



Village Kids' Awareness Programme

**Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve
November 2014**

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"Pehle zamane mein tiger logon ki sunta tha sahib! aao bolo toh aata tha, aur chale jao bolo toh chala jata tha, ab lagta hai cheezein badal gayi hain. Ab woh humari nahi suntan. Humein tiger se koi shikayat nahi hain aur na hogi, lekin maveshi aur logon ki zindagi ka daar toh bana reht hai na?"
– Ramnath, the cook for the programme, a local of Bagdara village, tiger's neighbor

Introduction

If you discount the superstition and the mythologic thought of the tiger being an 'obedient' wild neighbor of man, much of what Ramnath said was true and is probably mirrored by most villagers. Sharing of space can still be dealt with, suffering economic and personal losses to the striped feline cannot. This included a number of tiger attacks on humans, with the last one resulting in a war of sorts with the villagers vandalizing and burning down the Khitauli range offices. Thus, in order to understand the issues of losses and to address a belt which has been a sensitive zone, Last Wilderness Foundation embarked on its journey to the land of the tigers to conduct the 7th leg of the village kids' awareness programme.



Pic 1: The range offices at Khitauli vandalized and burnt down by irate villagers

The focus for our November programme was different, with the gist of the programme being 'living with tigers'. For these were people who feared for their lives and that of their livestock and wanted the wild animals that 'strayed' into the village to be 'taken away' or killed.

Hence, it was imperative to help them understand the tiger as an animal and give them solutions on how best to avoid conflict before pitching the idea of saving the tiger/tiger conservation, which is what we tried to achieve through the duration of this programme.



Pic 2: Programme preparation, the banner goes up!

The Programme

The programme was conducted from 6th to 10th November 2014, which was attended by 123 students and 7 teachers from the villages of Bagdara, Bagdari and Khitauli girls' hostel. It was a great experience to see the enthusiastic students eager to see the forest and to understand it, despite the fact that they belong to a belt, which has been rife with conflicts in the recent past.

The programme began, by taking the students on a safari drive inside the forest, wherein, they were told about the forest and how and why conflict arises. The students not only agreed that such a beautiful forest needs to be saved at every cost, but also reasoned with the idea that conflict can be dealt with rather than viewing trapping, killing and relocating of animals as the primary solution. They also gave their versions of man-animal conflicts that they have witnessed which included-village dogs hunting deer, villagers killing snakes based on misconceptions, electric wires set up for crop raiding herbivores etc. and admitted that extreme measures such as these, to try and 'eliminate' wildlife instead of eliminating the conflict did not benefit anyone.



Pic 3: Students enjoying the safari ride

The safari drive was followed by, a screening of the movie – “The Truth about Tigers” and a presentation. The emphasis was on how tigers and its forests were a huge benefit to the people in the surrounding villages and the reason why they needed to protect it. The understanding was also about what they could do in their own capacity to safeguard their backyard, which provided them with endless resources on a daily basis, which came out through these interactions. The learning from these sessions for both LWF and the students was huge. While it entailed in us getting an insight into the impact of human- wildlife conflict, it gave the students getting an insight into how they can best avoid this conflict, living in such close proximity to the forest without harming the forest or the wild denizens living within.

Session Details:

Session date	School location	Students from villages	Number of students	Number of teachers
November 2014	Bagdara	Bagdara	65	3
	Bagdari	Bagdari	34	2
	Khitauli Hostel	Khitauli hostel	24	2
Total number of participants			123	7



Pic 4: Students watching – ‘The Truth About Tigers’



Pic 5: Lunch!



Pic 6: Together trying to understand, the importance of forests and the denizens living within

With the closing of the programme, the students were also encouraged to read and maintain a touch point with wildlife and the need for its conservation by reading books on the same. To this effect, the Khitauli students were given a set of books (donated generously by LWF volunteers) for their hostel library.



Pic 7: Presenting books on wildlife, to the Khitauli hostel warden, Smt Sushma



Pic 8: With the Khitauli hostel students at the hostel (L) at the Center point, Khitauli (R)

Conclusion

The Village Kids' awareness programme provides for a great learning opportunity and allows both parties to learn a lot from one another. However, it is not only sufficient to have such programmes as a one-time effort, but to maintain proper touch points with these villages through constant interaction so that, there isn't a repeat of the outrage that took place in Khitauli. The future vision is that the villagers co-operate with the Forest Department in safeguarding the forest rather than being antagonistic about these large cats.



Pic 9: Village life- a beautiful tiger temple in the Khitauli village (L) a day in the life of a village (R)



Pic 10: Some of our sightings during this programme!

Benefits of this programme

- 1) It will help in sensitising the students towards wildlife (existing around them) and its importance to their lives.
- 3) Helping the students see and understand the co-relation between conservation of tiger and survival of mankind.
- 4) Involving the locals in conservation, creating contacts for information on poaching, forest fire and any other illegal activities.
- 5) Bridging the gap between the Forest Dept. and communities.

6) Imbibing a sense of ownership towards the forest.

7) Educating /creating 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. Details given below.

Living with tigers: Solutions

- 1) Avoid grazing of cattle within the forest, unattended cattle can attract tigers towards villages
- 2) 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
- 3) Do not leave children alone in the dark hours
- 4) 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.
- 5) Do not allow people to snare tigers because an injured tiger can be dangerous to the people and cattle of your area