



Village Kids' Awareness Programme

**Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve
December 2016**

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Village Kids' Awareness Programme, Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve, December 2016



Pic 1: Future of conservation

Introduction

Now in its 4th year and 12th leg, the Village Kids' Awareness Programme was initiated this time around, in the villages of Parasi, Dadraudi, Kudaar and Bartarai. A region, with a history of human-wildlife conflict with regard to tiger attacks, the last of which was in 2012. Thus, in keeping with the conflict scenario of the past, it was necessary to initiate awareness sessions to lay emphasis on the necessary precautionary steps to be taken in order to best avoid conflict situations in the future. To this effect, the LWF team embarked on a journey to a region fascinated yet unsure of their dealings with the denizens that often wander into the village realm.

The idea behind Village Kids' Awareness programme

Conservation and protection of species 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 armed with alternative solutions, can form the buffer between development and nature.

How does the programme work?

The Village Kids' Awareness Programme which was conducted from 15th December – 19th December 2016 saw participation of 303 students from the villages of Parasi, Dadraudi, Kudaar and Bartarai. The students were taken for a safari by the LWF team where they were encouraged to be more aware of their surroundings, understand the interconnectedness between organisms, understand the role of the frontline staff in protection of the reserve, and finally contribute to the conservation of their reserve in their personal capacity.

During interaction with the students, reduction of their dependency on the forest and forest products was also emphasized upon and they were advised methods which would help minimise human-wildlife conflict by reducing the number of hours a villager spends in the forest during the Mahua, Tendu collection season. An example of one such method was the use 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. The students were also encouraged to plant more trees in and around their villages and not burn forest patches either for agriculture or for collecting forest produce.



Pic 2: Forest Guard, Roshni Sahu interacts with the students



Pic 3: Enjoying their time during the safari

The safari was followed by a lunch with the students and then a screening of the 'Tiger song' which spoke of the precautions to be taken by the villagers while living in such proximity to the reserve. The screening was followed by a presentation, which reiterated the 'how- to' of precautionary measures and the students were also 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.



Pic 4: Happy faces after seeing the tiger



Pic 5: Prayer before lunch



Pic 6: Waiting at the park gate eagerly for the safari to begin



Pic 7: Students watching a tiger

Session Details

Session date	School location	Villages covered	Number of students	Number of teachers
15 th -19 th December 2016	Dadraudi	Dadraudi	62	3
	Parasi	Parasi, Mahaman, Majhauri, Gadhava	47	3
	Bartarai	Bartarai	65	3
	Kudaar	Kudaar	129	5
Total number of participants			303	14

How does the Village Kids' Awareness Programme help?

- 1) Helps in sensitising the students towards wildlife (existing around them) and its importance to their lives.
- 2) Helps the students see and understand the co-relation between conservation of tiger and survival of mankind.
- 3) Involves the locals in conservation, creating contacts for information on poaching, forest fire and any other illegal activities.
- 4) Bridges the gap between the Forest Dept. 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 conflict and dependency on forest products thereby equipping them with solutions to deal with the concerned issues.
- 7) Helps in thinking beyond the daily needs and thinking for long term conservation.



Pic 8: All for the tiger

Protective measures suggested/given to avoid man-animal conflicts

- 1) Avoid grazing of cattle within the forest, unattended cattle can attract tigers towards villages
- 2) Do not try to save your cattle in case of a big cat attack. In the event that a livestock is killed by the cat, timely compensation will be provided
- 3) To reduce your losses, make sure your domestic animals are well protected in the night in cowshed and when grazing in the day, that an adult is herding them
- 4) Do not wander alone in the dark hours
- 5) If you are going out alone in the night then sing songs or play songs on the mobile so that the tiger knows it is a human being and not a deer or a prey. If you see a tiger do not chase or throw anything at it, just move away, because otherwise it might attack you in self-defense.
- 6) Do not go to the forest at a very early hour to collect forest produce. Enter only when there is sufficient light, and try going in groups so as to best avoid conflict situations
- 7) Do not set snares or traps for wild animals
- 8) Plant 1 economically important tree like mahua or tendu for every tree felled for the purpose of fuel and household purposes, preferably around villages so that entering the forest is avoided thereby reducing Human- Wildlife conflict
- 9) Be aware and spread the message

Conclusion

A region with a history of conflict situations, there is need to not only maintain touch points with the villages but to also rope in villagers to provide timely information about the tiger, the wild animals moving within the village/bordering areas, in order to act upon in a timely manner by the Forest Department thereby averting a conflict scenario. There is also a dire need to continue and maintain a dialogue and presence in this area as apart from conflicts, this region is believed to be prone to logging and cutting of trees in the forest as well as setting up traps for wild animals.