



Village Kids' Awareness Programme

**Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve
April 2014**

Core Team:

Vidya Venkatesh
Bhavna Menon
Pushpendra Dwivedi

Support team:

Pramod Yadav (Driver, Tala)
Ravi Pathak (Driver, Tala)
Amit Shukla (Driver, Tala)

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	3
THE PROGRAMME	4
Session details	12
Highlights.....	12
CONCLUSION	14

Introduction

The primary objective of the awareness sessions conducted by Last Wilderness Foundation(LWF) have been to help enable village communities living in these areas to engage and interact with their surroundings in a manner that is mutually beneficial to both, forests and people. Having lived here for centuries, they have an innate relationship with their environment. However, in recent times, external circumstance have jeopardized that relationship, thus leading to an antagonistic attitude towards wildlife.

The villages chosen for this segment of the programme are especially susceptible to the problems of poaching and human-wildlife conflict, owing to their location within the forest. Hence, the thrust of the sessions was to inculcate in these communities a sense of belonging and ownership over the forests such that the forests, wildlife and people flourish. An effort was also made to revisit the relationship between the Forest Department(FD) and the people which has been under duress owing to the spate of conflict in this region.

Thus, it was thought that “Humara jungle, humare baagh” would be a fitting motto to lead this session.



Pic 1: “Humara jungle, humare baagh”

The Programme

The 6th leg of the awareness programme was held between 30th March-4th April, 2014 and attended by 162 students (from classes VI-VIII) and 9 teachers from government schools in Narwar, Pataur and Bamera villages which lie within the buffer zone of Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve(BTR). While Narwar and Pataur share a boundary with Panpatha Wildlife Sanctuary(WLS), Bamera shows high incidences of man-animal conflict owing to its location within the Pataur range of the Panpatha WLS. There have been regular reports of conflict caused by the movement of both herbivores and carivores in this area. High incidences of livestock predation has caused considerable antagonism towards wildlife.

As is the norm, the sessions included safari rides within the park as well as presentations and discussions that addressed issues faced by people and wildlife. The idea behind the safari rides is to allow the children to experience the beauty of the forest firsthand. They saw and appreciated fauna such as tigers, peafowl, chital, sambhar as well chinkara and bears. In their natural surroundings, these animals no longer seemed destructive in the eyes of the children.



Pic 2: On a safari!



Pic 3: Taking a break at a camp in the forest



Pic 4: Students at the Damdama patrolling camp



Pic 5: The ever helpful Forest Department staff at the patrolling camp



Pic 6: Lunch!



Pic 7: The school at Narwar, the base for our programme



Pic 8: Students at the Narwar school - the centre for our sessions



Pic 9: Rajah, our programme mascot was an integral part of our sessions and was loved by the students!



Pic 10: Students watching 'The Truth About Tigers' with rapt attention



Pic 11: Understanding the importance of Bandhavgarh



Pic 12: Vidya Venkatesh, Director, LWF tells the students what they can do to save the tiger



Pic 13: Listen closely, for you are responsible for the tiger's survival!



Pic 14: Tiger and its defender!

In order to gain the villagers' perspective upon certain issues and help in resolving them, LWF conducted presentations and initiated discussions that touched upon issues such as poaching and human-wildlife conflict. The importance of ensuring the survival of wildlife was explained to them both in ecological and economic terms. They were made to understand the role and importance of the tiger as an umbrella species and were given simple solutions to save it. While they were discouraged from the practice of revenge-killing of tigers, they were also made to understand that collection of produce such as Mahua, Chiraunji, Amla and others from within the forest precincts is as much a driver of conflict as animals entering villages. The practice of setting fire to the forest for collection of Non-timber Forest Products (NTFPs) was also discouraged by making them aware of the ill effects of uncontrolled forest fires. Instead, LWF suggested alternative methods of collection that ensured minimal damage to the forest as well safety of both, human and wild animals. Collection of these products happens during peak summers. Therefore, this programme was timed such that these precautionary measures could be immediately implemented in the upcoming collection season.

Session details

Session date	School location	Students from villages	Number of students	Number of teachers
April 2014	Bamera	Bamera	54	3
	Pataur	Pataur	63	3
	Narwar	Narwar	45	3
Total number of participants			162	9

Highlights

- Distribution of posters disseminating information on wildlife.
- Advocacy of controlled burning of forest by dousing fires that are lit to collect NTFPs.
- Reduce dependency on forest resources by plantation of trees like Mahua, Chiraunji, Amla and others within villages.
- Ecological and economic significance of forests and wildlife was explained
- Facilitated a better understanding of the role and importance of Forest Department, which will hopefully better their relationship.
- Solutions were discussed to enable negate conflict between humans and wildlife.



Pic 15: Students reading a poster created by LWF, on how best to avoid conflict in areas close to tiger reserves



Pic 16: Vidya Venkatesh, Director, LWF with the students

Conclusion

As the rate of conflict is high in these areas, antagonism towards forests and wildlife was considerable. However, after the sessions, these villagers seemed to view wildlife in a positive light. In order to sustain this point of view, these ideas will have to be reinforced through continued interactions through governmental and non-governmental organisations.

These sessions also gave LWF valuable insights into the lives and situations of these people who have to live in close proximity to wildlife. It will be our endeavour to continue to enable them ensure peaceful co-existence to the best possible extent.