

LIFEFORCE REPORT 2005 – 2006

Synopsis

- Photo update from last year
- Plans for camera trapping
- Supplied 50 more jackets for Forest Guards
- Supplied 60 more pairs of boots for Forest Guards
- Supplied 100 Stainless steel water filters for Forest Guards
- Supplied 10 large solar panels for Tiger Reserve radio communications
- Supplied computer and peripherals for Forest Department Head Office
- Educational presentations for Forest Guards and local civilians
- Continued Health & Hygiene Workshops
- Provided support for N.C.S.A. tiger conservation workers in Melghat Tiger Reserve
- Promotion of and training in organic agriculture for 44 farmers living next to Satpura Tiger Reserve
- Bigger LifeForce initiatives, the environmental crisis and the need for widespread action and changes in peoples' priorities and attitudes.
Questions over the tiger's future and increasing difficulties for LifeForce

Introduction

The tiger crisis in India has deepened with some Tiger Reserves now either holding no tigers (Sariska plus at least one other of which LifeForce is aware - but which has not been 'officially recognised') or so few tigers as to be approaching that status (Ranthambhor, Panna, Palamau and Melghat). The tiger population census of 1972 yielded a figure of 1827 tigers remaining in all of India which, the same year, triggered the Indian government's Project Tiger conservation programme. Initially Project Tiger was a great success but now tiger population figures are returning to, if not going beyond, the original crisis levels – but whilst Project Tiger is *still* in operation. So the situation is doubly dangerous to that of 1972, since the solution (Project Tiger) is no longer solving the problem.

This is, of course, deeply depressing to report but LifeForce is trying to contribute to conservation, not public relations. Over the years and wherever possible, LifeForce has tried to focus on positives and emphasise them in these reports. However, if and when a variety of negative aspects increase to the point of threatening the overall objective of the work this report is duty-bound to reflect it. Otherwise, a reader of these reports could think that, despite various difficulties some progress is being made. Then, abruptly, that same reader could find that *Panthera tigris tigris* no longer existed.

One might expect that the deepening crisis would provoke increased assistance for tiger conservation. LifeForce has experienced otherwise. LifeForce will continue to do what it can in the face of all obstacles for as long as it can but the work becomes more difficult. Our experience has shown that individual's and organisation's self-proclaimed concern for the tiger and/or the environment is usually closely connected with initially hidden agendas and/or linked with public relations, publicity and/or profit. The concern is either very short-lived or evaporates once it requires any long-term commitment or sacrifice on their part. In other cases personal preferences and emotions override the impersonal cause that meant so much. Of those who commit, some renege or claim a different record of agreements or find other reasons to back out, or just fail to reply to enquiries or communicate in any way. LifeForce has been promised many things including personnel, regular funding, introductions to influential contacts and a host of other things that have never materialised. There is no response to LifeForce emails of enquiry and no explanations. We wonder what has happened or changed but not why the work gets evermore difficult.

Sounds familiar? Yes, it's sadly typical of human behaviour. Does any of this matter? From our personnel's perspective: No. Yet, as these games are being played, the tigers, forests, topsoil and other elements of essential life-support systems are disappearing. The world continues to slide into the most dangerous situation in recorded history (empires and wars have come and gone but we have never before, to our knowledge, been able to dismantle the life-support system of the planet). Too many people have their own good reasons for not doing anymore (or in many cases, anything!) to help – and many of these people are parents. This theme concludes in the final section after recording LifeForce's attempts to help...

LifeForce Support for Forest Department

Photographs

Forest Guards and their families have now completely moved in to the second block of accommodations built by LifeForce with monies from both U.S. Fish & Wildlife and LifeForce, and their completion was reported last year, as was the capture of a poacher with all his various traps and snares by a LifeForce vehicle. However, photographs were not then available so they are now included herewith....



Five homes for Forest Guards and their families at Matkuli.



After a raid by a LifeForce vehicle, a poacher with some skins, baskets, knives, nets, snares and traps.

Camera Trapping

At Satpura Tiger Reserve (STR) – and taking an overall perspective to eliminate occasional population fluctuations - LifeForce has definitely noticed a decline in the frequency of tiger or leopard pug marks found on the tracks of the Reserve over the last ten years. However, the official census carried out earlier this year for tigers resident in STR, gave an estimated population in the region of the higher 40's, approaching 50. If this seems optimistic, the new Conservator of Forests and Field Director is a dynamic individual and plans to supplement this estimate with camera-trap evidence with which, he says, 'no-one can argue.'

LifeForce believes camera trapping would be beneficial and enormously improve accuracy. Hence we have contacted Conservation Research Ltd of Cambridge England, which has developed unique computer software for recording and speeding analysis of photo data. Together we will be trying to help with the equipment needs of setting up sufficient camera traps. Some preliminary test shots with a few cameras in Satpura Tiger Reserve early this year have revealed some leopards and a tiger.

Supplementing Equipment

This year LifeForce further supplemented equipment for Forest Guards with the provision of 50 more warm winter jackets and 60 pairs of good quality jungle boots. Forest Guards in remote outposts regularly suffer from intestinal complaints so LifeForce has supplied 100 stainless steel water filters (one for virtually every outpost) with the advice to also boil drinking water.

There was pleasing feedback this year that incidents of malaria in Forest Department personnel have decreased since LifeForce supplied mosquito nets a few years ago.

10 large (75 watt) solar panels were also supplied to help maintain the radio network for STR and thereby help, with improved communications, to improve efficiency in general and response to emergency situations in particular.

Modern technology can help manage a Tiger Reserve: GIS software and digitalisation of maps and images of the Tiger Reserve can help with understanding, planning and efficiency. A computer which could be dedicated exclusively to this work was required by the Forest Department, so LifeForce provided to the F.D. offices in Hoshangabad, a computer with a large hard disk and memory, CD writer, top-quality monitor and large map-printer capable of producing A3 size maps. Using GIS software acquired independently by the F.D., the digitalised imaging will, amongst other benefits, allow:

- A map of any chosen scale to be produced immediately. Previously, changing a map from one scale to another was a tedious, time-consuming job fraught with errors.

- Features of the Reserve e.g. waterholes, can be plotted according to, say, size, or perhaps, the month in which they will dry-up, or whether they have water all year etc.
- G.P.S. co-ordinates of locations of, for example, tiger pug marks or camera trap images can be recorded accurately. Territories can thereby be mapped and populations monitored.
- Combinations of features can be added or removed as separate 'layers' e.g. using the above examples, permanent water holes in particular tiger's territories would represent two 'layers'. Water holes lasting six months could be added as a third layer etc.

Education

As usual, LifeForce gave its educational and morale-boosting presentation to Forest Guards in their final year of training before being posted to various Reserves and National Parks in Madhya Pradesh, and was gratified to see an enthusiastic and positive response.

LifeForce Support for Local People

(As always, this work is delivered with the environmental and tiger conservation message while linking the health and welfare of the individual recipient with the health and welfare of the environment - as indicated by the presence of tiger)

Education

LifeForce supplies booklets with diagrams and text in Hindi and English for the Guard presentations mentioned above. With a few adjustments these booklets are suitable for public use, so 450 have been printed as an initial batch for distribution to the audiences at 'Bison Lodge', the F.D. Natural History museum, popular with hundreds of visitors from all over India. LifeForce has provided 3 educational DVD's for display. After viewing these, the audience should be more receptive to the information and suggestions for the environmentally-friendly actions recommended in the booklets.

LifeForce education for local town's people also continues and we received a comment from a local resident:

'I had what was supposedly a 'good' education and learned about world history, the likes of Caesar and Napoleon...but no-one ever told me our lives were dependent on the survival of healthy forests...what sort of education is that?' (If you're not sure of the connections yourself please see 'Tiger Conservation is People Conservation' as a 'Conservation pdf' selection on this website).

Health & Hygiene Workshops

These continued for tribal people this year with some added experimental supplements:

Advice for women with regard to female physiology, childbirth and birth control. This was enthusiastically received - even before the start, male LifeForce personnel were unceremoniously ushered out of the door by the lady volunteers to protect the modesty of the eager ladies awaiting enlightenment!

Another addition to the H&H Workshop was the provision of a particular brand of salt: Thousands of Indian children suffer permanent mental retardation due to a lack of iodine during infancy. The easiest and most effective method of supplementing their diet with iodine is to add it to salt. However, Indian cooking methods can destroy much of the iodine. Some ingenious work by Indian technologists has found a way of 'locking' the iodine in the salt which not only protects it from cooking but also releases it after ingestion for optimal digestion. LifeForce has located this salt and provides it free of charge to tribal mothers, along with information and where it is available for future needs.

Helping other Tiger Reserves

A previous report mentioned that LifeForce had supplied an important vehicle to Pench Tiger Reserve and now it is pleased to report that it was able this year to help Melghat Tiger Reserve, located just across the border of Madhya Pradesh with Maharashtra. This took the form of financial support for the N.C.S.A. (Nature Conservation Society Amravati) tiger conservation workers operating in this area. LifeForce supplied funding for their office needs as listed below...

- Generator
- Fax machine (Sharp)
- Laptop computer
- Scanner
- Pen drive (1GB) (Sony)
- Laser Printer (HP-Laser jet 1160)
- Slide projector (Sharp)
- Mobile Handset (Nokia)

Promoting Organic Agriculture around the Tiger Reserve

Last year LifeForce reported its fact-finding visits and educational presentations to tribal villages to promote organic agriculture in general but particularly in those areas adjacent to the Tiger Reserve and now growing crops due to LifeForce tube-wells. Although this work was useful, LifeForce recognised the need for thorough, formal training. A professional Institute, offering a two-day residential course on organic agriculture, specifically tailored to the needs of tribal farmers, is located at Hoshangabad. Although never as straightforward as it sounds, LifeForce has so far organised and funded the training of 44 tribal farmers, all of

whom are living just across the north-west border of Satpura Tiger Reserve. In future it is hoped that many more will be trained. One of the biggest problems was organising (with fragmented or absent communications) the transport of the farmers from their various, and extremely remote, villages to the Institute and then returning them home. However, this was eventually accomplished and every farmer was very enthusiastic about the course.

Some features of the Organic Training Centre at Pawarkeda:



Natural fertilisers being prepared in buried clay pots.



Compost pits (brick if they can be afforded or home-made as in the foreground) or pits containing dead leaves, rotting with the aid of worms and a little water.

Whilst, at the present time, environmental and personal health impacts are not always thoroughly understood by the farmers (who have never in their lives had the benefit of any formal education), the financial savings associated with organic agriculture are immediately perceived since all techniques involve little or no expense whilst 'chemical farming' traps the farmer into buying and applying ever greater quantities of pesticides, herbicides (due to the rapid development of natural resistances) and artificial fertilisers (due to treated plants losing their ability to assimilate naturally available nitrogen). This means increased expense for farmers, increased profits for manufacturers and increased poison into the food chains of our finite and fragile planet.

Therefore it is worth the time and trouble to arrange training for organic agriculture because it is so fundamentally important: poisoning the soil with chemicals poisons everything else – the plants that grow in it, the animals and humans that eat the plants, and the carnivores that eat the animals. All the farmers trained are neighbours of tigers.

For making much of the above work possible, LifeForce would like to thank Australia Zoo, Dreamworld, all those individuals who make regular donations via Standing Order and the Indian citizens who work voluntarily for LifeForce.

The Bigger Life Force

Regular supporters of LifeForce will realise the critical importance of a 'multi-faceted' approach to conservation in particular and the environmental crisis in general, which is essential for tiger...and people...conservation. Hence some

projects mentioned in the above sections might easily be included in this section (e.g. the educational DVD's with supporting booklets containing life-style suggestions and the organic agriculture training). These illustrate some of the inter-connections in Nature - inter-connections which must have corresponding elements in any strategy to conserve Nature. Increasing appreciation and understanding of the importance of these connections is essential for a healthy future. Comments, not necessarily directly addressed to LifeForce, but overheard, include 'we can't solve all the problems.' (Environmentally we have to. There is no other choice (except a suicidal one)). Another comment is that LifeForce should confine itself to tiger conservation. LifeForce would like to ask those of this opinion – 'To what purpose? If it is possible to 'save the tiger', what value is this while essential elements of the life-support system for all mammals (including tigers and humans) start to collapse? It is an illusion to think we can save the tiger in the long-term without addressing the other factors – tigers, like us, need air, water and food and it is these which are threatened by the wider environmental crisis. Moreover, a thorough understanding of the factors which threaten the continued existence of the tiger reveal them to be the same factors that threaten all aspects of our environmental health (governments not obeying the electorate but big business).

e.g. global warming is currently receiving some long, long overdue attention by the media. This is positive and good but addressing it in isolation from ozone depletion, deforestation, species extinctions, pollution, loss of topsoil, chemical farming, GMO and other problems we don't yet know about, reveals either ignorance and/or continuing influence of commercial interests (the whole list just referred to traces back to improperly regulated big business). To illustrate: within the last few decades we have learned that the oxygen content of the air is maintained by photosynthetic algae and bacteria living in the world's oceans. Industry still uses the oceans as a dumping ground for the worst types of toxic man-made industrial waste and filth. The oceans are so vast that polluters had been able to suggest, without fear of immediate contradiction, that there was no limit to the amount of poison we could throw into it. However, a recently completed five-year American study of the world's oceans has shown that even in the Pacific mid-ocean, man-made chemical pollutants are present and accumulating in the bodies of whales.

At what level of toxins will the oxygen-maintaining organisms start to die?

Answer: nobody knows.

So when we all start finding difficulty breathing (and that includes tigers), pollution will eclipse global warming as the most dangerous factor; frightening scenarios but, sadly, real possibilities. Hence, any attempt to address environmental problems must be all-embracing; complete; holistic.

If we are going to survive to live in a healthy and sustainable society that society must be comprised of all, or at least most, of its citizens protecting and conserving natural ecosystems, conducting ethical business, eating organic food, using environmentally-friendly cleaning products, using renewable energy and,

having reduced or eliminated excess carbon emissions, halted man-made climate change etc. – along with other healthy and sustainable life-style options (re-cycling, conserving energy etc.).

Therefore, the sooner we can bring that society about the better for all – especially as Nature is indicating that the time remaining in which to make these changes is rapidly diminishing.

So, an increase in the customers or members of organisations that are currently providing such products or services will increase the...

- physical environmental benefits that could actually be measured
- rate of change toward a healthy and sustainable society (business responds quickly to any decrease in profits).
- rate of change of non-ethical or non-sustainable organisations to being ethical and sustainable in order to retain their share of the customer base (business responds quickly to any decrease customers).

LF experience of giving public presentations show that people might, say, eat organically but not bank ethically, or, for another example, donate to conservation programmes but not use environmentally-friendly cleaning products.

LifeForce considered that one way to increase ethical and sustainable options would be for ethical and environmentally-friendly organisations to become each others' customers and to recommend the services or products of the other ethical and environmentally-friendly organisations to their own members or customers, whilst launching public awareness and education initiatives.

The above chain of reasoning seemed valid to LifeForce and so it organised, funded and, giving 2.5 months notice, invited 33 environmentally-friendly and/or ethical businesses and organisations to a meeting in London. There was no charge to attend, nothing was for sale, no donations were required and there was no hidden agenda. The only function of the meeting was to increase the customers or membership of the attending organisations.

Out of those invited only four attended. LifeForce is surprised at the response and worried that the response to initiatives for effective and rapid change is neither effective nor rapid - even in the face of Nature's 'global warnings'. These organisations, by their very existence, indicate that they are aware both of the gravity of the situation and, more importantly, that they are prepared to take action to address it. The meeting represented a single person's expenses for the day and effectively free-advertising to a 'targeted audience' for all attendees. I suspect the advertising budget of some of these groups is in four figures at least. Yet, even these 'cutting edge' groups apparently could not see the benefit of the 'cross-fertilisation' the meeting represented. Readers with insights as to how or what LifeForce is reasoning or doing incorrectly are asked to email LifeForce with their suggestions (lifeforcelink@hotmail.com).

The Tiger, the Environment and LifeForce

For all the above work to be continued, expanded and/or developed, serious, long-term commitment must be found amongst donors, other supporters and new staff.

Priorities revolving around money, broken promises and all the other findings mentioned in the Introduction are common in human behaviour but, once again, when it comes to the environment, we can't play the same old games, without paying a terrible price. If we mess up these last chances to heal and respect the environment, the whole structure of society is going to change drastically. Changing one's own priorities, values and lifestyle now, can limit the severity of the changes which will be imposed by Nature. We need to communicate, discuss, agree and commit to long-term plans and then take appropriate *action*.

We have to encourage a revision of the values, priorities and attitudes of people in general and donors in particular, reminding them that they live on planet earth too – that money for the environment is not a gift but an investment.

This or some other evidence that people really understand and want to do something for their own and their children's survival, would encourage field-workers to continue their efforts. It would be a refreshing change to the old, and now dangerous, pattern of money being seen as the all-important factor – it is if we make it so. Money follows the attitudes and priorities of our hearts and minds. When these support a cause, money can fuel that cause - but not replace the attitudes and priorities. If we change our personal values, society's values must change as a consequence and we might save the tiger and ourselves - and have some change to spare!

In the meantime please ensure that your life-style options are as ethical and environmentally-friendly as possible for you and your circumstances – and your tigers and your children (for ideas and suggestions please see the 'Take Action' page of this website).