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Wildlife Trust of India turned 21 this year.

In line with our commitment to service of nature, WTI’s teams have rescued and released around 900 wild animals of different species in distress, addressed 27 cases of human-big cat conflict, removed 883 snares from four tiger reserves and a wildlife sanctuary; trained 867 forest guards; provided ex-gratia support to 18 families of forest guards who met their death or had suffered life changing injury while on duty.

WTI addressed 36 critical wildlife conservation emergencies by providing timely support through Wild Aid. Our rescue team extended adequate disaster response to distressed wildlife in natural calamities (floods, cyclones and forest fires) through our Emergency Relief Network (ERN). WTI’s Species Recovery projects worked on population restocking programmes towards stabilizing the endangered wild buffalo at Udanti-Sitanadi Tiger reserve as well as the critically endangered gharials of the Gandak river. Our Wild Lands projects worked towards conserving critical habitats across the country which included coral reefs, mangroves, wetlands, village reserve forests, habitat linkages and corridors that exist outside the protected area network.

WTI conducted speciality workshops targeting specific stakeholders – the railways, tea estate owners, forest department, media to ensure favourable decisions and optimal policy interventions. Our mass outreach programmes towards sensitizing local communities and students were conducted across the country on World Wildlife Day (3rd March), International Biodiversity Day (22nd May) World Environment Day (5th June), Shark Awareness Day (14th July), International Mangrove Day (26th July), Global Tiger Day (29th July) and the World Elephant Day (12th August).
The Centre for Wildlife Rehabilitation and Conservation (CWRC) in Assam, is a one-of-its-kind facility of its kind in India where orphaned and/or injured wild animals of several species are hand raised and rehabilitated or treated. The animals are subsequently returned to the wild after due acclimatisation and rehabilitation. The facility is jointly run by WTI, International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) and the Assam Forest Department. CWRC is serviced by Mobile Veterinary Service Units (MVS) operating across the landscape with dedicated veterinarians and animal keepers.

240 cases
This year MVS Central Assam operating from CWRC has attended to 240 cases. This included 53 species of mammals, birds, and reptiles. Of these, 135 cases had to be admitted to CWRC for treatment of which 54% were released back to the wild. The remaining 105 cases were treated on-field (in-situ intervention) with an 87% release rate. The most common cause of intervention was when the animal was found in human habitations, (29.17% of cases) followed by displacement due to annual floods (15.83% of cases) while 15% of the cases accounted for a mass poisoning incident of vultures.

66 vultures
diagnosed with secondary poisoning (feeding on poisoned carcass) were found in Sivasagar district, Assam. 32 vultures had succumbed to death when found, the remaining 34 were brought to CWRC in a critical condition. After two weeks of intensive care and treatment, 30 of these recovered and were released back to the wild.

Elephant Rehabilitation
Post release monitoring of four elephant calves hand-raised at CWRC and released in Manas National Park in 2017 was satisfactory. Two more calves were released this year, one of which could not be tracked as it had ventured into Indo-Bhutan border area, while the other was brought back to captivity as it had got habituated to human – presence and kept wandering close to human habitations. In addition to these calves, the team attended to 20 cases of elephants (7 adults and 13 calves, all of these either separated from herd or orphaned). Of the 13 calves, four were reunited with the natal herd, while one was admitted to CWRC.

One of the most notable stories of this year was of the tigress which had entered a home during the Kaziranga floods in July. It had sought refuge in the bedroom of a home at Harmouti, Kohora Range in Kaziranga. Our rescue team working together with the Assam Forest Department ensured its safe passage back to the wild, without having to chemically immobilize it.
Rhino Rehabilitation
Greater Manas Recovery Project

Four rhinos were released post acclimatization into Manas National Park. Acclimatization was done in a boma (artificial enclosure representing natural habitat) for 11 months in December. Two of these rhinos were translocated to Sidajhar area under Bansbari range, falling under the First Addition to Manas National Park. This was the first instance of an alternative site chosen for rhino rehabilitation within Manas. Two of these four rhinos were fitted with VHF radio transmitters and post release monitoring showed them getting back to the wild. One among them, a female was grievously injured by a resident rhino post release and unfortunately succumbed to her injuries.

The team also attended to five rhino calves displaced during the floods. After recovering under critical care and observation at CWRC and they were moved to a controlled paddock at CWRC.

Since 2006, we have successfully sent 17 rhinos back to the wild.

Mobile Veterinary Service Units

While MVS Central Assam attached to CWRC attended to 240 cases, MVS – Western Assam in the Manas landscape attended to 96 cases of 28 species, ranging from jungle cats, leopards, to marbled cats and pangolins.

77% of these cases were successfully treated and released back to the wild.

The unit also rescued a female Asiatic black bear cub from Salbari village, Chirang in December which was admitted to the wildlife transit home for further care. A suitable release site was identified by a site selection survey by our biologists.

MVS – Arunachal Pradesh attended to two Asiatic black bears and one hog deer.

MVS – Similipal responded and attended to 29 cases of 14 species and had a release rate of 55%.
The ERN network initiated disaster relief in the forest fire at Bandipur National Park, Karnataka, and post cyclones Vayu which had hit the Gujarat coast, and Fani on the Odishacoast. ERN members also responded during the Assam floods; during the floods in Bihar; cloudburst and associated landslides and flash floods in Kerala.

The ERN also conducted regional workshops in three states of India namely, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra towards developing region-specific ‘Best Management Practices’ (BMP) ensuring Disaster Response and Risk Reduction (DRRR). An ERN meet in Jaipur, this year was also organized which saw participation from over 70 participants across India who presented their work on animal rescue and disaster response. The Jaipur workshop also deliberated on further expansion in parts of the country where new areas can be covered.

The highlight of ERN was however the avian emergency that struck thousands of birds at Sambhar Lake, Rajasthan.

Avian Botulism outbreak at Sambhar Lake, Rajasthan

This year witnessed Asia’s largest mass mortality of birds due to Avian Botulism. Sambhar Lake (a Ramsar site) was particularly affected with large scale mortality of wintering waterfowl as well as resident species in the months of November and December. Spread by spores of the anaerobic bacterium Clostridium botulinum, the victim succumbs to a paralyzing toxin.

Around 22,000 birds were affected due to botulism at Sambhar Lake.

Working with local partners, ERN members and supported by HCL Foundation, the WTI veterinary teams rescued 1200 birds (33 species) of which 514 were successfully released after treatment.
The Wild Lands Division has been working to secure critical wildlife habitats that lie outside Protected Area (PA) system – especially habitat linkages (such as corridors), wetlands, grasslands, important bird areas and sacred groves.

Kannur Kandal Recovery

Mangroves are lost to human development requirements, and this project aims to stem this loss by promoting mangrove restoration, awareness and scientific research of mangrove species. An interpretation centre and a mangrove nursery have also been established at the project site. WTI and Apollo Tyres purchased a mangrove parcel in Kunhimangalam village, Kannur District, Kerala. This district has 45% of the remaining mangroves of Kerala and mostly under private ownership.

The historical extent of mangroves in Kerala is 70,000 hectares. Of these, 1,750 hectares of mangroves remain in Kerala today. 

- 2.86 acres of mangroves were added to the existing 19.83 acres
- 73 awareness programmes were conducted.
Garo Green Spine Project

This project in Meghalaya aims to secure Right of Passage for elephants by working with local communities who set aside community owned lands as Village Reserve Forests (VRFs) through easements and bilateral benefit sharing.

In return, the community is provided with equitable benefits in the form of alternative livelihoods, improved lifestyle, healthcare and infrastructure facilities.

Since the inception of the project, 17 VRFs encompassing an area of 31.33 sq km have been notified in the Garo Hills of Meghalaya.

This year the team conducted consultative meetings with three villages namely, Halwa Ambeng, Dambuk Atong and Dambuk Jongkol on securing community owned lands as VRFs. School buildings of Halwa Ambeng and Dambuk Atong were renovated for the community.

The team also surveyed, new VRF area for potential notification in addition to the already notified VRF in Sasat Sakal Aduma village. Demarcation of Dura Kalakgre VRF and redemarcation of Selbagre VRFs were also done this year.

Green Corridor Champions

WTI has enabled and empowered a cohort of Green Corridor Champions (GCCs) who are essentially local organizations and individuals working towards protecting elephant corridors for elephants. Some of the activities conducted by GCCs include – monitoring corridors for potential threats to wildlife, monitoring land use changes and usage of corridors by animals, conducting campaigns and other awareness activities, liaison with local authorities, forest department and line agencies (e.g. highway authorities, railways.)

20 GCCs have been engaged targeting 41 corridors across nine states. This financial year, GCCs conducted several awareness programmes targeting nearly 15000 individuals including school children, government officials from relevant administrative state departments, tea garden workers and members of the local community. World Elephant Day (12th August), World Environment Day (5th June), Earth Day (22nd April) were celebrated across the country by GCCs through street plays, painting competitions, film screenings, elephant-themed essay competitions, wall paintings and consultative workshops with government authorities. With a large number of tea estates on elephant corridors in north Bengal, a workshop to address human – elephant conflict in the tea gardens of North West Bengal was held in August, 2019. Human –elephant conflict leads both to human and elephant fatality in tea gardens. This workshop facilitated formation of ‘Quick Response Teams’ in the tea growing regions of West Bengal to track elephant movement and to avert negative encounters between humans and wildlife.

- 20 green corridor’s engaged
- 41 corridor’s targeted
- 9 states
- 1500 individuals targeted in awareness programmes
Mithapur Coral Recovery

The project seeks to develop and implement appropriate strategies towards conservation of the Mithapur Reef situated 12 km south of the Gulf of Kutch. In addition, the project is working to recover coral reefs in Gujarat’s marine national park.

This year a total of 120 artificial reefs encompassing 304.8 sq m surface area were created. In addition, the team assessed and compiled the density and diversity of the coral cover, assessed the commercial fish resources of Mithapur and monitored the water quality to determine the growth and survival of corals and associated species.

Community engagement activities like coastal clean-up with school students, fishermen training in field-level monitoring techniques and socio-economic survey of reef dependent fishermen were also conducted by the team.

120 artificial reefs
304.8 sq m surface area
Rapid Action Projects

WTI’s Rapid Action Projects (RAPs) address wildlife threats that require an immediate, short-term response. Through RAPs we collaborate with identified on-ground proponents – grassroots organisations, government agencies and community stakeholders to identify and resolve potential conservation adversities at an early stage. We extend financial and logistical support as well as technical expertise to our RAP proponents with proven capability.

38 new RAPs were sanctioned this year of which some notable ones were:

- Mitigating ritual hunting as well as wildlife trade (under the veil of ritual hunting) in West Bengal.
- Addressing the negative impact of tourism and developmental expansion on endemic faunal diversity of little Andaman islands.
- Rescue and release of fresh water fauna (the larger species such as Gangetic Dolphins, muggers and gharials) trapped in barrages connecting the river Chambal in Uttar Pradesh.
- Rescuing, handling, treating and releasing distressed vulture species in Ahmedabad, Gujarat.
- Identifying the cause of high mortality rate of Indian wolf in and around Pune in Maharashtra and preventing the same.
- Construction of elevated crop storage facility in Lakhimpur, Assam to prevent crop depredation by elephants and the resulting human-elephant conflict.
- Conservation of horseshoe crabs by preventing accidental by-catch of the species through sensitization programmes in Balasore, Odisha.
- Mobilizing the indigenous tribe of Dilzawl and Dapachhuah villages in Mizoram against illegal hunting.
- Reducing human-snake conflict by sensitizing the local community in Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh.
- Providing equipment for rescue and treatment of distressed animals in Nashik District, Maharashtra.
- Restoring windowpane oyster (Placuna placenta) in Chicalim bay area, Goa.
- Providing forest fire mitigation support (fire prevention equipment) in Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve.
- Providing winter gear support to assist temporary staff in patrolling duties in Kashmir.
- Mitigating illegal hunting and poaching of spiny tailed lizard in selected villages of Kachchh district, Gujarat.
- Monitoring breeding grounds of Lesser Floricans (Sympheotides indicus) in Bidar, Karnataka.

WTI ANNUAL REPORT 2019-2020

Highlights

As a key outcome, the RAP in West Bengal curbed illegal ‘ritualistic’ hunting in two targeted districts in West Bengal where teams monitored 14 railway stations and intercepted 600 armed hunters. 40 more hunters with 36 bird carcasses on ground were caught and a record 95% decline in hunting was registered as compared to the previous year.

The RAP on Lesser Floricans resulted in protection of 2-3 nesting sites in Bidar, Karnataka.

The RAP on window pane oysters in Goa, resulted in about 500 larvae collected and released back into the protected habitats of Chicalim Bay area.

Providing equipment in Nashik district, helped in a total 235 wild rescues, including 11 mammals, 22 birds, and 200 reptiles which were released back to the wild. Notable rescues were of leopard, golden jackal, civet, Bonell’s eagle, turtles, monitor lizard.

The Horseshoe crab RAP helped in rescue and release of 84 of this ancient arthropod.
Wildlife Trust of India’s Wildlife Crime Control Division (WCCD) operates with a multi-pronged strategy towards curbing of wildlife crime in India. This includes training and equipping the frontline staff, boosting their morale by capacity building and also with ex gratia support in the event of death or life changing injury sustained in the course of duty. WCCD also provides legal assistance to Forest Department through our appointed lawyers.

Sustained efforts to prevent wildlife crime in Assam, especially in the first addition to Manas National Park have yielded three landmark judgments by the Sessions Court, Bijni, BTC, Assam, which has imposed a maximum sentence of seven years of imprisonment and INR 50,000 fine in all three cases. This were notable as even in cases of rhino poaching, the maximum sentence wasn’t given until now, definitely a ripple effect of our crime and law trainings given right after the notification of the first addition to Manas.
Anti – snare walks

WCCD has with the help of village volunteer teams been conducting anti-snare walks in four tiger reserves in Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh and been able to remove 883 snares.

883 snares removed

Wildlife Seizures

The WCCD team assisted enforcement authorities in recovering 9.5 kg of turtle calipee on 11th June from Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh. 224 pieces of Trochus niloticus (Schedule I sea life) and eight pieces of ‘hathajodi’ in Gurgaon, Haryana (hathajodi is perceived as a dry root that brings prosperity and good luck to the buyer is in fact the dried sex organ of the monitor lizard, a Schedule I species listed in the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972)

On 24th October, 2019 in one of the biggest coordinated joint seizure operation “Clean Art” conducted by WCCB, MoEF & CC, Govt of India and Wildlife Trust of India along with CBI, State Forest Departments and Police Departments across four states namely, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Kerala around 85,900 mongoose paint brushes and 113 kg of mongoose hair were seized and 49 people taken into custody.

WCCD recovered 8 pieces of ‘hathajodi’ in Gurgaon.
Wildlife Crime Prevention Training

16 Wildlife Crime Prevention Trainings were organised in Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala and Assam. 753 frontline staff were trained on the Wildlife Protection Act (1972), forensics, digital investigation tools (call data record analysis), patrolling, procedural law, behaviour of hunting communities etc. Field gear pack of backpack, jackets, rain suits, sleeping bags were provided to 590 forest staff. Apart from trainings imparted to frontline staff, the team also gave training sessions to senior officers of the forest department.

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<td>wildlife crime prevention training sessions</td>
<td>frontline staff trained</td>
<td>forest staff were given field gear</td>
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WTI's supplementary accident assurance scheme is the only NGO run pan-India scheme for frontline forest staff. It covers frontline forest staff under an ex-gratia scheme which grants up to INR 1,00,000 (approx. 1100 GBP) in the event of death on duty, while a partial amount is sanctioned for permanent disability sustained while on duty.

State forest departments of 23 states have joined this scheme so far and over 20,000 frontline forest personnel have been covered under this scheme. Over 150 families have benefited in the last 15 years. Since April 2019, 18 cases have been approved for ex gratia support from Assam, Kerala, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka and Uttarakhand amounting to INR 11,50,000 (approx. 12,400 GBP).

A total of 730 new frontline staff have been added to WTI's PASS database, a unique database maintained by WTI to keep records of the frontline staff of India.

Major Achievement

Considering the requirement for an effective and real-time intelligence gathering system to curb poaching incidents and wildlife trade, the Kerala Forest Department has formally adopted WTI – conceptualized system “Hostile Activity Watch Kernel” (HAWK) for the state.

HAWK is a real time technology based solution aimed at monitoring criminal networks, criminal activities and associated incidents to provide actionable intelligence to enforcement agencies to undertake pre-emptive measures against a possible crime.

1061 offenders and 315 cases have been registered in HAWK till now.
Preventing human-wildlife conflict

WTI released ‘Kinara’ an animation movie highlighting tiger-human conflict on the International Tiger Day this July. With a strong message on co-existence and solutions to avoid potential conflict situations, this short film won the Best Animation Film award at CMS Vatavaran Film Festival this year.
The Rapid Response Team (RRT) in the Dudhwa – Pilibhit landscape addressed 27 human-big cat conflict cases while tracking the movement of 7 leopards and 8 tigers in conflict prone areas. They also attended to two critical cases of human – elephant conflict by monitoring the elephants, managing crowds and rescuing people from potential danger zones.

Awareness meetings with villagers on precautionary measures to be taken in conflict situations, capacity building of the Primary Response Teams (PRTs) were also conducted apart from anti-snare training walks for frontline forest staff were also conducted in both these tiger reserves.

Awareness events in 116 schools engaging 7800 students and 289 faculty members encouraging positive attitudes towards wildlife conservation.

50 solar streetlights were installed across one km stretch of Purba Gurguria village, Kutali Block in Sundarbans, West Bengal under the Sunderbans Tiger project with the support of IUCN and KFW Bank. The lights would help avoid negative encounters between humans and wildlife in the Sundarbans landscape.

The Sunderbans tiger project is aimed at community integration and development, sensitization with awareness activities towards preventing human animal conflict in the Sundarbans delta.
Central India Wild Buffalo Recovery

The project aims to stabilize the wild buffalo population in Udanti-Sitanadi Tiger Reserve, Chhattisgarh by implementing a number of ex situ and in situ interventions. The project has three objectives, preventing unnatural deaths, habitat improvement, re-stocking individuals (especially females) by translocating individuals from closely related populations.

The project has secured necessary permissions to acquire five buffaloes from Assam. A detailed protocol to guide on-ground translocation has also been drafted and opined by all stakeholders.

Alternative livelihoods such as pisciculture has been introduced to two villages in Udanti to reduce anthropogenic pressures on the buffalo habitat. The added income would eventually reduce dependency of villagers on the forest. A special postal cover dedicated to wild buffalo was also released this year.

Rajaji Train Hit Mitigation Project

Nearly 204 potential elephant deaths due to train hits were averted in 2019. 233 elephants were driven away from the crucial distance of 0-10 meters along the tracks. 140 trains were actively stopped to prevent collisions with elephants.

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<td>potential elephant deaths due to trains were averted in 2019</td>
<td>elephants were driven away within 10 meters of the tracks</td>
<td>trains were stopped to prevent collisions with elephants</td>
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Whale Shark Conservation Project

Launched in 2004, this project has been widely acclaimed for its conservation successes, especially in being able to bring about a change in perception of fishermen and coastal communities in Gujarat.

The initiation of the ‘Whale Shark Conservation Project’ also established baseline data on the species, essential to ensure long term conservation of whale sharks. Data on whale shark distribution is being generated through satellite tagging and tracking, photo documentation and identification (whale shark photos are being contributed to ECOOCEAN database) and genetic analysis. The project also reaches out to the coastal communities through awareness programmes towards inculcating a sense of ownership by the community for the whale shark.

On 14th – 15th March, International Whale Shark Conference was organized by WTI to develop whale shark conservation action plans and management framework for the Arabian Sea region. The conference saw active participation from both national and international whale shark experts from scientific and conservation organizations.

The project also celebrated Shark Awareness Day (15th July), World Wildlife Day (3rd March), in Gandhinagar, Gujarat with awareness programmes; participated in World Sustainability Fair at IIT Gandhinagar, Science fair at Veraval, 6th International Whale Shark Day (30th August) in Jamnagar, 11th Gujarat Whale Shark day (26th November) in Veraval.

WTI’s ‘Whale Shark Conservation Project’ was also showcased in CMS COP 13 held at Gandhinagar from 14th to the 22nd of February with the life sized whale shark inflatable stationed right at the entrance of the venue.
Whale Shark Conservation Project

Our whale shark mascot ‘Vhali’ was also included in the 71st Republic Day celebrations hosted by the district administration of Girsomnath district of Gujarat on 26th January 2020. This project was also a subject of an indepth article in Mongabay, a US based environment news portal.

Whale Shark campaign implemented in Lakshadweep and Minicoy

WTI’s Whale Shark Campaign also reached around 5000 islanders in Minicoy and Kavaratti islands of Lakshadweep atoll. Fishermen of this atoll witness the largest congregation of whale sharks, and this was the first such outreach by a wildlife organization in these islands. The campaign team organized awareness talks, art activities and quiz competitions in 18 schools and colleges with an engagement reach of around 1500 students. A multi-stakeholder consultative workshop was also organized inviting officials from coast guard and government agencies entrusted with civil service, public relations of the islands apart from the police and the fisheries department.

GIS Cell

Most conservation projects in WTI use GIS and Remote Sensing maps and tools for better representation of information as specialized maps to habitat analysis and modelling. A robust and strong GIS analysis not only results in clear informative outputs but also better understanding of the conservation issues. GIS tools thus aids in future planning and project management.

This financial year, the GIS Cell assisted in the Wild Buffalo Recovery project, in mapping the home range of wild buffalo to analyse habitat utilization pattern, identified potential sites suitable for the wild buffalo in the Central India landscape using habitat suitability modelling techniques.

The GIS Cell also analysed the Land Use Land Cover change in the identified elephant corridors for the Right of Passage project over the last two decades. The Cell also mapped critical Markhor habitat using location data collected by the field teams. Relevant maps of the protected areas of Jammu and Kashmir were also prepared and updated for Jammu and Kashmir Management Plan at the request of the state forest department.
Mr. Vivek Menon, Founder, Trustee, Executive Director and CEO, WTI won the prestigious Clark R. Bavin Wildlife Law Enforcement Award, 2019 in Geneva this August. He has been awarded for his work towards combatting illegal wildlife trade in his career spanning more than three decades.

He was also conferred the Excellence Award at the ninth edition of Condé Nast Traveller Readers’ Travel Awards on 19th November. Vivek Menon was felicitated for his exceptional contribution towards wildlife conservation and his decades of work on anti-poaching, including undercover operations.

WTI had participated in the 13th Conference of Parties of the Convention on Migratory Species (Bonn Convention) held at Gandhinagar, Gujarat from the 17th to the 22nd of February.

WTI had played a key role in preparing the proposal towards Appendix I enlistment of the Asian Elephants which was agreed by the parties in their plenary sessions. Appendix I listing will greatly help in cross boundary cooperation in addressing threats faced by elephants. Elephants routinely cross borders into neighbouring range states Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Nepal and this was a major breakthrough achieved during CMS COP 13. The other key species which got enlisted in Appendix I during this convention were the Great Indian Bustard and the Bengal Florican.

WTI also participated in regional consultative workshop for the Eastern and the Central Landscape on elephant passages and solutions towards mitigating human-elephant conflict. These consultative workshops were held by the Ministry of Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC).

The Central Indian landscape are home to about 3128 elephants comprising of elephant populations of Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and Southern West Bengal and this workshop saw the participation of line agencies, the National Highway Authority, the Railways, Power and Irrigation Sector officials.

WTI also helped produce an illustrated children’s book ‘Baghon ki Kahani, Munna ki Jubani’ by the Madhya Pradesh Tiger Foundation Society (MPTF). The book is meant to be distributed among school kids across all tiger reserves and protected areas of Madhya Pradesh spreading the message of tiger conservation and why it is important to conserve the tiger.

WTI project teams also celebrated the Global Tiger Day (July 29) across the country with students, conservationists, government agencies and local communities spreading the message of tiger conservation on this day. Events were organized at Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh, New Delhi, Chandrapur, Maharashtra and Udanti-Sitanadi Tiger Reserve, Raipur, Chhattisgarh.
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