



CAPACITY BUILDING TRAINING PROGRAM

PANNA TIGER RESERVE, MADHYA PRADESH

MARCH 2013

PROGRAM COORDINATORS:

VIDYA VENKATESH (vidya.venkatesh@thelastwilderness.org)

BHAVNA MENON (bhavna.menon@thelastwilderness.org)

LAST WILDERNESS FOUNDATION

251 Kewal Industrial Estate
S B Marg, Lower Parel
Mumbai 400013

+91 22 24990044
conservation@thelastwilderness.org
www.thelastwilderness.org

INTRODUCTION

“Bagh ka sanrakshan, khud ki suraksha, choron ki pitai.”

With these words and a sharp salute, which was met with the collective chorus of “Jai Hind!” Shri. Srinivasa Murthy, Field Director of Panna Tiger Reserve (PTR), inaugurated the ‘Capacity Building Training Program’ conducted by Last Wilderness Foundation (LWF) in association with the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department. This program was designed to help train the frontline staff of the reserve, which is the most precious asset in any forest.

Panna, in the central highlands of India is a pristine forest characterized by deep, rocky valleys and plateaus specked with Kardhai, Mahua and Tendu trees, through which the Ken River flows. Its beauty notwithstanding, it is ecologically important as it forms an important link between the populations of animals on the both sides of the central Indian plains. In recent years however, PTR has stood out for other reasons. Lack of protective measures as well as rampant poaching led to the local extinction of tigers from PTR, which was confirmed in 2009, but due to an excellent and effective management system and dedicated staff, PTR now boasts of a population of 16 tigers.

Along with the management, the dedicated frontline staff (comprising forest guards and foresters among others) has contributed to the success of tiger re-introduction in PTR. Together, they have been monitoring and patrolling the forests tirelessly to ensure that the reserve is not riddled with extinction of the apex predator, again. .

Thus, in order to ensure that PTR’s tigers continue to script a success story, LWF conducted a training program for the reserve’s field staff to equip them with necessary skills needed to protect the forest.



Pic 1: A view of Panna's landscape

THE PROGRAM

The 'Capacity Building Training Program' conducted on 2nd-4th March 2013, was attended by 39 participants, which included Sukraksha Shramiks, Forest Rangers, Deputy Rangers, Foresters and Forest Guards. It was divided into different components, with each aspect being addressed by a competent resource people from their respective field.



Pic 2: Training Program inaugurated by PTR Field Director, Shri. Sreenivasa Murthy



Pic 3: Participants at the Training Center



Pic 4: Assistant Director, Shri. Tamrakar interacting with the participants

The topics for the program were as follows:

- i. Snake Rescue, Identification and First Aid
- ii. Tiger Behaviour and Stripe Identification Methodology
- iii. Panna Tiger Reserve- the Habitat and Ecosystem
- iv. Motivation & Team Work
- v. Role & Importance of the Frontline Staff

SESSION DETAILS

March 2nd, 2013-The day started with an ice-breaker activity whereby each staff had to introduce his partner by describing his favourite past time activity and then narrating the best and the worst incident that each of them had faced during their tenure of service in the forest department.



Pic 5: Participants interacting during the Ice-breaker activity

This helped the participants to start interactions with each other as well as with the resource people. The interesting part was that most of them mentioned that their favourite past time was to roam around in the jungles and watch wild animals & birds!! The best incident for majority of them was their first tiger sighting in the wild and almost 80% of them said that their worse time was in 2009 when all the tigers from PTR went extinct.

The first module '**Snake Rescue, Identification and First aid**' was conducted by Shri. Kedar Bhide (a snake expert who also runs a Mumbai-based NGO, Reptile Rescue and Study Centre). This session got an enthusiastic response from the participants who were able to build upon their knowledge about snakes, basic snake rescue techniques and first aid with the help of an informative presentation.

They were given information about the identification of various snakes that are likely to be found around them and which of those are venomous & non-venomous snakes.



Pic 6: Field work on snake rescue techniques

After the session, the participants were encouraged to come up with all the questions that they have about snakes and the various myths about them. The participants were given a field assignment in which they were given hypothetical situations, which they had to enact to showcase how they would carry out emergency snake rescue operation with the help of simple accessories/tools available around them in the campus. The staff managed to collect pipes, sacks, sticks etc. which they could use during such operations.



Pic 7: Snakes in Indian mythology

This session was relevant to the staff since they often come across snakes either during foot patrolling or when snakes enter their camps/houses. They were imparted with the necessary knowledge to deal with such emergency situations using the simple and effective tools along with the process to be followed while doing a first aid before rushing the patient to the hospital.

‘Tiger Behaviour and Stripe Identification’ session was conducted by Vidya Venkatesh (Chief Administrative Officer at LWF). It helped build on the participants’ knowledge about tigers and tiger behaviour with the help of a presentation. It also elaborated on the Stripe Pattern Identification technique, (which is based on the fact that no two tigers have the same stripe pattern) thus training the attendees to identify individual tigers based on their stripes.

The presentation was followed by an exercise, which enabled the participants to identify and count tigers using on the images provided to them.



Pic 8: Understanding the life cycle of a tiger



Pic 9: Stripe identification exercise

March 3rd, 2013- 'Panna- the Habitat and Ecosystem' conducted by Dr. Parvish Pandya (Associate Zoology Professor at Bhavan's College in Andheri, Mumbai). He began the session by taking the participants on a nature trail in the Hinauta range of the reserve where they learnt about the biodiversity of the park, identified different birds & bird calls, spotted different creatures right from the skink in the leaf pile to the Crested Serpent-Eagle perched high on a tree, etc.



Pic 10: Participants during the nature trail conducted by Dr. Parvish Pandya

The trail was followed by an activity titled-‘Web of Life’ which required the participants to explain the interrelation between the various elements of biodiversity that they saw during the trail. This was then followed by a presentation on the biodiversity of PTR as well as that of India with emphasis on the flora and fauna of different regions. For example, they were shown the Kutza/Indrajau plant (*Holorrhena antidysenteric*), which is used to cure diarrhoea.

The time was also used to discuss and dispel myths and misconceptions about different birds and animals. One of the myths that we heard was about crows and owls that are considered bad omens and believed to be fatal to human beings. The session ended with a presentation titled “Small is Beautiful” which elaborated on the multitude of organisms -both big and small- and their importance. This was followed by a discussion on the same.



Pic 11: Carnivore scat found on the nature trail

March 4th, 2013 - ‘Motivation and Team Work’ conducted by Mahesh Chaturvedi (a pioneer in outbound intervention in India), this module aimed at enabling the participants to work together as a team and find solutions to their problems in an analytical and motivated manner. The idea behind all the activities conducted during this session was also to help build trust amongst the participants and to motivate them so that they could work as an effective team to serve and protect

the forest that they are an intrinsic part of.



Pic 12: 'Everything is possible'!!



Pic 13: When Teamwork gets better!



Pic 14: Learning the importance of trust and teamwork through experiential training



Pic 15: Mahesh Chaturvedi reflecting on the day's activities.

March 4th, 2013- Role and Importance of frontline staff conducted by Shri. Sreenivasa Murthy (Field Director, PTR), this interactive session between the Field Director and his staff brought thoughts, questions, problems and suggestions with respect to the protection of the forest to the fore. Post this, a small but powerful movie “How to save the tiger” was screened, which depicted a day in the life of a forest guard and how simple innovative things can improve the monitoring system of any forest. It also throws light on the advance being made in conservation that will help forest guards manage the forest better. Following this, the participants were encouraged to think of ‘out of the box’ ideas which will help them protect the forest.



Pic 16: Field Director, Shri. Sreenivasa Murthy, Deputy Director, Shri. Vikram Singh Parihar and Assistant Director, Shri. Tamrakar interacting with the staff



Pic 17: Putting together ideas for better protection of the park

The Training Program concluded with a felicitation ceremony in which all the participants were given certificates, for having successfully completing the program.





Pic 18,19,20: Felicitation function & certificate distribution ceremony



Pic 21: Shri. Sreenivasa Murthy with all the participants and resource people

CONCLUSION:

This 'Capacity Building Training Program' conducted at Panna Tiger Reserve helped in equipping the staff with the necessary skills needed to carry out the difficult job of protecting India's forests. Some of the important outcomes of this program were:

- 1) Enhancement of knowledge of the staff in relation to the park and its biodiversity.
- 2) Enhanced the ability to monitor and observe wildlife and forests in a more effective manner.
- 3) The staff was exposed to the existing techniques involved in tracking, monitoring and identifying tigers. With the knowledge of the stripe identification technique, the front line staff can contribute to Phase IV of National Tiger Estimation that is conducted by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).
- 4) The staff was provided a platform to put forth their strengths, weaknesses and solutions that will help them carry out their duties better.
- 5) Helped motivate the staff to strive towards better protection of the park through teamwork to ensure that the fight against poachers continues.

OBSERVATIONS:

- 1) There is immense potential amongst the staff of PTR (participants).
- 2) There is an urge and curiosity to learn new things.
- 3) People are very creative and willing to think 'out of the box'.
- 4) They're willing to strive and contribute towards making PTR a success story after the reintroduction of tigers.
- 5) The management and the leadership team at PTR has a very high sense of ownership and responsibility.
- 6) The staff is very proud of the successful reintroduction of tigers in the park.
- 7) The staff is conscious of the consequences of slackening on protection of the park. They understand that PTR is one of the most focused tiger reserves of our country and any wrong step can be detrimental to the park's success.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1) The motivation and enthusiasm levels of the staff will increase multifold if the management is able to provide a few small incentives as rewards for good work. Ex. Providing insurance to an employee and his family, giving additional leave of absence, supporting/sponsoring the education of one of their children, providing specialized training to selected few (darting & tranquilizing skills, self defense training, rescue operations, procedures & legalities involved in WPA relevant to the park, etc.)
- 2) Most of the problems discussed by the staff were related to family and health. Hence, any support that can be provided in this domain would act as a booster on the performance of the staff.
- 3) Water borne diseases are quite common amongst the staff. Hence, facility for cleaner drinking water at chowkis etc. will prove to be very useful.
- 4) Some of the staff have an aptitude for learning computer skills and have also shown willingness to go out of their way to spend time and learn the same. If there is a possibility to make computers available at the existing offices at certain time of the day for training purpose, it would further build the capacity for the staff of PTR.
- 5) There is a tremendous work pressure on the ground staff due to the continuous monitoring schedule and shortage of staff resources. Filling up of these vacancies immediately is crucial for the park, even though that may not suffice the requirement (as mentioned to us by one of the officials). This will atleast motivate the existing staff to notice that there is progress on that front and they will try to perform their duties better.
- 6) Regular interactions/meeting with the field staff may prove to be an effective tool to reduce the 'unhappiness' quotient within themselves.