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36

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Survey of wild animals from April 26

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The Haryana Wildlife Department is all set to launch a survey of wild animals in the forest belts of the state from April 26. This will provide a base for environmentalists and forest officials to have a tentative estimate of the wildlife population.

The census work, say wildlife officials, will be carried out in the Shivalik forest belt — Kalesar Wildlife Sanctuary and the surrounding areas like the Dappar forest in Yamunanagar and the Morri area in Panchkula, the Aravali forest belt in Gurgaon and Mahendragarh.

Other than panthers, the population of sambhar, cheetal, barking dogs, black deer and chinkar will be identified. After the seizure of a panther skin from a Kalka resident earlier this year, and the seizure of two more in 1998 and 2000 from Panchkula district alone, concern for the preservation of wildlife among environmentalists had mounted. The wildlife census in 1993 had identified 30 panthers. With reports of panthers being killed for procuring their skin, their population could have gone down now.

Sources in the Wildlife Department informed TNS that 34 teams, comprising nearly 70 wildlife employees, had been specially trained to conduct the census operation in all forests. This census is conducted every four years, but is being carried out after a gap of five years this year.

Senior officials say the wildlife census, which was scheduled to have been conducted in June last year, could not be carried out because of early rains. Because of early rains, the census work could have yielded conflicting results and

the entire purpose would have been defeated. The census work is now being carried out for 10 days, beginning April 26, when dry weather would ensure that the pugmarks of animals can be easily identified in dry soil. Also, penetration in the forest area is much easier on dry land.

Though forest officials, including forest guards, were sensitised for the census work last year by the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehra Dun, an internal refresher course has been undertaken for the 34 teams.

It is learnt that sampling is done by counting the pugmarks on 10 hectares of forest area and similar figures for 100 hectares of forest area are then worked out. The data thus collected is sent to the Wildlife Institute of India for assimilation.

Officials in the Wildlife Department say that the information thus collected will be vital in determining the breeding pattern of wildlife, the extent of ecological imbalance (if any), the prey base ratio for animals and long-term policies to preserve the state's wildlife.