

CORRESPONDENCE

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BENJAMIN P. Y.-H. LEE*
YOAN DINATA

Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology,
University of Kent, Canterbury,
Kent CT2 7NR, United Kingdom
**e-mail: benjamin.lee@alumni.nus.edu.sg*

Response:

In my correspondence on tiger farms, I was keen to maintain the dichotomy between tiger breeding centres and tiger farms, with the former meant to be run with reintroduction in view and devoid of profit motives, and the latter being run with profit motives as well. This distinction, if followed by Lee and Dinata throughout the discussion, would have enabled them to accord the proposed breeding centres, their rightful place

among conservation strategies. They have, however, coalesced the two terms into a single concept with inappropriate inferences following.

Wise use of replenishable resources for the benefit of mankind is a conservationist's ideal. But it is regrettable, as pointed out also by them, that resources are being over-exploited. I have also acknowledged the fact that China has not so far ensured the long-term survival of tigers in the wild. There has to be strict enforcement against wildlife crimes, including illegal trade and poaching, and other institutional set-ups in order to stop depletion of the species. In the absence of such measures, breeding centres are bound to fail. Lee and Dinata have alluded to Antropogenic Allee Effect (AAE), which according to them will possibly occur among wild tigers when farms are promoted. But the effect can be countered, even according to the proponents of the theory, if enforcement of laws against wildlife crimes and other tools of conservation are assiduously put in place. Even though Clayton and co-workers have observed the spurt in babirusa trade when *ex situ* conservation was initiated in Indonesia, they have also found as speedy a decline in the trade when law enforcement and market monitoring were vigorously pursued. Fortified by such surveillance, *ex situ* breeding of tigers will be a countervailing force against rarity of the species and will effectively offset AAE, which is founded on the rarity principle.

Lee and Dinata appear to be skeptical about the effectiveness of gene-tagging, in case tiger parts should be brought from abroad, but as they themselves have rightly proposed, development of a genetic database for tigers from the wild and from the farms, which must be shared among tiger-range countries, and surveillance by CITES parties and Interpol can make the method more efficacious.

One is inclined to support the cause of tiger farms in India only if tiger parts prove to be of medicinal value and their viable numbers have been guaranteed in the wild. It must be conceded that in China such farms serve a widely felt need for traditional Chinese medicine which uses tiger parts.

Lee and Dinata have supported breeding programmes, this time unconcerned about AAE, but insist that they be carried out in zoos. But captive breeding programmes for reintroduction purposes should allow as little contact as possible with humans, which is not practicable in zoos with animals on display. The authors are quite right in suggesting that proper records of provenance be maintained; but it ought to be in separate breeding centres and not in zoos or farms.

NICKY K. XAVIER

Kollannur House,
Patturaiikal,
Thrissur 680 002, India
e-mail: nickyxavier@yahoo.com