

## National award for Madhya Pradesh tiger reserve

The Pench Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh has been selected for the 'Best maintained tourist-friendly national park award' by the union tourism ministry.

The award would be given for achievements in the year 2006-07 at a national tourism award function to be held at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi, on Wednesday, an official said.

Pench Tiger Reserve, an amalgam of Indira Priyadarshini Pench National Park, Mowgli Pench sanctuary and other buffer forests, is situated in Seoni district on the southern end of the Satpura ranges. The Pench river, which flows through the reserve, is its lifeline.

The number of visitors to Pench Tiger Reserve, which is the first international tiger reserve in the country, has gone up substantially from 1,333 in 1999 to 45,556 in 2006-07 due to efficient wildlife management and increase in tourist facilities, wild life officials said.

Tourist attractions at the park include jungle visits, elephant rides, boating, river rafting and trekking with ample opportunities for lodging, both government and private.

Carnivores found in the reserve include tiger, leopard, jackal, wild dog (sonekutta), wild cat, jackal, fox, common mongoose and small Indian mongoose while herbivores found in large numbers include cheetal, sambhar, neelgai and chinkara.

More than 325 species of local and migratory birds like the Malabar Pied Hornbill, Indian Pitta, Grey Headed Eagle, White Eyed Buzzard, Short Toed Eagle and six kinds of vultures are found there.

During the winter season, the migratory birds arrive at the reserve, which makes it an ideal place for bird watching.

Pench Tiger Reserve has 90.3 per sq km density of grass-eating animals, the highest in the country, and 6,012 kg per sq km vegetation, the second in India after Nagarhole National Park in Karnataka. It also has more than 1,200 species of vegetables including many endangered near-extinct ones and valuable medicinal plants.

And last but not the least, the tiger reserve known for its natural beauty finds mention in books like 'Ain-e-Akbari', R.A. Strandel's book 'Seoni, Camp Life in the Satpura', Forsyth's book 'High Lands of Central India' among others.

Strandel's autobiography 'Seoni' was the main source of inspiration for Rudyard Kipling to write 'The Jungle Book'.

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