

Poachers electrocute tigers, bison in park

Calcutta, April 19: Growing incidents of animal poaching by electrocution at the Pench National Park, 116 km off Nagpur in Maharashtra, have created a flutter among the wildlife activists.

The latest in the series of deaths — that of a tiger — caused by electrically charged wiremesh trap laid by poachers came to the notice of a Calcutta-based wildlife protection group "Junglees" while on a trip to the national park.

Quoting range office sources, Junglees said that another tiger was electrocuted in late 1995, a bison in 1996 and a sloth bear, whose population is not more than four in the forest, in March 1998. A suspected poacher too lost life in Jan-

uary when he accidentally got caught in his own trap.

The group's secretary Raja Chatterjee said on reaching the park on April 10, they were informed of the electrocution by the beat officer. "We decided to probe the matter and met the sub-divisional and range officers

who said the tiger's body was first noticed near the trap on April 6 by a beat officer," Mr Chatterjee said.

Forest officials on investigation found that the poachers had planted wooden pegs in the forest to which galvanised wires were hooked. The wires attached to the pegs ran approximately 400 metres

inside the jungle, he said.

The poachers hooked the wires to 1,100 KV overhead electric lines passing through the jungle. "Such traps are generally laid around during night and removed at dawn to hunt herbivores like cheetals and sambhars," he said,

suspecting that the poachers could be from any of the four close by villages — Tikadi, Paraspani, Barelipar or Karmajhiri.

When the poachers realised that a tiger had been killed, they removed part of the wire mesh and disconnected the power supply before forest officials reached the spot.

"Surprisingly, the spots where

the bear and the poacher were killed earlier are also within 500 m of the spot where the tiger was killed," Mr Chatterjee said.

After officials informed field director S.K. Chauhan, the carcass of the tiger, following a post-mortem examination, was burnt in his presence on April 7. Junglees have faxed details of the poaching to the New Delhi-based Ranthambore Foundation, project tiger officials, green leader Maneka Gandhi and the Union environment minister. Mr Chatterjee suggested connecting the high tension electric lines through underground cable ducts and incremental night patrolling at the national park to protect endangered wildlife. (PTI)

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