



Nature Education Camp

Kanha Tiger Reserve

March 2017

Core Team:

Vidya Venkatesh

Bhavna Menon

Sangita S. Mani (Volunteer, Taj Safari)

Nature Education Camp, Kanha Tiger Reserve, March 2017



Pic 1: Field Director, Kanha Tiger Reserve Shri. Sanjay Shukla and Assistant Director Shri. Surendra Kumar Khare with the team, students and teachers

Introduction

Everyone has an equal right to enjoy what nature has to offer, whether it is one who is able bodied, one who can't see but can still feel the dip in temperature while crossing a forest stream or one who may not be able to hear the peacock call but still cup the ear to its sight and 'hear' it drag its train on the forest floor imagining it's high pitched call ring through the air.

Last Wilderness Foundation in association with the Kanha Forest Department conducted a Nature Education Camp on 30th, 31st March 2017 for students from the Justice Tankha Memorial Rotary School for children with special needs, Mandla

The camp was attended by 20 students and 5 teachers. While some of the students attending, had hearing impairment, a few of them had been diagnosed as mentally challenged. A 2-day camp for meant for students with special needs, was special for more reasons than one, where disability took a backseat and sheer love for the forests took over in the duration of the programme.

The Camp

A camp where sign language (as a means of communication) was the main proponent was perhaps one of the most memorable ones the LWF team has been part of.

It was started by orienting the students about Kanha and the importance of conservation by the Assistant Director, Shri. Surendra Kumar Khare (with the help of a presentation aided by the school's sign language teacher) who was the core strength of the programme and ensured smooth execution of the same. Fascinated by the faunal variety of the forest, the students put forward a host of questions. From "How do tigers sleep?" to "How many birds live in the tiger reserve?" "From why does the tiger attack the jugular of the prey animal?" to "Can bears see?" the interaction was immense.

The excitement palpable, which was complimented by a screening of the movie, "The Truth About Tigers." Springing up, to get a better look, and pointing excitedly at the screen every time the tiger was on the move in the movie, the feline had already found a loved place in the children's heart. Every now and then the screening was interspersed with the question of whether they would see the cat during the safari. A sighting dependent on chance, timing and jungle calls, we promised to try our best to track it and in the event we did not spot it, we encouraged them to enjoy it's home, the forest instead.

The screening was followed by a nature trail around the campus, wherein they were told about bird watching, and taught how to identify different birds from the field guide. Trees along the trail were also identified and the students felt the leaves and bark of the various trees to understand the difference. In order to re-iterate what the students had seen during the trail, a round of wildlife bingo was played with them with the help of game cards depicting different species. This helped the students learn about new species of birds, animals and trees and identify the ones they had already seen.



Pic 2: Happy faces during the nature trail

Safari special

The safari was the most special aspect of the programme. Excitement of the students on seeing the forest and the animals knew no bounds and they would exclaim with happiness every time they were told of the different animal sounds being heard around the park during the ride.



Pic 3: On the safari!



Pic 4: Watching wild boars during the safari



Pic 5: Students run to the Assistant Director with an expression of pure joy

The source of the calls was depicted with the help of sign language. Peacocks were the clear favourite among the students as it strutted proudly in their midst. They were also fascinated by the anthills and beamed with happiness every time they saw one, keeping a note of the number of anthills they had seen. However, the best moment for the students was when they spotted a tiger.

The contrast of ochre against the grassland brought gasps of admiration from the students and they watched transfixed at the tigress scent marking her territory. The safari was followed by a trip to the museum where the students enjoyed a depiction of the forest in rains and also read about why it is important to protect a forest like Kanha.



Pic 6: A trip to the museum

Field Director special

The students had an opportunity to meet with the Field Director of Kanha Tiger Reserve, Shri. Sanjay Shukla, along with other staff of the Forest Department. On being asked, they enthusiastically depicted with the help of sign language what they had seen during the safari and what their favourite bird or animal had been during the same. The programme was concluded with a beautiful rendition of our National anthem with the help of sign language, which was enjoyed by all.



Pic 7: Krutika, a student in an animated discussion with the Field Director about what they saw during the safari



Pic 8: A beautiful rendition of our National Anthem in sign language



Pic 9: Field Director felicitating the students