

NEWSLETTER

(29/07/2021)

PART -3

Tigress P213-32, four Cubs and Tiger P243

(by - Team of Panna Tiger Reserve)

Story continues...

1. Braving the wild and learning the skills:

Two and half months have passed since the death of Tigress P213-32, mother of four cubs and as everybody is eagerly waiting, we have news to share: "All four cubs are together and doing very fine in the wild. They are now nearly 10 months of age, have grown bigger in size, have started venturing out of their earlier small Cub's Territory, successfully protecting themselves from other threatening carnivores, and finally and most importantly, news to BREAK: Learning the Skill of Hunting".

A little recap of previous two Newsletters: mother Tigress P213-32 died on 15/05/2021 from unknown illness even though attempts were made to treat her. Her four cubs, then of age around 7 months, were left in the wild. Male Tiger P243, considered father of these cubs, remained in the area helping them in survival. Due to presence of the Tiger P243 in the area, cubs got required protection from other co-predators especially other male tigers. Initially there seemed to be daily interaction between P243 and cubs, which later became less frequent, but even then, no instance of P243 eating Kill with cubs either observed or recorded. It mainly became responsibility of Park management to see that they get timely kill.

All four cubs are much bigger and heavier since reported in last Newsletter Part 2, may be around 60-70 Kg and surely more aggressive than earlier, as observed recently in the field.

2. Can cubs Hunt now?

The straight answer is 'No'. Hunting for a tiger means: fixing a suitable prey target, chasing it and kill it while protecting himself from any severe hurt and injury. Killing a target also requires skills. Most of the big cats catch their prey from back and when it falls down, catch it from neck to make a quick kill. Going close to neck of a prey require lots of practice and skill as this move might injure them.

About the cubs, they are yet to learn the art of hunting but they are learning how to kill. They can now kill a live prey, if it doesn't run and of suitable size. It is a long journey for cubs to learn the require skills, first for acquiring all the skills of killing a live prey and finally Hunting down the prey. And it will take time. As discussed in Newsletter Part-2, normally Tiger cubs begin to learn hunt with their mother and siblings between eight to ten months of age. The mother is primarily concerned with teaching her cubs how to hunt and protect themselves. Now, without mother, standing at the age of nearly 10 months, they are learning skills of hunting on their own and as a first step, now can kill a live prey of suitable size with ease.



Picture 1: Learning the skill of Killing in the wild (Dated: 01/07/2021)



Picture 2: Learning the skill of Killing in the wild (Dated: 25/07/2021)

It is believed that in wild, after completion of 14 months of age, a tiger cub can hunt independently. But that normally happens when cubs are with mother who imparts hunting skills to cubs at every step. Whether these four cubs without mother will be able to hunt independently, it is for all to see in future. Whether father has any role in imparting this skill of hunting? Cannot be said for sure but father Tiger P243 regularly interacts with cubs as observed from its movement data obtained from its satellite collar.

3. The mysterious father Tiger P243:

Interaction between father Tiger P243 and four cubs is still a mystery and probably will remain so. There are facts:

- a. Whether father Tiger P243 remains in the area of cubs?
 - YES
- b. Whether father Tiger P243 staying with cubs?
 - YES. Seen with cubs.
- c. Whether father Tiger P243 has taken cubs out with him?
 - Not sure, but on 25/06/2021, P243 was observed staying with the cubs for the whole night and moved out next day morning on 26/06/2021. For next two days, cubs were neither seen in their Cub's Territory nor any activity was recorded by field staff. No camera trap pictures of cubs were captured for this period from the Cub's Territory. Later, on 28/06/2021 afternoon, field staff noted cub's activities in the area again and it was

confirmed by camera trap pictures of cubs in the afternoon. As nobody saw movement of cubs with P243, one cannot conclude for sure that cubs went out with P243. No other occasion of this kind came to the notice.

d. Whether father Tiger P243 sharing kills with cubs?

- Not seen sharing any kill with cubs in last one and half month.

e. Whether father Tiger P243 teaching survival skills to cubs?

- Hard to tell. But no visible activities of this kind have been observed.

In fact, satellite data of past one and half months show that there is lots of movement of Tiger P243 outside its known territory. It is a well established fact that a male tiger after establishing a territory of its own, would search for a female tiger and in this search will venture out in to new areas and during the process, may fight with other male tigers. Tiger P243 movement data show that after coming in close proximity of Tigress P213-63 on 25/05/2021 night, the relationship did not develop further. No further interaction was found between them. Later Tiger P243 was seen and frequently observed moving in the areas of Tigress P652 and Tigress P653, both tigresses now more than two and half year old and yet to be seen pairing with any male tiger. On 22/07/2021, it was observed by tracking party that P243 is with one tigress and carrying some fighting marks in the form of minor injuries on both the shoulders. Next day an Elephant Search Party was dispatched and the Search Party found what was guessed: P243 with Tigress P652. Both seem to be going well together. Those injury marks were minor but it suggested that P243 and Tigress P652 came together after P243 fought with other male tiger in the area. It seems P243 won. The other male tiger identity is still unknown.



Picture 3: Tiger P243(with Collar) with Tigress P652 on 23/07/2021

Tiger P243 also has been observed courting with Tigress P653. Due to his courtship with two tigresses, P243 is spending less and less time in Cub's Territory and latest satellite data reveals that he is not seen in Cub's Territory since 16/07/2021. Currently both the tigresses i.e. P652 and P653 maintains their own territory but with

the entry of Tiger P243, there are chances that one of the tigress may move close to Cub's Territory in future.

4. What lies ahead:

All four cubs survived 75 days in wild without their mother. It is no small achievement for them. Only two cubs out of four of first litter of Tigress P213-32 survived though she was there to protect them in 2019. Surviving in the wild is an onerous task and it is not over yet. Till the time these cubs start hunting independently, the job is not over. Following new challenges will emerge for cubs in near future:

- a. Learning skill of hunting.
- b. Ward off the danger from other co-predators.
- c. If father Tiger P243 pairs with other tigresses (P652 or P653 or both), how the situation will emerge? Will there be any changes in P243 behavior towards cubs?
- d. If any tigress comes close to Cub's Territory with Tiger P243, will this a threat to cubs?

These new challenges will put Tiger Reserve management also on toes along with cubs. Past two and half months were of great learning. It has given new insights in to tiger behaviour, of cubs as well as of adults, in wild. Working closely with cubs while leaving no imprint of human on them, is of prime importance. The management is conscious of this fact. It is emotionally also quite a challenge. Every new day brings more challenges. But with all these challenges, future holds new insights, learning and valuable experience for Tiger Reserve management and to all those who now feel related to the continuing and evolving story. Let's experience this together.
