



**Pardhi Nature Guides Advanced
Training Programme,
Panna Tiger Reserve,
June 2019**

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Pardhi Nature Guides Advanced Training Programme, Panna Tiger Reserve, June 2019



Pic 1: The four fantastic Pardhi guides who were a part of the advanced training programme

Introduction

Last Wilderness Foundation in association with Panna Tiger Reserve and Taj Safaris conducted a 10-day Guide Training programme for Pardhi community members from 5th – 15th June 2019 at Panna, Madhya Pradesh. This was the advanced training programme which was attended by 4 participants. The idea behind the programme was to equip the trained participants (a mixed batch of boys and girls) with in depth knowledge of birds and birding techniques 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. Till date, training for two batches (first one was in September 2018, while the second training was held in April 2019) have been held for the Pardhi community members on fine guiding techniques, guest interaction and information on the forest and bio- diversity that exists within it. The advanced training held in June 2019 was targeted

specially at understanding birds, bird habits, (habitat, diet and behavior) how to identify them according to a field guide and correct usage of binoculars.



Pic 2: Bird watching and learning how to use the binoculars under the guidance of Taj naturalists

The Training Programme

Expert naturalists from Taj Safaris conducted the training programme, which was divided into classroom and field sessions. The training started with classroom sessions re-iterating the knowledge imparted in the earlier trainings thereby refreshing all that has been taught till date. The participants were also provided with scientific information butterflies, their importance in the ecosystem and pollination.

During the classroom sessions, the participants were given more information about the different mammals commonly found on the trail, which included understanding the behavior of the animal, its role in the ecosystem and the vulnerability of the species. They were also taught how to use a mammal field guide, which was given to the participants as reference for the walk. These 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 and the participants were also shown several wildlife clips to better understand animal ecology, behaviour and their role in the ecosystem.

After the initial classroom sessions on the basics of birding, the participants were encouraged to practice looking out for birds and to identify different bird calls, while leading the trail with the other participants acting as guests. The participants were also asked to spend time looking at the birds through the binoculars to understand their behavior and general bird activity. After each practice trail, participants would rate each other's walk and discuss on what was the best thing communicated by each of them and what needed improvement. This proved to be a great way on understanding how to take feedback and improving upon their trail leading skills.



Pic 3: Identifying tracks during a practice trail in the field

Visitors

In order to meet Pardhi community members as part of their study tour to understand the work done by Last Wilderness Foundation with the Pardhi community in Panna, three newly appointed Assistant Chief Conservator of Forests (ACF's) from the Orissa cadre met with the advanced level Pardhi guides and spent time interacting with them about the training sessions and their experience in undertaking the walk with guests. In order to understand 'Walk with the Pardhis' initiative better, the officers also undertook a walk with the guides at the Ranipur trail, wherein the guides used their recently learnt knowledge of birds, bird calls and regaled the officers with stories from the wilderness and shared information of the commonly found birds and animals found on the trail.

In addition to the officers, members from the MP Tourism Board visited Panna to undertake a walk with our Pardhi guides in order to see the trail and to experience the walk for themselves. The board members were not only privy to the excellent guiding, mimicking (animal calls) and storytelling by the Pardhi guides, but also experienced the hospitality of the Ranipur villagers (trained by Taj Safaris with regard to culinary skills, hygiene and presentation) who plied the participants with snacks and beverages after the walk. The participants ended the visit by undertaking a walk in Ranipur village to experience the cultural aspect of the region.



Pic 4: Our Pardhi guides welcome members from MP Tourism Board



Pic 5: Members of the MP Tourism Board undertake the walk

Way forward

In order to gain valuable insights and garner support on making the model of 'Walk with the Pardhis' in Panna a replicable one, and to be able to carry it forward to the rest of Madhya Pradesh and other states as well, members from the Tata (CSR team), members from Sahapedia (Heritage & culture tourism sector), senior personnel from Taj Safaris, members from MP Tiger Foundation Society, members from MP Tourism Board, officers from Forest Department Panna Tiger Reserve and the LWF team engaged in a discussion for the future of the initiative and to meet with the Pardhi community members to gain an insight into their thought process as well.



Pic 6: Discussion with the Pardhi community members on the way forward

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 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.