

*A White Tiger and a Cadillac*

Ajai Singh IRS(R), Gaya, Bihar

The generation of the 1960's will immediately relate "white tigers" to the Maharaja of Rewa in Madhya Pradesh. The Maharaja had raised and successfully bred white tiger cubs in an old palace. Many of the captive white tigers in zoos across many countries could trace 'Mohan', the Rewa tiger, as their ancestor.

In the early 1960s I was at school in Dehradun. The wide coverage of the Rewa tiger in the newspapers and in National Geographic generated much interest amongst the boys and schoolmasters. A white tiger, then unknown, was obviously very distracting.

34

I remember being a bit smug amongst all the excitement. I had an advantage there. In the winter of 1957 I had actually seen, touched and gaped at Mr. J.G. Wakefield's white tiger - a mounted head and cape. The senior Wakefield, (father of John Wakefield of Kabini fame) was then living in retirement on the edge of Gaya Town.

Our parents sent me, along with my siblings, to visit with the old stalwart for a rather uncommon learning experience. J.G. Wakefield had a way with young children and was a wonderful storyteller. Two hours went by quickly; much of which time was taken up with

stories about white tigers in the Gaya jungles. To enliven his story Mr. J. G. Wakefield had a surprise. He called out, and immediately his magnificent white tiger trophy was brought out and unrolled in the winter sun falling on his verandah!



Mr. Wakefield had shot the white tiger in the rich Danua – Bhalwa jungles, which formed the Maharaja of Tikari's private forests and shooting box abutting the Hazaribagh jungles. Mr. Wakefield, a school friend of the Maharaja had also served as General Manager of the Raj for decades. He told us of the five white tigers that had been shot in Tikari Jungles during his time. Of these, four were shot in the Maharaja's Danua - Bhalwa jungles between 1926 and 1935. The fifth was shot in the Gurpa

Jungles that belonged to the younger branch of the Tikari family. The Maharaja shot two of these tigers, one of which made the Poland Ward record for white tiger. The third tiger was shot by George Tikari (MK Fateh Singh), the fourth by Mr. JG Wakefield and the fifth Tikari tiger in Gurpa jungles by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Kumar of Amawan.

Another two white tigers were shot further south in Gaya District. One on the slopes south of the Rajauli Jungles of Maksudpur Raj by a local zamindar and the second in the Itkhori Jungles by the Maharaja of Ramgarh. Further east of the Gaya District, the Maharaja of Gidhaur also shot a white tiger on the southern jungles. All the above locations in Gaya or

Bhagalpur form the marcher lands of old Magadh (now south Bihar) that merge with the Jharkhand forests on the Chotanagpur Plateau.

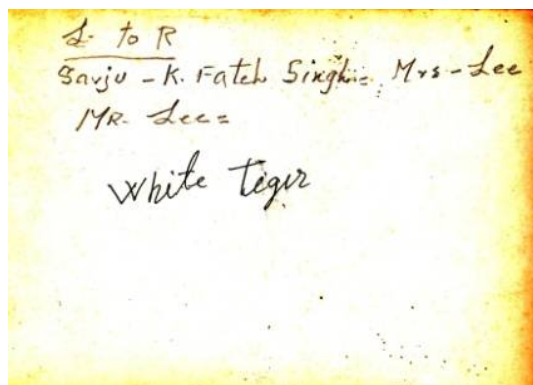
All the six Gaya tigers were shot without prior intelligence of the tigers being white. They



were taken from a macchan over a natural kill or in an organized beat following natural or domestic cattle kills. And all the shikaries involved were apparently surprised when their trophy turned up to be white.

MK Fateh Singh (Uncle George) had a romantic story about his white tiger which he related while we were his guests at Bhalwa Kothi during our school winter holidays in

1963. As it happened, in December of 1935 a fully-grown male tiger was reported to have killed just behind the Bhalwa Kothi. Uncle George, then a 17 year boy, was offered his chance by his father, the Maharaja of Tikari. The 'Jhalawa' or beat, involving beaters, flags and stops, finally kicked off in the late afternoon. The tiger that showed up and was shot by George Tikari – his first tiger – surprised everyone. It was a 10ft white tiger that the hunters triumphantly carried to their nearby home. The accompanying photograph shows the white tiger at Bhalwa Kothi with Sarju Shikari, George Tikari, Mrs. Lee and Mr. Lee. (Mr. Lee, originally on contract through Folls Royce, had accompanied the Tikari Maharaja's sporting Folls Royce Silver Rogue 1908 and two other cars to Gaya. Lee later resigned his job in England to join the Maharaja's service, as head of the latter's sprawling motorcar garage).



The twist in the tale happened the following year. Maharaja Bhupendra Singh of Patiala, an old friend of the Tikari Maharaja, was a guest of the latter at his Bhalwa Shooting Box. Calcutta was an easy drive away and was then the popular winter watering hole for Indian princes with its polo, its racing and its up-market restaurants.

The flamboyant Patiala Maharaja saw young George's white tiger trophy and was bowled over by its rare charm as he had never before seen or heard of a white tiger. After the usual shooting and merriment at the Bhalwa Shooting Box, when it was time for Maharaja Bhupendra Singh to leave, he was overjoyed to learn that young George's white tiger was part of his luggage. His host, the Tikari Maharaja, who was well known for his generosity and large heartedness, had bullied his obviously reluctant son, to gift the tiger to his friend and their guest. And so the Bhalwa white tiger fetched up at the Patiala Palace Billiard Room.

Maharaja Bupendra Singh was obviously sensitive to the heart-wrench the young George Tikari would have gone through. Not one to do things in small measure, he decided to gift the young George an extraordinary Cadillac. He had, during his stay at Bhalwa, learnt from his host that a custom built Cadillac V-16RHD Sports Phaeton in style 4260 was being readied for delivery to fill the order of the Tikari Maharaja's exacting specifications. Having privately settled the financial bit with his friend and late host, Maharaja Bupendra Singh commandeered the Cadillac on the high seas and gifted it to George Tikari as a thank you present. George Tikari soon owned an emerald green 'in line' V-16sRHD Cadillac Sports Phaeton. Only 75 of these Cadillac's 'in line' V-16 were ever built in style 4260 and the RHDV-16 in question was the only one amongst these special seventy-five cars with a factory built right hand drive chassis. In 1960-61, I saw this showstopper classic sitting, a bit listlessly, in the porch at Bhalwa Kothi.



Eventually the car fetched up with a West Coast Collector and after a full restoration reigned as the Crown Jewel of the West Coast. The car is now in the United Kingdom and has featured in a Jersey Island postage stamp amongst many other honours. Uncle George passed away in the early 1970s. But his Cadillac continues to turn heads of the discerning and the passionate and to beat the competition in all her outings in different geographies. Lately, it was on the market again with Sotheby's exulting: "To a British enthusiast, any Cadillac V-16 is a rare, exotic and seldom-seen sight – but the opportunity to acquire one with factory right-hand drive, and such a significant and magnificent complete history, represents a truly unique moment. It is an automobile worthy of a Maharaja, in size, power and glamour that fairly radiates from every nut and bolt".

Coming back to our white tiger, the acknowledged authority, Kailash Sankhala notes, 'that the white tiger is a full-bodied mutant that has not caused any damage to the species. This is a very rare phenomenon in any animal species and our generation has been lucky to see this important mutation'. He also notes that in the 1920's and 1930's more than 15 white tiger have been shot in Bihar alone. There were reported sporadic instances of white tiger occurring at Mirzapur, Cooch Behar and in the Jaintia hills. But an unusual concentration seems to have occurred in the southern forests of Magadh Bihar. Incidentally, a white leopard too, in the Rohtas forests of the Dumraon Maharaja – shot by his guest the flamboyant Boris Lissanevitch of 'Tiger for Breakfast' fame.

Alas, when the Bihar Government took over the above private forests through a Legislative enactment, the Bihar State had no forest service that could take control or manage these forests. It took decades to recruit and put a service in place. Resultantly, a decade of reckless felling and poaching destroyed the very fine virgin forests and habitat of southern Magadh.

The District Census Handbook (Gaya) Bihar 1965 –Vol 2 notes, “the forests of Rajauli, Dilwa (Danua) - Bhalua and Sherghati were very dense once upon a time. Though they have all suffered large-scale **unsystematic felling during the period of takeover of zamindari, ...**”

{Note: Rajauli- Ektara were the Maksudpur Raj forests, Danua - Bhalwa the Tikari Raj forests and the Sherghati forests included the Dumraon Raj forests.}

Interestingly, to paper over the destruction of Bihar forests due to the hopelessly mismanaged process of bureaucratic take over, at the next opportunity, the public narrative itself has been shamelessly doctored. Now the Census of India 1981, Part 13, Vol.18 Page 2 notes, “In the southern part, the forests of Rajauli, Dilwa and Bhalua have greatly suffered due to **unsystematic and large scale felling during the Zamindari period.**”

37


For managers and administrators the policy of living in denial is always counterproductive. Such policy will certainly not bring back our lost habitat and our rich flora and fauna or our forests and mountain streams and our wetlands. Acknowledging that we have a serious problem is the first mountain to climb. And, being open to a radical and, occasionally disruptive, re-design of approach, methods and processes for forest and wildlife management, the second mountain to climb. Then we can be in business. Both these mountains are in the mind. But both are showstoppers.



Mr. Ajai Singh, Indian Revenue Service, 1972, has served at several management and leadership positions. He retired as Member CBDT & Special Secretary, GOI. His key achievements included IT driven Administrative Reforms, Policy Advice and oversight to India's Social Security programs. He has presented papers at various International Conferences at Washington, Bangkok, Istanbul, Paris, Stockholm, Kuwait and Canberra. He headed the International Commission on Financing of Social Security for I SSA, Geneva. He served as an International Consultant for World Bank in Bangladesh and Nepal. He is the scion of the Maksudpur Raj in Magadh.



THE DIARY OF A  
SPORTSMAN NATURALIST  
IN INDIA BY E. P. STEBBING  
FSA, FZSL  
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS  
AND SKETCHES BY THE AUTHOR AND OTHERS



LONDON: JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD  
NEW YORK: JOHN LANE COMPANY MCMXX

*Volume I Issue ii*  
*December 2021*  
*Indian Game Gazette*  
*Journal of the Wild Game Pan India*

