



# WILDLIFE VETS INTERNATIONAL

## Report on Support for the Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh January 2010

### Introduction

Tigers are critically endangered throughout their range. However, the mangrove forests of the Bangladesh Sundarbans are currently thought to support 300 – 500 individuals, one of the largest populations remaining in the world. In this part of their range prey depletion, habitat degradation and direct losses all threaten the tigers' survival. Bangladesh suffers from an unusually high level of tiger-human conflict, manifesting in human killing and livestock predation. An average of 20 – 30 people are killed each year according to official statistics, but the true number is likely to be much higher. If tigers are found in the villages or nearby fields bordering the Sundarbans they are often killed by the villagers who surround the tiger and beat it to death.

(Source: Bangladesh Tiger Action Plan 2009 – 2017, Ahmad et al, Bangladesh Forest Department, Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Dhaka, Bangladesh)



Location of Bangladesh Sundarbans



Sundarbans mangrove forest

The recently published “Bangladesh Tiger Action Plan 2009 - 2017” recognizes that dedicated teams are required to deal with situations requiring tiger capture – such as may arise when tigers stray into villages. However, this would require specialist training in immobilization techniques currently unavailable in Bangladesh.

Against this background, WVI was approached in 2009 by Dr Adam Barlow of the Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh\* (WTB) to provide veterinary support for a tiger immobilization training workshop for Forest Department (FD) staff to be held in Bangladesh during January 2010. The support sought from WVI was the provision of a specialist vet to instruct staff during the workshop (see Appendix 1).

*“Currently the Forest Department has no staff available with the necessary skills to capture and immobilize problem tigers. WVI’s support for the immobilization workshop would therefore greatly improve the capacity of the FD to deal with tiger-human conflict by reducing the number of tigers and people killed each year. This in turn will help improve local attitudes and create better conditions for implementing tiger conservation initiatives.”*

Wildlife Vets International was happy to respond and Dr John Lewis was tasked with the job.

\*The Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh is a national institution committed to conserving the biological diversity of Bangladesh. As an NGO, it is independent of government although it works closely with government agencies responsible for wildlife and habitats. Its CEO is Professor Md Anwarul Islam. [www.wildlifetrust-bd.org](http://www.wildlifetrust-bd.org).

## **Tiger-human conflict incident at Chandipur**

John Lewis arrived in Dhaka on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2010 and was met by Dr Adam Barlow and Ms Christina Greenwood – co-founders and project managers of WTB’s Sundarbans Tiger Project. Although it had been planned to stay in Dhaka to meet FD staff initially, this schedule was dramatically interrupted by a tiger-human conflict situation that had arisen in Chandipur village – one of the many villages along the northwestern edge of the Sundarbans. An adult female tiger had entered the village at about 4am that morning and had eventually settled in a village hut. Following a request for help from the FD and a local politician an 8 hour journey was made by road and boat to get to Chandipur. Unfortunately no flights were available between Dhaka and Khulna (the nearest large town to the western part of the Sundarbans) at that time.

A WTB-FD Tiger Response Team had arrived in Chandipur early on and helped keep everything quiet while other FD staff arrived, together with some Bangladesh Rifles staff (BDR). Normally in these situations the tiger is killed very quickly but the FD, BDR, and local MP were able to control the villagers so that the tiger remained safe for over 12 hours. Unfortunately as the day progressed the crowd swelled to many thousands from the surrounding villages and tensions rose. Near sundown the situation deteriorated beyond the control of the authorities and the tiger was beaten to death by the crowd. The event was widely reported in the Bangladesh national newspapers - See Appendix 2.

Adam Barlow, John Lewis, Christina Greenwood and the WTB’s chief executive Prof. Md Anwarul Islam arrived in the area an hour and a half too late. For safety reasons they didn’t go to Chandipur, but met the local FD staff at their range office nearby in Burigoalini where the carcass had been taken. This was examined briefly but the remaining crowd was too large to allow anything more than a cursory look. The tiger was put onto a WTB boat and examined in more detail on the river. It was an adult female estimated at 4-5 years old, in good condition and with no wounds apart from those inflicted by the crowd. Samples were taken for genetic studies by the WTB. The carcass was returned to the Forest Department for a full post mortem examination.



Riverside crowd at Burigoalini



Examining and sampling the Chandipur tiger on the river

Although this was a dramatic and tragic event, it provided a perfect and timely illustration of the need for in-country training in tiger immobilization techniques. Staff from the FD and WTB were at the incident soon after it was reported; darting equipment was on hand; the villagers were informed and initially calm; the FD even managed to contain tiger in the hut with nets at some point. The only elements missing were appropriate anaesthetic drugs and staff trained to use them in a timely fashion. Had these been available the outcome may have been very different.

## Workshop on tiger immobilization

Following a welcome night's sleep at the WTB base in Khulna, John Lewis and the WTB senior staff returned to Dhaka on the 23<sup>rd</sup> January, visited the WTB's main office to meet other staff members and discussed the forthcoming workshop. With Adam Barlow, John Lewis was then able to edit the first version of the tiger immobilisation manual designed to complement the forthcoming workshop sessions. WTB were able to translate this document into Bangla before the workshop started so that all delegates could be given a copy.

Further discussions were held at the WTB offices and over subsequent days to design an appropriate veterinary support structure for the Sundarbans tigers into the future. More details of this can be found below.

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On the 25<sup>th</sup> January John Lewis attended the official launch of the Bangladesh Tiger Action Plan and of the tiger immobilisation workshop in Dhaka. This was a formal event held at the Ministry of Environment and Forests, and attended by the recently elected Minister of Environment and Forests, his parliamentary Secretary, the Chief Conservator of Forests, the Conservator of Forests (Wildlife Circle), Professor Md Anwarul Islam and others from the WTB, approximately 200 interested delegates and many members of the local and international press. John Lewis gave a short presentation explaining how WVI can contribute to resolving tiger-human conflicts in villages. This was an extremely important event politically, marking the new Bangladeshi government's interest in conservation and publically stating its intent to support the Tiger Action Plan.

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After the official launch, John Lewis flew to Cox's Bazaar with Adam Barlow, Christina Greenwood and Prof. Md Anwarul Islam to start the workshop proper. This was held at the FD's Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Safari Park.

The three day workshop organised by the WTB was attended by 30 delegates from the FD and from WTB. Subjects covered included overviews of animal capture techniques, anaesthesia of carnivores, and the assessment and planning of capture operations. Other sessions explored the options available for problem tigers. John Lewis acted as lead instructor but Adam Barlow and Prof Md Anwarul Islam also made substantial contributions. Theoretical training was complimented with practical sessions on catching tigers, making darts, use of the dart guns, and anaesthesia using fishing cat as a model species. It was unfortunate that the safari park could not make tigers available for these practical demonstrations, but it was still possible to teach the principles of good anaesthetic practice.

The workshop was extremely well received by everyone who attended. This was a good start, but it is fully acknowledged that one workshop can only be the beginning of a training programme that aims to bring field staff to an adequate level of practical competence in tiger immobilisation.

At the conclusion of the workshop it was possible to identify individuals from the FD and WTB who showed a particular aptitude for capture and immobilisation. The FD and WTB will focus future training efforts on these people and include them in tiger-human conflict resolution teams.

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As the workshop proceeded another tiger was seen in fields close to a village immediately to the east of the Sundarbans. As John Lewis left Bangladesh, WTB staff members were already on their way to work alongside the FD personnel in the area.

## **Veterinary equipment and drugs supplied**

WVI was able to provide WTB with a moderate amount of anaesthetic drugs suitable for tiger capture, some basic items of anaesthetic equipment and a copy of the "Handbook of Chemical Immobilization" by Terry Kreeger and Jan Arnemo. This book is a very useful reference for field anaesthesia in a very wide range of species.

Small quantities of anaesthetic drugs were also provided to the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Safari Park.

## Scenes from the workshop



Prof. Md Anwarul Islam lecturing



Delegates calculating anaesthetic dose rates



Dr John Lewis lecturing



Practical dart preparation sessions



Pulse taking with fishing cat



Discussing practical anaesthesia with vets from FD & WTB



Presenting course certificates



Teaching staff and delegates at the workshop's conclusion

## The future

Although this support visit was initially intended just to provide training in immobilisation of tigers, wider veterinary concerns relevant to tiger conservation became apparent through the many discussions held with Dr Barlow, Christina Greenwood, Prof. Md Anwarul Islam and other staff of both the FD and WTB. A number of key points need to be taken into account when trying to design and establish future veterinary support for the tiger population in the Bangladesh Sundarbans:

- By delivering the tiger immobilisation workshop in Bangladesh, WVI was able to begin the process of training wildlife personnel to safely anaesthetise tigers when that is required. However, this can only be viewed as a start and follow up training including more practical work with tigers will be necessary in the near future if the lessons learnt are not to be forgotten for lack of reinforcement.
- There are 5 – 6 veterinary faculties at universities within Bangladesh, but none include wildlife medicine on their curricula. Vets working in captive non-domestic animal facilities such as the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Safari Park receive no specialist training in wild animal medicine.
- The FD in cooperation with WTB is organising four, trained, rapid response teams to cover all sectors of the Sundarbans. It is planned that there will be two FD staff vets available to these teams. Given suitable training of staff this structure should provide sufficient local capacity to deal with tigers that stray into villages.
- Local FD staff positions are not always secure. Employees may be moved from one section to another due to changes in policy and practice within the department. Senior staff may also be subject to an unpredictable rate of turnover. As a result, there is little guarantee that FD foresters and vets trained in tiger immobilisation will remain in post for long periods, resulting in loss of valuable expertise.
- The WTB has recently created a post for a veterinarian and has employed a keen young veterinary graduate from Bangladesh. If he completes his probationary period satisfactorily employment stability is lightly to be greater than for FD staff.
- In the Bangladesh Tiger Action Plan it is acknowledged that although disease may kill tigers in the Sundarbans, there has been no research into this area at all.
- A large number of feral dogs live in and around the villages all along the northern borders of the Sundarbans. It is not known what diseases they currently carry, but viral diseases such as rabies and canine distemper are commonly problems in such populations. If this is the case in the Sundarbans these dogs may constitute a reservoir of disease that could impact negatively on tigers. (*NB – both rabies and canine distemper are potentially lethal to tigers and other wild cat species.*)
- Domestic cats are present around the many FD guard posts throughout the Sundarbans forests. The disease status of these cats is unknown and it is extremely unlikely that they have been neutered. Such cats could not only pose disease risks to tigers but they may even be able to hybridise with wild leopard cats.
- Personnel from all levels of the FD, WTB, and the Ministry of Environment and Forests met on this short trip welcomed the idea of further specialised veterinary assistance from WVI.

Bearing in mind all the factors listed above, WVI is now developing a proposal to second a full time wildlife veterinarian to the WTB for a period of 2 – 3 years, under the guidance of Dr Lewis. It is envisaged that this vet will work closely with WTB's staff vet and the FD vets to continue their training not only in tiger immobilisation but in many other aspects of wildlife medicine as well. Crucially, such an initiative would create the possibility of conducting a much needed disease risk assessment for the tiger population in Bangladesh – and if significant risks are identified develop a strategy to mitigate them. Thus the post would provide a combination of in-country training in wildlife medicine plus the development of a preventative medicine programme to help protect the tigers into the future.

Details of this ambitious and exciting plan will be agreed with both the FD and the WTB in the near future – and then the challenge of securing the necessary funding will begin!

**WVI would like to thank the following sponsors for supporting our initial work in Bangladesh:**

Paradise Wildlife Park, UK  
The Wildlife Heritage Foundation, UK  
The Welsh Mountain Zoo, UK

And other private and anonymous donors.



**Tiger footprints in the Sundarbans mud  
(Adam Barlow – WTB)**



## Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh

Trustees of Wildlife Vets International  
c/o IZVG  
Keighley Business Centre  
South Street  
Keighley  
West Yorkshire  
BD21 1AG.  
16th July, 2009

Dear trustees,

This letter is a request from the Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh (WTD) to Wildlife Vets International (WVI) for veterinary support for a tiger immobilization training workshop for Forest Department staff in Bangladesh (25<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2010). The support sought from WVI would be the provision of a specialist vet to instruct staff during the workshop.

Tiger-human conflict (THC) continues to result in the unnecessary deaths of humans, tigers, and livestock in and around the Sundarbans Reserve Forest (SRF) of Bangladesh. When a tiger strays into a village area it is often surrounded by villagers and bludgeoned to death but this can be avoided if there are special Forest department (FD) teams available to capture, immobilize, and transport the tiger in question. Such a management option requires FD staff with specialist training in tiger capture and immobilization. The Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh (WTB) is applying to the FD to run a tiger capture and immobilization training programme in January 2010. The tiger capture and immobilization training will be given to 12 FD staff stationed in the Sundarbans. The tiger capture and immobilization workshop will be carried out over three days. The first day will be taken up with lectures on tiger physiology, animal handling and drug use. The second day will be used for instruction on tiger capture techniques and working safely around tigers. The third day will be practical demonstrations and supervised immobilizations of tigers, followed by a revision period for everything learned on the course. FD staff will receive training materials and a certificate on completion of the course. The training programme will be carried out at the FD's Dulahazra Safari Park (DSP), Cox's Bazaar, where the programme coordinators, instructors and FD staff will stay.

Currently the FD have no staff available with the necessary skills to capture and immobilize problem tigers. WVI's support for the immobilization workshop would therefore greatly improve the capacity of the FD to deal with tiger-human conflict by reducing the number of tigers and people killed each year. This in turn will help improve local attitudes and create better conditions for implementing tiger conservation initiatives.

WTB looks forward to your response and appreciates your time in consideration of this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Adam Barlow  
Project manager  
Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh

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From the Bangladesh "Daily Star" – 23-Jan-10

### Tiger beaten to death in Satkhira

IMR SATKHIRA

Jan 22 A Royal Bengal tiger has been beaten to death by villagers at Chandpur village in Shyamnagar upazila this evening in the presence of law enforcers as it eat up live goats.

Outraged villagers and forest officials, police said that the tiger entered the village, 5km off the Sundarbans, at around 5am and took shelter on the rooftop of the house of Rashedul Mirza.

As the panicked house owner surrounded, villagers rushed in and cordoned off the house. The frightened tiger then took shelter in the larder of the house. Being informed, forest officers, police and BDR members went to the spot and stayed there till 7.30pm.

Local MP HM Gulam Reza, Khulna Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Akbar Hossain Talbar, BDR 7 Kullies Battalion Commander Lt Col Rauful Alam, Shyamnagar UO Shabbir Ahmed and senior forest officials tried to save the man-eater by quelling the panicked villagers.

Sources at the Forest Office said DFO Talbar and Forest and Animal Department UO Yasir Ali with a transpilling-machine reached the scene at 12 noon. But, the machine could not be used for lack of its operator.

The forest officials at about 1pm informed the local MP and local administration that they were unable to catch the tiger and a team of experts already left Dhaka for Shyamnagar.

"There is nothing to do until they reach," said one of the officials.

Police and BDR charged baton on the crowd and lobbed teargas shells to calm them down. As another special team of BDR started charging baton on the people, they pulled back bats at the paramilitary troops.

Later, agitated people had swamped on them and beat the tiger to death before the expert team reached the spot, forest department sources said.



The Bengal Tiger that entered Chandpur village in Shyamnagar upazila of Satkhira and took shelter on the rooftop of a house was beaten to the death by the villagers yesterday — NewsBangla photo

## JRC to meet before end of March: Tariq Karim

ISS, NEW DELHI

Jan 22: The meeting of the Joint River Commission (JRC) will be held before the end of March, Tariq A. Karim, Bangladesh High Commissioner to India, said here today.

Speaking at a meet the press organised by the Indian Women's Press Corps (IWPC) here this afternoon, Karim said that for the last seven years the meeting of the JRC had not taken place. He said the meeting of the Technical Committee and the meeting at the Secretary-level were held.

"Let them (JRC) meet first and let us not pre-judge the outcome of the meeting. If the political leaders want to resolve it in no time however, all issues can be resolved," the High Commissioner told a journalist.

He said that with two friendly governments now in power, there

can not be any problem to resolve any issues.

Replying to a question on Bangladesh's expectations from the four-day state visit of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the High Commissioner said that both the governments (India and Bangladesh) have domestic commitments and that have to be kept in mind. He, however, said that the friendship of the two countries has brought nations that were demarcated during the 1971 war. He said that broad parameters have been laid down during the visit.

He said that there is a lot to be done in the two countries to set and set for the betterment of the two peoples. "There has come an era of progress and friend and an allied." We can take the present friendship to a newer height and set it the limit," he said a questioner.

In his conversation, Karim recalled the remark of the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi when he said that India has to help Bangladesh to make her economically strong. He said there are 30 years before that but Rajiv Gandhi first mentioned it during a meeting with the diplomats in Calcutta.

Replying to another question on foreign investment in Bangladesh, the High Commissioner said that Karim Ahsan Uddin goes to Bangladesh considering the bright business prospect there. "It is a right investment we want, but it creates employment opportunity for Bangladesh people and also improve their quality of life," he said.

The expert said Bangladesh would attract outdoor foreign investments, be it from West Bengal due to proximity or Korea. He said there exists a unique atmosphere for investments.

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