



Village Kids' Awareness Programme

Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve

November 2012

Team:

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Programme partner: Taj Safaris

Special thanks to: Field Director, Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve for the immense support provided during the entire programme.



Introduction:

“Aisa dikhta hai kya tiger?” asked Om Prakash Yadav, pointing to the handsome face of a tiger that stared at us from our banner of Last Wilderness Foundation.

Om Prakash Yadav has spent all his life in a village on the periphery of Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve (BTR) and the truth is that he has never seen a tiger nor an image of this beast.

It is perhaps a common assumption that people living in forests will tend to be mesmerised by the beauty and power that has come to be associated with the tiger. The truth however is that many people have not even seen the tiger. While most of us reading this would associate the tiger as India’s national pride, the villager who lives in proximity with the tiger and has lost his cattle to it cares little for its status as ‘India’s national animal’. Their argument is simple-when their cattle aren’t allowed to feed within the forest, why should the tiger be allowed inside their villages, and therefore, when it does, why should it be spared?

Hence, we, at LWF, believe that to save the forests and the tigers, we must also 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 better, In keeping with this belief; we carried out the third leg of the awareness session for villagers (previously held between 23-27 April and 6-30 June). Bhavna Menon and Vidya Venkatesh from Last Wilderness Foundation carried out this programme.

The programme:

The awareness programme, which was held between 23rd-29th November, 2012 was attended by 238 students and 11 teachers from 4 different villages' viz. Marai Khurd, Malhera, Badkhera and Samarkoini all of which lie in the buffer zone of Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve. These students are from class 6-8 in schools run by the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, a scheme under the ambit of Government of India.



Image 1 & 2: Transportation of vegetables and utensils from Umaria to Marai Khurd.



Image 3: School building at Marai Khurd where we learnt, debated and even dined!



Image 4: Working the generator.



Image 5: Bhavna Menon with the students.

Session date	School location	Students from villages	Number of students	Number of teachers
Nov-12	Marai Khurd	Marai Khurd, Gobatal, Marai Kala, Badkhera	100	5
	Badkhera	Badkhera	21	1
	Malhera	Malhera	59	2
	Samar Koini	Samar Koini, Marai Kala	58	3
Total number of participants			238	11



Image 6: Off to the jungle!

It was heartening to note that the students were very well informed about the different trees found in the reserve and were able to identify almost 75% of the trees found in the reserve. Going for a safari was a new experience for them and they were enthusiastic about every sighting right from wild boars to peacocks to the noisy spurfowl on the jungle track!



Image 7: Students watching a tiger near Badi Gufa.



Image 8 : Students at Sheshshaiya.



Image 9: Field Director of Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve interacting with and motivating the village kids.



Image 10 : Students at Badi Gufa.

Their level of enthusiasm didn't wane on not sighting the tiger; instead they made the most of the ride by taking the sights and sounds of the jungle.

Emphasis was laid on the importance of the forests as watersheds for both man and beast by taking the students to places like Shesh-shaiya which is the point of origin of the Charanganga river (water source for some villages within Bandhavgarh TR), Andhiyari Jhiriya, which is a beautiful stream passing through the Mirchaini grasslands, Rajbhera dam, which is an important source of water for the animals and a good spot to sight tigers during summers and Badi Gufa which is home to a large colony of Horseshoe Bats.



Image 11: Screening of the movie, 'The Truth About Tigers.'

The safari was followed by lunch and an audio-visual screening which primarily helped them understand the apex predator of the forest i.e. the Royal Bengal Tiger, its value to human kind, the challenges faced by this predator and what should be done to save it.



Image 12: Interaction with the students after the screening.

At the end of the session, each village was also given a set of four stories (to combat the myths about various wild animals like owls, tigers, geckos and snakes) to put up at their respective schools.**To acquire a copy of these stories, you can write to us at - contactus@thelastwilderness.org*



Image 13: Students reading the stories.

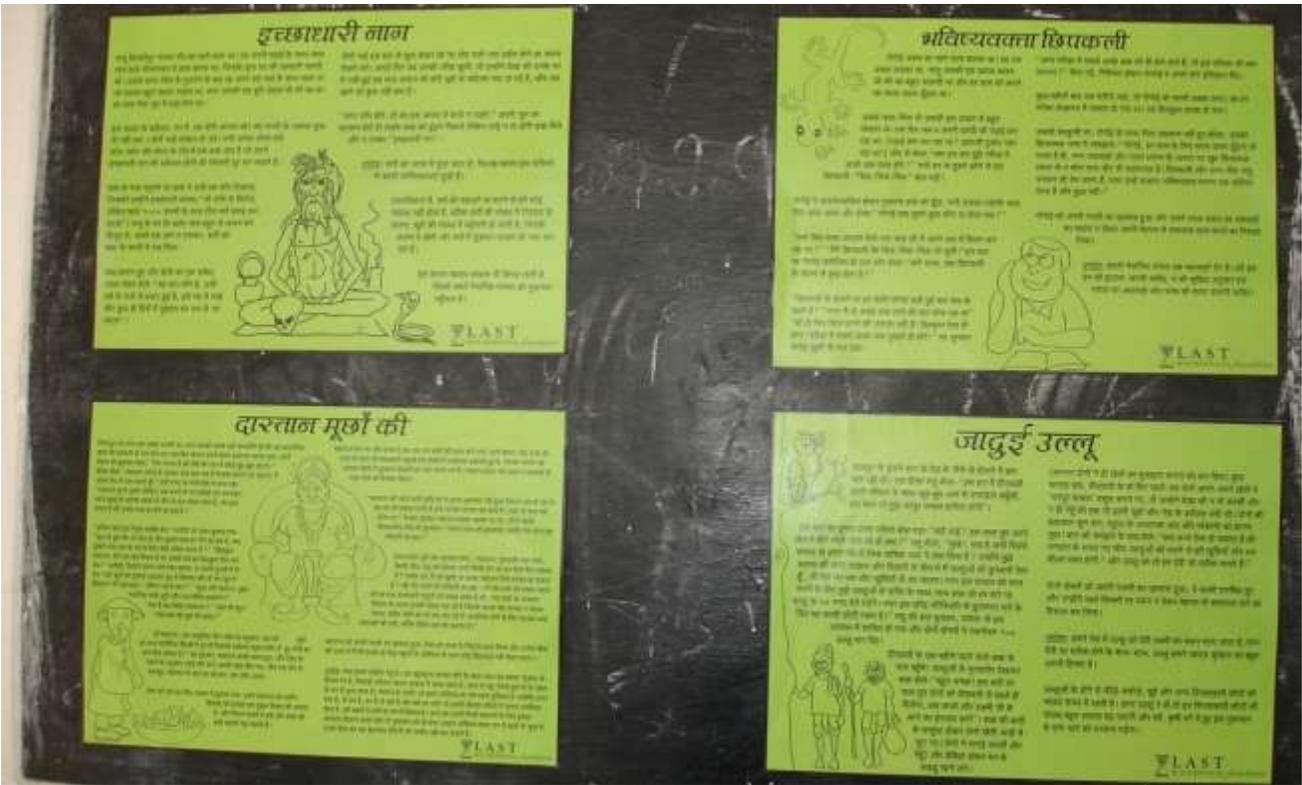


Image 14: The set of four stories that was given to each village.

Highlights of the session:

- Helping the students appreciate and understand the importance of the reserve by visiting it
- Information about Royal Bengal Tiger like its life-cycle, its food habits, its survival
- Requirements, challenges faced for survival & what can we do to save it.
- The interrelationship/interconnection between forests, wildlife and man. i.e. the need to save the species which in turn will save the forest, which acts as a store house for water which is one of the most important resources for survival of human beings.



Image 15: Team Last Wilderness Foundation! From L-R (Sanju Kewat, Suraj Singh, Vidya Venkatesh, Ravi Pathak, Pramod Yadav, Bhavna Menon, Pushendra Dwivedi and Ram Kumar Kewat)

“Life is either a daring adventure or nothing at all” said Helen Keller and we couldn’t agree more! Our awareness program this year has been a constant ‘adventure’ of sorts. Adventure with respect to transporting groceries from Umaria to our “centre point”- the Marai Khurd school building, (which would serve as a centre for learning/eating/debating) to our efficient team of drivers tirelessly ferrying the students (be it within the park or being dropped back to their homes) to laudable efforts by our culinary experts who catered perfectly to 50 odd hungry students everyday! Not to forget one person being single- handedly responsible for the audio visual screening by making sure the generator ran in times of crisis!



Image 16: Future custodians of our natural heritage!!