

DownToEarth

[Wildlife & Biodiversity](#)

Forced evictions in India's tiger reserves spark outcry among Adivasi communities

Thousands demand justice and the right to remain on their ancestral lands

<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/wildlife-biodiversity/forced-evictions-in-indias-tiger-reserves-spark-outcry-among-ativasi-communities>

[Shimali Chauhan](#)

Published on:

22 Sep 2024, 8:22 am

Thousands of Indigenous Adivasi people are protesting across India against forced evictions from their ancestral lands, now designated as tiger reserves.

While conservationists often acknowledge Indigenous peoples as the true guardians of forests, promoting community-based conservation as a solution to wildlife protection, the reality in India tells a different story. Indigenous communities are being forcibly removed from forests they have inhabited and protected for generations, all in the name of wildlife conservation.

These evictions are affecting nearly 400,000 Adivasis, who are now fighting to defend their homes and heritage. Protests have erupted in major tiger reserves such as Nagarhole, Kaziranga, Udanti-Sitanadi, Rajaji, and Indravati. Demonstrators are calling for an immediate halt to what they describe as illegal actions by the government.

India is home to around 3,000 tigers, spread across 53 tiger reserves covering 75,000 square kilometres of forest. While these reserves are vital for tiger conservation, they have come at a significant human cost. Since 1972, the Indian government has evicted [56,247 families](#) from 751 villages across 50 tiger reserves, according to the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) data from 2019.

Recently, the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) has pushed state wildlife officials to expedite these evictions. The NTCA's plans came to light through an RTI request, which made public letters from its director in July. The revelation has ignited fury among Indigenous groups, who say they were never consulted before their lands were turned into protected areas, and are now being forced from their homes. In response, thousands of Adivasis have gathered in protest. At Nagarhole Tiger Reserve alone, over 700 people demonstrated at the reserve's gates.

JK Thimma, a prominent activist, expressed the frustration of many in a press release: “The NTCA is trespassing on our land. We never agreed to give up our homes. These evictions must stop immediately.”

Close to 400,000 Indigenous people across India face the threat of losing their homes due to these forced removals. Critics argue that these evictions violate both national and international laws. The Forest Rights Act of 2006 grants Indigenous communities the right to remain on their ancestral lands unless they provide informed consent to relocate.

Despite the legal protections, large conservation organisations that support tiger conservation efforts, have remained silent on the issue of forced evictions. These organisations argue that relocating Indigenous people is necessary to protect endangered tigers.

Caroline Pearce, Director of Survival International, strongly condemned the actions, stating in a press note, “The Indian authorities are adhering to an outdated, colonial model of conservation. This approach wrongly views Indigenous people as a threat to wildlife, when in fact, they play a vital role in sustaining these ecosystems. Indigenous people and tigers need each other to survive.”

Critics have also pointed to the financial interests behind these evictions. Once Indigenous people are removed, tiger reserves often become lucrative eco-tourism destinations, feeding into India’s growing tourism industry.

However, examples of conservation and coexistence exist. In Kerala’s Periyar Tiger Reserve, Adivasis work alongside forest officials to protect wildlife, demonstrating that collaboration is possible.

“We have always protected these forests,” said Thimma. “If the government truly cares about conservation, they should be working with us, not against us.”

International human rights organisations have condemned these evictions, citing violations of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Globally, Indigenous communities face displacement in the name of conservation, but research consistently shows that forests are healthier, and wildlife thrives, when managed by Indigenous people.