

Dummy mummy comes to the rescue of tiger cubs in India

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The tiger cubs have been feeding from milk bottles fitted inside the cuddly toy at the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve, in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh

Park rangers in India are using a cuddly toy tigress to help three traumatised cubs spring back to their feet after the death of their mother.

The cubs, who were orphaned last month, have been happily feeding from milk bottles fitted inside the toy, said the field director at Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve in the central state of Madhya Pradesh.

"We tried to give them goats' milk initially but they didn't like the human interaction. They just refused to take the bottle from our staff," Mridul Pathak told AFP.

"Now they have been feeding from the synthetic nipples attached to the dummy for six days. Their energy levels increased from the first feed."

Forest rangers have also built a special enclosure for the cubs inside their compound, using twigs, grass and sand to mimic their natural habitat, he said.

"We even rubbed the faeces of the mother on the toy tiger and grass to recreate the feeling of being close to their real mum."

The cubs were found in a critical condition not long after the body of their mother was discovered near a river in January.

It is believed the mother was killed after brushing against an electric fence erected by cattle farmers, Pathak said. An investigation is under way.

Rangers quickly treated the cubs for dehydration and rushed them back to the enclosure.

The [tiger](#) treatment has a precedent.

In rural India it is common to keep dummy calves next to cows and buffaloes who stop lactating when they lose their offspring. The sense of attachment encourages the [mothers](#) to begin producing milk again.

India is home to more than half of the world's [tiger population](#) with more than 2,200 roaming its reserves, according to the most recent census in 2014.

At least 98 big cats died last year, said the National Tiger Conservation Authority, with poaching blamed in most cases.

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