

Baagh Shikar: The Art Of Hunting The Royal Bengal Tiger

by Mr. Golam Habib Dulal

I. Introduction

Since a lot of you often get intrigued about how Royal Bengal tigers were hunted back in the good old days, I thought that perhaps this little article of mine might be of some interest to you all. Even though the hunting of Royal Bengal tigers became outlawed in our part of the world in 1973 (as per the Wildlife Conservation Act 1973), I can't help but notice that there have been an increasing number of arguments put forward by many Southeast Asian politicians (in India, Nepal & South Bengal) in order to relegalize tiger hunting (in a highly regulated manner) as a form of wildlife conservation and game management.

Wishful thinking, maybe? I don't know, but if it ever does happen (and it just might...) Then, maybe this guide will be useful to some of you who might want to go after a Royal Bengal tiger. If not, well... then hopefully you'll just find it to be an interesting read that just might kill a few minutes of boredom.

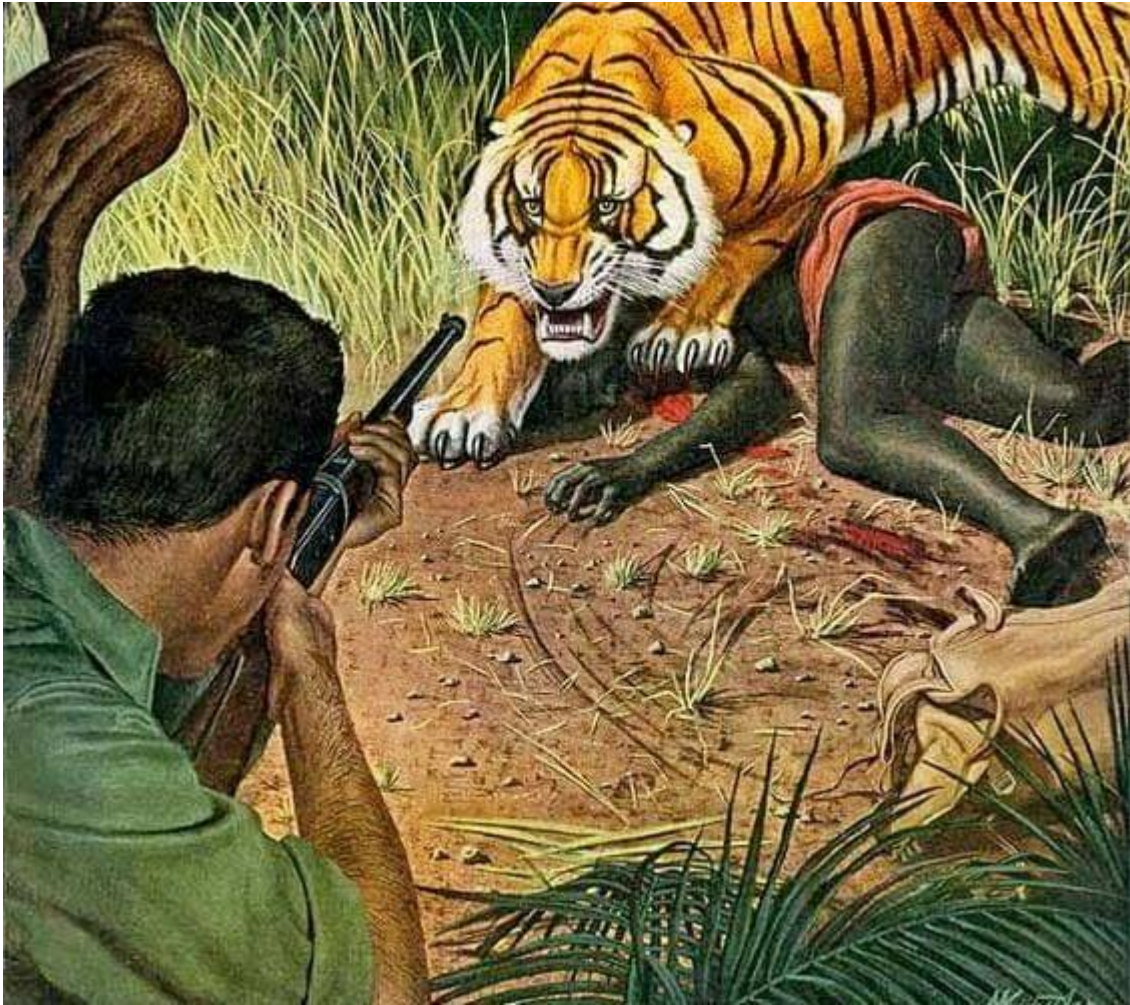
In my life, I have shot and killed 3 man-eating Royal Bengal tigers (in 1981, 1988 & 1989 respectively) while I was the DFO (Divisional Forest Officer) of the Sundarban mangrove forests (serving 2 terms manning this post from 1981-1989). Since these are 3 of the only 4 Royal Bengal tigers to be legally killed in the Sundarbans after the country was born in 1971... many of my colleagues and fellow hunters frequently request that I put together a comprehensive guide on how to hunt these great cats.

They also pointed out that while several authors had written about the subject of hunting the Indian Bengal tiger, the Nepalese tiger, the Indo-Chinese tiger and the Siberian tiger (back when hunting these animals for sport used to be legal)...virtually nobody had ever authored a book about hunting the Sundarban Royal Bengal tiger (which is a very different animal from its other counterparts). While I don't consider myself to be any great authority on the subject, I finally agreed and decided to compile a guide of sorts on the subject matter (based on my rather limited experiences).

Please note that this guide also only applies to hunting the Royal Bengal tigers that inhabit the Sundarban Mangrove Forests of South Bengal and not their Indian, Nepalese, Indo-Chinese or Siberian counterparts.

About the author:

Mr. Golam Habib Dulal is a former Member of Parliament. Before his career in politics, from 1993 until 2000 he observed the position of Chief Conservator of Forests of Bangladesh. From 1981 until 1989, he fulfilled the role of Divisional Forest Officer of the Sundarban Mangrove Forests of South-Bengal, during which time he successfully hunted three man-eating Royal Bengal Tigers, under direct order and permission from the Ministry of Forests. These were three of the last four legally hunted Royal Bengal Tigers. He started his service for his country in the army, obtaining the grade of Staff Sergeant in the East-Bengal Regiment of the 109th Battalion, where he served with distinction in the Indo-Pak war of 1971. He is currently a Director for the NGO Evergreen Bengal and is enjoying his retirement.



An Outdoor Life magazine artist's depiction of a Royal Bengal Tiger hunt (1956)

II. ROYAL BENGAL TIGERS & THE LAW

During the British colonial era (prior to 1947), there were no legal regulations against the wanton butchery of these magnificent creatures. It was considered rather fashionable amongst British military officers and the Nawabs and Maharajas to hunt multiple Royal Bengal tigers for sport during a single hunt.

During the East Pakistani era (1948-1970), Royal Bengal tigers were considered to be vermin. They were recognized only as livestock killers and man-eaters. The situation was such that a hunter was legally prohibited from hunting Axis deer in the Sundarban mangrove forests without a written permit from the Sundarban Department of Forests, but no legal regulations existed for hunting Royal Bengal tigers. On the contrary, the Sundarban Department of Forests used to issue generous financial rewards to those who managed to exterminate man-eating and livestock-killing Royal Bengal tigers.

After the country became Independent in 1971, the new government passed the Wildlife Conservation Act in 1973. This act offered complete legal protection to Royal Bengal tigers and made it a criminally punishable offense to kill one. A Royal Bengal tiger could only be legally killed if it had become a man-eater and the Ministry of Forests had issued a death-order for the animal in question. This would be done if the Chief Conservator of Forests of Bangladesh (speaking on behalf of the Department of Forests) had proven to the Ministry of Forests that all non-lethal attempts to contend with the man-eater had culminated in unsuccessful results.

Between 1973 and 2022, the Ministry of Forests has only issued Death-Orders for four man-eating Royal Bengal tigers. 3 were shot by myself in 1981, 1988 and 1989. One was killed by the late Pachabdi Gazi via gun-trap in 1987. The man-eater of Atharobeki (which I shot in 1989) was the last Royal Bengal tiger for which the Ministry of Forests had issued a Death-Order. The reason for this is quite unfortunate.

Prior to me reluctantly agreeing to go after the man-eater of Atharobeki, 2 military officers by the names of Brigadier-General Mahmudul Hassan & Major Poto Khan (a former forum member here & then branch supervisor of Bengal Ordnance Factories) had tried to go after the problem animal with their sepoy. What ended up happening, was downright ugly. When they went to the Sundarbans to hunt down the Man-eater of Atharobeki, they massacred 5 Royal Bengal tigers... none of whom were the man-eater in question- 1 male tiger, 3 tigresses (1 of whom was pregnant) & 1 sub-grown cub. The news eventually got leaked to the media (because of the Major's boasts) and the ignorant anti-hunting masses publicly rioted outside the Ministry of Forests until Chief Conservator of Forests Noor Uz Zaman publicly declared to never again issue another "Kill Order" after the Man-eater of Atharobeki would be dispatched. Then, I had to step in and (through sheer luck) managed to successfully hunt down the man-eater on the existing "Kill Order".

In theory, the government still possesses the discretion to issue a Kill Order for a man-eating Royal Bengal tiger but they are unlikely to do so due to pressure from neighbouring & European foreign countries. Without delving into any political subject matter, the reason for this is because these countries tend to view our part of the world as a neo-colonial possession of theirs ... and in the eyes of the urban people living in these "Developed Countries", animal lives are given a higher priority than the human lives in our part of the world.



The Shah of Iran with a Royal Bengal Tiger & Royal Bengal Tigress, shot from the deck of a launch (1968)

III. CHARACTERISTICS & HABITAT

The heaviest male Royal Bengal tigers in the Sundarban mangrove forests can weigh up to 140 kilograms (although they do not always get this large) and can measure a full 10 feet from snout to tail. Naturally (like most mammalian species), the females tend to invariably weigh and measure less than their male counterparts. Old Pachabdi once told me that he had killed 1 particularly large man-eater in 1966 (in the Buri Goalini forest range) which measured a full 12 feet from snout to tail. I see absolutely no reason whatsoever to question his credibility and his integrity, but according to official records made during my 2 terms as the Divisional Forest Officer of the Sundarbans.... 10 feet is the largest recorded length of a Royal Bengal tiger which I personally know of.

The predominant natural food of the Royal Bengal tiger is the Axis deer and the Bengal bush boar, both of which are found by the hundreds of thousands all over the Sundarbans. A Royal Bengal tiger suffering from some sort of pathology will feed on either livestock from nearby settled territories or even human beings. It takes a Royal Bengal tiger 2 meals to complete feeding on an Axis deer, a bullock or a human being. It completes feeding on a Bengal bush boar or a calf or a goat in one single meal.

A Royal Bengal tiger invariably attacks its prey from either the rear or from the sides. Never from the front. They are extremely fast and aggressive (even more so than their Indian, Nepalese, Indo-Chinese or Siberian counterparts). They are incredibly agile and powerful swimmers. They have incredibly keen

eyesight and hearing, but are (contrary to popular belief) extremely deficient in their sense of smell. Prior to making a kill, a Royal Bengal tiger will always clean its claws on the barks of nearby trees.

When I studied "Principles of Forestry" in the University of Peshawar, I was taught that the tigers of North Bengal only return to feed on the carcasses of their partially eaten prey after evening. In the Sundarbans however, I have observed Royal Bengal tigers to feed on their natural quarry (Axis deer and Bengal bush boars) during all times of the day. However, when a (pathological) Royal Bengal tiger kills a human being or a bullock and partially feeds on the corpse, then they will invariably return to the kill-sites to complete their feeding after sunset.

Royal Bengal tigers may be found roaming in the wild all across the Sundarban mangrove forest, barring the Shoronkhola forest range (which now serves as a tourist location and wildlife sanctuary). They will be found anywhere their pugmarks can be seen on the ground and their claw marks may be found on tree barks.

It is interesting to note that the Royal Bengal tigers in the Sundarbans weigh almost half as much as their Indian, Nepalese, Indo-Chinese and Siberian counterparts. There are 2 reasons for this. Royal Bengal tigers in other parts of the world feed on massive animals such as the Sambar deer and the Nilgai. In the Sundarban mangrove forests however, the tigers feed on the relatively smaller Axis deer and Bengal bush boars. Thousands of years of evolution has caused them to have lighter frames than tigers from other parts of the world (which aids them in swimming through the thousands of canals which run through the entirety of these mangrove forests and contributes to their immense speed). The second reason is the same reason why the Axis deer inhabiting the Sundarbans grow to smaller sizes than Axis deer found in other parts of the world (such as India, Nepal, Indo-China, Australia and the U.S.A.). The saltwater found everywhere in the Sundarbans impacts their growth.

In 1977, President Ziaur Rahman released 6 pairs of Axis deer (captured from the Sundarbans) into Monpura in the southern part of the country. Today, thousands may be found in the region. They have been studied to achieve weights in adulthood, which exceed those of their Sundarban counterparts by at least 15 kilograms on average. The reasons for this, was discovered to be: a) Due to the absence of Royal Bengal tigers in Monpura (who feed on Axis deer in the Sundarbans), the Axis deer were being able to grow to larger sizes since they do not have any natural predators save for human hunters (who by law, are permitted to shoot only 2 fully grown stags per year). b) The water in and around Monpura is fresh instead of being salty.

While Royal Bengal tigers (on account of their ferocity) were never released into any other part of South Bengal (barring the Sundarbans where they naturally dwell) where fresh water can be found, if one applies the same analogy to what occurred with the Axis deer released into Monpura ... The theory stands that they would grow to sizes as large as their foreign counterparts.



The author (left) with son & son's friend on an axis deer hunt (1991)



The author (right) accompanied by assistant range officer Sitesh with a Bengal bush boar shot for Royal Bengal Tiger bait (1988)

IV. ROYAL BENGAL TIGERS & MAN

On average, the deaths of at least 52 people in and around the Sundarban mangrove forests every year may be attributed to Royal Bengal tigers. As grim as these figures sound, not all Royal Bengal tigers are man-eaters. As a matter of fact, it is the occasional (rather than the usual) Royal Bengal tiger which turns to feeding on human beings. Generally speaking; if a Royal Bengal tiger spots an approaching group of human beings from a distance, then it will lie down (in an attempt to conceal itself) and wait for the party of human beings to pass by it before it gets up and continues walking again.

That said, the disconcerting truth is this: Every 5 out of 10 Royal Bengal tigers which reside in the Sundarban mangrove forests, happen to view human beings as food. Having extensively studied cases of both Royal Bengal tigers and leopards attacking human beings (during my career as Chief Conservator of Forests of Bangladesh), I have formed a conclusive view. Should a leopard choose to pounce on a human being, then (with the exception of a man-eater) it shall usually give its victim a short series of bites with its fangs and scratches with its claws before leaping off and bounding away. You will most likely survive (especially with the advent of modern medical practices), but you will end up suffering severe mutilations and facial disfigurement. From my 42 years of professional experience, I can attest that this is not the case with a Royal Bengal tiger. A Royal Bengal tiger which pounces upon a human being will not stop mauling them, until the victim is dead. Or unless someone manages to shoot it off the victim.

Under most normal circumstances, a Royal Bengal tiger wants to have nothing to do with human beings and will deign to keep as much distance between itself and human beings as possible. There are only 3 kinds of Royal Bengal tigers which have a propensity to actually kill a human being. The first is a wounded Royal Bengal tiger which is being approached by a human being. The second is a tigress who feels that a human being poses a threat to her cubs. The third is the Royal Bengal tiger which has turned man-eater. A Royal Bengal tiger may turn man-eater for a single reason, a combination of reasons or no reason at all.

A Royal Bengal tiger may get injured by a hunter's (back when hunting these creatures for sport was legal) or poacher's bullet/arrow/trap and turn man-eater. As per the ethics of hunting... while wounding any animal without finishing it off is largely considered to be immoral and irresponsible and unsportsmanlike, this actually produces extremely dangerous long-term consequences when the wounded animal in question happens to be a Royal Bengal tiger. This is because the wounds inflicted on these animals would leave them unable to hunt their ordinary quarry (Axis deer and Bengal bush boar). As a result, Royal Bengal tigers turn to human beings (and their domesticated livestock) as their source of food as they view human beings as a far weaker quarry and thus easy to attack and kill for food.

The second reason why a Royal Bengal tiger becomes a man-eater is when it gets old and reaches an advanced age in its life. The animal's teeth will fall, its claws will break and it will lose its agility and its strength. It will no longer be able to hunt its natural quarry (Axis deer and Bengal bush boar) for food. As a result, elderly Royal Bengal tigers turn to human beings (and their domesticated livestock) as their source of food because they view human beings as a far weaker quarry and thus easy to attack and kill for food. The second man-eater which I shot in 1988, was quite an old animal indeed... with several broken teeth and fangs.

The third reason why a Royal Bengal tiger becomes a man-eater may be if it gets stabbed in the paws or some other part of the body by porcupine quills. Porcupine quills cause severe pain, irritation, infection and disturbance to any creature who is stabbed by them. Initially, this may seem to be a very

rare occurrence. However, it happens a great deal more frequently than one cares to think. When I shot the man-eater of Mohesshoripur in 1981, we found a porcupine quill had been embedded in his right testicle and the genitals of the animal had become gangrenous. Pachabdi told me that out of the 57 man-eating Royal Bengal tigers which he had killed between 1945 and 1987... no fewer than 13 of them were found to have been injured by porcupine quills in one part of their body or another.

A fourth reason may be if a Royal Bengal tiger somehow comes across a human corpse and takes a few bites from it out of morbid curiosity. In India (which shares a border with Bangladesh on the edge of the Sundarban mangrove forests), many Hindus (Hinduism being the religion of most Indians) of the lowest caste working in factories or rubber plantations are simply not given a proper cremation when they die. Their corpses are often simply dumped into rivers, after having a lump of live coal placed in their mouths. This would also happen during times of mass death, such as plagues or pandemics. The current of these rivers frequently causes the corpses to wash up on the river banks near forests. Curious Royal Bengal tigers bite off chunks of these corpses and then become man-eaters. During the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971, thousands of human corpses would regularly get thrown into the Meghna and Jamuna rivers which found their way into the Sundarban mangrove forests. As a result; during the 1971 Liberation War, man-eating Royal Bengal tigers were rancid in the Khulna division of Bangladesh. This prompted several of the paranoid soldiers stationed in Khulna (both Bangladesh AND Pakistani) to begin indiscriminately shooting every single Royal Bengal tiger with whom they would cross paths. It was this indiscriminate slaughter during these 9 months that caused the population of Royal Bengal tigers to drop near endangered levels in the Sundarbans.

A fifth reason why Royal Bengal tigers may become man-eaters is if their mothers were man-eaters and got the immature Royal Bengal tigers accustomed to the eating of human flesh, since they were cubs. This reason is actually the most difficult reason to pinpoint, since there are no blemishes on the Royal Bengal tiger's body which might act as a visual aid.

A sixth reason why a Royal Bengal tiger may turn into a man-eater is if its natural food (Axis deer or Bengal bush boar) is no longer available to it. This may either be caused by uncontrolled hunting or deforestation which causes the Bengal Bush boar or Axis deer to move out of the area. This is why game laws stipulate that no more than 2 fully grown Axis stags may be legally hunted per year by a single hunter.

A seventh reason why a Royal Bengal tiger may turn into a man-eater, is if it suffers from Chrysomya Bezziana (cerebral damage caused by maggots entering into its brain & feeding on brain tissue). The events that lead to this macabre phenomenon are as follows: Since Royal Bengal tigers are extremely deficient in the sense of smell, they will frequently eat the carcasses of Axis deer which have begun to rot (by the time of the second feeding) without even being remotely able to detect the putrid smell. These Axis deer carcasses (by the time of the second feeding) invariably become infested with maggots; a few of which manage to get onto the bodies of the tigers and invariably crawl into the nearest orifice (i.e. the earholes through which they slowly begin to eat their way into the brain). While having the post-mortem conducted on the final man-eater which I had shot in 1989, we discovered that several large maggots had eaten into his brain tissue.

Finally, a Royal Bengal tiger may become a man-eater for no apparent reason whatsoever. What is clear however, is that once a Royal Bengal tiger has gotten the taste of human flesh, it will eschew all other forms of meat in favour of the flesh of man. They will often travel miles to find their quarry. Being the expert swimmers that they are, a man-eating Royal Bengal tiger is also willing to swim for several miles in order to locate the nearest human settlement. Thus, a Royal Bengal tiger which has turned man-eater must be put down, as quickly and efficiently as possible.

The easiest way to determine whether a human victim was killed by a man-eating Royal Bengal tiger or simply ran afoul of a Royal Bengal tiger that attacked them on instinct, is by examining the buttocks of the corpse. A man-eating Royal Bengal tiger will always and without exception, consume the flesh from the victim's buttocks first (and also the breasts if the victim happens to be a female). A Royal Bengal tiger which instinctively kills a human being will only claw and bite their victim from the front side, but will not touch the buttocks. A Royal Bengal tiger will always require two meals to completely strip a human corpse of all of its flesh.

V. FINDING YOUR ROYAL BENGAL TIGER

The 3 most common methods of hunting Royal Bengal tigers in India, Nepal and Indo-China (back when hunting these animals for sport was legal) were:

A) Beats: A group of trackers narrow down the general forested area where a Royal Bengal tiger may be lurking. A bullock is tied to a tree and left. It takes a Royal Bengal tiger 2 meals to complete feeding upon a bullock. Every day, the bait must be checked, because sooner or later the Royal Bengal tiger will kill the bullock and partially devour the carcass. Upon eating his fill during the first meal, the Royal Bengal will invariably take a nap somewhere around the partially consumed bait (such as a cave or a hole in the ground). As soon as news of the partially eaten bait is received, the hunters employ anywhere from four dozen to five dozen villagers and give them a series of instructions to act as beaters. The beaters comb through the entire patch of forested area in a single row (with each beater being 5 meters apart from the other) loudly beating drums, blowing flutes and generally attempting to make as much noise as possible. The entire concept is to "spook" the Royal Bengal tiger away from the beaters, so that it moves towards the other end of the forest where the hunter(s) will be waiting (invariably on the tops of macchans or howdahs on top of domesticated elephants). This was the preferred method of the wealthy Indian Maharajas, Nawabs and British military officers during the British colonial era.

B) Live baits: A cow or a goat is tied to a tree in an area frequented by Royal Bengal tigers. The hunter and an assistant wait on a nearby macchan (which they construct beforehand) for nightfall to come. When the tiger arrives, it kills the bait and begins to feed. The assistant then switches on a powerful torchlight, providing enough illumination for the hunter and giving him roughly 2 seconds to take a shot at the shocked Royal Bengal tiger. This was the method favoured the most by hunters in Indo-China (modern day Vietnam).

C) Stalking on foot: The hunter accompanied by a competent local tracker goes to an area frequented by Royal Bengal tigers and finds a set of pugmarks which belong to a particular animal. They then follow the pugmarks in order to lead them to the Royal Bengal tiger. This was the method which hunters used if they wished to hunt Royal Bengal tiger in a "Romantic" manner.

None of these 3 methods will yield successful results, when hunting a Royal Bengal tiger in the Sundarban mangrove forests. Anybody who has ever visited the Sundarbans will immediately learn that the forest is basically a series of thousands of tiny islands dispersed across what may best be described as a very big marsh. Thousands of canals run through the entirety of the forest and into the Bay of Bengal. This terrain makes it practically impossible to have men conduct beats or to stalk a Royal Bengal tiger on foot by following its pug marks. Using a cow or a goat as live bait would not work in enticing a Sundarban tiger because the mangrove forests were already abundant with Axis deer and Bengal bush boars. Rather, seeing a cow or a goat tied to a tree in the middle of the forest was bound to alert the Royal Bengal tiger and make them feel suspicious. As I learnt the hard way in 1988, even using artificial baits do not yield successful results.

During the British colonial era and the East Pakistani era, the most common method for the Maharajahs and Nawabs and British military officers (and later Pakistani military officers and foreign diplomats) to hunt a Royal Bengal tiger in the Sundarbans... was from the safety of a launch deck. When the launch passes through the wider creeks of the Sundarbans, a lucky hunter often can spot a Royal Bengal tiger (or sometimes even a PAIR of Royal Bengal tigers) coming to the river bank to either rest or drink water. With a reliable long-range rifle (and a good telescopic sight), it was possible to pick the tiger(s) off from as much as 300 yards away. Of course, this method is only of use to those who just want to kill any random Royal Bengal tiger. When a hunter was searching for ONE SPECIFIC Royal Bengal tiger, this method would do him no good.

During the East Pakistani era, the most common method utilized by the locals to kill man-eating Royal Bengal tigers in the Sundarban mangrove forests ... was by setting up gun-traps in their hunting trails. The late Pachabdi Gazi (1924-1997) was an absolute master of killing Royal Bengal tigers by employing this technique. Between 1945 and 1987, Pachabdi killed a confirmed number of 57 man-eating Royal Bengal tigers, by making use of gun-traps (a craft which he had learnt from his father, Meher Gazi who had learned it from his days in the Indian Forest Service during the British Colonial Era). In case any of my dear readers are wondering how this unconventional method works, I will try my best to explain it below.

As I have previously mentioned, Royal Bengal tigers are extremely deficient in the sense of smell. For this reason, a Royal Bengal tiger which has killed and partially fed on a human being's corpse or bullock's carcass... will (in between meals) go some distance away from the kill-site and lay down to rest. Since it cannot use its sense of smell to locate its partially eaten quarry again, it will follow the same track which it had made while originally walking away from the kill-site (after its first meal)... To return to the partially eaten remains of the human or bullock for its second meal.

Local hunters would exploit this habit of the Royal Bengal tiger, by setting up a loaded gun (invariably a 12 bore double barrel shotgun loaded with Eley Grand Prix Lethal Ball cartridges) at the end of the hunting trail near the partially consumed remains of the man-eater's human victims...pointed towards the direction from which the tiger would be expected to return. By estimating the height of the Royal Bengal tiger (which is done by calculating the circumference of the pug marks and measuring the distance of the fore legs' pug marks from the hind legs' pug marks), they could easily gauge the height of the creature's heart above the ground. The shotgun would be placed on 2 wooden pegs made from "Y" shaped tree branches at a height where it would be at the estimated same level as the Royal Bengal tiger's heart. The triggers of the shotgun would be tied together by a strong black cord, which would then be used to form a taut tripwire across the Royal Bengal tiger's hunting trail. The concept was that the Royal Bengal tiger would inadvertently touch the tripwire while passing through its hunting trail in order to return to its kill-site. The slightest amount of tension on the tripwire was designed to pull both the triggers of the shotgun. Both barrels of the shotgun would then discharge simultaneously into the tiger's heart at point blank range... killing it on the spot. After setting up the gun-trap, the local hunters would camouflage the shotgun with leaves and vines and spend the night on a boat in a nearby creek. At night time, they would inevitably hear the 2 simultaneous gunshots (indicating that the gun-trap had been sprung) and upon returning to the site of the gun-trap in the morning... they would usually find the man-eater lying dead somewhere near the gun-trap. Since the hunting trail where the gun-trap was set up would only be used by the one particular man-eating Royal Bengal tiger which the local hunters were seeking... this method did not pose a threat to any tiger other than the one which was being specifically targeted.

The technique did have its limitations, however. There are many areas in the Sundarbans where the terrain makes it impossible to set up a gun-trap in such a manner that it will successfully fool a Royal

Bengal tiger into triggering it (such as areas where the foliage is not very dense, thus enabling the Royal Bengal tiger to easily spot the gun-trap). There have also been more than a few documented cases of uncannily cunning man-eating Royal Bengal tigers walking through their hunting trails with a tree branch in their mouths... which touches the tripwire and causes both barrels of the shotgun to get prematurely discharged without even remotely harming the man-eater. As they say, reality often really is stranger than fiction. The only reason I had to personally step in and go after the 3 man-eating Royal Bengal tigers which I had shot... was because Pachabdi (the official Shikari of the Sundarban Department of Forests) had been unable to dispose of them by setting up gun-traps (and he was unwilling to risk hunting them down and directly shooting them).

The most (and in my humble experience, ONLY) efficient method of dispatching a man-eating Royal Bengal tiger in the Sundarbans, is to wait (accompanied by a reliable companion to carry a powerful torchlight) to ambush it (from either a macchan or an enclosure on ground level) when it returns after sundown to complete feeding on a natural kill which has been temporarily abandoned by the tiger in between meals. As I have previously mentioned, a pathological Royal Bengal tiger will require 2 meals to complete feeding upon a human corpse or the carcass of an adult cow. The first 2 man-eaters which I had shot in 1981 and 1988, were both ambushed at night when they returned to feed on the partially eaten carcass of a bullock that they had killed (while the third one was shot during a chance encounter in broad daylight).

A word of warning is imperative here. When constructing a macchan to ambush a Royal Bengal tiger from, it is essential that the macchan be disguised to look as if it is a natural part of a tree. Or else the man-eater WILL notice the macchan and be immediately alerted to the hunter's presence. It is also imperative that the hunter and his companion remain extremely quiet while waiting to ambush the man-eater. I made both of these mistakes when I was attempting to shoot my first man-eater in 1981, and the result was that I spent almost 2 weeks experiencing repeated failure before I finally switched tactics and succeeded in shooting him.

When shooting a Royal Bengal tiger (or indeed, any big game animal) over torchlight, it must be remembered that the hunter will only see the 2 glowing eyes of the creature in the beam of the torchlight. He has less than 2 seconds before the Royal Bengal tiger dashes off, and his aim must be swift and instinctive. When the animal turns to look at the source of the light, it will be facing the hunter from a frontal position. The hunter must aim an inch below the eyes, in order to make an educated guess as to where the tiger's chest is... before pulling the trigger. A great deal of practice is required in order to skilfully pull off such a shot in the limited window of time that one is provided.



The author meeting forest guard Pachabdi Gazi for the first time at the Buri Goalini Forest Range Office (1981)



*A gun-trap set by Pachabdi Gazi to kill a man-eating Royal Bengal Tiger (1958)
Note: This photograph was taken from Tahawar Ali Khan's excellent 1961 book "The Man-eaters Of The Sundarbans"*

VI. SHOT PLACEMENT ON ROYAL BENGAL TIGERS

There are 4 regions on a Royal Bengal tiger's body, which a hunter should take aim at:

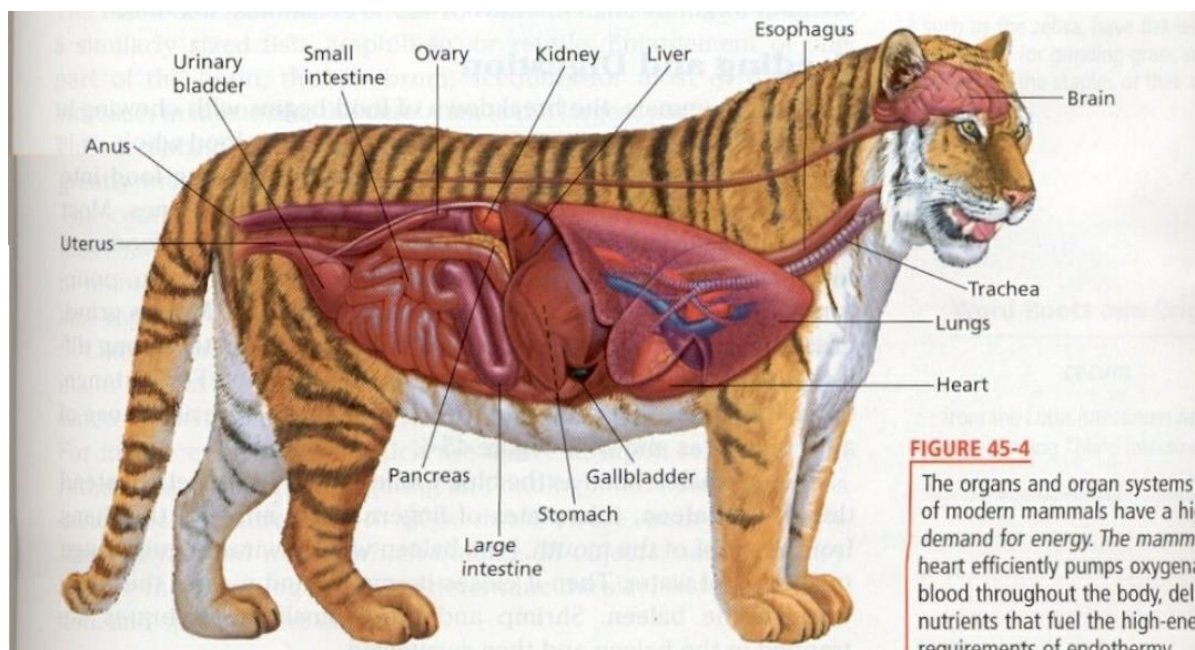
- 1) The heart
- 2) Both lungs
- 3) The spinal column
- 4) The brain

On an unsuspecting Royal Bengal tiger, the ideal shot for the novice to attempt is the double lung shot. This shot should always be attempted when the hunter is facing the Royal Bengal tiger from a broadside position. A perfectly aimed shot that pierces both lungs will prove fatal quite swiftly, but not instantly. A royal Bengal tiger which has had both its lungs pierced by a premium quality expanding bullet, will roughly go 120 to 130 yards while coughing blood from its mouth and nose before collapsing lifeless. An advantage of the double lung shot, is that (on account of the large target being presented) it is the easiest shot for the novice to attempt. It is the widest target on the animal's body. I dispatched the third and final man-eater which I shot in 1989, by giving him a broadside lung shot. However, my bullet had only managed to penetrate one of the lungs... which is why the animal succumbed to the gunshot wound 3 hours after I had shot him.

Another considerably more effective shot (albeit one that should only be attempted by a skilled operator) is the heart shot. When facing the Royal Bengal tiger from a broadside position, the shooter's point of aim (in order for his bullet to reach the heart) should be the upper part of the foreleg (right behind the shoulder). In order to reach the heart of the Royal Bengal tiger from a broadside position, the hunter's bullet must be able to piece the upper foreleg bone of the animal and still hold together in order to penetrate into the heart. If the hunter wishes to land a frontal heart shot on a Royal Bengal tiger, he must take care to remember that the heart is located just above the base of the Royal Bengal tiger's chest and tucked between the two fore legs. My first 2 man-eaters which I had dispatched in 1981 and 1989, were taken with frontal heart shots. However, the lead L.G pellets had been unable to actually go through the animals' chest muscles and penetrate into the heart. The first man-eater was only successfully killed, because 2 of the L.G pellets had struck him in the throat and managed to rupture one of the blood vessels inside. The second man-eater was only successfully killed, because 1 L.G pellet had managed to sever the jugular vein in the tiger's throat.

The spinal column of the Royal Bengal tiger is the most vulnerable part of the animal. However, it is also the most difficult part of the Royal Bengal tiger's body for the hunter's bullet to reach. The only position from which one can take aim at the Royal Bengal tiger's spinal column, is if the hunter is shooting from an elevated position and the Royal Bengal tiger has its back turned to the shooter's direction.

The head of the Royal Bengal tiger should only be selected as a target, when facing the animal from the front. The biggest advantage to this shot is that a bullet which penetrates the brain of the Royal Bengal tiger brings instant death to it. The point of aim should always be in the region between both of the eyes. However, this is the most difficult shot to make on the tiger on account of the small size of the target (if the Royal Bengal tiger is moving while the hunter is attempting this shot, then this only makes matters worse). The sloped structure of a Royal Bengal tiger's skull also makes it incredibly difficult for shotgun pellets or rifle bullets to maintain a straight course and penetrate into the brain. I would only recommend this shot for a shooter (armed with a large caliber rifle) who possesses a great deal of experience in taking frontal brain shots on large and charging dangerous game. The late Arjun Sadar (who shot 5 man-eating Royal Bengal tigers for the British Imperial Forest Service) was well known for exclusively preferring this shot to dispatch his man-eaters.



Anatomical diagram of a Royal Bengal Tigress taken from the internet. Crucial for aspiring tiger hunters to understand the location of vital organs.

VII. APPROPRIATE ARMAMENTS FOR TIGER HUNTING

The hunting of creatures as heavy and dangerous as man-eating Royal Bengal tigers demands a very particular discussion of the right tools for this application. Out of the 3 man-eaters that I have shot, I used a 12-bore Pakistani single-barreled Sikdender shotgun (loaded with a British plastic-cased Eley Alphamax L.G cartridge which contained 8 hardened lead pellets of .36 caliber) to take the first 2 in 1981 and 1988. I shot the final man-eater in 1989, with a 7x57mm Mauser Pakistani bolt action Churchill Gunmakers model Deluxe rifle (loaded with American Winchester Super-X 175 grain copper jacketed soft-nosed cartridges). While each of the 3 animals was felled with a single shot, none of them were killed outright. The first man-eater succumbed to his gunshot wound 7 hours after getting shot. The second man-eater succumbed to his gunshot wound 4 hours after getting shot. The final man-eater succumbed to his gunshot wound 3 hours after getting shot.

Based upon my personal experience, I would not recommend anybody to attempt to shoot a tiger with a shotgun (and certainly not one with a faulty extraction problem like my old Pakistani Sikender shotgun). Even when using L.G (the largest pellet size which shotgun cartridges are commercially loaded with), it is simply not possible to kill a large male tiger outright. And the animals remain mobile for lengthy periods of time. To put matters into perspective: My first man-eater (upon getting shot) had made multiple attempts to attack me and Mustapha for the next 7 hours, before he finally gave out (due to blood loss causing him to eventually haemorrhage). This was even though all 8 L.G pellets had struck the animal's body at 20 yards range. Because not a single one of those 8 pellets had managed to penetrate into his heart. Death was only (eventually) brought about by 2 of the L.G pellets rupturing the creature's throat and damaging one of the major blood vessels within. My second man-eater (upon getting shot) succumbed to his gunshot wound no less than 4 hours after I had shot him, despite (similar to his predecessor) all 8 L.G pellets striking the creature's body. The 7 L.G pellets which had struck the tiger in the frontal chest region, had all flattened out like clay putty inside the great cat's rock-hard chest muscles. Death was only (eventually) brought about due to a single L.G pellet which had managed to (by some miraculous stroke of good fortune) sever the jugular vein of the man-eater... thus, eventually causing the animal to haemorrhage out of prolonged blood loss.

The shotgun DOES possess ONE advantage over a rifle, though. 8 L.G pellets permit for a greater margin of error than a single rifle bullet, which is definitely a plus point when shooting in low visibility situations (such as when shooting at night over torchlight). But (to me, anyway) the disadvantages of the inability to kill a male Royal Bengal tiger outright and the inability to render him incapable of attacking the hunter, far outweigh this advantage.

A large caliber rifle, on the other hand, will deliver a crushing blow to a Royal Bengal tiger as long as ANY REASONABLE SHOT is made to the vital organs. Even if the tiger is not killed on the spot, it will retreat rather than attempt to attack the hunter. When I shot the man-eater of Atharobeki in 1989, I was quite pleasantly surprised to see the terminal ballistic effects which the 175-grain copper jacketed soft-nosed bullet had on the animal. Upon receiving the shot, the animal was clearly in no position to even attempt to charge at me. And this was even though I had made a desperate broadside shoulder shot at the Royal Bengal tiger, which ended up rupturing only one of his lungs. While I have never personally shot a Royal Bengal tiger with a rifle at night, I know of at least a few documented cases where this has been successfully done. Practice is essential.

We now come to the discussion of the most suitable caliber of rifle for the purposes of hunting Royal Bengal tigers. Even though I personally used a 7x57mm Mauser for hunting the final man-eater (and am quite an ardent admirer of Paul Mauser's magnificent little cartridge in general), I do not ever recommend such a light caliber for the purposes of tiger hunting. The only reason why I shot the man-eater of Atharobeki with a 7x57mm Mauser, was because of the sheer unavailability of any heavier caliber rifles to me at the time. The 7x57mm Mauser was the heaviest caliber for which I could acquire a reliable rifle and a stock of fresh cartridges at the time. I am of the view that no caliber smaller than .338 Winchester Magnum, employing a bullet of 250 grains weight should ever be employed for hunting Royal Bengal tigers.

Other hunters of Royal Bengal tigers inhabiting the Sundarbans have thus (very sensibly) opted for heavier calibers of rifles when pursuing these great cats. The Pakistani journalist, Mr. Tahawar Ali Khan (who dispatched 1 man-eating Royal Bengal tigress and 4 man-eating Royal Bengal tigers in the Sundarbans in 1957, 1958, 1966, 1967 and 1970) favoured (to the exclusion of all other firearms) a .375 Holland & Holland Magnum caliber pre-64 Winchester Model 70 Super Grade rifle with a heavy barrel. He used 300-grain Winchester Silver Tip soft nosed cartridges exclusively for his Royal Bengal tiger hunting purposes, whenever he used to travel to the Sundarbans during his visits to East Pakistan. IGF Yusuf Salauddin Ahmad (the first Asian to become the Inspector General of Forests for the British Imperial Forest Service during the Colonial era and the first Inspector General of Forests of both East Pakistan and West Pakistan) preferred a .400/450 3 Inch Nitro Express caliber William Evans boxlock ejector double-barrel rifle (loaded with British Kynoch 400 grain soft-nosed cartridges) for hunting man-eating Royal Bengal tigers during the British colonial era (he downed 9 of these creatures between 1927 and 1947). When Pakistani politician (and son of President Marshall Ayub Khan), Mr. Gohar Ayub Khan hunted 2 man-eating Royal Bengal tigers in Nil Kamal Khal and Gol-Khali in 1958 and 1961, he used a 1938 made .470 Nitro Express John Rigby & Co. double-barrelled boxlock ejector rifle (loaded with Kynoch 500 grain soft-nosed cartridges) which his father had presented him.

Royal Bengal tigers (just like all other members of the great cat family) have a highly developed central nervous system that is extremely susceptible to hydrostatic shock. A slightly smaller caliber bullet traveling at a higher velocity has visibly more impressive ballistic terminal effects on a tiger than a larger caliber bullet travelling at a slower velocity (all other factors being equal). For instance: For body shots on tigers, a .375 Holland & Holland Magnum (with velocities actually measuring at 2530 feet per second or thereabouts with 300 grain bullets) has noticeably more terminal effect than a freshly

loaded .458 Winchester Magnum (with velocities actually chronographing at the desired 2130 feet per second or thereabouts with 500 grain bullets). Assuming of course, that all other factors are equal.

The choice of whether to use a bolt action rifle, a lever action rifle or a double-barrel rifle is a matter of individual preference. The former 2 permit the loading of anywhere between 3-6 cartridges in the magazine (depending on the rifle's caliber), while the latter must be reloaded after every 2 shots. But the advantage of the double-barrelled rifle is that it permits the taking of a second shot, within a fraction of a second... simply by pulling the second trigger (as opposed to bolt action or lever action rifles which must have their bolts or levers manipulated in between shots). Learning to quickly cycle the bolt on a bolt action rifle requires a great deal of practice, especially if the operator is a left-hander (since most commercially manufactured bolt action rifles have the bolt on the right side of the receiver). Lever action rifles (on the principle of their design) do not lend themselves to the use of high-velocity calibers. Double-barrel rifles are very particular about the kind of ammunition to be used in them. Any slight variation in cartridge brand, velocity or bullet weight from what the manufacturer originally regulated the rifle for... will result in a noticeable fluctuation in accuracy.

Generally speaking, I personally favoured the bolt action platform over both the lever action platform and the double barrel platform for a long time, because the bolt action rifle is inherently more accurate out to longer ranges than the other 2 platforms. I also have more experience with bolt action rifles, due to my wartime service in the East Bengal Regiment in 1971 (where I was initially issued a bolt action .303 caliber Lee Enfield rifle before later switching to an automatic .308 Winchester Fabrique Nationale FAL rifle) and due to using rented bolt action rifles more during my African safaris.

But in recent years, as I look back & reflect upon my previous assessment... I have slowly come to realize that double rifles definitely hold the greater edge for hunting Royal Bengal tigers in the Sundarbans (especially when the hunter runs a risk of facing a charge from a wounded and/or infuriated animal). The dense mangrove foliage of the Sundarbans denotes an almost guaranteed probability that most shots on Royal Bengal tigers will be taken in low visibility situations and at close range (barring of course, Royal Bengal tigers which were shot during random encounters from passing launches or boats when they come to drink water at the river banks or canal mouths). Indeed, in several of the forest ranges... the hunter will not even clearly be able to see what lies 100 yards away from him. Most shots on Royal Bengal tigers are thus, taken at ranges under 60 yards. During a charge scenario, a Royal Bengal tiger will be attacking the hunter from distances as close as 30 feet. In such situations, the double rifle's inherent ability to get off an instant second shot by merely pulling the second trigger could essentially be the deciding factor between life and death for the hunter.

In a tragically ironical set of circumstances, just 23 years after hunting Royal Bengal tigers became outlawed in our part of the world... Krieghoff developed the perfect caliber for hunting the great cats- The .500/416 Nitro Express. Pushing 400-grain bullets at 2330 feet per second, this rimmed cartridge is the ideal double rifle caliber for hunting Royal Bengal tigers. Were I completely unburdened by any sort of constraint in regards to cost or availability... then my ideal rifle for hunting Royal Bengal tigers would hands down have to be a Heym Model 89B boxlock ejector in .500/416 Nitro Express with 26-inch barrels and a non-automatic safety.

While the modern notion is that most hunting rifles should be fitted with the best high-tech telescopic sights, I personally find that (for hunting Royal Bengal tigers in the Sundarbans, at least) nothing surpasses the old-fashioned traditional iron sight. Wide "V" back-sights and an uncovered ivory bead fore-sight are my preferred setup for tiger shooting in the dense mangrove forests of the Sundarbans. They are very quick and instinctive to use. And they do not go out of setting if bumped (unlike a telescopic sight). In the Sundarbans, the vegetation is so dense that the hunter is unlikely to spot a Royal Bengal tiger from any great distance which necessitates a telescopic sight on his rifle. When the

Royal Bengal tiger is spotted, it will invariably be at ranges below 80 yards. And they will only offer a chance for a very quick, instinctive shot to be taken. This is where open iron sights really come into their own. They are far easier to quickly line up and aim instinctively with, than even the most modern telescopic sight.

In regards to the most appropriate choice of rifle ammunition to employ for Royal Bengal tigers, it is imperative that only the best quality soft-nosed cartridges (i.e. those loaded with premium grade lead cored expanding bullets) be used. Royal Bengal tigers are classified as soft skinned animals and a bullet that expands in diameter while still holding together, will provide the largest wound cavities while also offering optimum penetration. I shot the man-eater of Atharobeki with the (now unfortunately discontinued) Winchester Super-X 175 grain soft-nosed cartridge for the 7x57mm Mauser caliber. Loaded with a charge of powder large enough to propel a 175-grain copper jacketed bullet at 2440 feet per second, this cartridge absolutely hammered the Royal Bengal tiger (breaking clean through the scapula/shoulder bone and tearing into a lung) with enough striking force to dissuade him from attacking me.

Based on my field experiences in hunting African lions & leopards, I would have to say that the finest bullet for hunting Royal Bengal tigers (in recent years) is the classic Nosler Partition. A 400-grain Nosler Partition bullet traveling at 2330 feet per second (fired from a .500/416 Nitro Express) is an absolutely unrivalled medicine for Royal Bengal tigers. Any reasonable hit to the creature's vital organs is guaranteed to prove fatal (even if the tiger may not be killed outright).

Unfortunately (at this time of writing), Nosler has not been manufacturing Partition bullets for the last 4 years (constantly keeping on listing them as "Out of Stock" on their website). Based upon the bullets that are currently being manufactured and are available on the market today... my choice would have to be the DGX (Dangerous Game eXpanding) bonded bullets which Hornady has begun to manufacture since 2018. Fortunately, these are currently available in .416 caliber weighing 400 grains.

I am strongly opposed to using the trendy modern mono-metal bullets (such as Barnes TSX all-copper hollow points) for hunting Royal Bengal tigers. These mono-metal bullets need to be pushed to rather high speeds in order to expand rapidly/reliably and they will frequently fail to expand properly on the great cats (especially one that is shot over bait or feeding at a kill).



The author with the man-eater of Chand-Pai, killed with a 12-bore shotgun (1988)



The author with the man-eater of Atharobeki, killed with a 7x57mm Mauser Rifle (1989)



The firearms employed by the author to hunt his 3 man-eating Royal Bengal Tigers: The Pakistani 12-Bore single-barreled Sikender shotgun (bottom) was used to down the man-eater of Mohesshoripur (1981) & the man-eater of Chand Pai (1988) & the English-made Pakistani-assembled 7x57mm Mauser caliber Churchill Gunmakers model Deluxe bolt action rifle (top) was used to down the man-eater of Atharobeki (1989)



12-bore Eley Alphamax L.G cartridges (left) of the type used by the author to dispatch the man-eater of Mohesshoripur (1981) & the man-eater of Chand Pai (1988)



7x57mm Mauser Winchester Super-X 175 grain soft-nosed cartridges of the type used by the author to dispatch the man-eater of Atharobeki (1989)



300 Grain .375 Caliber Nosler Partition bullets are extremely well-suited for hunting any member of the Great Cat family.

VIII. FOLLOWING UP WOUNDED ROYAL BENGAL TIGERS

When wounded by a hunter's bullet, a Royal Bengal tiger will ALWAYS retreat into dense foliage in an attempt to evade his tormentor(s). It is the following up of the wounded Royal Bengal tiger that leads to the most fatalities and/or injuries to members of the hunting party. Because the tiger then stays prepared to ambush the hunters. When a wounded Royal Bengal tiger attacks, it will invariably be from very short range and the animal will be incredibly fast. A Royal Bengal tiger can cross 28 meters in 0.39 seconds. And it has an almost supernatural ability to recognize exactly who shot it.

For this reason, I am of the view that following up a wounded Royal Bengal tiger immediately after it has been shot... is extremely unwise and dangerous. After I had shot each of my 3 man-eating Royal Bengal tigers, I used to wait for AT LEAST one hour before taking up the spoor of the wounded animal.

And this was only for the final Royal Bengal tiger (which I had shot with a heavy caliber rifle). When I shot the first 2 man-eaters (with a shotgun at night), I waited until morning to take up the spoor. When I found each of the 3 man-eating Royal Bengal tigers, they had already succumbed to their injuries. I subscribe to the philosophy of “Give the man-eater time to die”.

It is imperative that one should never spoor wounded man-eating Royal Bengal tigers by themselves. They should be accompanied by at least one other adequately armed companion (at the bare minimum). If a wounded Royal Bengal tiger does manage to charge and get a hold of a member of the hunting party, then it will not cease to keep mauling the victim until either the victim is dead or somebody manages to shoot the tiger off the victim.



*Dense mangrove vegetation growing all throughout every single forest range of the Sundarbans.
Ideal for Royal Bengal Tigers to ambush their prey or pursuing hunters.*

IX. PREPARING ROYAL BENGAL TIGER HIDES AS TROPHIES

As per government policy, the hides/body parts/carcass of any endangered animal that has been legally dispatched after a Kill-Order is issued by the Ministry of Forests, must be surrendered to the government as soon as possible.

However (just for the sake of interest), I am adding a few notes on how Royal Bengal tiger hides may be field-dressed and preserved. Royal Bengal tiger hides make for splendid trophies and thus, it is imperative that the hide of a slain Royal Bengal tiger be removed neatly and properly. Here are some lessons in rudimentary taxidermy, in case it is of interest to anyone.

With a pair of scissors, a sharp (preferably carbon steel) knife, pliers, salt, or alum with ash, one can dabble in some amateur skinning. To those who are interested from an academic perspective, this is how it is done: The first and foremost thing is to measure the animal, as quite often after it has been skinned and stretched, the resulting specimen is often larger than the original, and some individuals actually prefer it this way. Firstly, with charcoal, spots on the animal must be marked out after turning it on its back. Starting from the lower lip all the way to the tail, the next cuts are from the inside of the fore and hind legs (through its pads). Now the hide can be taken off; although around the head, extreme care must be taken. It is not for the squeamish and many a time I have had friends who vomited, upon seeing such a sight.

Carnivora take a longer time to decompose but also gives off an offensive odour and hence it is always better to have your nose and mouth covered with a handkerchief. The hide is cleaned to remove blood and then stretched out, with pegs if one has carried them (over a carpet of dried grass) and liberally mixed with ash. There should be extra support under the head and the ears must be turned inside out. It is then treated with an equal amount of salt and ash, to get the moisture out. This has to be repeated multiple times for the next 48 hours, after which it is ready to be mounted by your taxidermist. This is, of course, how it used to be done in Bangladesh during the East Pakistani era. In the Sundarban mangrove forests, there is always moisture in the air. Hence parts of the skin that do not feel the effects of the preservative at the time, will simply decompose taking the hair along with it, leaving unsightly bald patches on the skin. In places where the skin is thick, it must be thinned down with a sharp knife so that the curing agent reaches the roots of the hair and hardens the whole skin.



The author (left) & Pachabdi Gazi (right) at the lobby of the Buri Goalini Forest Range Office, on the day that the hide of the man-eater of Atharobeki was submitted to the Department of Forests (As per government policy) (1989)



The fangs of the man-eater of Atharobeki, which the author was permitted to retain.



Shikari Pachabdi Gazi with the tanned hide of the man-eater of Talpatti (1987)

X. FAMOUS HUNTERS OF ROYAL BENGAL TIGERS IN THE PAST

Without boasting, I can say that the late Pachabdi Gazi and I are the only 2 men to have legally killed man-eating Royal Bengal tigers in the Sundarbams after the passing of the Wildlife Conservation Act-1973. I shot 3 of them in 1981, 1988 and 1989. Pachabdi killed one (via gun trap) in 1987.

However, in this segment ... I will give a short overview of some other very prominent hunters who downed man-eating Royal Bengal tigers in the Sundarban mangrove forests in the past (i.e. prior to 1973). In order to keep the list concise, I will not include the names of those who exclusively dispatched man-eaters with traps (such as Pachabdi Gazi who employed gun traps for this purpose) or those whose method of hunting Royal Bengal tigers involved having multiple shooters fire at one tiger simultaneously (such as Aktaruzzaman Kamal and Ali Akbar Qureshi).

I will only feature the names of those who killed man-eating Royal Bengal tigers by directly shooting them on their own (without other members of the hunting party firing upon the animal). I will also refrain from featuring the many foreign diplomats and Pakistani military officers who randomly shot a Royal Bengal tiger for sport from the deck of a passing launch, upon spotting the animal by chance on a river bank in the Sundarbans. For the purposes of categorization, I shall divide the hunters into 2 groups: Local hunters & visiting hunters.

Local Hunters

I. Arjun Sardar (deceased)

Arjun Sardar was a local fisherman who resided in a village around the Sundarbans until his natural death in 1967. Between 1930 and 1945, he occasionally lent his services to the British Imperial Forest Service whenever a man-eating Royal Bengal tiger would be at charge. During this time, he shot and killed 5 man-eaters (4 male and 1 female) by using a 12 bore R.B Rodda & Co. "Improved Paragon" model double barrel back action hammer paradox gun (which was loaned to him from the forest department's coupe office) and Eley Grand Prix Lethal Ball cartridges. Arjun was noted for being incredibly skilled with a gun, being that he is one of the very few hunters of Royal Bengal tigers to exclusively prefer the frontal brain shot (a shot which I previously explained in Chapter IV as being incredibly difficult to execute) ... frequently at ranges as short as 15 feet. His adventures can be read about in the 1955 Bengali classic "Sundarban Er Arjun Sardar".

II. Abdur Rahman

Abdur Rahman is the current general secretary of Dacca Rifle Club and a long serving firearms instructor for Bangladesh Shooting Federation. An avid hunter and keen sportsman since his youth, he shot a notorious 9 foot large man-eating Royal Bengal tigress which was operating in the Gol-Khali region of the Sundarban mangrove forests in the winter of 1972. The animal had fed on 8 local villagers in 15 days, before Abdur randomly crossed paths with the man-eater by chance while hunting Axis deer in the Sundarbans one day. The tigress was feeding on the corpse of a local woodcutter, when Abdur encountered her. In his hands, was his 12 bore (2 3/4 inch chambers) Astra Imperial double barreled side by side sidelock non ejector shotgun (with a fully choked left barrel and a half choked right barrel) which was loaded with plastic cased Eley Alphamax L.G cartridges. As the man-eater turned to look at Abdur, he fired both barrels into her broadside at roughly 30 yards range. The tigress was hit by 5 L.G pellets in the heart and dropped dead on the spot. Abdur has since sold his Astra shotgun and now owns 4 other firearms: A 12 bore (2 3/4 inch chambers) Beretta Model 686 Silver Pigeon boxlock ejector over & under shotgun (with a fully choked upper barrel and a half choked lower barrel), a 12 bore (2 3/4 inch chambers) BRNO Model 501.2 boxlock ejector over & under shotgun (with a fully choked upper barrel and a half choked lower barrel), a .22 Winchester Magnum Rimfire caliber Anschutz Model 1516 bolt action rifle and a .22 Hi-Velocity Taurus 8 shot revolver.

Visiting Hunters

I. Yusuf S. Ahmad (Deceased)

Yusuf S. Ahmad is widely remembered as the father of wildlife conservation in Pakistan. He was the first Asian man to become a Divisional Forest Officer under the British Imperial Forest Service, during the British colonial era. After the India-Pakistan partition in 1947, he became the first Chief Conservator of Forests of both East Pakistan and West Pakistan. A very keen and passionate hunter, he was the pioneer of the concept of using sustainable hunting practices as a wildlife conservation tool. Despite eventually settling down in Karachi after his retirement, he kept visiting Bangladesh occasionally for his entire life (even after the Liberation war in 1971). During the course of his life, he shot a sizable amount of dangerous game including 9 man-eating Royal Bengal tigers, 2 man-eating Asiatic leopards, 3 rogue Asiatic elephants and 2 man-eating saltwater crocodiles. For the majority of his hunting purposes, he preferred to use a .450/400 Nitro Express Magnum double barreled side by side boxlock ejector rifle made by W.J. Jeffery and a 12 bore 3 inch Magnum fully choked double barreled side by side boxlock ejector shotgun made by W.W. Greener. For hunting Royal Bengal tigers in the Sundarban mangrove forests (as well as other parts of Bengal), Yusuf preferred to use his

.450/400 Nitro Express Magnum exclusively (loaded with Kynoch 400 grain soft nosed cartridges). His adventures may be read about in his 1981 autobiography "With The Wild Animals Of Bengal".

II. Tahawar Ali Khan (Deceased)

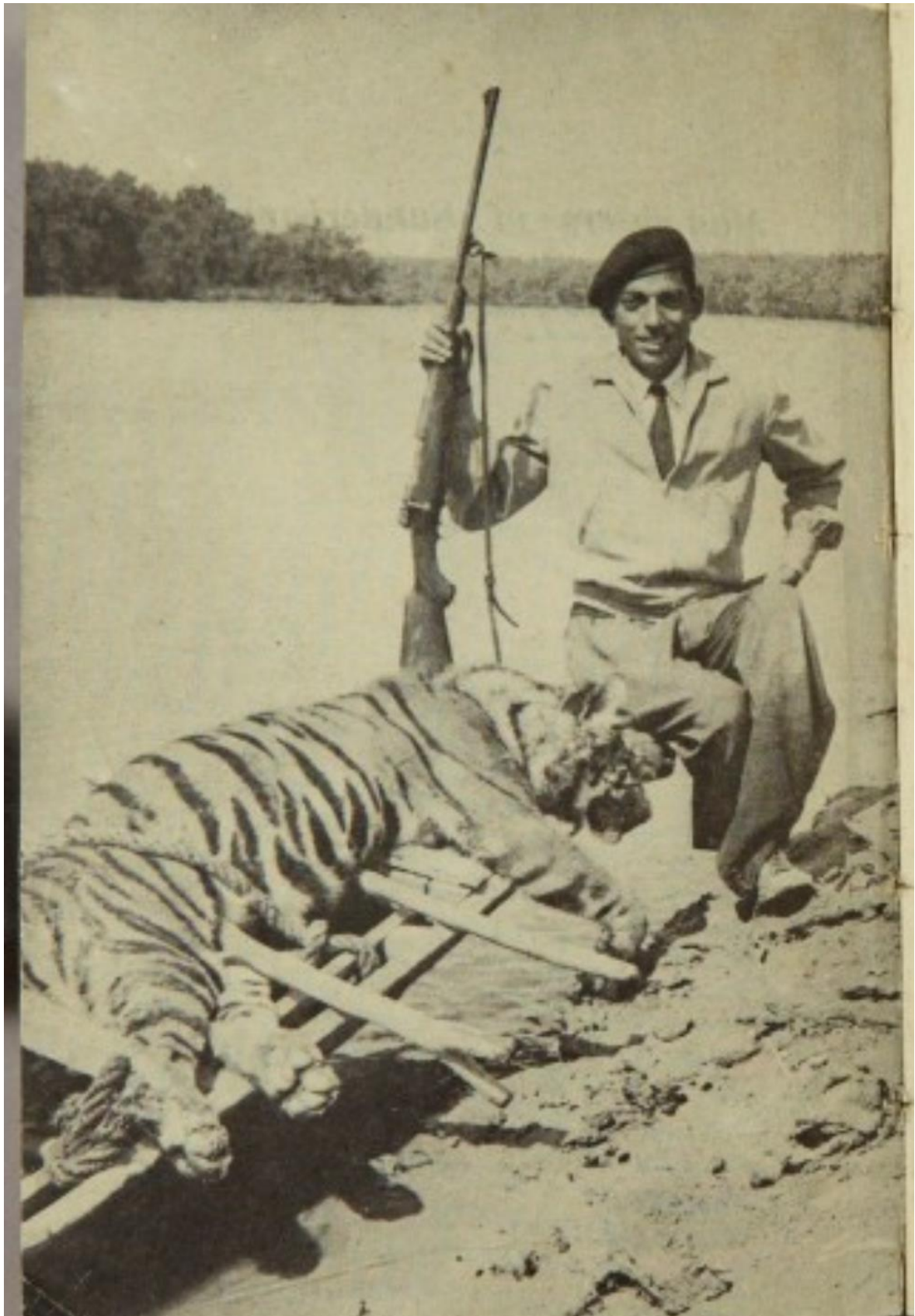
Tahawar Ali Khan was a Pakistani journalist and quite possibly the most famous hunter of man-eating Royal Bengal tigers in the Sundarbans (amongst non-resident hunters) during the East Pakistani era. A passionate hunter and writer, this Lahore based journalist made several hunting excursions into the Sundarbans between 1957 and 1970 ... simply out of sheer fascination with the mysterious mangrove forests. He shot 1 man-eating Royal Bengal tigress and 4 man-eating Royal Bengal tigers in 1957, 1958, 1966, 1967 and 1970 ... with Pachabdi Gazi serving as his guide. He owned and hunted with 3 firearms during the course of his life: a .375 Holland & Holland Magnum pre-64 Winchester Model 70 Super Grade bolt action rifle, a .30-06 Springfield pre 64 Winchester Model 70 Super Grade bolt action rifle and a 12 bore 3 Inch Magnum fully-choked Birmingham Small Arms Wildfowling Model double barreled side-by-side boxlock ejector shotgun. For dispatching man-eating Royal Bengal tigers in the Sundarbans, Tahawar preferred to use his .375 Holland & Holland Magnum (loaded with 300 grain Winchester Silver-Tip soft-nosed cartridges). His adventures may be read about in his 1961 non-fiction thriller "The Man-eaters of the Sundarbans". It is worth noting that this is the only English book to have been published about exclusively hunting in South Bengal (then known as East Pakistan) after the end of the British colonial era in 1947.

III. Gohar Ayub Khan

Gohar Ayub Khan is a retired Pakistani politician and the son of the late Pakistani President Marshal, Ayub Khan. As a young military officer in the late 1950s (and being an avid hunter), Gohar made 3 hunting excursions into the Sundarban mangrove forests between 1958 and 1962. During his second and third visits to the Sundarbans, Gohar successfully downed 2 large man-eating male Royal Bengal tigers ... with Pachabdi Gazi serving as his guide. While Gohar currently owns several excellent sporting firearms, he used to own only 4 at the time when he hunted in the Sundarbans (all of which were gifted to him by his father): A .470 Nitro Express 1939 made John Rigby & Co. double barrel side-by-side boxlock ejector rifle, a 9.5x57mm Mannlicher Schoenauer Model 1910 bolt action rifle, a 12-bore (2 1/2 inch chambers) F.J. Baker double barrel side-by-side boxlock ejector shotgun (with a half-choked left barrel and a quarter choked right barrel) and a 9x19mm Parabellum Luger P-08 semi-automatic pistol. For dispatching the 2 man-eating Royal Bengal tigers in the Sundarbans, Gohar preferred to use his .470 Nitro Express (loaded with Kynoch 500 grain soft-nosed cartridges). His hunting adventures in the Sundarbans may be read about in the first chapter of his 2009 autobiography "Shikar in the Days Gone By".



*Yusuf S. Ahmad with the hide of one of his man-eating Royal Bengal Tigers seen in the background.
(1928)*



Tahawar Ali Khan with the man-eating Tigress Of Nil-Kamal Khal (1957)



Gohar Ayub Khan with his first man-eating Royal Bengal Tiger (1956)

XI. STEPS TAKEN FOR THE CONSERVATION OF ROYAL BENGAL TIGERS

I have shot Royal Bengal tigers (all man-eaters) on 3 days of my life. By comparison, I spent 17 years of my life (1981-1989 as the Divisional Forest Officer of the Sundarban mangrove forests and 1993-2000 as the Chief Conservator of Forests for all of South Bengal) protecting these magnificent creatures with every possible resource available to me. And indeed, every sportsman must take great care to protect the game which he loves hunting so ardently. Yes, I find absolutely nothing immoral about hunting Royal Bengal tigers (provided that the act contributes to wildlife conservation as a whole). And yes, now & then the resolution of human-wildlife conflict (especially when a man-eating Royal Bengal tiger is concerned) mandates that certain Royal Bengal tigers inhabiting a particular forest range must be destroyed. But a tiger must never be loathed merely by dint of being a tiger. Royal Bengal tigers are critical components of our ecosystem and as IGF Yusuf Salauddin Ahmad used to say "The tiger is the friend of the forest".

The Indo-Pak war in 1971 had proven to take a severe toll upon the populations of Royal Bengal tigers inhabiting the Sundarbans (for reasons mentioned above). In addition to this, the political instability of the newly born country during the entire decade of the 1970s (including several bloody military coupes) basically meant that no governmental body was taking any serious steps towards conserving the Sundarbans swiftly dwindling tiger population. Commercial hunting (for the accumulation of Royal Bengal tiger hides, fangs, claws, genitals and bones for sale) was also rampant, with many locals indiscriminately killing dozens of Royal Bengal tigers (males, females and cubs alike) either by using gun traps or by using folidol to poison them. In our part of the world, more Royal Bengal tigers have been poached by using folidol than perhaps by all other means combined.

In 1982, my men and I actually arrested a group of Royal Bengal tiger poachers who had 126 Royal Bengal tiger hides in their tin shed (so just imagine how many of these poor creatures they might have indiscriminately killed and already sold the hides and bones of). The hides of Royal Bengal tigers

were/are prized as decoration pieces. The bones were/are used as herbal medicine and were/are a hot item on the black market (especially in China and Vietnam). The fangs and claws were/are prized as jewellery. And the penis and testicles were/are prized as aphrodisiacs (especially in China and Vietnam). It was only when President Ershaad (a fellow army officer & passionate sportsman himself) came to power, that the government finally began to take the conservation of Royal Bengal tigers seriously.

I was 29 years old when I was first made the DFO of the Sundarbans in 1981 (having previously served 2 terms as the DFO of the Chittagong Hill Tracts), and the President had personally told me “Mr. Habib, I hereby make you king and guardian of our nation’s greatest natural resource for the next four years. You have but one responsibility. Protect these forests from the enemy and looters at all costs. By the end of your term, I want to see every single pirate/poacher/drug smuggler eradicated from these forests by any means necessary. I am providing you with every available resource that you require in order to accomplish this. But do not fail me.”

In regards to preventing the poaching of Royal Bengal tigers, I knew exactly what I had to do. Within the first four months of my administration, I had recruited exactly 2000 new forest guards... all former war veterans and each of them loyal to a fault. I had given these young men a source of income that they could be proud of. I had given them a purpose. They had 1 duty only- To put the very fear of God into every single pirate, commercial poacher and drug smuggler that inhabited these forests. And this, they excelled at.

For the leader of the anti-tiger poaching patrol unit, I had appointed a young forest ranger by the name of Jabbar Molla (an avid hunter himself) who was so successful in his duties at following my orders & eradicating tiger poachers, that his deeds soon earned him the nickname “Bagerhat Er Jollad” (The Brute of Bagerhat).

In 1996 (when I was serving as the Chief Conservator of Forests for the entire nation), a foreign human rights group (who came here masquerading as a “Non-Profit Organization”) brought up the laughable accusations against me for violating the human rights of “Innocent people forcefully driven towards (commercial) poaching in order to feed their starving families”. Fortunately, the Ministry of Forests found their deluded accusations against me to be just as baseless as I did. I successfully retired from the post of CCF in 2000 and went on to pursue a career in politics. Indeed, I was incredibly fortunate that most of the people around me who were interested in true wildlife conservation... understood very well that you can’t protect an endangered species without having an iron hand.

We now come to the question of what I personally believe should be the future of Royal Bengal tiger conservation. In my observation, the population of Royal Bengal tigers is strictly on the rise in the Sundarbans (contrary to what the media wants you to think). This is why the case of human-wildlife conflict in the Sundarbans is now much more severe than ever.

I strongly believe that if an African mode of conservation was used (i.e. issue five to ten fairly priced hunting permits per year for adult male Royal Bengal tigers and then use the funds to pay for the conservation of the great cats), then two ends would be served:

1. Human-wildlife conflict would reduce
2. Funds for conserving the other tigers (which would NOT be hunted) would be generated

But in today's political climate, I doubt that will ever happen (although I chose to remain optimistic).

THE END



The author (center) & the President (top right) during Her Majesty the late Queen Elizabeth II's state visit in 1983



The Brute Of Bagerhat (1982)



The author on anti-poacher patrol (1989)