



# **Village Awareness Programme**

**Panna Tiger Reserve  
July 2016**

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# Village Awareness Programme

## Panna Tiger Reserve, July 2016

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### Introduction

A park, which for some time was known for losing all its tigers 2009, is now known as one of the most successful case studies in tiger re-introduction, 100% breeding success and a management whose tenacity in wanting to protect its forests and denizens can be only be admired.

Back on the tourism map with a bang, Panna now needs to reconnect with its locals who live in regions surrounding the park in order for them to join the conservation movement too, to help the Forest Department protect what they have so painstakingly brought back to life and to finally acknowledge that Panna is not just about diamonds but about something even more precious, the tiger, without which our own survival seems questionable.

Thus, in order for us to connect with the locals, the Last Wilderness Team embarked on a journey to the land of diamonds, tigers and people whose ideologies are fairly in tune with that of conservation.



**Pic 1: Locals, the answer to conservation. With students of Govt. Middle school at Nehari**

## Idea behind the 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 given the right direction and alternative solutions, can form the buffer between development and nature, thereby reducing the blow or impact wildlife otherwise suffers at the hand of mankind.

## The programme

The Village Awareness Programme conducted by Last Wilderness Foundation from 16<sup>th</sup>- 19<sup>th</sup> July 2016 saw participation by 300+ students and villagers from the villages of Nehari, Madla, Madeyan, Harsa, Baghona, Darera and Badaur. With the age group not being the deciding factor of who could attend these sessions, our participants ranged from 10 to 60 years of age! Some of the schools covered during the programme, like the Primary School at Madla and the activity center at Kaundarpukh are being run under the ambit of Samavesh, an NGO that works for the purpose of education in rural areas.



**Pic 2: All smiles at the Govt. Higher Secondary school, Madla**



**Pic 3: A rapt audience at the Govt. Primary school, Madla**



**Pic 4: Forest Department staff interact with the students at Nehari**



## Programme Details

The sessions with the villagers and students included screening of the movie – ‘The Truth About Tigers’ a movie about tiger conservation, which emphasizes on the need to protect our forests, tigers and the different ways in which we can all contribute towards safeguarding them. Along with this, the team also screened a 7-minute movie titled – ‘Bagh- Hamara Astitva Sahastitva’ made by the team, which has the *van devi* or the forest goddess addressing the audience on the importance of co-existence that can ultimately aid the survival of mankind. The audience was also privy to video called ‘Tiger Song’ produced by Last Wilderness on how to best avoid conflicts, meant especially for an audience that lives in close proximity to tiger reserves.

This song was a huge hit among our participants as it features village kids who help in re-iterating safety measures with the help of an easy to remember tuneful song and dance.



**Pic 5: Movie screening at a local dhaba**



**Pic 6: Open house. Movie screening for all passer bys in Madla village**

### **A positive response**

During our interactions with the villagers and student alike, we came across a common attitude, which was reflective of a broad-minded approach towards the idea of conservation. Despite some of the villagers complaining of crop raiding by the herbivores and altercations with the Sloth Bear at times, they seemed more than willing to protect the forests, as they seemed aware on the need and importance of it. On being asked whether they burn the cover under ‘mahua’ trees to collect the flowers (a practice common in similar regions), one villager said that they merely clear the ground under the tree and in no way harm the forest floor by burning it. While another villager claimed that they inform the Forest Department instantly if they sight any untoward incident inside the forest. L. B. Tiwari, Deputy Ranger Hinauta spoke positively of the supportive nature of the villagers as well, especially of a village named Badaur, which has been cooperative of the department’s efforts he says.



**Pic 7: Full house at Madeyan. Villagers and kids form a brilliant audience**



**Pic 8: The women formed a healthy part of the population too! The screening at Badaur**





**Pic 9: A colourful collective. The audience at Darera**

## **Benefits of this programme**

- 1) Helps in sensitising the people towards wildlife (existing around them) and its importance in their lives.
- 2) Helps people 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 the communities.
- 5) Imbibes a sense of ownership towards the forest.
- 6) Educates /creates awareness among people about issues of forest fires, illegal grazing, safety measures to avoid man-animal conflict and reduction in 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.

## **Conclusion**

The Village 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 to maintain the constant support by the villagers and vice versa.

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 as the population of the latter increases.