



Village Awareness Programme

**Kanha Tiger Reserve
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Core Team:

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Introduction:

Kanha, a tiger reserve established in the year 1973, is a stunning scape. Complimented by the evergreen Sal trees, the forest plays host to a myriad of species like the rare Hard Ground Barasingha, plethora of birds, smaller mammals and of course the striped king of the forest- the tiger. However, apart being known for a healthy habitat for these denizens, the managers of the park, the Forest Department has noted conservation achievements too. Be it the successful relocation and breeding of blackbuck to revival of a dwindling population of the Barasingha to having an active management system in place making it an exemplary example for other tiger reserves.

However, in order to further strengthen the conservation model, Last Wilderness Foundation in association with the Kanha Forest Department has initiated a Village Kids' Awareness Programme which allows pivotal stakeholders of conservation i.e, the communities/ children living in the buffer areas of the park to understand the importance of the forest and imperativeness of conserving it and developing a connection of appreciation between them and nature.



Pic 1: The team with the students from Lajma village

Programme details

The Village Awareness Programme, which was conducted between 26th- 31st May 2017 and saw participation of 120 students and 150 adults from the villages of Bhilwani, Sarhi, Behra Khar, Samaria and Lajma.

How does the programme work?



Pic 2: Screening of the movie 'The Truth About tigers'



Pic 3: Interaction with the students of Bhilwani at the interpretation center



Pic 4: Breakfast at the camp

With the students

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, reduce their dependency on the forest and forest products, and finally contribute to the conservation of their reserve in their personal capacity.



Pic 5: Post movie discussion with the students



Pic 6: A round of wildlife bingo in progress

They were advised to do so by following a few simple methods like - planting of trees, not setting fire to the forest patches during *Mahua* collection season, planting of trees around their village, reporting of any ill-legal activity that may be taking place around the village like putting of snares etc. to the nearest forest 'chowki', saying no to products made of animal parts and finally spreading the word about the need for conservation.

The interaction was followed by a screening of the movie 'The Truth About Tigers' which helped re-iterated the importance of the tiger as an animal, protecting, which not only saves the wild spaces and all that live within but also ensures survival of mankind. The session was concluded, by playing a round of wildlife bingo, a game that acts a good tool to help the students identify various species found in the forest.



Pic 7: On the safari



Pic 8: Home word bound

With the adults



Pic 9: A gathering of the elders of the village

Apart from interacting with the children in the villages, the LWF team with the help of the Forest Department initiated a dialogue with the elders of the villages namely, Bhilwani, Sarhi, Behra Khar, Samaria and Lajma. The idea was to understand the on ground problems of each of these villages by having a village meeting or '*baithak*'.

The problems put forward by the villagers were then noted by the Forest Department staff and the villagers present were assured of addressing the concerned issues in a timely manner. Such '*baithaks*' play an important role in conservation, as addressing issues of the people living around the reserve will deign a positive attitude among the people towards conservation instead of an agnostic one.

Conclusion

Even though conservation outreach programmes help deepen the connect between people and the forest, it is important to help maintain that by having touch points with these children with regard to conservation and how they can play a pivotal role in it. On the other hand, in order to upkeep the conservation model, it is important to address the issues put forward by the villagers in a timely manner to help garner their support for conservation in the long run.