group Cub-Vriksh, and is considering modeling for some skin-darkening creams to help move it out of obscurity.)

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