

# LifeLines from **LifeForce**

Issue No. 1  
1997-1998

For all those who have expressed an interest in the protection and preservation of tigers, or who may have supported LifeForce in any way, we hope the following will update you on the work we are currently undertaking in India. In the notes which follow you may see ways in which you can help, be encouraged to come and see the environment in which we work, or just broaden your own understanding of the problems which face us all.

## **Why tigers?**

More than just another endangered species, the tiger represents an indicator of health for the whole ecosystem, with its position at the head of the food chain. Its health and continued existence has a direct bearing on all other forms of wildlife and ultimately Man. We considered therefore, that by making a contribution towards tiger conservation, it would in turn be making steps towards the preservation and healthy existence of all forms of life.

Reserves and National Parks at various geographical locations throughout India. These travels revealed a number of needs, which varied from park to park and an overwhelming impression that the situation was worse than we had first anticipated. Tiger numbers appear to be critically low (probably below the crisis levels which generated the inception of Project Tiger in the seventies) and the Forest Department is beleaguered by many setbacks, not least of which is a severe deficiency of funding to the parks. Whilst it is generally acknowledged that only political will at the highest level will save the tiger and forests in India, nonetheless we felt that every effort must be made to buy the tiger 'breathing space' whilst lobbying in the political arena continued.

We have currently opted for a location in Madhya Pradesh, the central state of India, generally acknowledged to be the 'Tiger State' by virtue of being home to the greatest percentage of tigers remaining in the world. Our location in Pachmarhi, an old English hill station, is conveniently positioned to be within driving distance of numerous tiger populated parks, including the famous reserves of Kanha and Bandhavgarh, whilst being adjacent to the Satpura National Park, itself tiger territory.

The first year of our existence in India was therefore of an exploratory nature and started to formulate plans for the projects which we considered to be of greatest value. Our return to England for the monsoons last July (97) enabled us to establish the Charitable Trust 'LifeForce' so that our activities could be put onto a more visible and formal footing and attract funding. The inception of LifeForce coincided with various national talks and interviews which may be how many of you first learned of us. Our return to India after the monsoons, to continue our work, meant that any fund raising activities could only be pursued in England with the support of those who could undertake them on our behalf. We made the decision to keep our administrative costs to a minimum, so that the maximum percentage possible of raised funds would go to the tiger. Whilst this increases our reliance on you to support fund raising wherever possible, we believe that there are ways in which we can help you enjoy this - more details later.

## **LifeForce and India**

Before we felt confident to direct our efforts towards any specific projects we thought it appropriate to investigate a broad cross section of Project Tiger

*Tiger trail - Satpura National Park*



### **The complete picture!**

We have become increasingly aware during our time in India that the success of our mission would only be achieved by attention to many different aspects that impact on the continued existence of the tiger. These extend from social and community issues, habitat preservation, support of the Forest Department and of course, direct tiger protection. All of the elements we identified are inextricably entwined with one another to the extent that we felt the need to generate a programme of projects which work hand in hand with one another towards a common goal. A brief summary of these projects follows, which have either short or long term objectives.

### **Current Projects**

**Cattle Compensation** - A common cause of tiger deaths is the poisoning or booby trapping by local villagers of the carcasses of their domestic cattle which have strayed into the forest and been killed by tiger. The continuing encroachment of man upon the jungle increases the risk of confrontation between man and tiger with these inevitable results. LifeForce has undertaken to supplement the compensation offered by the Forest Department in Satpura in the event that either delay or inadequate compensation is forthcoming to a villager for the loss of his livestock. We will undertake, with the Forest Department, stringent checks to verify the authenticity of claims and make prompt payment to avoid the consequences described above.

**Village relocation** - Several villages within national parks are anxious for relocation as their activities have been severely curtailed by the Forest Department. Human and livestock activity can be highly detrimental to the

the relocation of two villages in Satpura (Bori and Dhain). This will probably involve drinking water supply, irrigation and education to smooth the transition to their new home beyond the park's boundaries. Funding to the level of approximately £2000 per family for each of fifty families will be needed but some of this will be met by the State Government and represents all costs of relocation including infrastructure. Whatever we can do to help will assist this relocation and thereafter release additional territory for colonisation by wildlife - a rare reversal of modern trends.

**Guards' accommodation** - If a Forest Guard is unhappy because he cannot see his family for six months, then the likelihood of absenteeism increases and the protection of the forest diminishes. Together with improving the lot of his children (as above) we seek to provide accommodation for guard's families near to the parks. If we can improve the self respect and morale of the guards, then we can expect them to fulfil their duties more effectively.

**The bigger picture** - LifeForce has arranged a number of talks and presentations to guards and foresters for



*Classrooms badly in need of attention before the monsoons*

**Education** - Many of the tribal villagers' and Forest Guards' children lack the financial support to ensure the chance of a basic education. We believe that at this formative level much appreciation of the need to protect the environment can be generated. LifeForce has identified a local school that struggles to support underprivileged children but which itself struggles to survive for lack of basic facilities. We hope to provide financial support for the children of tribals and

the purposes of putting their valuable contribution to wildlife protection into a global context. Illustrating their role in global conservation stimulates in them a feeling of pride and self respect for their work.



*The village of Dhain - one of two currently scheduled for relocation*

health and policing of the parks. The spread of bovine diseases and the presence of people who are difficult to account for (potential poachers) make the Forest Department's job exceptionally difficult. LifeForce is currently investigating how to support

Forest Guards together with the provision of basic facilities for all, such as re-building classrooms.



# SATPURA NATIONAL PARK

MADHYA PRADESH

Approx 1500sq km



there is the realisation that any solutions they may be pressured into producing, take long periods of time to implement - time which many species, including perhaps ourselves, do not have. So what can be done?

The fastest working and most powerful remedy lies in choosing how we spend our money. It is of vital importance to our future to actively select products and processes that are not harmful to our environment, while not purchasing those that are. This can begin at your local supermarket with purchase of, for example, Ecover washing and cleaning products, recycled goods eg. toilet paper, and organically grown produce when you can afford it. For those with money to invest, ethical investment groups have been showing the same, if not better, returns as conventional investments. If only a bank is needed, the Co-operative Bank also fulfils ethical criteria. There are also the 'Shared Interest' and 'Ecology' Building Societies with humanitarian and conservation concerns respectively, in their foundation and operation. Traidcraft, One World shops and perhaps others that you already know of are trading organisations that do not pursue profit to the exclusion of all other considerations. Those organisations that do, have to be taught by us, in how we spend our money, that their harmful products will not sell. This has an immediate and powerful effect on their decision makers, to the benefit of every living thing on the planet. Talk about your concerns to shop managers, politicians, friends and family. Hopefully this trend might develop such that society wide changes (not feasible for the individual), such as transport and energy production, are also arranged with environmental considerations as a foundation.

Whilst LifeForce continues to do what it can in the forests of the Indian subcontinent, you can have a beneficial effect directly eg. by simply not pouring harmful chemicals down your sink, which ultimately impact on the global ecosystem. There is no 'away' to which things are thrown. Send a message, in this way, to the dominant corporations of the world (the principal cause of so much environmental damage) that their harmful products will not sell. If you are interested in learning more about the ways in which you can help at home please phone for our environmental help sheet.

***Better to light one small candle than to curse the darkness - Confucius***

### **The Bigger LifeForce**

In a very real sense the tiger crisis is our crisis - it is representative of what we are doing to the life-support system of the planet. We have already mentioned the tiger as an indicator of the health of the ecosystem it inhabits. These ecosystems are part of what may be described as a global ecosystem on which, of course, we all ultimately depend. Whatever our occupation or pastimes (no matter how sophisticated) all of our activities are built on little green leaves flourishing in the sunshine - the beginning of the food chain.

Environmental degradation is now, sadly, a common occurrence and is one of the factors contributing to tigers and other species disappearing. One important example of the significance a forest holds for our lives and others' is its function in retaining water; binding soil and thereby preventing 'dustbowls'. Often a forest will be holding water not only for the land area it covers but also for the surrounding area, whether cultivated or

industrialised. More important is the recognition that we, as a species, do not understand how the ecosystem works in all its subtlety and detail. We may understand more after essential elements, such as the forests, have disappeared but by then solutions to the resultant problems will have disappeared with the forests. All indications are that we cannot continue to degrade or destroy natural ecosystems with impunity. The results will be visited upon us and will, no doubt, be unpleasant to experience, if not worse.

When investigated, most instances of environmental abuse result from some company or individual making a short-term profit via the complicity and/or failure of politicians. Larger commercial interests are associated with larger abuses. The number, size and power of these interests can appear to be overwhelming to concerned individuals. Even for those people who believe in the effectiveness and ability of politicians

### **LifeForce Charitable Trust**