



Village Kids' Awareness Programme
(Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve - Dec 2013)



Report on Village Kids' Awareness Programme

Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve
December 2013

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INDEX

OBJECTIVE	4
INTRODUCTION	5
THE PROGRAMME.....	6
COMPONENTS OF THE PROGRAMME	7
HIGHLIGHTS OF THE PROGRAMME	7
BENEFITS FROM THIS PROGRAMME	7
METHODOLOGY.....	8
CONCLUSION	8
IMAGES WITH CAPTIONS.....	9

Village Kids' Awareness Programme – Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve (December 2013)

Objective

The aim of this project is to create awareness about forests and its importance for students and teachers from the villages, which fall within the buffer area of Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve. We believe that to save the forests and the tigers, we must consider the interests of the people living around and within. They are as much the custodians of the forests as the rest of us and must be given an opportunity to appreciate and understand the forest better, and understand the co-relation between conservation of tiger and survival of mankind which they often miss out on in their daily fight to survive. Hence, it is imperative to conduct awareness programmes for the people living in these villages.

Last Wilderness Foundation, Mumbai with the support of Ashirvadam Trust, Bangalore, conducted this programme.

About Last Wilderness Foundation:

Our vision at Last Wilderness Foundation (LWF) is an India with a vibrant and eternal natural heritage, which is respected and protected by its people. We have made it our mission to increase awareness about India's wildlife, her forests and the plight of her tribal populations, to provide assistance to various individuals and organisations (governmental or otherwise) in their battle to conserve her natural heritage and to be actively involved in the sustainable development of the villages and tribal settlements in the peripheries of her forests.

Website: <http://thelastwilderness.org/>

About Ashirvadam Trust, Bangalore:

Ashirvadam's mission is to provide employment skills and opportunities leading to a better quality of life for slum dwellers and to ensure environmental restoration through wildlife protection, forest preservation and other stewardship projects. With a vision to alter the social typography of our nation, Ashirvadam believes in lending its support to any worthy cause that creates an impact and takes us a step closer to our vision.

Website: <http://www.ashirvadam.com/>

Introduction

The tiger is at the top of the food chain and hence is an indicator species. Through the tiger, nature ensures that there is a balance in the ecosystem. Therefore, the extinction of the tiger will result in the loss of lesser fauna and consequently the forests too. This can have dangerous environmental consequences for man. Therefore, saving the tiger means saving all the animals and other creatures that live within the tiger's forests.

Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve (BTR) covering an area of approximately 449 sq. situated between the Vindhya and Satpura ranges in the state of Madhya Pradesh in Central India is divided into core and buffer zones which apart from the diverse flora & fauna is also home to a multitude of villages and tribal communities.

Hence, we believe that to save the forests and the tigers, we must consider the interests of the people living within. They are as much the custodians of the forests as the rest of us and must be given an opportunity to appreciate and understand the forest and the issues associated with it better. Especially since it has been seen that in a lot of the cases, killing, trapping or even electrocution of wild animals (for bush meat, poaching for skin and bones, or even revenge killing in case of cattle lifting or crop raiding by the animals) is carried out with the help of these local communities living in and around the reserve.

Although this is the 5th leg of our awareness session with the students living in the buffer zone of the park, it still feels like we have much to learn from the students. Be it their belief about animals or their perception of the forest. Thus, to further understand these ideas and enhance their interest in the wilderness the children inherently possess, it is important to expose them to a world that they know probably exists but haven't really explored.

For it is when you visit the park with these students do you realise in how many ways a forest can be perceived; the good, and the bad - it can be perceived as the enemy for their relatives who they visited a fortnight ago were thrown out in the name of attaining a "good wildlife habitat" – through a "cruel" process known as village relocation or they can perceive it as a wonderland and the tiger as the unicorn they had always heard about but never seen and the sight of it made their day.

Thus, with these diverse perspectives we started our awareness programme with a hope that it would help in eliminating the feelings of antagonism and would start changing their attitude towards respect for the animal and the need for protection of forests.

The programme



Audience: Students from class VI-VIII and teachers from Dhamokhar, Pathari, Badrehal and Tala school, which fall in the buffer zone of BTR.

Programme co-coordinators: Vidya Venkatesh, Bhavna Menon & Pushpendra Dwivedi

The programme held at Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve (BTR) between 12th- 20th December 2013 covering **314 students and 19 teachers** from schools in **Dhamokhar, Badrehal, Pathari and Tala** villages run by the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), a scheme under the ambit of Government of India.

Session date	School location	Villages covered	Number of students	Number of teachers
Dec-13	Dhamokhar	Kharadand, Majhauili, Parasi, Gohdi	121	5
	Pathari	Pathari	55	3
	Badrehal	Badrehal	30	3
	Tala	Tala	108	6
Total	4 schools	7 villages	314	17

During the safari drives, the students really enjoyed themselves with identifying trees, birds, mammals etc. It was heartening to note that they were active participants in discussions carried out with the help of a presentation of how everything is so beautifully entwined in nature and each component of it is imperative to our survival to the effect of writing essays on the same and their experience in the forest.

In the end we can only hope that our “hope” – these children, who when given a chance were so enthralled by what they saw around them, prove to be the hope for the tigers survival in its true realm.

Components of the programme

- ✓ Screening of the movie – “The Truth About Tigers” which details the importance of tigers, the need to save them and what can be done in order to ensure our own survival
- ✓ Presentation on the interconnectedness (as a link to what the students see within the park) , tiger as an important component of our ecosystem and the importance of Bandhavgarh
- ✓ Presentation on the importance of animals in Indian religion thereby providing this as motivation factor in safeguarding our natural heritage
- ✓ Preparation of educational materials for the students to help identify the herbivore/ carnivore population within the park and stories to dispel myths and misconceptions centred around animals

Highlights of the programme

- 1) Preparation of articles/ essays by the students after their visit to the park.
- 2) Successful implementation of theis programme lead the Forest Department to request coverage of an extra village - Tala, which was unplanned for this batch.
- 3) Excellent response to the programme by the school authorities thereby extending great support to the programme.
- 4) The District Project Coordinator of SSA, Umaria, participated for an entire session along with the students.
- 5) Active participation by the students as compared to the earlier batches.

Benefits from this programme

- i. Children were sensitised towards wildlife (existing around them) and its importance to their lives
- ii. It gave the children an opportunity to appreciate our natural heritage
- iii. It helped the children see and understand the co-relation between conservation of tiger and survival of mankind
- iv. Involved locals in conservation, which helps in future communication of information like poaching, forest fire etc.
- v. Acted as a bridge to fill in the gap between the Forest Dept and the locals

- vi. It also imbibed a sense of ownership for the forest and its denizens in these communities for their conservation
- vii. Educated and created awareness among the students about issues of forest fires, man-animal conflict and reduction of dependency on forest products thereby equipping them with the necessary knowledge to deal with the concerned issues in future
- viii. Educated and created awareness among children about the ill-effects of setting traps, high tension wires within the reserve as has been seen to be done by the communities living around the reserve

Methodology

The kids are taken on a safari ride where they're shown different important places inside the park. We try our best to give them a tiger sighting; then they're brought back to the village and given a brief presentation about the park, its tigers and the inter-connection between and the importance of the survival of these animals/forests and their own lives. The children are also provided with a meal during this programme. This is followed by an interactive question & answer session. These kids are also provided with a meal during this programme.

Conclusion

Owing to the proximity of these villages to the park, they are often riddled with issues of cattle lifting tigers and crop raiding herbivores thereby causing severe man-animal conflict and antagonism towards the forest. Therefore it is imperative to create a sense of ownership among these communities by educating them and creating awareness with regard to issues pertaining to - forest fires, man-animal conflict and reduction of dependency on forest products thereby, also equipping them, with the necessary knowledge to deal with the concerned issues in future.

The idea is to sensitise them towards our natural heritage so that they can safeguard the forest and its denizens with the motto of – "*Bagh Hamara, Jungle hamara, bagh hain toh hum hain, bagh nahi toh hum nahi!*" for it is these people of the forest on whose firm shoulders primarily the future of the tiger rests.

Images with captions



Pic 1: Off we go! Students wait early morning for the park gates to open



Pic 2: Students at the elephant camp posing with the forest guards and mahouts



Pic 3: Students at the Badi Gufa reading the board about the history of the caves in Bandhavgarh



Pic 4: Students inside Badi Gufa understanding how bats play an important role in our ecosystem



Pic 5: Students on a safari understanding the concept of Gaurs as a re- introduced species



Pic 6: Ravi Pathak pointing out a tiger sitting in the open to the kids during the safari drive



Pic 7: The principal of Tala school, Shri L.P. Prajapati with students at Shesh Shaiya



Pic 8: A salute to our natural heritage! May we preserve it well



Pic 9: Director, LWF, Vidya Venkatesh, Project Coordinator, LWF, Bhavna Menon and DPC Shri Mahendra Yadav with the students at Shesh Shaiya



Pic 10: Educational posters prepared by LWF being put up at the school



Pic 11: Poster prepared by LWF displayed at the school building in Dhamokhar highlighting steps to be undertaken by villages in proximity to the park to avoid man-animal conflict



Pic 12: Posters prepared by LWF on herbivores & carnivores being put up at the schools



Pic 13: Stories written by LWF to dispel myths and misconceptions centered around different animals put up at schools



Pic 14: Students read the stories prepared for them to dispel myths and misconceptions centered around animals



Pic 15: Food being cooked



Pic 16: Kids eating food



Pic 17: Students from Dhamokhar school assemble for the session after their visit to the park



Pic 18: Vidya Venkatesh, Director, LWF, interacting with the students about animal calls



Pic 19: Vidya Venkatesh, Director, LWF explaining how forest fires can pose a threat to our forest cover and wildlife



Pic 20: Importance of animals seen in Indian religion too!



Pic 21: Dheeraj, a student of Dhamokhar village, explains to fellow students what each one of us can do to save the tiger



Pic 22: Bandana Tripathi, a volunteer with LWF, explains to the students about the importance of saving tigers



Pic 23: Forests - our only hope for survival!



Pic 24: Identifying the carnivores and herbivores found within the reserve



Pic 25: Understanding the reasons behind man-animal conflict and cattle lifting



Pic 26: A student from Tala village reads out an essay written by her after a visit to the park with the LWF team



Pic 27: Future tiger defenders!



Pic 28: Happy faces from Tala school posing for a photo



Pic 29: Yes! We will protect the tiger!!



Pic 30: Students pose for a photo at Dhamokhar village



Pic 31: Vidya Venkatesh, Director, LWF along with Bhavna Menon, Project Coordinator, LWF with the students



Pic 32: Lets come together to protect our natural heritage! Along with the Pricipal of Tala school, Shri L P Prajapati.



Pic 33: LWF Field Coordinator Shri Pushendra Dwivedi with the principal Shri L.P.Prajapati , District Project Coordinator (DPC) Shri Mahendra Yadav and Head Master Shri Bhunkar with the students of Tala school



Pic 34: Vidya Venkatesh, Director, LWF, Bhavna Menon Project coordinator, LWF, Principal of Tala school, Shri L.P.Prajapati , DPC, Shri Mahendra Yadav and HM, Shri Bhunkar with the students of Tala village



Pic 35: Director, LWF, Vidya Venkatesh, Project coordinator, LWF, Bhavna Menon and the DPC Shri Mahendra Yadav with the students at Shesh Shaiya



Pic 36: The team behind the scenes with the DPC Shri Mahendra Yadav at Shesh Shaiya