

Final Evaluation Report

Your Details	
Full Name	Ashraf Shaikh
Project Title	Identifying Ecological and Anthropogenic Factors Influencing Tiger Attacks on Humans in the Tiger Conservation Landscape of Central India
Application ID	42383-1
Date of this Report	30/04/2025

1. Indicate the level of achievement of the project's original objectives and include any relevant comments on factors affecting this.

Objective	Not achieved	Partially achieved	Fully achieved	Comments
To understand the spatial, temporal, and contextual drivers of tiger attacks on humans in Chandrapur district.				The study, which initially focused on Bramhapuri and Junona, was expanded to include additional regions including the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve. This allowed for a robust comparative analysis across a conflict gradient. The data revealed that in high-conflict areas like Bramhapuri, 61% of attacks occurred outside forests, primarily in agricultural fields during peak work hours (1–4 PM). In contrast, in lower-conflict regions like Junona, 90% of attacks occurred inside forests during early morning resource collection. These findings illustrate how habitat fragmentation, human land use, and tiger movement patterns intersect to influence the risk of attack
To assess how socio-cultural beliefs and local perceptions shape community attitudes toward tigers and influence human-tiger coexistence.				The study uncovered a nuanced relationship between fear, reverence, and tolerance. In Chandrapur district, Waghoba worship (tiger deity) plays a central role in shaping perceptions and attitudes of local communities. However, in Bramhapuri, increased conflict has strained traditional reverence, with some respondents viewing rituals as ineffective. In contrast, Junona retained higher levels of empathy

				for tigers, with 48% of respondents expressing understanding of tiger behaviour. This contrast highlights how cultural values and perceived risk interact to influence conservation attitudes.
To evaluate forest department strategies for managing human-tiger interactions and assess the effectiveness of their engagement with local communities				Interviews with 36 forest department personnel across the 3 three divisions and Tadoba revealed challenges such as limited decision-making power, inadequate resources, and mistrust from communities. Notably, officers in Bramhapuri described their roles as "executors of top-down orders," often without room for local adaptation. Community members reported dissatisfaction with ex-gratia policies (only 9% in Bramhapuri expressed satisfaction), citing delays and rigid disbursement structures. The study thus brought out the disconnect between policy intent and community experience, offering concrete recommendations for improving responsiveness and transparency.

2. Describe the three most important outcomes of your project.

- a) Empirical evidence of conflict dynamics across a gradient: By covering regions from high-conflict (Bramhapuri) to low-conflict (Junona and parts of Tadoba), the study revealed how spatial patterns of human activity and forest fragmentation influence attack frequency, timing, and severity. This has direct implications for zoning, land-use planning, and mitigation policy.
- b) Revealing the duality of fear and reverence in local tiger perceptions: The study demonstrated how cultural frameworks like Waghoba worship foster long-standing coexistence, yet are now under pressure in high-conflict regions. This insight underscores the importance of reinforcing relational values and not relying solely on fear-based messaging in conservation outreach.
- c) Identification of key gaps in management and policy: The research highlighted dissatisfaction with ex-gratia mechanisms, lack of community

involvement in decision-making, and the absence of proactive communication during tiger movements. These findings provide a clear roadmap for improving conflict management practices and building trust with communities.

3. Explain any unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project and how these were tackled.

A significant challenge was the underrepresentation of women and younger individuals due to seasonal migration (especially among working-age males) and cultural norms restricting women's public engagement. This limited the diversity of perspectives in some village interviews. To address this, we made sure that if there is a female participant, then there are other female family or community members present during the interview to make the participant comfortable.

Additionally, due to a series of tiger poaching cases in Central India, there were bureaucratic delays in obtaining permissions for fieldwork in Tadoba and some other areas and required persistent follow-up. Having institutional affiliations and prior networks helped ease this process.

4. Describe the involvement of local communities and how they have benefitted from the project.

Local communities were at the heart of this study as it focused on their sentiments and perceptions. We engaged a total of 214 participants across 70 villages through semi-structured interviews along with focus group discussions in 8 attack (conflict) hotspot villages, ensuring representation of tribal and non-tribal populations, victims of tiger attacks, and general residents. These engagements:

- Gave communities an opportunity to express their concerns, cultural practices, and policy preferences.
- Provided valuable feedback to be shared with forest authorities for more inclusive planning.

In several villages, the research process itself catalyzed discussions on forming local vigilance teams and exploring alert systems.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

As we progress with the analysis, we will publish and present our findings. Disseminating the findings through scientific publications will be vital in linking evidence to on-ground conflict preventive strategies and policy interventions.

I may conduct further research in the landscape to (i) assess ethical dimensions of conservation in shared spaces, (ii) investigate socio-ecological drivers of tiger attacks & (iii) biocultural and systemic influences on human responses to presence of tigers.

6. How do you plan to share the results of your work with others?

We plan to disseminate findings across multiple platforms:

- Peer-reviewed journal publications
- Policy briefs tailored for state forest departments and district administration.
- Conference presentations at conservation and anthropology forums.
- Public outreach via blogs and op-eds focused on human-wildlife coexistence.

Below is the link to a popular article I wrote on the practice of tiger worship in Chandrapur with various narratives on its origin and its future.

<https://roundglassustain.com/conservation/waghoba-central-india>

This work was also featured in the Hindustan Times, a prominent national news media outlet in India. The link to the article is given below.

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/chandigarh-news/wildbuzz-in-the-heart-of-india-tigers-are-worshipped-as-gods-101732385117497.html>

7. Looking ahead, what do you feel are the important next steps?

- Reform ex-gratia policies to be faster, more transparent, and better tailored to community needs (e.g., job guarantees over lumpsum ex-gratia payments).
- Institutionalize community participation in tiger monitoring and response — moving from reactive to preventive strategies.
- Scale up relational-value-based conservation messaging, drawing from Waghoba worship and forest stewardship traditions.
- Advocate for conflict-sensitive development in buffer zones — including alternative livelihoods, robust fencing, and prompt compensation for crop loss due to prey species.

8. Did you use The Rufford Foundation logo in any materials produced in relation to this project? Did the Foundation receive any publicity during the course of your work?

Yes. The Rufford Foundation logo was displayed on a poster presentation at a conference organized by the Maharashtra Forest Department, which featured researchers, policy-makers, and conservation practitioners. The Foundation's support will also be formally acknowledged in the upcoming journal publications, as well as in all future outreach materials including community reports. This ensures continued

visibility and recognition of the Foundation's role in supporting meaningful conservation research and practice.

9. Provide a full list of all the members of your team and their role in the project.

Ashraf Shaikh	Principal Investigator: Conceptualization, Study Design, Data Collection & Analysis
Dr. Kulbhushansingh Suryawanshi	Supervisor: Conceptualization, Study Design & Data Analysis
Dhananjay Dakhare	Field Assistant: Building trust with community members, helped navigating the landscape and assisted in data collection

10. Any other comments?

We are deeply grateful to The Rufford Foundation for supporting this vital work. The flexibility and trust offered through this grant allowed for meaningful engagement across a sensitive landscape and enabled the project to grow in scope and depth. This study not only contributes to the academic field of conservation social science but also lays the groundwork for community-centred, culturally-informed conflict mitigation strategies in India's tiger landscapes.

Field Photographs



Habitat Type- Chandrapur forests (and the Central Indian Landscape in general) are dominated by Teak (*Tectona grandis*)- Photo: Ashraf Shaikh



Tiger at the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve during a trip to the core area with the local forest department. - Photo: Ashraf Shaikh



Doni village at the fringe of the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve. The forest in the background is the core area of the tiger reserve. - Photo: Ashraf Shaikh



A resident of Junona village weaves a traditional bamboo split fence around his house to safeguard against wildlife incursions, including tigers and leopards (**verbal consent was taken from the villager before capturing the picture. He was informed that the picture maybe used in reports or publications**). – Photo: Ashraf Shaikh



A participant in Halda village, Bramhapuri division, points out fresh tiger pugmarks in his agricultural field, left by an individual he sighted earlier that morning. – Photo: Ashraf Shaikh



A Waghoba (tiger deity) shrine in Awalgaon village stands at the site where a 7-year-old girl was killed by a tiger, built in her memory. Awalgaon, among the most attack-prone villages in the Bramhapuri division, has recorded nearly 12 attacks in the past three years. – Photo: Ashraf Shaikh



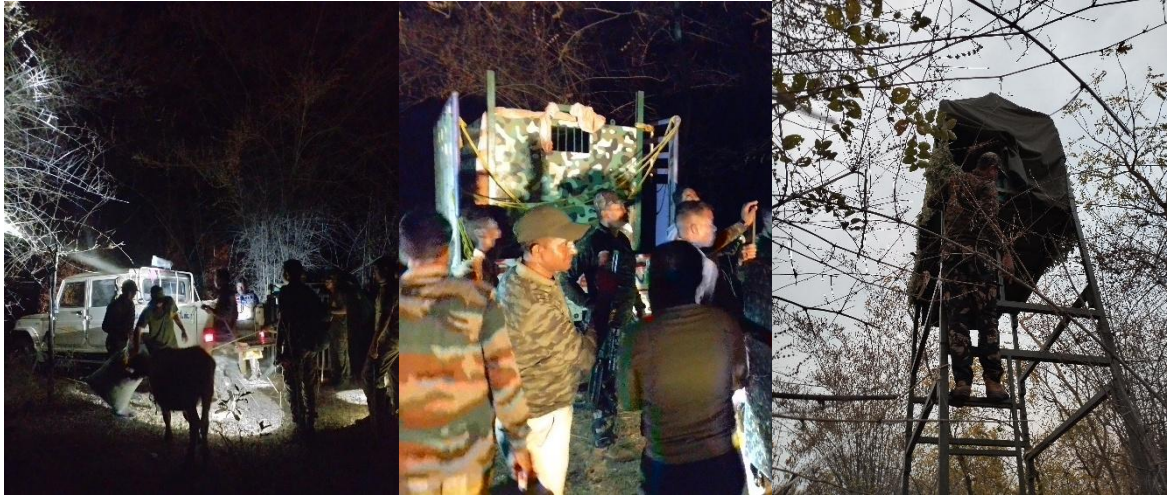
In Halda village, the Chimurkar community reveres the tiger as their clan deity. They invited us to the installation ceremony of the newly built Waghoba temple. On the left, an elderly community member—who performs the rituals and offers prayers to Waghoba—is seen in devotion, while on the right, other members sing traditional devotional songs in reverence (**Verbal consent was obtained from the village head and priest to capture photos and were informed that these maybe used in reports and publications**). – Photo: Ashraf Shaikh



A focus group discussion with the Gram Panchayat (village council) members of Halda village in Bramhapuri division, which is another high attack-prone area with close to 8 tiger attacks in 2023 (**verbal consent was obtained from each participant prior to the discussion**). – Photo: Firoj Tupat (Friend and local villager)



Photos taken during one-on-one interviews in Maroda village in Tadoba buffer (top left), Chora village in Chandrapur territorial division (top right & bottom). **Verbal consent was taken from all participants before taking pictures and were informed that these maybe used in reports or for publications.** – Photo: Dhananjay Dakhare (Field Assistant)



A 9-year-old tiger had allegedly killed 6 people in Junona block in a span of 6 months. The local forest department received the permission from the state authorities to capture the tiger. We were involved in the capture operation with the forest department and their rapid rescue team, which lasted for weeks. – Photo: Ashraf Shaikh.