



# **Village Kids' Awareness Programme**

**Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve  
November- December 2015**

**Core Team:**

Vidya Venkatesh  
Bhavna Menon  
Pushendra Dwivedi  
Nikita Sarangdhar (Volunteer)

# Table of contents

<b>INTRODUCTION:</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>THE PROGRAMME:</b> .....	<b>3</b>
PROGRAMME DETAILS:.....	3
PARTICIPANT DETAILS: .....	9
GUEST VISITORS: .....	9
<b>EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROGRAMME:</b> .....	<b>12</b>
EMERGING CONSERVATIONISTS.....	13
<b>BENEFITS OF THIS PROGRAMME:</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>LIVING WITH TIGERS: PROTECTIVE MEASURES &amp; ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>WAY FORWARD:</b> .....	<b>16</b>

## **Village Kids' Awareness Programme, Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve, November - December 2015**

### **Introduction:**

Whenever we tell our colleagues of our Village Kids' Awareness Programme, which was started almost 3 years ago, with this being the 9th leg of the initiative, the most common reaction is one of skepticism. "They live around the forest; they are children of the forest for all practical reasons and have been for so many years, how new can the learning for both the parties be?" Right? Wrong! It is probably very hard to believe but every time we visit the villages for the implementation of our projects, the experiences are completely new and frankly quite spectacular.

### **The Programme:**

Conservation and protection of forests in a fast developing world is not easy and promises to get tougher especially since the protection means standing up against our own kind against the decimation of species and the environment. However what makes it possible is, standing up against our own kind by roping in some of our own kind too! This is what our model is based on: working in tandem with your own kind, by roping in the communities that live around the forests, who, if given the right direction and alternative solutions, can form the buffer between development and nature, thereby reducing the blow or impact wildlife otherwise suffers at the hand of man.

### **Programme details:**

The Village Kids' Awareness Programme which was conducted from 27<sup>th</sup> November to 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2015 saw participation of 457 students and 11 teachers from the villages of Khitauli, Medra, Karchulha and Utin Tola. The students were taken for a safari by the Last Wilderness Foundation team where they were helped them understand the interconnectedness between different organisms in the forest, understand the role of the frontline staff in protection of the reserve, reduce their dependency on the forest and forest products, help minimise the interactions between humans & wild animals and finally contribute to the conservation of their reserve in their personal capacity. These were advised by following a few simple methods like- planting of trees, not setting fire to the forest patches during Mahua and Tendu collection season and instead using of more 'eco – friendly' methods like putting a dark cloth under the tree, cementing 'gobar' under the tree so when the flowers fall, they will be easy to collect, due to the contrast against the mentioned surfaces. This way, the villagers need not spend more time than required in the forest, thereby also minimizing contact with wild animals and reducing human-wildlife

interactions. The students were also encouraged to note whatever they had seen during the safari and also make a note of the alternative methods suggested, which would ensure a start to the co-existence model. The safari was followed by a lunch with the students and then a screening of the movie – “Bagh: Hamara Astitva - Sahastitva” which translates as, our existence is linked to co- existence, a 7 minute movie put together by the LWF team which encapsulates the essence of co-existence and conservation in a narrative form featuring ‘Van Devi’ or the forest goddess. The screening was followed by a presentation, which reiterated whatever had been told to the students through the day and the children were encouraged to ask questions and think for themselves about how even a slight imbalance due to negligence on our part may cause for the entire ecosystem to falter. In the past 3 years, after these sessions conducted by LWF, many students have surprised us with beautifully detailed essays and write ups of what has been told to them with their own inputs too and these small gestures often add a bright spark of hope to the world of conservation.



Pic 1: All aboard!



Pic 2: Students taking a break at Khitauli center point



Pic 3: On the safari





Pic 4: School teachers act as catalysts during our programme



Pic 5: Lunch time!



Pic 6: Our kitchen and our diligent cooks



Pic 7: At the Damdama camp with the hard working frontline staff





Pic 8: The students had an opportunity to witness a tiger pugmark being traced



Pic 9: Students watching a tiger, who they have vowed to protect



### Participant details:

Session Date	School location	Villages covered	Number of students	Number of teachers
Nov 27 – Dec 2, 2015	Khिताuli (girls)	Khिताuli	169	4
	Khिताuli (boys)	Khिताuli, Medra	180	4
	Medra	Medra, Karchulha, Utin Tola	65	2
	Utin Tola	Utin Tola	43	1
<b>Total Number of participants</b>			<b>457</b>	<b>11</b>

### Guest visitors:

The students, this time around received a number of visitors who spoke to them about their experiences, how they view conservation and how the students can contribute in their capacity towards the cause, which proved to be very motivating to the students. Some of these special visitors were: Shri. N.P. Dubey, **APC, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan**, Shri. Shiv Shankar Gupta, SRS, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Shri. KL Patel, BRC, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Mrs. Nilmani Upadhyay, Head Mistress, Karchulha Middle School, who as educators encouraged the students to understand the importance of the bio-diversity that surrounds them and to pay heed to the alternative solutions that were provided to them during the session.

The students were also visited by the **Khिताuli ranger, Shri. R.K. Markaam** who spent a considerable amount of time with the students and regaled them with his experiences of working in the forest and how the Forest Department and the communities living around the reserve should work together to safeguard the forest that has so much to offer.

Lastly, the students were visited by **Shri. Sidhnarayan Dwivedi, a guide** working at Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve, who travelled a good distance of 30kms just to spend time and interact with the students. Sidhnarayanji told the children how being a part of the forest had changed his perspective towards it. A former villager and farmer and now a full time guide, he told the students that more than the forest needing us, we need it even more as it gives us so many things that keep us economically stable. He proceeded to call the tiger 'Annadata' and urged the students to save its realm for their own survival.



Pic 10: Shri. Markaam, addressing the students



Pic 11: Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan officials attending the session



Pic 12: Shri. Sidhnarayanji addressing the students



Pic 13: A session in progress





Pic 14: Full house!

### **Effectiveness of the programme:**

Khitauli, an area in Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve, has in the past year seen three separate cases of wild animals (two leopards and a tigress) entering villages. Instead of taking the matter into their own hands, the villagers this time around did not hurt the animal or gather around it. They informed the Forest Dept and quietly waited for them to come and perform the rescue operation. Khitauli, is a region in which we have been working for the past 1 year, lead us to believe that awareness and sensitisation programmes of this nature can bring about a positive change and ease the strained relationship between man-animal-forest department.

A shining example of such positive change was reflected when a tigress recently entered the Khitauli village and spent close to 6 hours there. On spotting the tigress, a villager by the name of Dhuli Ram and his wife Hema bai did not panic, instead informed all of their neighbours not to venture out due to the tiger's movement. They then informed the Department of the cat's presence and after a smooth operation, the tiger was ushered back into the forest. In order to honour these villagers, the Forest Department recently organised a '*Bagh Samrakshan Samaroh*' in Khitauli whereby all the concerned villagers, media staff and the forest guards were felicitated by the Field Director, Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve, Shri. K. Raman.

### Emerging conservationists

There were quite a few of our participating students who have been privy to the tigers presence in their village, one of whom was Parvati (daughter of Duli Ram & Hema bai) a class 7 student, who when asked by the Field Director simply said *“haan woh hamare baade (courtyard) mein aaya tha, lekin apne aap chala bhi gaya, agar hum usko kuch nahi karenge, toh woh bhi humko nuksaan nahi pahunchaega”*. One of many to be felicitated and recognised in the essential ceremony, we surely hope that youngsters like Parvati and many others will keep this thought alive and one day work as protectors of the striped feline.



Pic 15: Parvati being felicitated by the Field Director, Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve at the 'Bagh Samrakshan Samaroh'



Pic 16: Field Director, Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve, Shri. K. Raman interacting with the students

### **Benefits of this programme:**

- 1) It helps in sensitising the students towards wildlife (existing around them) and its connectivity to their lives.
- 2) Helps the students see and understand the co-relation between conservation of tiger and survival of mankind.
- 3) Helps involve the locals in conservation, creating contacts for information on poaching, forest fire and any other illegal activities.
- 4) Bridges the gap between the Forest Department and communities.
- 5) Imbibes a sense of ownership towards the forest.
- 6) Educates /creates awareness among the students about issues of forest fires, man-animal conflicts and dependency on forest products, thereby equipping them with solutions to avoid/prevent the occurrence of these issues.
- 7) Helps in thinking beyond the daily needs and understands the long term vision of conservation.



## Living with tigers: Protective measures & alternative solutions

- 1) Avoid grazing of cattle within the forest; unattended cattle can attract tigers towards villages.
- 2) In order to reduce the losses, make sure your domestic animals are well protected at night in a cowshed and when grazing in the day, an adult is always with them.
- 3) Do not leave children alone in the dark hours.
- 4) If you are going out alone in the night, try **not** to be very silent. Playing/ singing a song or use a stick to hit the ground to make some noise so that the animals are aware of the presence of a human being and does not mistaken them for a deer or any other prey.
- 5) If you see a tiger do not chase it or throw anything at it. Simply move away without disturbing the animal or making any sudden action which may trigger the animal to react.
- 6) Do not set fire to forest patches during *mahua* or *tendu patta* collection. Instead, use more eco- friendly methods like spread a dark sheet or cloth or cement 'gobar' under the tree for easier and faster collection.
- 7) Do not set snares or traps for wild animals.
- 8) Plant at least one economically important tree like *mahua* or *tendu* for every tree felled for fuel and household purposes, preferably in villages so that entering the forest is avoided thereby reducing human-wildlife interactions.

## Way forward:

We definitely see a change in the attitude and perspective of the villagers in terms of being more positive and acceptable towards towards the wholistic approach of co-existence & conservation. However, there is more work to be done, with the first being maintaining a continuous channel of communication with the villagers and keeping them in the heart of the conservation model. There is much that we can still learn from one another. The future vision is to have the villagers co-operate with the Forest Department in safeguarding the forest rather than being antagonistic about the large cats or its realm.



Pic 17: A thumbs up for conservation, the tiger and it's people