

Summary Report: Phoenix Fund

Grantor: Save the Tiger Fund

Project name: Conflict Tiger Emergency Response Team

Grantee: Phoenix Fund

Project #: 1999-0268-002

Grant period: 01 November 1999 – 31 December 2000

Project Objectives and Scope

The objectives of this project were:

- Establish and coordinate a comprehensive emergency response team aimed at preventing, reducing and gradually eliminating human-tiger conflict situations;
- Ensure long-term survival of the wild Siberian tiger population in the region;
- Ensure cooperation with other government law enforcement agencies and environmental NGOs in terms of providing awareness and attracting public attention to the human-tiger conflicts in the Russian Far East, Russian Federation.

Background

In order to systemise the work on preventing and resolving human-tiger conflict situations, a specialised Emergency Response team was established within the Primorsky Krai State Committee on environmental protection on August 27, 1999. Shortly afterwards, Phoenix signed a contract with the Committee stipulating that financial, informational, and technical support would be provided to this newly created **emergency response team**.

The emergency response team of eight people consists mainly of Inspection Tiger rangers. The team is divided into two mobile brigades, each of 3 people: "Vostochnaya" based in Terney in north-eastern part of Primorsky Krai, and "Vladivostok" that operates in the south of Primorye. Boris Litvinov - the leader the Emergency Response team, and Vladimir Shetinin - the project consultant, both possess large personal experience in wildlife conservation, and have been coordinating the project throughout the year.

Depending on circumstances, investigation of a particular situation usually suggests involving scientists, nature reserves' staff, Forest and Hunting Departments' experts, law-enforcement officers, environmental committee's regional branches, as well as requires participation of other Inspection Tiger teams. The emergency response team works in close contact with mass media in order to ensure that the residents of Primorsky Krai become aware of the outputs of the team's work. During patrols, the emergency response team rangers regularly meet with local residents who live in the areas of tiger habitat. The rangers explain to people the reasons of the past conflict situations with tigers and tell them about possible ways of how to prevent and gradually decrease the number of such situations in the future.

Introduction

The main working principles of the emergency response team:

1. Monitoring of all conflict situations;
2. Operative investigation of each situation and - depending on further development of the situation - taking up one of the following measures:
 - putting the situation under control;
 - using various methods to scare the tiger off from the place of incident;
 - catching a tiger with further immobilisation, temporary putting the animal in captivity (if necessary), reintroduction into the wild (special areas);
 - eliminating the tiger (only in exceptional cases when facts indicate that a person suffered severe injuries or got killed by a tiger; when the local residents are threatened by a wandering tiger; when there are no other ways to catch and immobilise a tiger).
3. Highlighting the problems/outputs of the project in the local mass media;*
4. Working with local communities on safety techniques, scaring methods, etc;
5. Preparing photo and video materials;
6. Personnel training.

* Today, over 25 local companies (TV, radio and newspapers) provide informational support for the project. Over 120 interviews, publications and announcements were made for the past year.

Decision on eliminating a tiger can also be made in cases when experts conclude that a particular species is not able to survive in the wild any more because of its illness or impossibility to provide an adequate treatment or rehabilitation.

In order to reveal the reasons of conflict situations that have led to a death of a tiger, professional criminologists are being drawn to work. Those are people who work at regional branches of the forensic medicine laboratory. One of them is Alexander Tupikov, the chief of the forensic department (a highly experienced physician with 15 year experience in the field). He works closely with other experts from the medical-forensic laboratory.

A tigers' remains (which are either found in taiga or received as the result of inevitable mortification) are transferred to forensic experts for investigation analysis. The experts normally try to give answers to the following questions:

- what is the reason of an animal's death;
- what is the prescription of an animal's death;
- whether a tiger corpse has some physical injuries, if yes - then what is their bodily localisation, mechanism of their formation, prescription and degree of their weight;
- whether a tiger corpse has some morphological indications which testify to animal's lifetime illness.

To date, 4 forensic analyses have been conducted. Corresponding reports have been submitted to the Primorsky Krai State Committee on environmental protection. Out of

those four, three analyses were conducted upon the inquiry from the Committee, one - upon the inquiry of the Sikhote-Alin State Biosphere Nature Reserve's authorities.

The forensic reports revealed the following conclusions:

1. A tiger from the vicinities of Melnichnoye Village, Krasnoarmeisky Region. 3-7 days prior to being eliminated, the tiger had a bullet wound as well as an injury of one of its paws caused by a powerful trap with subsequent self-extraction. The tiger could not possibly survive in the taiga by itself. Self-recovery in the wild was out of the question. These reasons forced the tiger out of the forest closer towards human dwellings where it was easier to get prey - livestock and pet animals like dogs.
2. A tiger cub from Dalnerechensky Region. The corpse was discovered by Inspection Tiger Bikin team during a regular raid. The death was caused by general emaciation of the organism, which in turn was the result of the traumas of hind legs. The right leg had an open fracture; the left one had lacerated wounds. The traumas had appeared 3-8 weeks prior to the tiger's death. A shape of fractures is the most typical for the "transportation" trauma (for instance, frontal collision of a vehicle and an animal). The tiger cub was not able to move properly, which meant that the cub could not hunt and feed itself at full value.
3. A tiger from the vicinities of Nagornoye Village, Pozharsky Rayon. 3-12 days prior to death, the tiger's left front paw had been caught into a powerful trap. The tiger had managed to extract the paw. Like in the previous case, self-discovery in the wild was excluded. Those factors forced the tiger out of forest towards villages where it could hunt for livestock and dogs.
4. A tiger from Sikhote-Alin Nature Reserve. Death was caused by disease. No lifetime wounds were discovered on the tiger's corpse.

Major Results and Findings

For the past period, the following conflict situations have been registered and investigated in various regions of Primorski Krai, including:

The 4th quarter of 1999

1. Khasan region -- regular visits of a tiger to the Deer farm Gamov territory;
2. Shkotovsky region - a tiger came to the military base territory;
3. Nadezhdinsky region- a tiger came to one of the "dacha's territory;
4. Pozharsky region - a tiger came to the village of Krasny Yar where he killed two domestic dogs;
5. Terney region- a tiger came to the village of Terney where he killed two domestic dogs;
6. Terney region -a tiger appeared near the peasant farm "Kunaleika" which is 20 km to the village of Plastun.

All investigations lasted for about 1-7 days. All those situations held no real danger for the local people. The emergency response team informed the local authorities and the local mass media of each situation. The necessary information was then published in the media.

1st quarter of 2000

1. Khasan region - frequent visits of a tiger to the Deer farm Gamov territory;
2. Krasnoarmeisky region - a tiger came to the Pokrovka village where he killed 2 domestic dogs;
3. Pozharsky region - regular visits of a tiger to Nagornoye village, numerous domestic dogs killed, danger for the local people resulted in closing down the local peasant farm. The inspection Tiger rangers together with specialists from the Hornocker Wildlife Institute caught and immobilised the tiger . The tiger then was examined by a professional vet. The results of the examination showed that the tiger had been seriously ill and could not survive in the wild, therefore it had been decided to mortify the animal.
4. Krasny Yar village - a wounded tigress had stayed very near Melnichnoye village for 25-30 days. During that time she killed 11 dogs and turned out to be extremely dangerous for the local people. The local school had to close down for sometime for fear the children might get exposed to danger. On February 23, 2000 it had been decided to mortify the tigress.
5. Terney region - a tiger killed 4 sheep on a farm near Terney village .
6. Terney region - a tiger stayed within the boundaries of Terney during 2 days. The Vostochny team rangers scared the tiger off in the end using the sound methods.

2nd quarter2000

1. May, Artemovo village (Terney region) - a tiger attacked a cow, then left the village.
2. August, Verkhny Pereval village (Pozharsky region) - a tiger ate 3 cows and afterwards left the village.

3rd quarter

1. September, Ussurisky region, a tiger wandering tiger was successfully scared off.
2. October, Verkhny Pereval, a tiger was seen near human dwellings.
3. October, Terney, a tiger attacked a cow and then disappeared back into the forest.

4th quarter of 2000:

1. November, Terney village: a 3 year old tiger that was eating dogs caught and immobilised by tiger specialists, put a radio collar on and transported to a remote place in the taiga.
2. November-December, Polyany village, Dalnerechensky village - a tigress attacked a forester. The tigress had been eliminated.

3. December, Vostok village, Krasnoarmeisky region - a tiger was put on radio collar and transported 300 km up North.
4. December, Terney village - an old tigress that could not survive in the wild on her own was eliminated.
5. December, Kavalerovo region - a tiger had been wounded presumably by a passing vehicle. The local people were warned of possible danger. The situation was kept under control for weeks afterwards.

Professional Training

In May 2000, a 7-day training for all members of the emergency response team was held in Terney (North of Primorsky Krai). Three experienced veterinarians from WCS and HWI (USA) were invited as instructors at the training besides scientists from Sikhote-Alin Reserve. The rangers who successfully completed the training were selected to visit the USA to continue training in September 2000. There, among other things the rangers learned how to use the immobilisation equipment when dealing with conflict tigers. Such exchange was crucial for the Russian rangers in terms of absorbing knowledge and experience from the US specialists who run similar programs in US zoos and National parks.

Phoenix also organised training sessions during the summer period (when conflict situations are less likely to arise) for the emergency response team rangers covering the following aspects:

- Investigation of the site of incident; how to collect samples (instructors -local forensic experts)
- Methods of scaring off tigers (instructor Galina Salkina)
- Peculiarities of tiger biology (instructors Victor Yiudin, Euegny Smirnov)
- Safety techniques and regulations during investigating a conflict situation and conducting patrols (instructor - Vladimir Shetinin)

Public Awareness

Booklet

Earlier in 2000, Phoenix published a brochure on "Recommendations on people behaviour and rules for keeping the livestock in the areas of tiger habitat" (edition of 1,800 copies). The "recommendations" are based on similar regulations that were approved by the regional environmental authorities both in Khabarovsk and Primorsky Krai. Phoenix distributed those brochures among nature reserves, schools, eco-centres, and libraries. Because the brochures proved to be very helpful in terms of raising people's awareness on the subject, Phoenix applied with a proposal to NFWF (USA) for financing the additional edition of those brochures.

Legislative regulations developing

On February 8, 2000, Phoenix organised and conducted a broadened working meeting where possible ways of resolving human-tiger conflict situations were discussed. Representatives of both State wildlife law-enforcement agencies and different NGOs took part in the meeting. During the discussion, everybody agreed that the main reason for

human-tiger conflict situations (apart from natural illness, poaching, and casual encounters) is decrease in and poor conditions of the natural Amur tiger habitat.

In order to preserve the stability of the Amur tiger population and reduce the number of possible conflict situations in the future, various measures must be taken to conserve the Amur tiger natural habitat, including introduction of the legislative regulations (normative documents) on the Krai level. Based on the results of the meeting, in the course of the project implementation the following legislative documents were prepared and submitted for approval to the Russian environmental authorities: "Procedures on investigating and solving human-tiger conflict situations and instructions for the environmental officials and Inspection Tiger rangers on handling human-tiger conflict situations", and "Methods for defining damage done to the wild cat population under habitat destruction in the Russian Far East".

Both these documents have been recommended for ratification by the Department for Natural Resources of the Russian Far East.

"Methods" will shortly be published in the most popular local wildlife magazine called "Zov Taigi" ("The Roar of the Taiga"), in order to attract public attention to the issue and later on receive references that will help legalise the document on the Krai level.

Regional Cooperation

There were useful exchanges of opinions and information during the project work. The work results were submitted by Phoenix Fund and discussed at the International Workshop on Siberian Tiger Population Recovery Plan Development held in Harbin, China, in October, 2000, where tiger specialists, conservationists and scientists from more than 7 countries took part as well. The issue was discussed, also, at various meetings, seminars and training courses both in Russia and abroad.

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