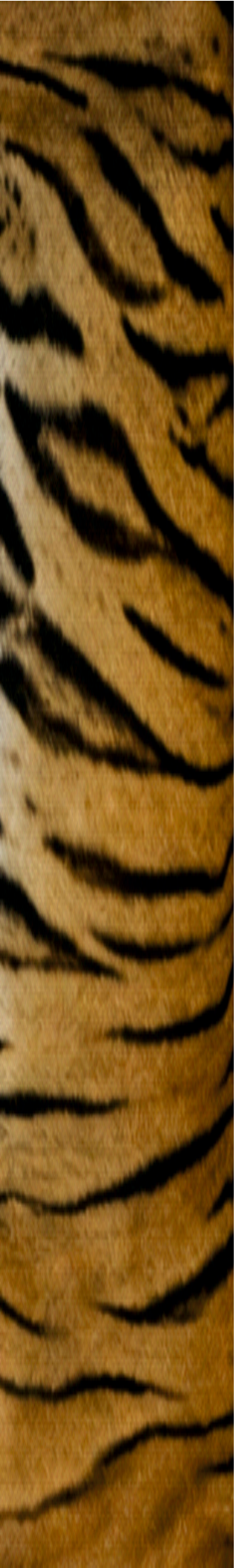


Field Guide

TIGERS OF SAHYADRI

SAHYADRI TIGER RESERVE

भारतीय वन्यजीव संस्थान
Wildlife Institute of India



SAHYADRI TIGER RESERVE

Field Guide TIGERS OF Sahyadri 2026

Prepared by

Sh. Tushar Chavan, IFS
Field Director,
Sahyadri Tiger Reserve

Sh. Nilesh Patil,
Ecologist, Tiger Cell,
Sahyadri Tiger Reserve

Mrs. Susmita Patil
Project Associate II,
Tiger Recovery Project, STR,
Wildlife Institute of India (WII)

SAHYADRI TIGER RESERVE

भारतीय वन्यजीव संस्थान
Wildlife Institute of India

FIELD GUIDE TO TIGERS OF SAHYADRI 2026

Contact:

Conservator of Forests & Field Director
Sahyadri Tiger Reserve
2nd floor, Vanvardhan Building,
Opposite to Post Office, Tarabai Park,
Kolhapur - 416003,
Maharashtra, India
Ph. No. 0231-2542766. Fax: 0231-2542988
Email: ccfwlkolhapur@mahaforest.gov.in

© Sahyadri Tiger Reserve

Published by:
Sahyadri Tiger Conservation Foundation, Kolhapur, Maharashtra

Reproduction of this publication, in whole or in part, requires prior permission and proper acknowledgment of the title and publisher

Year of Publication:
March 2026

Photo Credits:
Onkar Bugad, Jitesh Sharma, Sachin Dhaigude, Susmita Patil & Nilesh Patil
Camera Trap Images & Drone Image :
Sahyadri Tiger Reserve, Kolhapur

Design & Layout:
Mohammad Naveed Zafar

Compilation:
Nilesh Patil, *Ecologist, Tiger cell, Sahyadri Tiger Reserve*

Citation:
Chavan T. R., Jagtap K. S., Patil N. A., and Patil S. N. Field Guide to Tigers of Sahyadri - First Edition, 2026. Sahyadri Tiger Reserve, Kolhapur.

Official Website
www.sahyadritr.org

FOREWORD

It gives me great pleasure to present this Field Guide to the Tigers of Sahyadri Tiger Reserve. This publication highlights the remarkable progress made in tiger conservation in one of the most important landscapes of the northern Western Ghats.

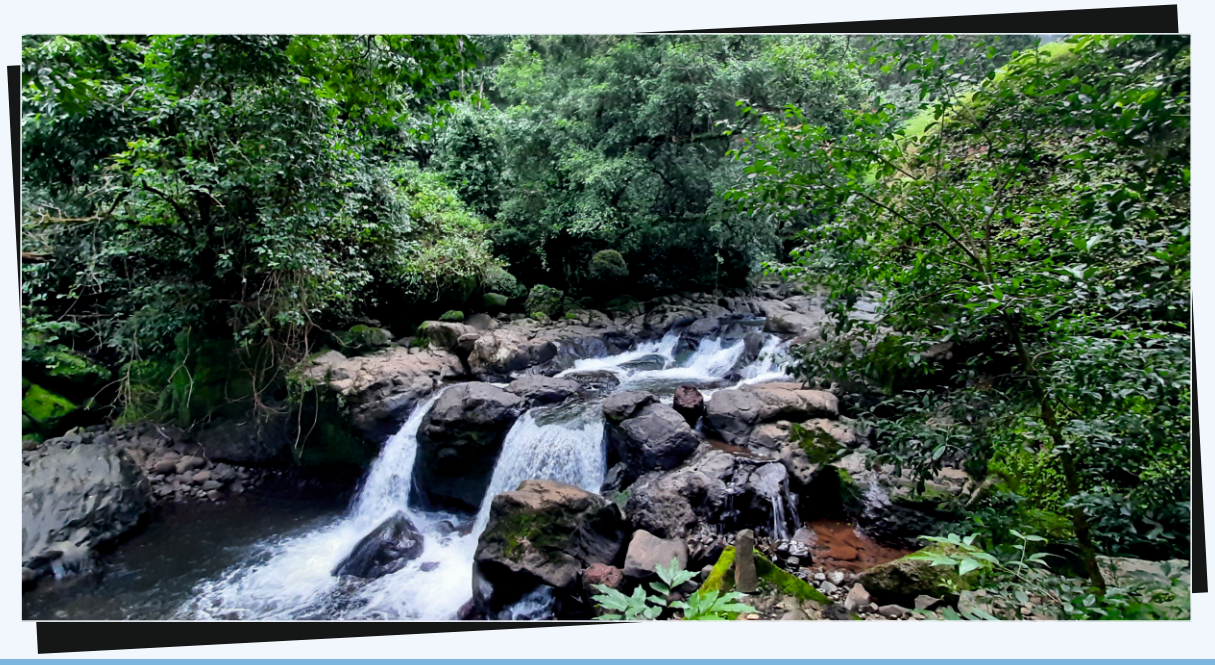
Sahyadri Tiger Reserve has witnessed encouraging changes over the past decade through sustained habitat protection, scientific monitoring, prey base improvement, anti-poaching measures, and the implementation of the Tiger Recovery Programme. The increasing number of individually identified tigers recorded through camera-trap monitoring reflects the success of these conservation efforts and underscores the growing ecological significance of the Sahyadri landscape.

This field guide has been developed to facilitate the identification of individual tigers using their unique stripe patterns. It will serve as a valuable reference for frontline forest staff, researchers, wildlife managers, and wildlife enthusiasts, while supporting long-term monitoring and scientific management of the tiger population.

I appreciate the dedicated efforts of all officers, frontline staff, Tiger Cell of Sahyadri Tiger Reserve, biologists from Wildlife Institute of India, and photographers whose contributions have made this publication possible. I also acknowledge the continued support of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) and the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) in strengthening scientific tiger monitoring.

I am confident that this guide will contribute to the effective conservation and management of tigers in Sahyadri Tiger Reserve and its surrounding landscaptes and inspire continued commitment towards protecting this invaluable natural heritage.

Sh. Tushar Chavan, IFS
Field Director
Sahyadri Tiger Reserve



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The preparation of this booklet has been made possible through the support and contributions of many individuals. We sincerely acknowledge their guidance and assistance.

We extend our gratitude to the field staff of the Sahyadri Tiger Reserve for their dedicated efforts in tiger monitoring, including camera trap deployment, field monitoring, and data collection under challenging field conditions. Their commitment has been instrumental in documenting individual tigers across the landscape. We also thank the Tiger Cell of the Sahyadri Tiger Reserve for its efforts in data compilation and the design of this booklet.

We further acknowledge the valuable support of the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) in advancing scientific approaches to tiger monitoring in the country.

Special thanks are extended to wildlife researchers, photographers, and wildlife enthusiasts who have shared photographs and field observations that helped in compiling this booklet.

We hope that this booklet will support field staff, researchers, managers, and wildlife enthusiasts in accurately identifying individual tigers and contribute to the ongoing monitoring and conservation of tigers in the Sahyadri Tiger Reserve and its surrounding landscapes.

Sh. Kiran Jagtap
Deputy Director, Koyna
Koyna Wildlife Division
Sahyadri Tiger Reserve

Ms. Snehlata Patil
Deputy Director, Chandoli
Chandoli Wildlife Division
Sahyadri Tiger Reserve



The **Field Guide to Tigers of Sahyadri** has been prepared to helpfield staff, researchers, managers, and wildlife enthusiasts identify individual tigers found in the Sahyadri Tiger Reserve and its adjoining landscapes.





INTRODUCTION

The tiger (*Panthera tigris*), India's apex predator and an umbrella species, plays a vital role in maintaining the ecological integrity of forest ecosystems. Conserving tigers not only safeguards the species itself but also protects the rich biodiversity and ecological processes that sustain these landscapes. Among India's tiger habitats, the Western Ghats stand out as one of the world's most significant conservation landscapes, supporting a network of protected areas that facilitate long-term tiger survival.

Situated in the northern Western Ghats of Maharashtra, the Sahyadri Tiger Reserve (STR) is an important component of this interconnected landscape. It provides crucial ecological connectivity with the forests of Karnataka and Goa, enabling the movement and dispersal of tigers across state boundaries. Although the reserve has historically supported a low-density tiger population, its conservation significance has grown considerably in recent years. Sustained habitat protection, improved prey availability, and enhanced landscape connectivity have created favourable conditions for tiger recovery, reinforcing STR's role in securing the northernmost tiger population of the Western Ghats.

Established in 2010 by merging the Koyna Wildlife Sanctuary and Chandoli National Park, the Sahyadri Tiger Reserve (STR) represents the northernmost tiger-bearing protected area in the Western Ghats. Located between 16°58′05″N–17°49′14″N and 73°33′33″E–73°55′12″E, the reserve covers an area of 1,165.57 km^2, comprising a 600.12 km^2 core and a 565.45 km^2 buffer. Situated along the crest of the Western Ghats, STR is characterized by rugged mountains, steep escarpments, deep valleys, perennial streams, plateaus, and dense tropical forests. Its vegetation is dominated by semi-evergreen, evergreen, and moist deciduous forests interspersed with grasslands and lateritic plateaus. High annual rainfall during the southwest monsoon supports a wide range of habitats that sustain exceptional floral and faunal diversity. In addition to tigers, the reserve supports leopards, sloth bears, dholes, gaur, sambar, barking deer, mouse deer, wild pigs, and numerous endemic species, making it one of the most biologically significant protected areas in the northern Western Ghats.

Despite its ecological richness, Sahyadri historically functioned as a low-density landscape occupied primarily by dispersing tigers. Recognizing its ecological importance and strategic location, the Maharashtra Forest Department, with support from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), initiated intensive habitat management, prey augmentation, village relocation, protection measures, and scientific monitoring to facilitate tiger recovery. A major milestone in this effort was the introduction of female tigers under the tiger recovery programme to establish a breeding population and restore the ecological role of the species within the reserve.

Scientific monitoring has played a central role in evaluating the success of these conservation efforts. Systematic camera-trap surveys have been conducted in Sahyadri Tiger Reserve since 2011, enabling continuous assessment of the tiger population. Individual tigers are identified using their unique stripe patterns, allowing reliable estimation of tiger

presence, occupancy, habitat use, movement, and landscape connectivity. The information generated through this monitoring provides valuable scientific evidence for adaptive management and informed conservation decision-making.

Results of camera-trap monitoring and field observations up to 2026 indicate the presence of at least ten individually identified tigers across the Sahyadri landscape, including seven individuals within Sahyadri Tiger Reserve and three in Radhanagari Wildlife Sanctuary. Of the seven tigers recorded in STR, four are naturally occurring males, while three are females introduced under the tiger recovery programme. The three tigers documented in Radhanagari Wildlife Sanctuary are all males. These records demonstrate the continued use of the Sahyadri landscape by dispersing tigers and underscore its growing importance as an emerging tiger conservation landscape in the northern Western Ghats. Furthermore, the movement of tigers between adjoining protected areas highlights the critical role of habitat connectivity and functional wildlife corridors in facilitating dispersal, maintaining gene flow, and ensuring long-term population viability.

Long-term monitoring also reveals a clear positive trend in tiger occurrence within the reserve. Camera-trap records from 2011 to 2026 show a gradual yet consistent increase in the minimum number of individually identified tigers, culminating in seven confirmed individuals in STR during 2026. Earlier years were characterized by sporadic detections, reflecting the low-density and transient nature of the tiger population. In contrast, recent years have witnessed a marked increase in both detection frequency and the number of identified individuals. This encouraging trend is likely the outcome of sustained habitat protection, recovery of the prey base, strengthened anti-poaching efforts, improved habitat management, and the strategic introduction of female tigers through the tiger recovery programme. Collectively, these conservation interventions have enhanced habitat suitability and increased the potential for long-term tiger persistence within the reserve.

The current population structure, comprising both resident and dispersing individuals, suggests that the Sahyadri landscape is gradually transitioning from a sink landscape with occasional tiger presence to one capable of supporting a self-sustaining breeding population. The successful establishment of introduced females alongside naturally occurring males provides favourable conditions for future reproduction and population growth. Continued scientific monitoring through camera trapping, genetic analyses, and ecological field surveys will be essential for understanding population dynamics, reproductive success, dispersal patterns, and habitat use. At the same time, sustained protection of prey populations, effective mitigation of human–wildlife conflict, maintenance of habitat connectivity, and coordinated management of adjoining protected areas will remain critical to securing a viable and resilient tiger population across the Sahyadri landscape.

TIGER IDENTIFICATION

At the beginning of Project Tiger in the 1970s, the Indian Forest Department used the pugmark identification method to distinguish individual tigers and estimate their population in protected areas. However, later studies by wildlife scientists revealed that this method was highly unreliable. The pugmarks of the same tiger could appear different depending on the type of terrain and substrate. Moreover, the high level of human subjectivity involved in casting and interpreting pugmarks often led to the same tiger being counted multiple times, resulting in inflated population estimates.

Over time, the stripe patterns of tigers have been recognized as the most reliable and distinctive features for identifying individual animals. Each tiger possesses a unique stripe pattern, much like the unique fingerprints found in humans. Just as fingerprint patterns allow us to distinguish one person from another, the stripe patterns on a tiger enable us to identify and differentiate individual tigers. During the 2006 tiger census, the camera trapping technique, pioneered by Dr. Ullas Karanth, was implemented for the first time by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) in several tiger reserves. Since then, photographic evidence has become an essential tool for tiger monitoring.

The photographs presented in this field guide have been compiled from camera traps deployed in Sahyadri Tiger Reserve during Phase III and Phase IV monitoring, supplemented by images obtained through routine field monitoring and verified photographs contributed by wildlife enthusiasts. This field guide has been developed to facilitate the identification of individual tigers occurring within Sahyadri Tiger Reserve and its adjoining landscapes. By documenting the unique stripe patterns of each known individual, the guide serves as a valuable reference for frontline forest staff, researchers, wildlife managers, and conservation practitioners. It also serves as an essential tool for long-term monitoring by enabling the consistent identification of resident and dispersing tigers. The resulting information strengthens scientific management, supports adaptive conservation strategies, and informs long-term planning for tiger conservation across the Sahyadri landscape.

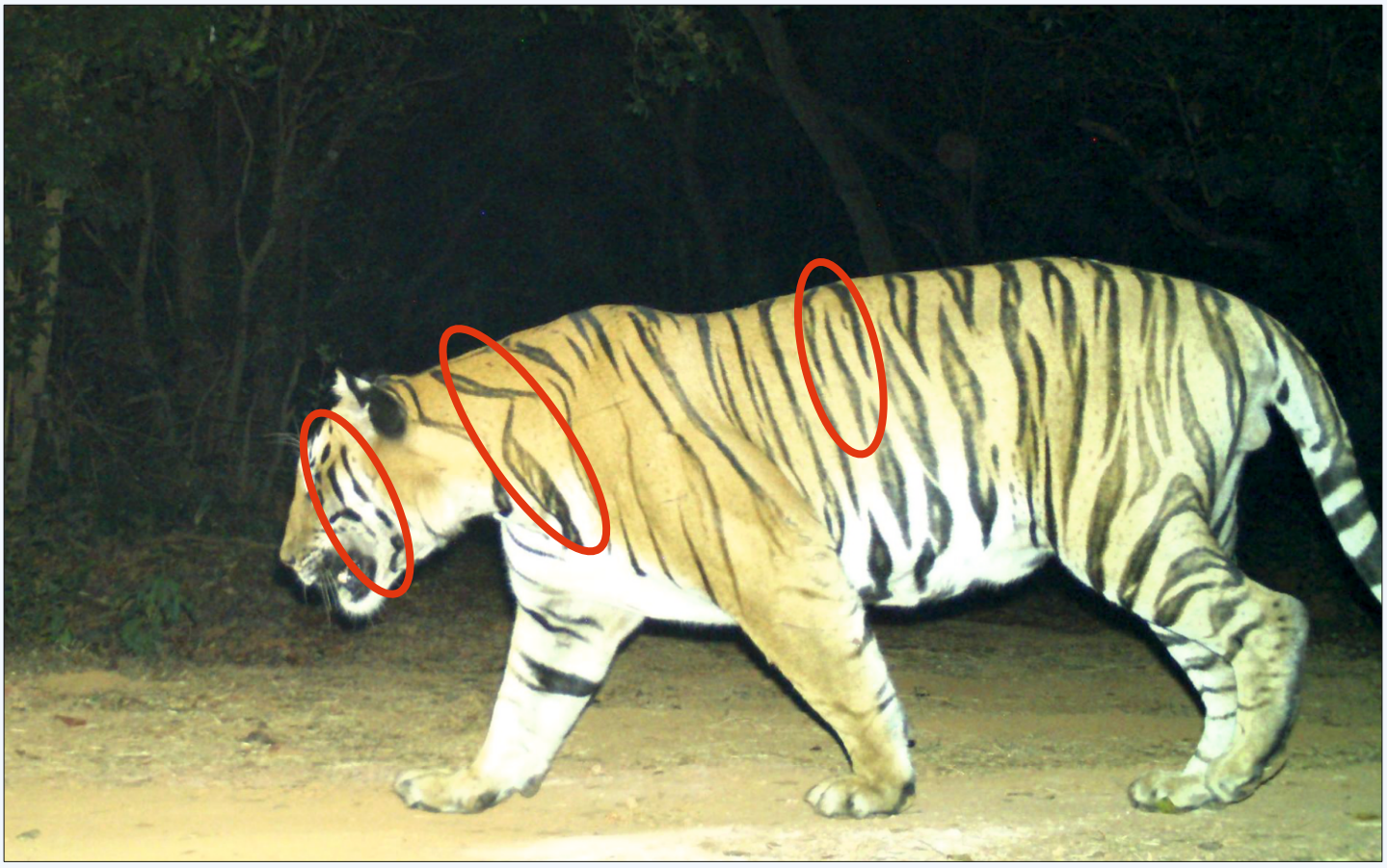
Details of Tigers captured in STR during camera trapping exercise from 2011-2026

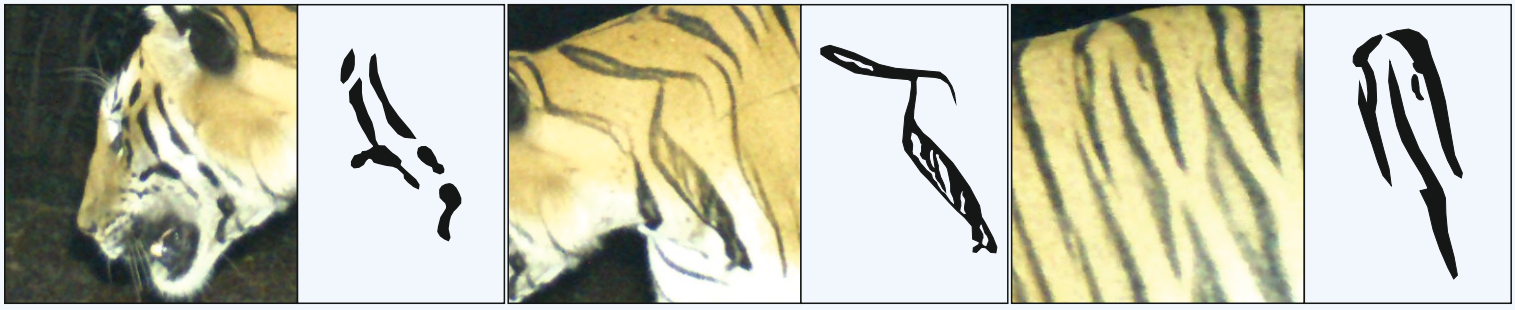
Year	No. of individuals captured	Sex Composition
2011	1	Male
2012	0	-
2013	0	-
2014	0	-
2015	1	Male
2016	0	-
2017	0	-
2018	1	Male
2019	0	-
2020	0	-
2021	0	-
2022	0	-
2023	1	Male
2024	3	3 Males
2025	5	3 Males, 2 Females
2026	7	4 Males, 3 Females

Left flank

STR - 01

सेनापती
SENAPATI





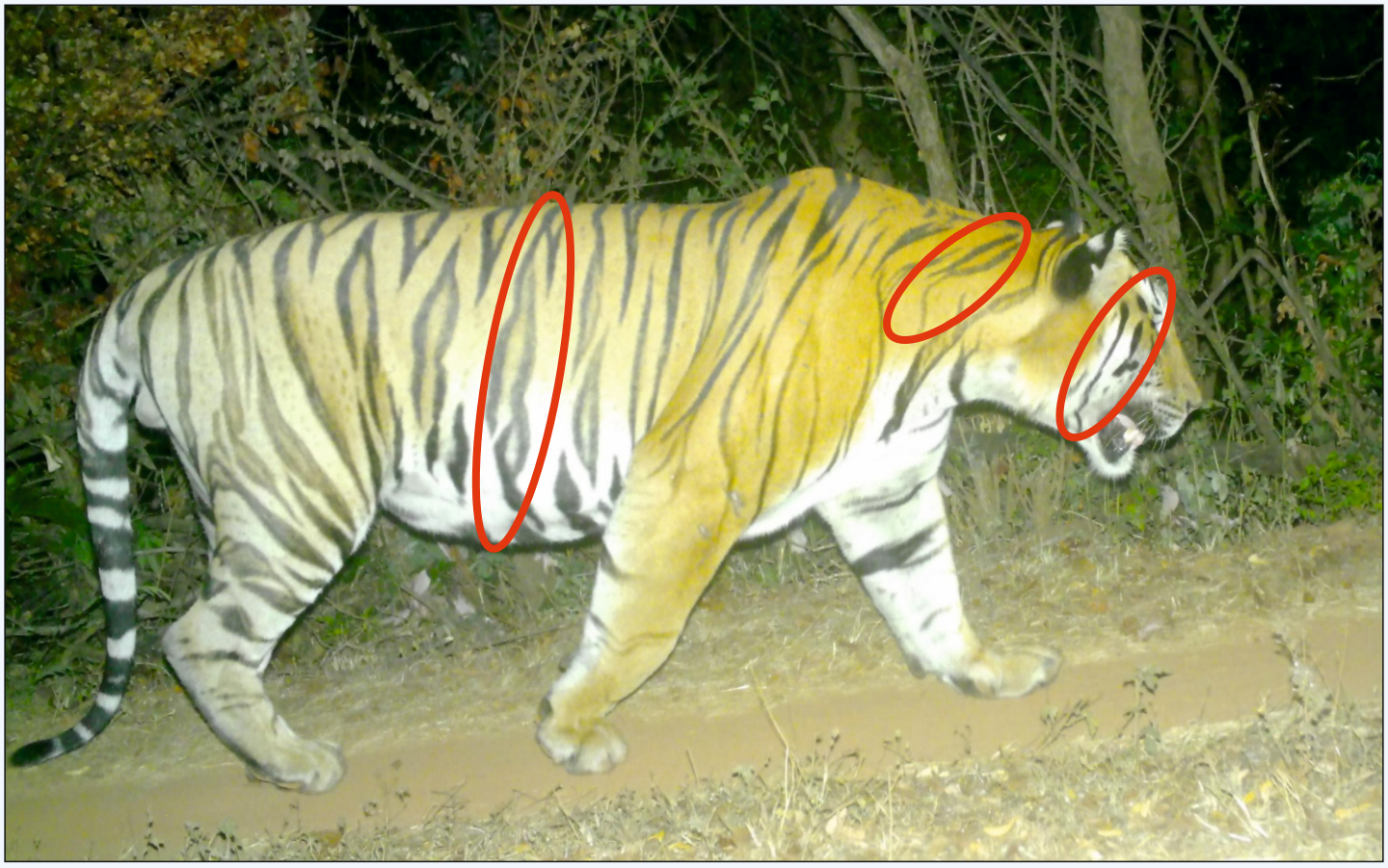
Cheek Pattern

Body Pattern

सेनापती
SENAPATI

Right flank

STR - 01





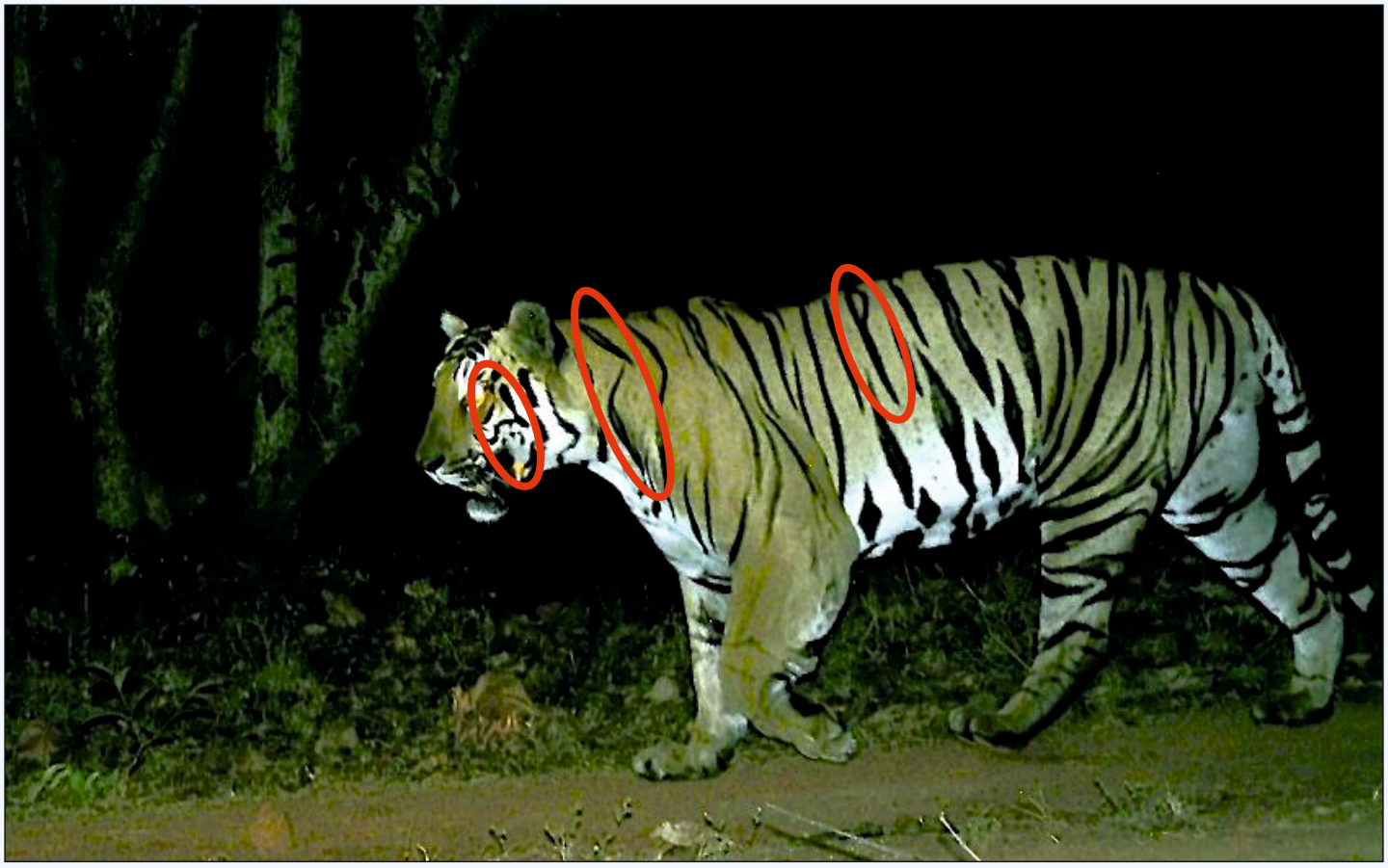
Body Pattern

Cheek Pattern

Left flank

STR - 02

सुभेदार
SUBHEDAR





Cheek Pattern

Body Pattern

सुभेदार
SUBHEDAR

Right flank

STR - 02





Body Pattern

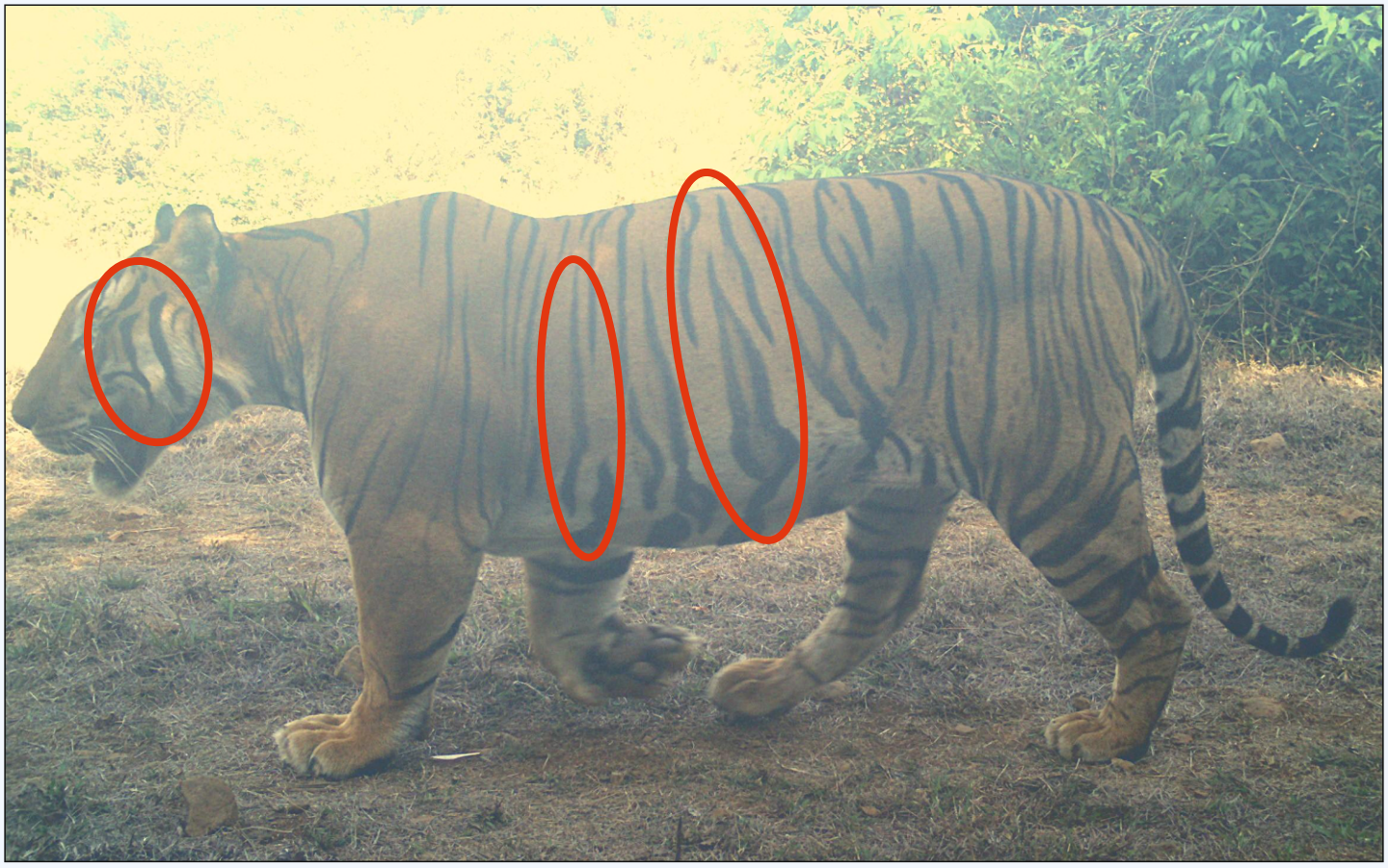
Cheek Pattern

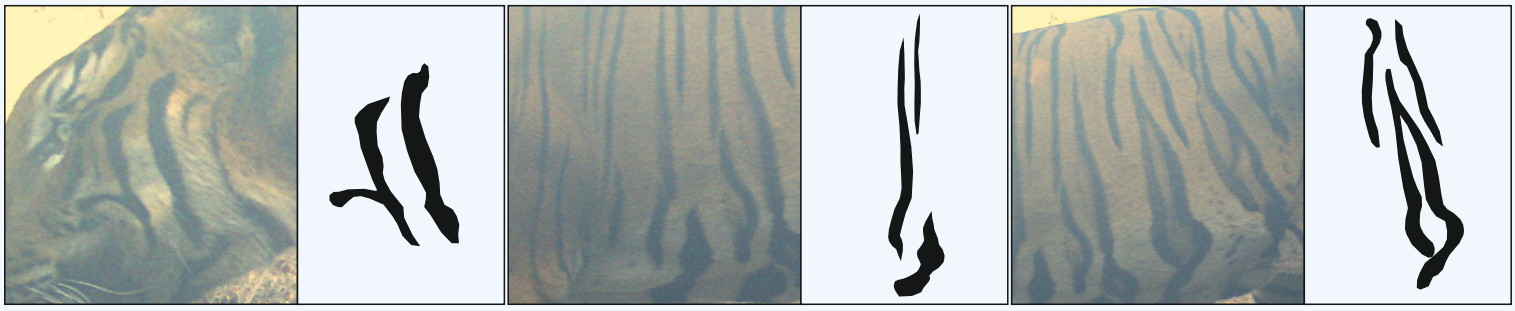
Left flank

STR - 03

बाजी

BAJI





Cheek Pattern

Body Pattern

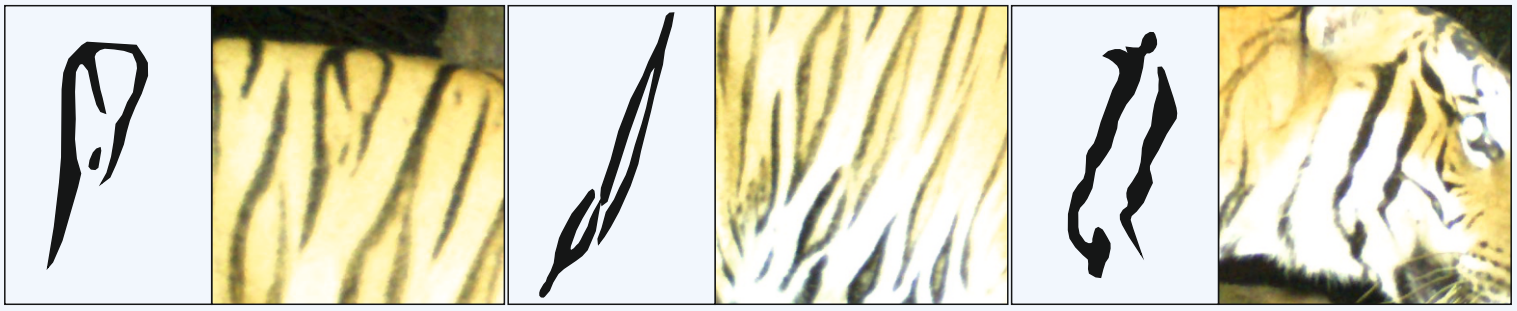
बाजी

BAJI

Right flank

STR - 03





Body Pattern

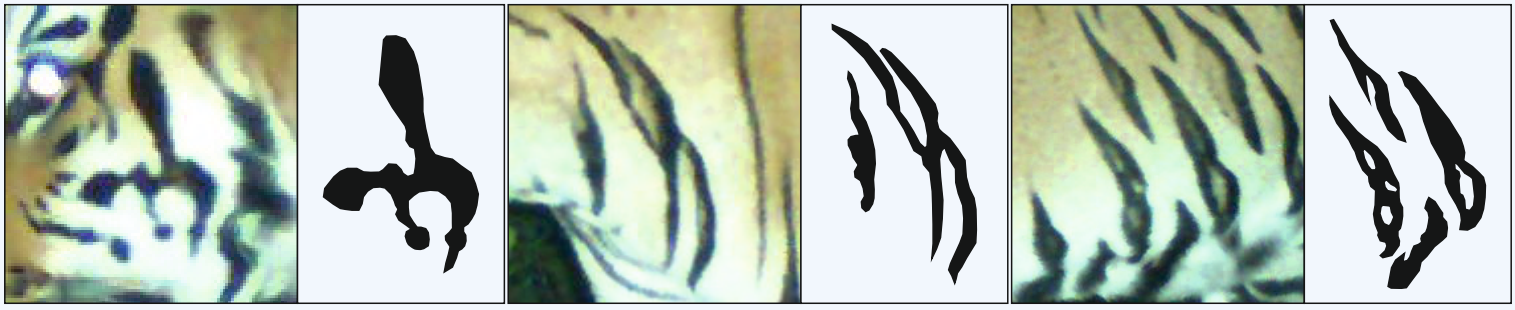
Cheek Pattern

Left flank

STR - 04

चंदा
CHANDA





Cheek Pattern

Body Pattern

चंदा
CHANDA

Right flank

STR - 04





Body Pattern

Cheek Pattern

Left flank

STR - 05

तारा
TARA





Cheek Pattern

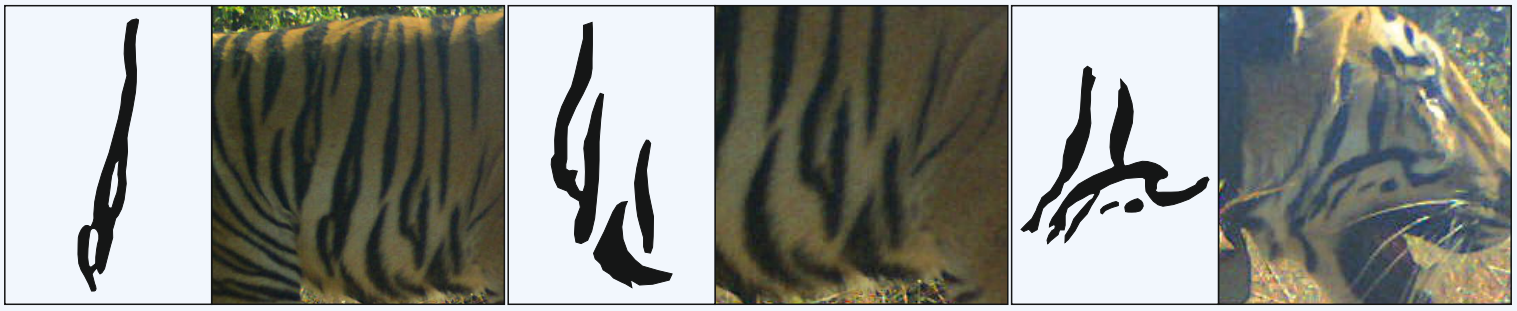
Body Pattern

तारा
TARA

Right flank

STR - 05





Body Pattern

Cheek Pattern

Left flank

STR - 06

हिरकणी
HIRAKNI





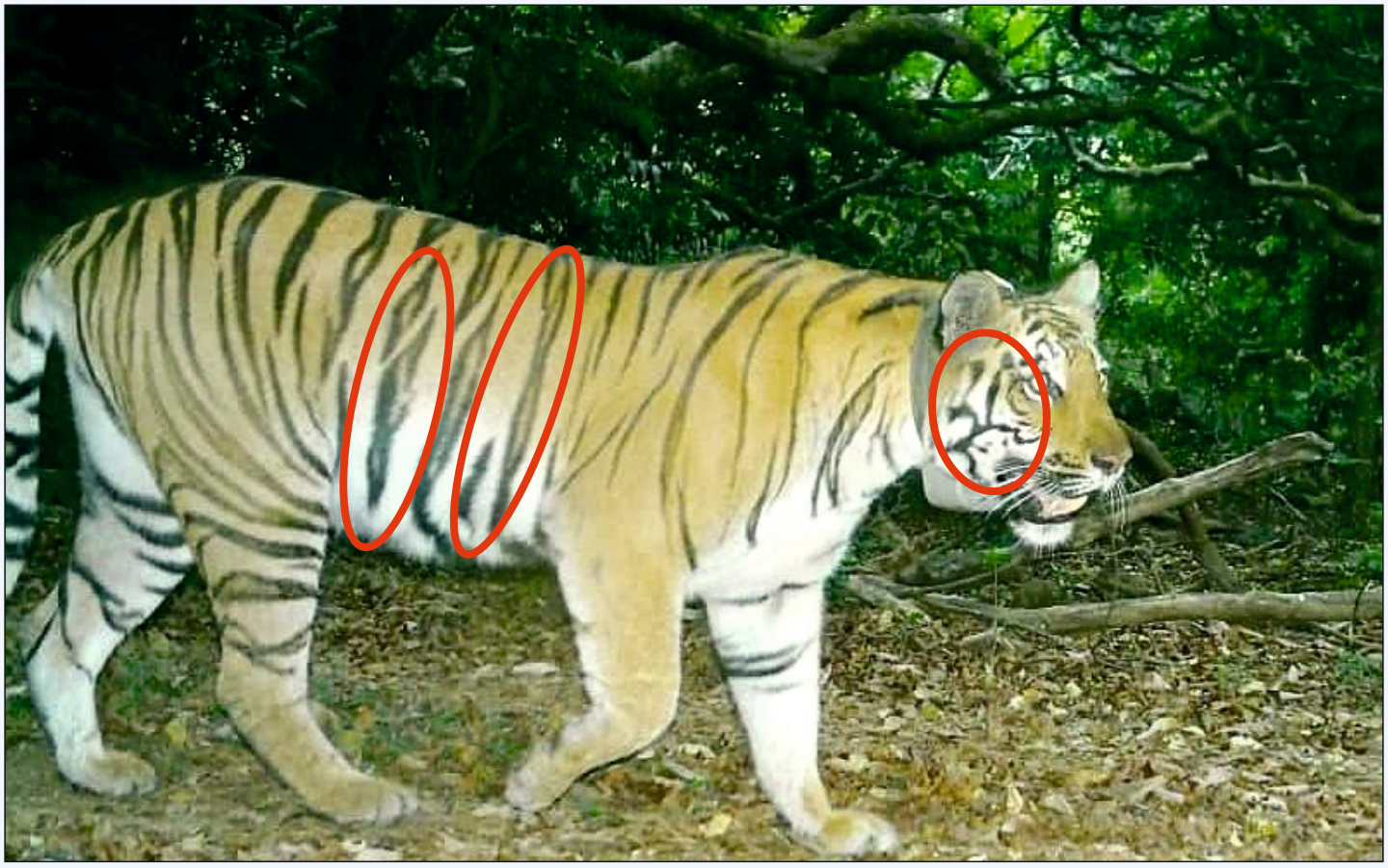
Cheek Pattern

Body Pattern

हिरकणी
HIRAKNI

Right flank

STR - 06





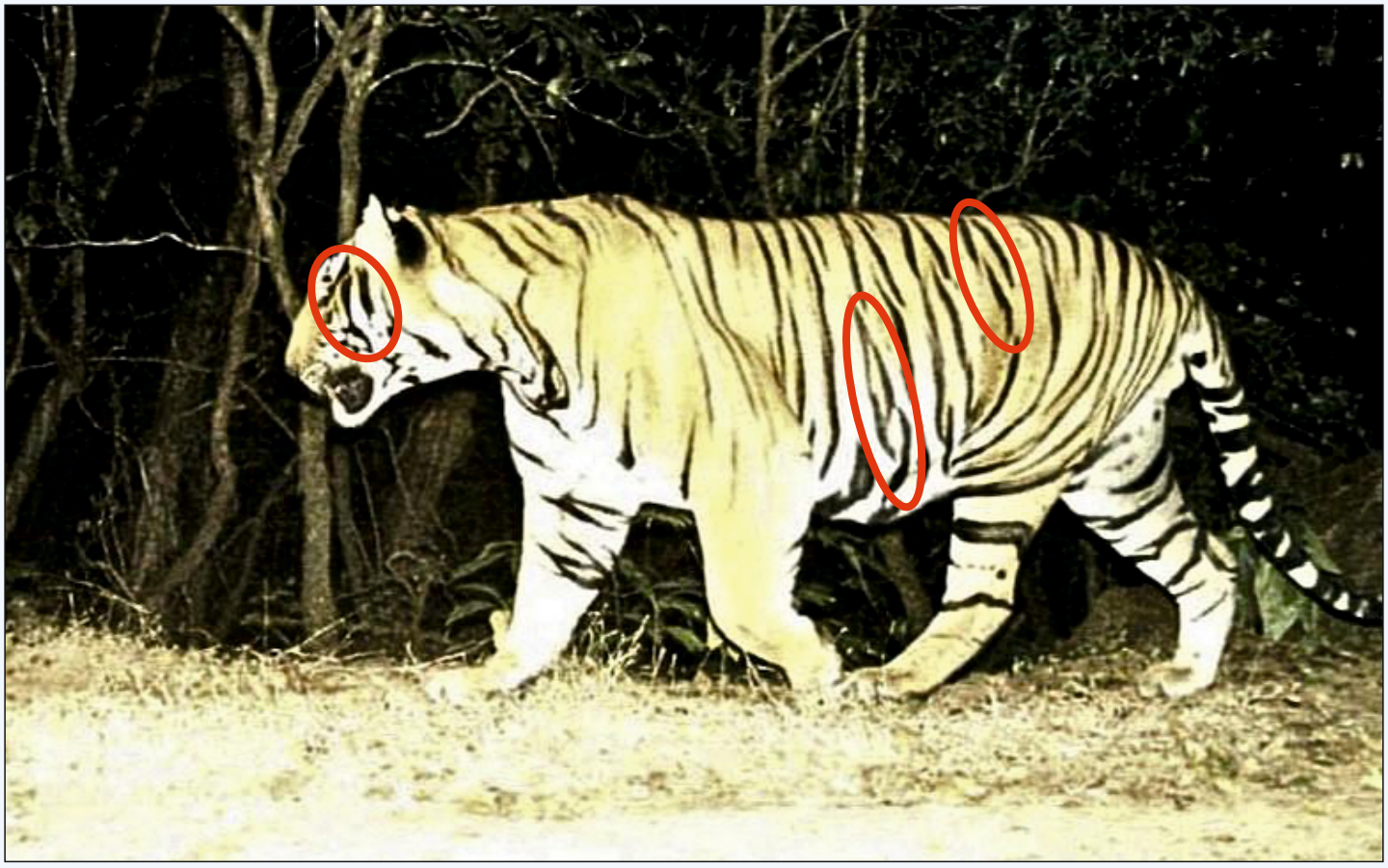
Body Pattern

Cheek Pattern

Left flank

STR - 07

रायबा
RAYBA





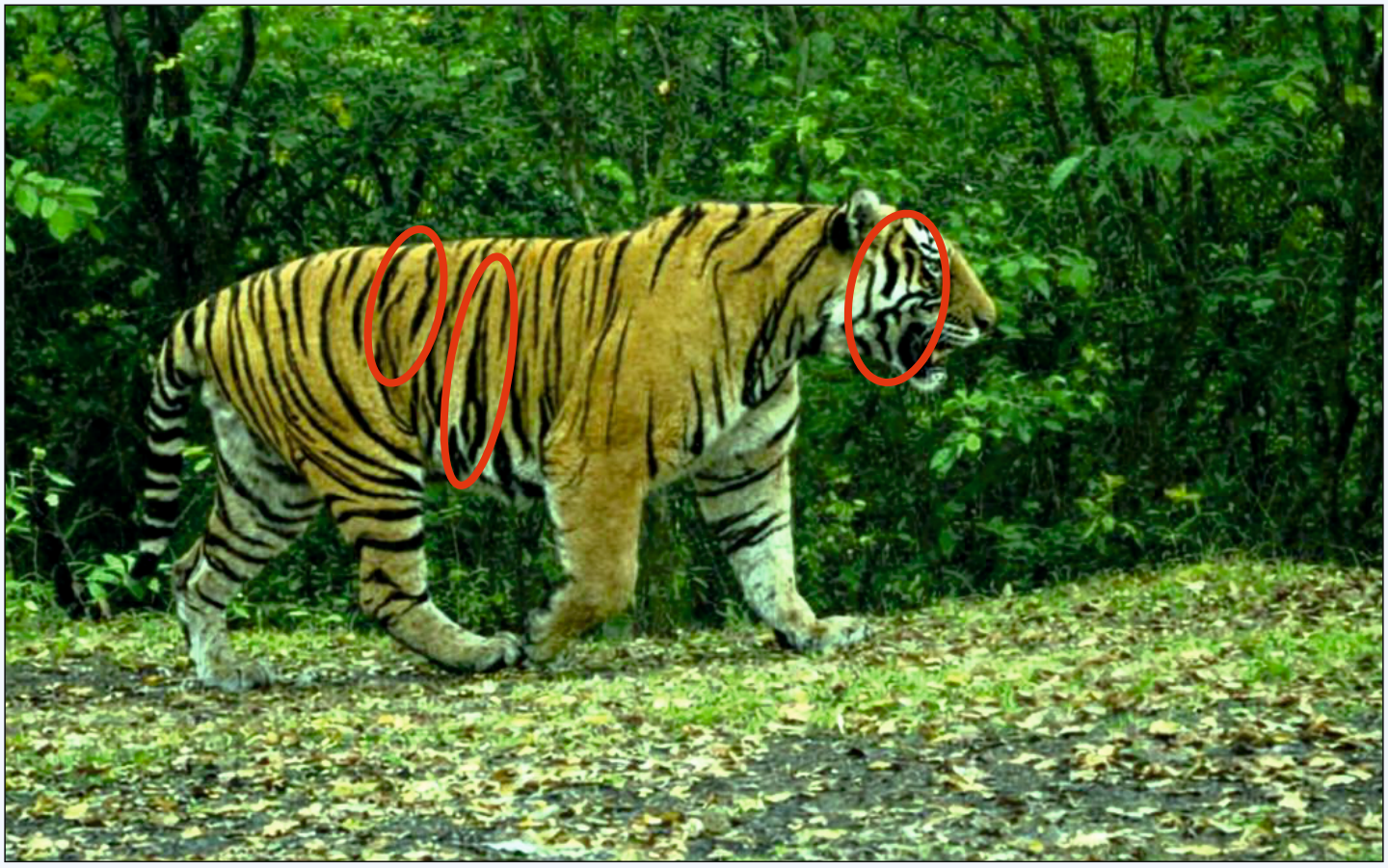
Cheek Pattern

Body Pattern

रायबा
RAYBA

Right flank

STR - 07





Body Pattern

Cheek Pattern

Left flank

STR - 08

सरदार
SARDAR





Cheek Pattern

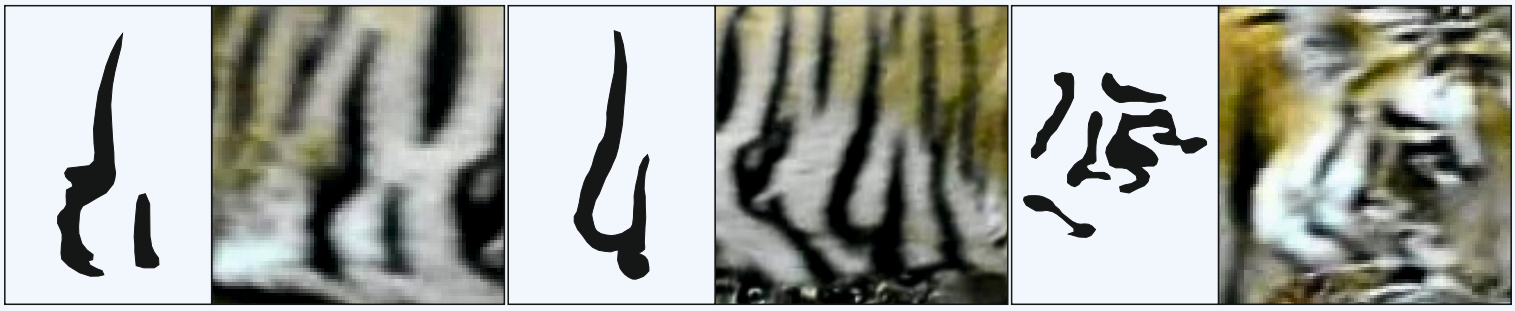
Body Pattern

सरदार
SARDAR

Right flank

STR - 08





Body Pattern

Cheek Pattern

Left flank

STR - 09

शिलेदार
SHILEDAR





Cheek Pattern

Body Pattern

शिलेदार
SHILEDAR

Right flank

STR - 09





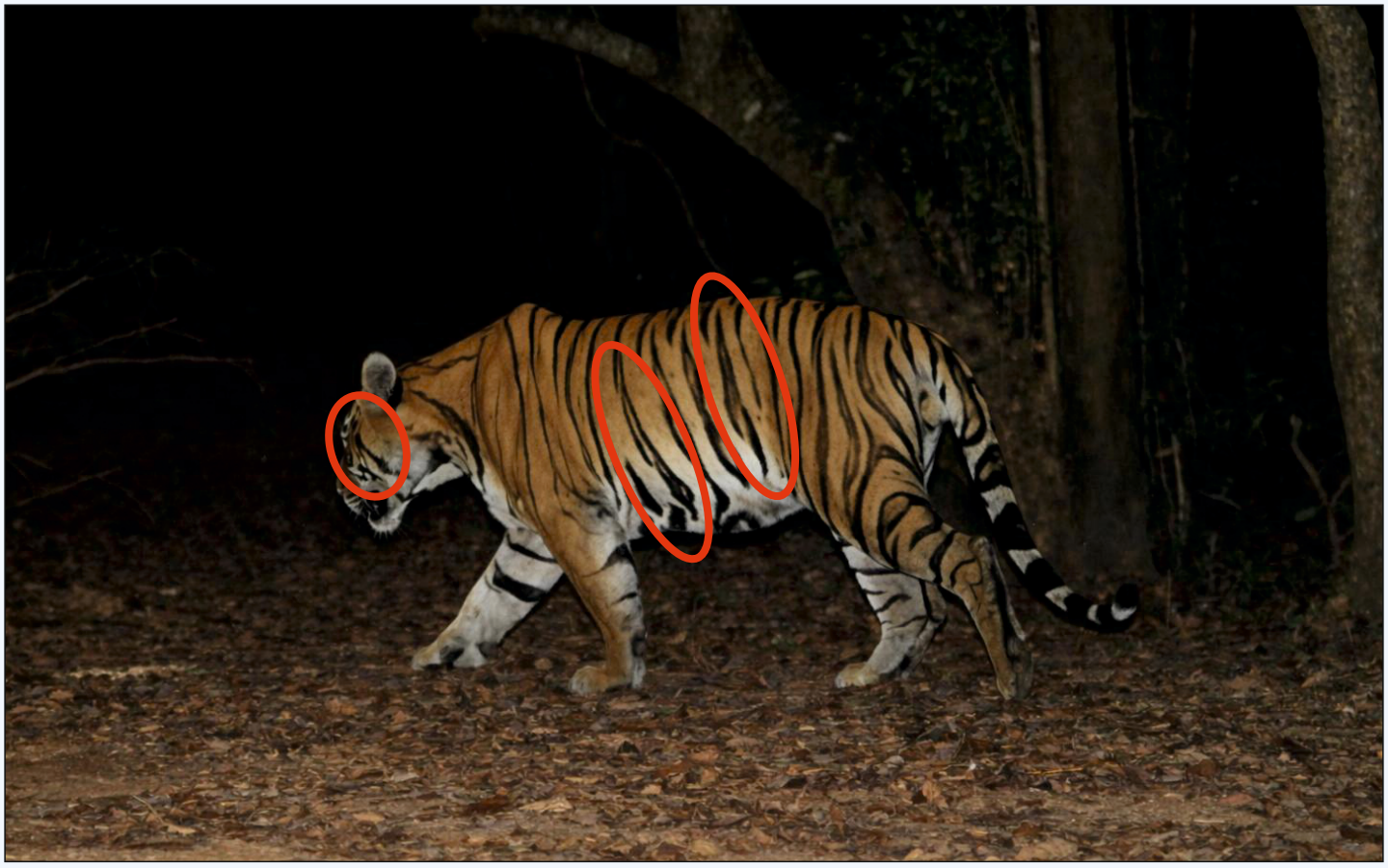
Body Pattern

Cheek Pattern

Left flank

STR - 10

रणोजी
RANOJI





Cheek Pattern

Body Pattern

रणोजी
RANOJI

Right flank

STR - 10





Body Pattern

Cheek Pattern



OFFICE OF THE CONSERVATOR OF FORESTS & FIELD DIRECTOR
SAHYADRI TIGER RESERVE

2nd floor, Vanvardhan Building, Opp. Post Head Office,
Tarabai Park, Kolhapur – 416003, Maharashtra, India

Ph. 0231-2542766 | Fax – 0231-2542988
Email: ccfwlkolhapur@mahaforest.gov.in
www.sahyadritr.org