

State launches smart cage to trap tigers

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Kolkata: The forest department on Tuesday unveiled a scientifically-improved cage to trap tigers in the Sunderbans and leopards in north Bengal.

The new cages are much lighter than those being used now and the officials said it would be safe for both the animals and department staff who use it. "The heavy cages cause injuries to both the animals and handlers, hence the new cages were designed," said chief wildlife warden Ujjwal Bhattacharya.

The cage has been jointly developed by the wildlife wing of the directorate of forests, government of West Bengal, WWF-India and Microware Technologies.

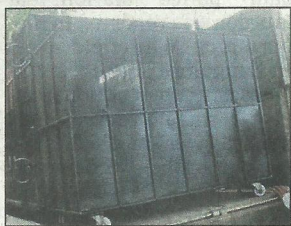
WWF-India's Sunderbans chapter head Anurag Danda said the new trap cage uses GSM technology to communicate date and time of trapping along with weight of the trapped animal. "The trap will not only help deal with human wildlife conflict, but also generate data in terms of video recording of animal behaviour prior to being trapped as well as from within the cage after the trap door is shut," he added.

According to him, two types of cages have been designed. While the first one, weighing around 240 kg, is meant for trapping smaller animals like leopards in north Bengal, the other one, weighing around 300 kg, will be used in the Sunderbans to trap tigers. "The cages currently in use weigh almost 400 kg. If an animal is trapped, then the weight increases further. Besides, the cages can't be transported over long distances and often the trapped animals — mostly tigers — need to be shifted to a transfer cage. In the new format, one only needs to remove the bait cage — fixed to the rear portion of the main cage — and it will be ready to be transported," said additional principal chief conservator of forests Pradeep Vyas.

Apart from being safe, lighter and not prone to corrosion, the cage will have electronic sensors and gadgets that will



One of the HD cameras (in circle) inside the trap cage and (below) the bait cage



send SMS to programmed mobile numbers when a tiger or leopard will be trapped. "It will have two high-definition (HD) cameras inside that will record the animal's behaviour before it's trapped and after the cage door is shut. A weighing mechanism is fixed to the base of the cage that will record the animals' weight. The circuitry comes in a closed panel that's attached on top of the cage from outside," said Dhurjati Prosad Chattopadhyay of Microware Technologies, adding that the images of the animals will be stored in the camera chip. Each cage will cost around Rs 2 lakh.

While WWF-India has given three cages — two meant to be used in north Bengal and the other one for the Sunderbans — to the Bengal forest department, Madhya Pradesh's Kanha and Uttarakhand's Corbett tiger reserves have also received a cage each from the NGO. The WWF-India officials and engineers of Microware Technologies will give training to the department staff initially on how to assemble the cage components — the main cage, bait cage, circuitry panel, cameras and others.

"The department can place orders on cage components based on their requirement. The cost will automatically come down then. For instance, the Corbett and Kanha officials didn't want any cameras to be installed inside the cages," added Danda.