

Tatas set example by saving 'aquatic tiger'

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The majestic Mahseer game fish would have gone extinct but for a dedicated conservation initiative from the house of Tatas, the salt-to-software conglomerate.

The majestic looking fish was once found in great numbers in the rivers that originate in the Himalayan and the Sahyadri ranges.

But as time passes, things changed drastically for the "tiger of freshwater".

"In the seventies, we came to know from locals that in Indrayani river, the fish number is reducing," says Vivek Vishwasrao, Head, Biodiversity Tata Power. Vishwasrao says that the causes for the numbers to dwindle were many including discharge of industrial pollutants in rivers and lakes, degradation of ecological condition of the fish's environment, indiscriminate fishing of brood stock, impact of big projects, poaching, introduction of exotic species and population pressure on resources. To help the fish, Tata Power has been running the Mahseer conser-



Mahaseer harvesting. FILE PHOTO

vation programme, 'Act for Mahseer', for the last four decades.

"We started in a small way but today it is one of the most successful conservation programmes," says Vishwasrao — In a span of one year, the campaign was successfully positioned as India's second largest conservation initiative after 'Save the Tiger'.

The conservation project located off the Walwan Dam in the Lonavla

hill ranges between Mumbai and Pune involves Deccan Mahseer (or Blue Fin Mahseer) and Golden Mahseer.

To give momentum to the initiative, the company pioneered a breeding facility at Walwan (also spelt Walvhan or Valvan). "In our hatcheries, we breed the fish and supply it across the country for introduction in lakes and rivers," he said. In four decades, over 13 million fertilized eggs have been obtained and over seven million fingerlings have been sent out.

Last year, Tata Power distributed around 6.5 lakh fingerlings to various fisheries boards across the country and other agencies— and the result was that India had the highest number of Mahseer breeding. Even with all this effort, the fish still figures in the "endangered" species list of International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

The Mahseer health is linked to the health of big rivers like the Ganga.

With 'Save Ganga' movement picking up, one expects Mahseer to be able to reap the benefits of the programme.