

## LIFEFORCE GENERAL REPORT 2004 – 2005

### **Support for the Forest Department**

In response to requests from Forest Department, LifeForce supplied the following equipment to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of Forest Guards. These men (and for the last few years, to a limited degree, women) are often the first and last line of defence for the forests and their inhabitants.

30 Backpacks  
30 Cameras + 30 films + 30 sets of batteries  
30 First-aid kits  
30 Pedometers  
30 Dictaphones + 60 tapes  
30 Stationery kits  
30 Water-proof map bags.  
35 Pairs of binoculars  
40 L.E.D. hand-held lights  
9 Global Positioning Satellite hand-sets

66 warm jackets for winter  
10 solar lanterns and solar panels

2 hand-held spotlights were donated to Pench Tiger Reserve.

After the Forest Department had successfully concluded a prolonged legal battle, LifeForce is pleased to report that the second block of five homes built by LifeForce for Forest Guards and their families is now fully and legally occupied. It has led to many benefits for the efficiency, welfare and motivation of the Guards and the Department as a whole. Due to the delays, LifeForce had to supplement the funding originally provided by U.S. Fish and Wildlife by an additional 50%.

The Mahindra 4WD vehicle supplied to the Forest Department by LifeForce, which has given such great service as reported in LifeLines issues 3 and 4 (available on the 'news' page) has once again been responsible for a raid on a village a few kilometres from Piparya, where it arrested a poacher and seized a store of skins, horns and hooves of blackbuck and four-horned antelopes while confiscating animal and bird snares.

After literally years of effort by LifeForce and the Forest Department, the village of Dhain has finally, successfully and voluntarily re-located. All residents are now happily re-settled in an area of good fertile land outside the Tiger Reserve, not far from the Kamithi range of villages, with (for the first time) easy access to markets, schools and medical aid. It will be interesting to see how the forest reclaims the land now vacated in the Tiger Reserve. Other villages are keen to leave the Reserve and it is planned for more villages to re-locate.

## Support for Local People

LifeForce personnel have visited the re-located villagers to make sure their immediate needs are catered for. In addition to a visit by the 'education minibus' (see next paragraph) a visit from a mobile medical minibus is being arranged for the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> June 2005 as further support. In accordance with LifeForce's promotion of organic agriculture (see below for more detail), the villagers are being advised to keep their new soil fertile and pure by not poisoning it with pesticides, herbicides or any other chemicals.

A 'Tempo Traveller' minibus fitted-out with educational media including DVD, funded by Born Free Foundation and staffed by personnel of the Bombay Natural History Society, provides environmental education to villagers with a focus on tiger conservation. It visited Satpura between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2005. LifeForce believes this work is important, so in addition to initial accommodation, map, advice and liaison with Forest Department, LifeForce also provided a 4WD support vehicle, with driver (and tow-rope!) to lead the way and be available to help with any difficulties (the minibus is not 4WD and the tracks to some villages can be challenging).

Health & Hygiene Workshops were continued. These educational role-plays by volunteers (the tribal people are illiterate) demonstrate practical techniques to prevent disease whilst linking individual health with environmental health.



The team introduce themselves to the villagers with a song about the environment.



Two volunteers role-play to the village audience (men sat separately out of shot)...



...amongst whom are these attentive listeners.



The do's and don'ts of water filtration



How to clean finger nails before preparing food or drink.



Some of the team after the presentation brewing up some 'chai' on the river bank

By some standards an H&H workshop may not sound difficult: perhaps 'collect the volunteers and equipment, drive to the location, deliver the role-play and go home'. To gain a clearer picture of what an H&H Workshop might entail, please consider the following aspects of a visit this year to a village called Dhargoan;

*Having organized the volunteers (another feature that sounds easy but isn't!), two 4WD vehicles set out in the morning, leaving town by the single-track tarmac road. On rounding a bend we found that this road was being re-surfaced. Readers in the West will be familiar with half the road being re-surfaced while half remains open to controlled traffic which is delayed but allowed to pass. This system was not in use and the whole road was being re-surfaced. After much manoeuvring, our vehicles managed to get past the obstacle and continued to a gate of the Tiger Reserve. The gate opens onto a dirt track that was also being repaired by people with shovels and baskets. It was almost impossible to negotiate some of the track, which had great furrows in it, awaiting new hard-core and earth fillings. The vehicles occasionally 'bottomed out' over particularly high earthworks. However, after a difficult drive, we reached a location called Paras Pani where we met with a guide vehicle from the Forest Department. This vehicle now took the lead and soon we found that the track led through a wide river. A path of large pebbles and boulders had been laid across the river as a raised pathway for vehicles. Whether the sun (now high in the sky) reflected off the surface and obscured this path or whether the angle of approach was wrong, is hard to say but the second vehicle slipped off the pebbles into the river and water swirled around the passenger's legs while the vehicle, although the engine was still running, refused to move in any direction. With the other driver and members of the F.D. standing on rocks with bare feet, up to their waist in water and holding the front section of the vehicle under the bumper and wheel arches, people and engine strained to lift and push the vehicle back. The vehicle suddenly lurched violently back onto the 'pebble road' in the river. All three vehicles continued up the dirt track to the village without further mishap. The H&H presentation began but, half-way through, rain began to fall. We continued, but so did the rain, until the audience (who were sat on the ground) moved away to shelter. The rain was there for the day so the H&H had to be abandoned and we started the journey back. The swollen river gave no problems this time and after crossing it we took an alternative track to the one under repair. This track was passable but long sections of it were above 30 m high, without edge-guards of any sort. Although the vehicles were driven gently, they were still prone to slipping and sliding on the mud as they negotiated the hairpin bends. Going over the edge would have proved highly dangerous if not fatal to the precious young lives of the volunteers in the back. Finally, we were back on tarmac. On approaching the town we once more had to wait...and wait..., before 'juggling' our way through the tarmac layer and steam rollers, while all of us were wet, tired and hungry.*

Hopefully the reader will gain some impression of the effort required to make seemingly simple arrangements happen.

Despite the H&H Workshops there is still much illness to treat. So in April, LifeForce organized another Medical Camp that treated over 400 people in one

day. Forest Department location and buildings were used to continue cementing relationships between tribal people and the F.D.



After most people had been treated there was time to take this photograph. Previously the same scene would have shown a sea of people, most of whom had to be persuaded to queue.....



and bear the tedium.....



.....until relief came courtesy of the volunteers' attention to their needs.

As reported in previous newsletters, one continuing problem is the removal of wood from the forests by tribal people. One group of tribal women agreed to switch to LPG gas (a 'low-emissions' and much preferred alternative to wood) if they could get a subsidy for the connection and equipment and a low-interest loan to repay the balance. In collaboration with a local and community-minded bank, LifeForce has paid the subsidy for the group and ensured the bank will give the low-interest loan. The participants are told that, on random inspection, if they are found to still be collecting wood (to sell), their name on any request for future support from LifeForce will result in their application being rejected.

Regular readers will be familiar with the eight tube-wells sunk by LifeForce in the Kamithi range of villages. They will also be familiar with LifeForce's active support of organic agriculture. Hence, this 'season' LifeForce organised a 'fact-finding' visit to those farmers using the tube-wells to assess what problems they experience, which crops are grown and when and where chemicals, if any, are used. A representative of LifeForce then visited Delhi to attend a conference of organic farmers and associated supporters. Using information gained there, as well as from books and the Internet, an educational presentation was put together and presented to the Kamithi farmers. It included information on the dangers of pesticides and natural, safe alternatives.

The poisoning of the soil is so dangerous to the health and viability of all ecosystems that LifeForce, whilst doing all it can to encourage sustainable

agriculture, will take action to remove some or all tube-wells if organic practices are not maintained or adopted. LifeForce cannot see any sense in the benefits of one project nullifying those of others. As always, our strategy must be as healthy as possible in all aspects and activities, no matter how small it might be on a global scale. A healthy tree cannot grow from an unhealthy seed.

Although, at present, India does not have a wide range of 'alternative' and environmentally-healthy 'life-style' options in retail and commerce, organic agriculture and horticulture are very much in evidence and widespread, offering a real alternative and challenge to the currently dominant chemical and centralised 'agribusiness'. Interested readers can find detailed information on the Internet.

LifeForce has become a 'lifetime member' of 'Navdanya' an organization dedicated to organic farming and sustainable agriculture for India. It has a head office, retail outlet and cafe in Delhi and runs training programmes in Dehra Dun (located in northern India). Membership of Navdanya, amongst other benefits, helps to sustain small-scale organic farmers and biodiversity, and allows discounted fees for attendance of the training programmes referred to.

LifeForce is planning to organise and finance a group of farmers and F.D. personnel to attend these courses by late 2005 and bring the knowledge and techniques back to the Kamithi range of villages.

Navdanya and groups like it are also acting as 'seed banks'. India's vast and rich variety of species of rice, wheat and other plants is being reduced to favour the commercial interests of large companies, usually of Western origin. Navdanya and the like are safeguarding the seeds of the species not chosen for commercial exploitation. Related issues are GMO's and the 'patenting' or 'ownership' of life forms by commercial companies. Navdanya reported that the Monsanto company was recently defeated in the courts after claiming 'ownership' of Basmati rice! The section of internationally and legally-binding frameworks which cover ownership of life forms is known as 'Intellectual Property Rights'. One of Navdanya's publications explaining why it opposes this law is entitled:

'It's not intellectual, it's not property and it's not right'.

A clever, concise and penetrating rebuttal to the 'newspeak' presenting theft and greed in formal, grandiose terms.

### **General**

LifeForce considers it only right to report that the general situation concerning tiger conservation in India does not look good. The Times of India reported on March 30<sup>th</sup> 2005 that there are no tigers left in Sariska Tiger Reserve (located in north west India) due to poaching and neglect. To LifeForce this was not such a shock since it believes other Tiger Reserves are in the same or similar situations. On the same note, the Hindustan Times of the 8<sup>th</sup> April 2005 reported the seizure in Delhi of 45 leopard skins and 14 otter skins while news of a gang of poachers being arrested in Jabalpur (a large city in Madhya Pradesh) and poaching problems in Panna and Ranthambhore Tiger Reserves was reported at the same time. One wonders what else is not seized or reported on.

Worryingly, LifeForce has noticed a steady decrease in the number of both tiger and leopard pug-marks in Satpura Tiger Reserve over the last few years. Having

said this, last year LifeForce organised visits for local children free of charge so that they may see their own natural and national heritage (locals could afford the 10 rupee entrance fee but not the hire of the necessary 4WD vehicle – so LifeForce provided the vehicle). As the group was leaving the Reserve as dusk approached, all had a good view of a tiger at approx 20-30 yards, climbing the gradient up from the left to the vehicle track. The tiger paused and looked at the vehicle, which had stopped, and then quickly crossed the track, continued his climb to the right and disappeared into the forest. In April 2005 the Conservator of Forests and Director Satpura Tiger Reserve was on the tarmac road which climbs the 'hill' up to Pachmarhi, passing by a gate about half-way up, which leads into the Reserve. As his LifeForce vehicle was by-passing the closed gate, he had a fine view of a leopard coming down from the steep hillside on the left, crossing the road and disappearing down into the undergrowth on the right hand side.

These observations are good to hear but they do not completely negate the absence of pug-marks as mentioned above.

So, can any conclusion be drawn? LifeForce is of the opinion that the situation is critical and, overall, going in the wrong direction. We sincerely hope this conclusion is incorrect or becomes so in the near future. The situation nationwide looks bleak.

Madhya Pradesh, known as the 'Tiger State' for holding 20% of the world's tigers, might retain this name for another and bleaker reason, since it might become the only State in India holding tigers. For as long as M.P. continues to hold tigers and for as long as LifeForce can survive, it will continue to do all it can to conserve those tigers and the forest 'corridors' connecting its Tiger Reserves. An efficient Forest Department has a braking or slowing effect on the decline of the tiger but, in our view it has not, as yet, been able to halt the trend leading to the tiger's eventual disappearance. The major factors contributing to this trend are habitat destruction/degradation and poaching – which are produced by the world's, and the country's, socio-economic systems.

The Forest Department has to work in a country where the majority of the population is steeped in poverty. A minority of the population is responsible for the pursuit of an industrial 'free market' economy which views natural resources in terms of their commercial value. This system increases the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots', producing more poverty which increases population (without a welfare state or pensions, the only hope for survival with a physically demanding lifestyle during middle/old age, is to have children). The increasing and mostly impoverished population then puts greater strain on ever-reducing natural resources as a means to survive and/or alleviate poverty.

Education could provide both an understanding of this vicious cycle, the means to break it and other benefits, including employment, but poverty does not allow for the luxury of education.

For an understanding of the connections between global economics, big business, governments, the environmental crisis and species extinction, see 'The Little Earth Book' by James Bruges (added to the website's recommended reading section). The book explains economics and the environment simply and concisely, yet with detail and references. It is highly recommended.

If there is a panacea for mankind's problems, LifeForce believes education will be an important part of it – and a broad education, not just specialised training for industrialised society. Hence, as and when resources allow, LifeForce plans to significantly expand its educational programmes.

Apart from the direct threats to its survival, one other contributing factor to the continuing decline of the tiger is a misguided complacency that, as long as there are some populations still in existence, the tiger is not 'actually' or 'completely' extinct. To LifeForce this is like looking at what remains of some previously magnificent classical buildings in a war zone, and focusing on a beautiful arch or façade that still precariously remain, while all around is the rubble and outlines of what was once the full glory and splendour of the whole creation. Yet, some have the perspective that we have 'saved the architecture'.

Humans might pedantically say that the species is not extinct because it can point to a few remnant populations, focusing on the fact that some tigers still remain, rather than on what the original populations signified in terms of healthy ecosystems. From Nature's perspective (the only one which will ultimately be of any significance) the situation is a disaster and we concentrate on a few individuals whilst forgetting the devastation we have wrought collectively and generally. Obviously conservation should be concerned to protect precious remains but it should at the same time also aim to restore as much as possible of what Nature originally provided. Just one reason why LifeForce champions the protection of the remaining corridors between Tiger Reserves.

The issue of the Times of India referred to above also carried a report at the foot of page 14 (!!!???) on a study by 1,360 experts in 95 nations which said that 'a rising human population had polluted or over-exploited two-thirds of the ecological systems on which life depends...10-30% of mammal, bird and amphibian species were already threatened with extinction...the harmful consequences of this degradation could grow significantly worse in the next 50 years...biodiversity – the very basis for life on earth - is declining at an alarming rate...strains on nature could trigger abrupt changes and could bring sudden outbreaks of disease...etc. etc.'".

The treatment of this information by the newspaper, the lack of comment or apparent concern, was as if this topic were just another news item.

In the view of LifeForce, this is a contributing factor to that paper's front-page news regarding the tiger. The report cites 'neglect' as one of the reasons for the situation in Sariska but ignores its own, and the general media's, neglect. It is true that now, years if not decades late, the environmental crisis is, amongst assorted trivia, being reported - but often on 'page 14' (see above) and never with

- advice on what the reader can do about it
- news of what the media are doing about it
- nor what we and they are demanding politicians and big business do about it.

If the media had met their responsibilities, they need never have had cause to print the recent front page news concerning the tiger i.e. a reason for this newspaper's front page news of the tiger is that it reports threats to the global life-support system on page 14! All things are connected.

The media could also play a significant role in a wider education for all, that LifeForce considers so important. Merely reporting some isolated facts about particular incidents or crises is insufficient. The media has an enormous responsibility - both for allowing the environmental crisis to proceed so far and now for doing everything it can to reverse the trend by pressurising those in power whilst protecting those who are not.

If you would like to do something constructive for the environmental crisis, please see the 'take action' section of this website.

### **Summary of the 'General' Sub-section**

Currently, the world's best hope of saving the tiger in significant numbers reduces to India. Within India the best hope reduces to Madhya Pradesh (where LifeForce is based).

The causes of the environmental crisis and the general lack of understanding of the vital importance of ecosystems (including varieties of animal and plant species, and the role of organic agriculture) reduce to global economic systems which are more powerful than governments, and dominated by large multi-national businesses.

The situation is bleak but governments, economies and businesses can all be influenced by individuals taking action as recommended in the 'take action' section of this website.