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Royal Government of Bhutan  
Ministry of Agriculture and Forests  
Department of Forests and Park Services

### ROYAL MANAS NATIONAL PARK TIGER ESTIMATE 2011

#### 1. Why should we save tigers in Bhutan?

- Guru Rinpoche brought Buddhism to Bhutan riding on the back of a flying tigress. The tiger is one of our four protector animals in the “Tag Seng Chung Druk” (Tiger, Snow lion, Garuda and Dragon) quartet, thus the tiger is a symbol of great reverence in Bhutanese society. Losing tiger is loss of one of the most integral part of our heritage.
- Ecologically, Tiger stands at the top of the food chain and its presence in the forest symbolizes the well-being of many other associate species living with it and outside including the human beings.
- Bhutan offers one of the best opportunities for the long-term survival of the tiger on earth, because poaching of tigers and prey and retaliatory killing is relatively

#### 4. Feature of 2011 Tiger Survey at RMNP

- Number of Forest personnel involved in data collection: 60 staff from Royal Manas National Park including staff from Wildlife Conservation Division and Ugyen Wangchuck Institute of Conservation and Environment.
- Number of park range covered: Three ranges under Royal Manas National Park viz. Gomphu, Manas and Umling ranges
- Survey effort: 5280 trap nights
- Total Number of camera traps used: 176 cameras.
- Total number of camera station: 88 stations
- Number of individual tigers camera trapped: 18

Special thanks to the dedicated field staff of Royal Manas National Park, UWICE and WWF-Bhutan for their all time support.



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low compared to other tiger range states and is unlikely that tiger populations are significantly depressed in Bhutan

- Over a quarter of its surface area, about 10,740 km<sup>2</sup> is estimated to be potential tiger habitat in Bhutan. Logically, all areas under forest cover in Bhutan connected with the main tiger habitat is a potential tiger habitat.
- Bhutan has the record of having the Royal Bengal tigers (*Panthera tigris tigris*) freely roaming in the high rugged mountain as high as over 4200m above sea level.

## 2. History of Tiger Conservation in Bhutan

- The tiger conservation in Bhutan is a old story as it's been revered ever since Buddhism flourished in Bhutan in 8<sup>th</sup> century. A strong religious and cultural ethos based on Buddhism for centuries has provided a safe refuge for these extraordinary species.
- The importance to Tiger conservation in Bhutan began with strong legal support in 1995 when the Forests and Nature Conservation Act of Bhutan labelled the tiger as “totally protected” under the schedule I which treats at par with the Appendix I of the CITES
- The Tiger Conservation Programme was the first species specific project initiated by the Royal government with the support of WWF in December 1995.
- In 1996, the Royal government in partnership with WWF developed a National Tiger Conservation Strategy (NTCS). The goals of strategy were two folds:
  - 1) **nationally**, to conserve a viable breeding population of tigers within the Kingdom of Bhutan and
  - 2) **internationally**, to safeguard the corridors connecting that population with tigers beyond its frontier in India to conserve the population of the entire Manas/ Bhutan/Namdapha Tiger Conservation Units (TCU)
- Based on NTCS, five nation-wide tiger survey was carried out from 1996 through 1998 and baseline tiger population established that estimated 115-150 tigers in Bhutan with breeding adult of 67 to 81.



Remote camera trap waiting for tiger



Tiger caught by camera trap

- In 2004, Royal Government of Bhutan in partnership with WWF held International Conference on Tiger at Paro, which led to the preparation of the “Tiger Action Plan for the Kingdom of Bhutan 2006-2015”. Sincethen, the Department of Forests and Park Services have been implementing this Action Plan.
- In 2010, the RGoB in partnership with GTI and WWF have prepared a National Tiger Recovery Programme highlighting Bhutan’s priority actions and commitments to conserve tiger. The programme was later incorporated in to Global Tiger Recovery Programmes and endorsed in Global Tiger Summit at St. Petersburg in Russia in November 2010
- 2010-2011 Estimation of Tiger numbers in Royal Manas National Park



WCD and RMNP staff setting up camera trap



Designing elephant proof camera trap stand

## 3. 2011 Tiger Monitoring Methods

The tiger estimation in RMNP was crucial component of the tiger conservation work for RMNP in particular and Bhutan at large. This is because exercise reveals the year long conservation outcomes of RMNP, and also set the bench marks for future tiger conservation for RMNP. In 2009, Wildlife Conservation Division (WCD), Department of Forests and Park Services in collaboration with WWF introduced and trained the park staff on use of the camera traps to scientifically monitor tiger population. In the same year, preliminary tiger survey based on presence, absence was carried out at RMNP using camera traps. In winter of 2010, the RMNP park staff together with WCD and Ugyen Wangchuck Institute of Conservation and Environment (UWICE) laid out the camera traps in the park. Based on the tiger numbers recorded in sampled sites, **25-35 individual tigers are estimated in Royal Manas National Park (RMNP).**