

GENERAL REPORT ON LIFEFORCE PROJECTS DEC 2002 – APRIL 2003

Strategy

Long term conservation must address two principle issues: alternative sources of income and energy for those people who still depend directly on forest resources. Secondly, to protect the remaining forests and their wildlife from the numerous threats posed by criminal and commercial activities. Hence, LifeForce pursues a community-based conservation strategy including humanitarian welfare projects to address the first issue and direct protection of the forests by supporting the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department to address the second.

As well as being community based in terms of strategy, for long term success conservation projects must also include the active participation of local people. Ten Indian citizens are currently involved with LifeForce projects. LifeForce also supports other related Indian conservation initiatives and aims to increase local involvement in future. So important have some Indian citizen's contributions been that a few projects would have faltered without their assistance.

Introduction

Since the opening of Satpura Tiger Reserve (STR) after last year's monsoon, it is good to report many signs of a healthy Reserve. Whilst the monsoon was not the heaviest known, vegetation is lush and green, large herds of Sambar and other herbivores are present, providing a good prey base for many carnivores – wild dog, smaller wild cats, civets, leopard and tiger. Unusually but encouragingly, on two separate occasions and at distant locations (precluding the possibility of the same animals being involved), five tigers were seen socialising and remaining together beyond a casual encounter.

Pachmarhi's location is adjacent to the core area of Satpura Tiger Reserve.* Whilst human disturbance and hence 'sub-optimal' habitat discourage most animals from venturing too close, an additional sign of a healthy tiger population in the core area was recent (November/December 2002), well-verified sightings of a tigress and cubs near forest only 3 km from Pachmarhi centre and the LifeForce base.

However, problems are ever with us and the poaching of 2 leopards and 1 tiger just south of Rorighat occurred in February. Strictly speaking the incident fell just outside STR but nature does not observe Man's maps. The poachers were caught but, although the defendants await trial and penalties have been increased (up to seven years in jail and a 25 000 rupee fine), these measures cannot repair the damage done.

* Note Satpura National Park + Bori Wildlife Sanctuary (Bori WLS) + Pachmarhi Wildlife Sanctuary (Pachmarhi WLS) = Satpura Tiger Reserve (STR)

Support of the Forest Department resulting in better-motivated Guards performing their duties more efficiently and effectively

Linequarters

Accommodation for five Forest Guards and their families has been constructed by LifeForce at Sohagpur to the north west of the Tiger Reserve and is now occupied by better motivated guards who are more easily and efficiently accessible to their officers. I include a summary (in his own words) of accommodation benefits written by Assistant Director Satpura National Park, Mr. Johri. Individual Forest Guards have personally expressed their appreciation of this accommodation to LifeForce.

The delayed second block, after much persistence and patience from LifeForce, began construction in March and will provide accommodation for another five Forest Guards and their families. In addition to funding it, LifeForce efforts on this project involve regular inspections, meetings and a constant review of expenditure and receipts. This block is due for completion on June 1st 2003.

This second block will provide similar benefits to those described in Mr. Johri's report. I would only add that this accommodation reduces, if not eliminates, absenteeism amongst the Forest Guards.

Supplementing Forest Guards' Equipment needs

LifeForce has always followed a policy of talking and liaising directly with the Forest Guards as the actual 'men in the field' facing all the threats to wildlife and forest. The forests and their wildlife depend on the Forest Guards – and nobody else - for protection. These guards are under-equipped in many ways.

With the onset of the fire season, needs were identified as fire-beaters, water bottles for individuals, canvas 'jungle boots', mosquito nets and torches. During April LifeForce supplied 370 mosquito nets (additional nets included for chowkidars and other staff at rest houses i.e. anybody working for the Forest Department at risk from malaria), 310 water bottles, 150 light-weight but good quality metal and rubber fire-beaters, approx. 20 pairs of best quality boots (a pair for each name and shoe size provided by Range Officers), and 20 good quality environmentally-friendly 'wind-up' torches. Given the logistical and supply problems of India, this was not simply a matter of placing an order and writing a cheque! Much effort and persistence has to be employed continually chasing suppliers of materials. The fire-beaters were constructed locally and the torches brought by hand from England.

LifeForce Litter Patrol

Satpura Tiger Reserve includes the two sanctuary areas of Bori and Pachmarhi which, as sanctuaries, are subject to less rigorous constraints than the National Park, and legally permit the permanent presence of people. A persistent and widespread litter problem produces a breeding ground for harmful bacteria, causes the death of animals and despoils natural beauty. LifeForce is funding and placing notices at each of the popular tourist beauty spots, encouraging use of bins provided and organising teams of youngsters to collect randomly dropped litter for

appropriate disposal. This is another example of involving local people with the added benefit of educating the younger generation at the same time.

Strategic support of tribals and villagers as part of community-based conservation

Tube Wells for Kamithi range villages(one project within the eco-development programme)

The final payment for pumps and pipe work was made in February and completion of the wells (which marks completion of this project) should occur by the end of April. Ten functional wells should be the final result, providing water for drinking, bathing and irrigation. Irrigation will mean a second (and in some cases a third) crop per year (LifeForce has supplied seeds to initiate these projects). This increases the families' income and welfare making illegal money gained through poaching or timber cutting unnecessary and unattractive. Just as importantly, it provides work during an otherwise quiet and boring period which could otherwise encourage participation in illegal activities. In areas where tube well bores did not find water, stop dams and lakes provided by LifeForce served the same purpose.

Kamithi range is on the northern border of the Park. LifeForce has also initiated the expansion of eco-development schemes in the eastern region of the park. This involves meetings, planning sessions and inspections on site - easier said than done when the sites are deep in the forest.

Health and Hygiene Workshops

A few years ago, during the LifeForce medical camp in the forest, when over 600 people were treated by four doctors from Bombay, it became apparent that a basic knowledge of hygiene, nutrition and malaria could prevent many problems. As a result LifeForce has organised, funded and delivered Health and Hygiene Workshops to tribals as part of Eco-development programmes and to encourage and establish co-operation between the Forest Department and villagers (in response to LifeForce invitations, F.D. personnel have attended all workshops and been very positive and supportive). All workshops are delivered in role play (since the tribals are illiterate) with the conservation message linking the health of forests (e.g. in terms of water table and soil quality) to the health of individuals and the importance of the tiger as an indicator of forest health.

In response to requests, LifeForce arranged another medical camp in the forest (at Manakachar during March), supplied all medicines and arranged for the attendance of doctors including a lady gynaecologist.

Village Relocation

Dhain is the village awaiting relocation and all meetings and preparations have been made. Everything is still on target and all awaits the turning of bureaucratic wheels in Delhi. LifeForce continues to urge and enquire regularly for any progress and we are expecting (and hoping!) that Dhain will relocate around May time.

General

One of the keystones for conservation is education, so LifeForce continues to make public presentations which include practical advice on what individuals can do to make constructive contributions to the environmental crisis which faces us all. These presentations also include morale boosting sessions, designed for and given to Forest Guards.

LifeForce also continues to provide free medicine to local doctors for the treatment of tribals and scheduled caste people. To date, these medicines have come from England. However, recently a new supplier in Delhi has been found and we await their first contribution.

LifeForce continues to promote the National Park classification of the still existing forest corridor between Satpura and Melghat Tiger Reserves.

LifeForce also visited Pench Tiger Reserve in the south eastern corner of Madhya Pradesh and plan to supplement its equipment needs during the 2003/2004 'season'.

Supplement

Mr. Johri's report in his own words:

Advantages of Line Quarters at Sohagpur

- 1) Five Forest Guards (FG's) live at one place near Range Office. So in case of emergency one can be traced in short time and rushed to the spot of emergency.
- 2) Families of five FG's live together who co-operate with each other in good and bad times, which results in less worries to the FG and the FG stops longer in the forest and performs better.
- 3) Line quarter being situated near Range Office, any message can be given either to the FG or his family.
- 4) Being rent free accommodation, the FG saves money resulting in better living hence better performance of duties.
- 5) In rental accommodations there are many limitations which do not occur in the well-designed line quarter so no 'kitch-kitch' resulting in a worry-free FG, hence better performance of duties.
- 6) The five families of FG's live together. So there is a feeling of safety amongst them which allows the FG to do better in the forest.
- 7) Families of FG's cannot live in forests where nobody lives. In Sohagpur the families of FG's enjoys all the facilities such as market, education, hospital and transport which are very necessary for human beings.

Mr. Johri
Assistant Director
Satpura National Park