



Pardhi Nature Guides Training Programme, Panna Tiger Reserve, September 2018

LWF team:

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Pic 1: The participants

Introduction

Last Wilderness Foundation in association with M.P. Forest Department, Panna Tiger Reserve and Taj Safaris conducted a 15-day Guide Training programme for Pardhi community members from 15th- 30th September 2018 at Panna, Madhya Pradesh. The idea behind the training programme was to equip the participants with fine guiding techniques and enhance their already existing knowledge of the biodiversity and the forests in preparation for an alternate livelihood – ‘Walk with the Pardhis’ initiative.

What is walk with the Pardhis?

‘Walk with the Pardhis’ is an initiative for the Pardhi community, not only to promote the excellent tracking skills and knowledge that the Pardhis possess about forest and wildlife, but also to help utilise these skill sets as a means of income, wherein the trained Pardhi will lead a nature trail for tourists or nature enthusiasts on a designated trail/ route in Panna.

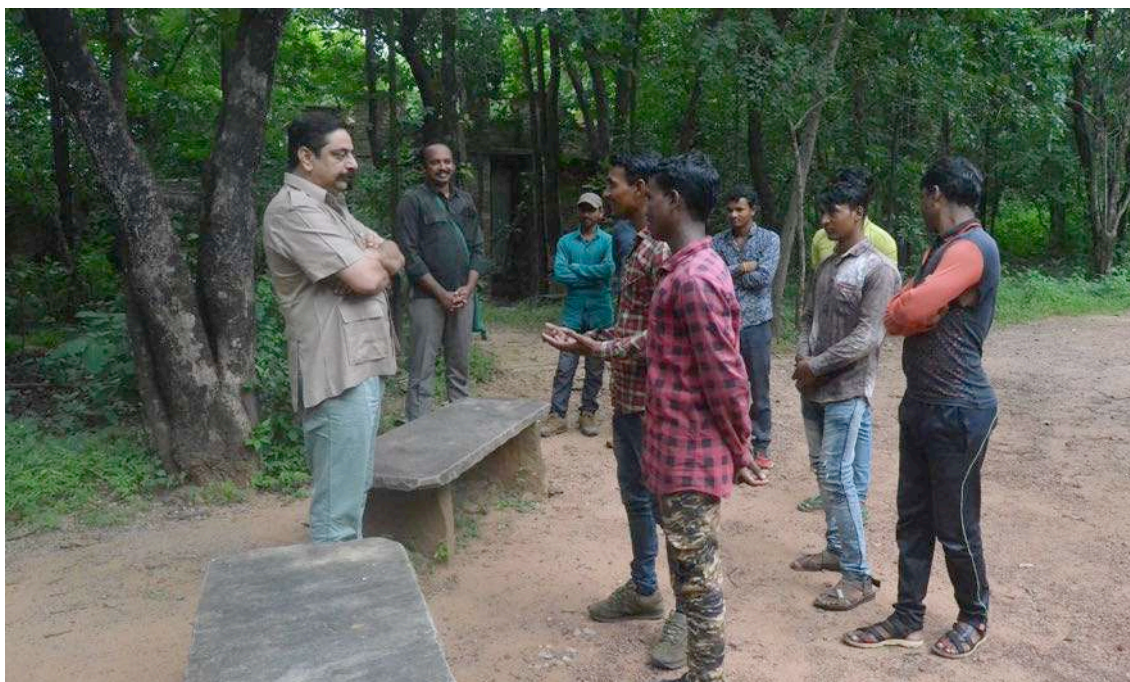
The Training Programme



Pic 2: On the field training

An expert naturalist team from Taj Safaris conducted the training programme, which was divided into classroom and field sessions. The training started with an introduction to the concepts of leading a nature trail which lay emphasis on understanding guests, how to conduct oneself in front of guests and the art of guiding while leading a walk. During this session, the participants were taught how to introduce themselves, how to hold a conversation with the guests and taught how to weave information of different flora and fauna into stories. During this session, the participants were also provided with scientific information on the different animals. This was done to provide certain degree of knowledge/ information, which could prove to be useful during walks with tourists.

The next session was about polishing their guiding techniques which was done over the course of days on the designated route where the participants were taught how to plan the walk with regard to communicating a plan to the tourist about the length of the walk, what the walk entails, identifying the different tracks and signs seen along the path, building upon their existent information about different trees and identification of birds. The participants were also taught how to describe the bird with relation to its colour, beak, legs and body structure. They were encouraged to listen to the different birdcalls while on field and were asked to identify some of the birds commonly found on the trail.



Pic 3: Learning to introduce themselves with Area Director, Taj Safaris, Shri Nagendra Hada

In between the classroom sessions, the participants were also engaged in team building exercises, which needed them to strategize and come up with a solution on how best to play the game. Some of the games included Hypothetical Animal and Wildlife Bingo. Each of the classroom/ field session ended with a feedback session where the participants were encouraged to discuss what they felt they had done right and what they needed to improve on. They were also encouraged to observe each other carefully so that they could learn from one another too. This proved to not only help build their skills of guiding but also helped them to bond as a team.



Pic 5: A team building activity during the training programme



Pic 4: Looking out for birds and learning to use a pair of binoculars at the Ranipur *seha* (gorge)



Pic 6: Encircling the pugmark, a guiding technique



Pic 7: Lunchtime!



Pic 8: Explaining the working of a Funnel Wolf Spider's web



Pic 9: Practical test being conducted with Dipu Sasi, Head Naturalist, Taj Pashangarh and Vidya Venkatesh, Director, LWF



Pic 10: A feedback session in progress at the gorge

After a session on birds, wherein the participants were provided with interesting information about the species, they were provided with information on the different snakes found in the region. Several myths brought up by the community members were clarified with appropriate explanation and scientific information about snakes. The session on snakes was followed by one on insects, amphibians, other reptiles and mammals.

The classroom sessions were also interspersed with tests on whatever had been taught, in the form of a quiz, which proved as a constant revision and practice mechanism.

The participants were also shown several documentaries and wildlife clips to better understand animal ecology, behaviour and their role in the ecosystem.

In order to further motivate the participants and as a reward for the successful completion of the training programme, they were provided with torches-cum-emergency lamps, t-shirts and caps.

Visitors:

In support of this programme and in order to meet the participants, the team was visited by high ranking officers, which included, Shri. Bhadauria, Field Director, Panna Tiger Reserve, Shri. Saxena, Assistant Director, Panna Tiger Reserve, Shri. Sanjay Shukla APCCF (Bhopal) and Shri. Naresh Yadav, D.F.O., Panna Territorial Division. The officers were not only extended their full support to the 'Walk with Pardhis' initiative, but also lent a word of encouragement to each participant to take this initiative with due diligence and personal involvement.



Pic 9: Shri. Sanjay Shukla, APCCF (Bhopal) interacts with the participants



Pic 10: Shri. Bhadauria, Field Director, Panna Tiger Reserve interacts with the participants



Pic 11: Shri. Bhadauria, Field Director, Panna Tiger Reserve distributing torches to the participants



Pic 12: Shri. Naresh Yadav, D.F.O, Panna Tiger Reserve interacting with the participants



Pic 13: Shri. Naresh Yadav, D.F.O, Panna Tiger Reserve felicitates the participants with the certificates

Conclusion:

If given constant encouragement and support, we believe that we will have the first generation of excellent trained Pardhi guides who will not only be more than able to showcase their exceptional tracking skills and knowledge, but this will also encourage other members of the community to join this initiative. This will definitely help reduce their dependency on the forest and forest produce, thereby helping us preserve not only their traditional skill sets, but also contribute to conservation of wildlife and wilderness.



Pic 5: The future of conservation!