

HUNTING TROPHY STAGS

Exploiting Their Vulnerabilities

If you find a top area which holds a few trophy stags, to be successful you will need to Hunt Smart. That means studying the numerous vulnerabilities or "chinks in their armour" that are discussed throughout this book and take advantage of them when they are ripe for exploitation.

During 14 days in the Indian Jungle from 21st February to 7th March 2018 I visited Sariska Tiger Reserve and Ranthambhore National Park in the north and Nagarhole National Park in the south. I took many photos of sambar groups, the typical size of which was eight to twelve, of which one third were males, ranging in age from 2.5 years to fully mature prime stags. The group shown at pp. 356 - 357 comprised 9 sambar; 5 of which were stags, 3 were primes and all were in hard antler.

Sex ratio in sambar at birth appears to be equal. Biologists agree that preferential predation on males is likely to be responsible for skewed sex ratio in sambar in favour of females [Schaller 1967, Johnsingh 1983, Varman and Sukumar 1993 in Johnsingh 1992]. Male sambar emigrate from the safety of the group at an early age, and during the dispersal period, they are vulnerable to predation [Khan and Johnsingh 1992]. As hunting by man has been prohibited in India since 1973, male mortality is mostly due to predation by tigers, leopards and wild dogs (dholes).

*February 21st 2018. Four sambar stags at Sariska Tiger Reserve in northern India. The larger stag in the foreground with "V" shaped antlers, is exhibiting dominance behaviour, as indicated by his erect hair and stiff legged walk. Two smaller stags are browsing sal (*Cappris separia*), an abundant evergreen shrub - the only green forage in Sariska at the time. Three mature stags in a group of ten sambar was a common sight in northern India. See photo p. 356.*

