

## [Statism killed the cats](#) [1]

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It's impossible to find out how many tigers are left in India's state owned tiger reserves. The estimates for individual reserves are not available beyond 2001/02. The lack in transparency serves to hide the fiasco of state-run animal protection.

In 1973 the Indian government set up [Project Tiger](#) [3], which initially covered nine tiger reserves. Now an increased number of reserves cover 1.14% of the land in India. Year-on-year increases in the tiger population were reported ? until an [independent study in 2008 \(PDF\)](#) [4] found that the figures had been fiddled by Field Directors to obtain more state subsidies. The estimates were reduced by some 60%. In some cases the reported increases had not even been biologically possible. It is now thought that tiger numbers have dramatically fallen in the last thirty-five years.

The report must have caused some consternation in government ranks. Now, even falsified figures are no longer available. We are left guessing how many tigers there are actually left from the 82 in Bandipur National Park, the 137 in Corbett National Park, etc.

Dense fog is used to deflect from state failure. From the individual reserves estimates, Project Tiger switched to province-wide estimates, making any comparison impossible. Even respected tourist guidebooks such as Lonely Planet base tiger figures on the 2001 estimates (discredited in the 2008 study), or say nothing at all (which feels odd if you try to find which reserve to visit).

?Anything but tiger numbers? is the order of the day?: Project Tiger's 2009's ?scientific assessment of the state of tiger reserves? merely distinguishes between ?low? and ?good? tiger density. Independent scientific research is [not allowed](#) [5]. Even if permission is granted, thousands of hurdles are thrown in the way; many end up having court cases brought against them, and some are even accused of killing the animals.

Project Tiger is a basket case of failing state enterprise and vested interests. Its website tells us a lot about budget outlays, steering committees, central assistance, and Five Year Plans ? but very little about the actual tiger number increase (absolute number increases are alleged but the territory was increased too, so one cannot compare). For some insight in the levels of bureaucracy between the Minister and the Field Worker, [click here](#) [6]. The whole project was paid for by the Indian government and the Indian states, with grants from some other organisations, including the World Wildlife Fund. Some side projects, such as the India Eco Development Project, were partly paid for by you, through the World Bank. For some light

entertainment regarding the bureaucratic organisation of eco-conservation, [click here](#) <sup>[7]</sup> (scroll to Implementation Mechanism).

Apart from the imposition of smoke screens, nothing has changed. The Project Tiger website continues to state that 'it is one of our most successful conservation ventures in modern times?'. One wonders what the failing ones are like.

And yet there are alternatives. Botswana, South Africa, [Costa Rica \(JSTOR link\)](#) <sup>[8]</sup>, and many others have been tremendously successful with the introduction of private wildlife concessions. Linked to [ecotourism \(PDF\)](#) <sup>[9]</sup>, private concessions can deliver income far beyond the potential gain from poaching; it allows paying for game wardens and maintenance; and the wildlife tends to flourish.

But for that to happen in India, statist dogma needs to be culled first.

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[3] <http://www.projecttiger.nic.in/>

[4] [http://projecttiger.nic.in/whtsnew/status\\_of\\_tigers\\_in\\_india\\_2008.pdf](http://projecttiger.nic.in/whtsnew/status_of_tigers_in_india_2008.pdf)

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