

LIFEFORCE REPORT 2009

Introduction

After the successful completion of the bio-diesel project (as featured in last year's report), all funds have been channelled into the Employment cell project.

Employment Cell Project

Despite the risks of and apprehension over initiating a completely new programme, the Employment Cell Project (EC) has proved an unqualified success in terms of people trained and placed in employment (removing people from the forest), the associated education and promotion of conservation, and by attracting future funding from agencies such as NABARD (National bank for Agriculture and Rural Development), CNI-SSI (Church of North India-Social Service Institute) and BFF (Born Free Foundation). As of December 2009, the EC has been implemented in 39 villages around Melghat Tiger Reserve, 11 villages around Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR), 19 villages around Pench Tiger Reserve (Maharashtra), 15 villages around Pench Tiger Reserve (Madhya Pradesh) and 18 villages around Satpura Tiger Reserve.



Employment Cell Meeting on training and placement

Placements during 2009

Area of Operation	Total
Pench Tiger Reserve	63
Kanha Tiger Reserve	31
Tadoba Tiger Reserve	18
Satpura Tiger Reserve	25

To give some idea of individual placements in and around the Tiger Reserves, a selection follows:

Village	Name	Salary	Start Date	Age	Employer
Ghatpendari (Pench TR.)	Meghnath Maskole	Rs 2,300 per month	Sept. 5th	25	Forest Dept. on daily wages
Dhamangaon (Kanha T.R.)	Bhupendra Yadav	Rs 160 per day + lodging	July 27th	18	Sintex Co. Butibori
Dhamangaon (Kanha T.R.)	Nilesh Yadav	-ditto-	July 27th	22	-ditto-
Kuthwahi (Kanha T.R.)	Dharam Singh	Rs 1200 per month	Aug. 10th	28	Christian Society Farmhouse
Chappri (Kanha T.R.)	Ganesh Saiyam	Rs 1500 per month + meals	Sept 13th	23	Maheshwari Resort
Chappri (Kanha T.R.)	Digambar Thakur	Rs 2200 per month	Sept 13th	22	Asst. Plumber
Dewada (TATR)	Vikas Meshram	Rs.1000 per month + lodging	July 20 th	19	Banglore Bakery, Chandrapur
Dewada (TATR)	Mukteshwar Yerme	-ditto-	July 20 th	18	-ditto-
Dhargaon (Satpura T.R.)	Sujan Singh	Rs 3000/-	July 16 th	26	Paper Mill, Hoshangabad
Nankot (Satpura T.R.)	Sannu Lal	Rs 3000/-	July 16 th	25	Paper Mill, Hoshangabad
Nayakheda (Satpura T.R.)	Brajesh Kumar	Rs 3000/-	Aug 17 th	26	Singh Commando Security Service Raipur
Podar (Satpura T.R.)	Santosh Yadav	Rs 3000/-	Aug 17th	27	Singh Commando Security Service Raipur

In addition to placing people with employers, numerous and various other beneficial activities have accompanied the EC programme, including making furniture from lantana and self help group (SHG) training programmes (as detailed below).

Making furniture from Lantana.

Lantana is a non-indigenous weed that grows virtually anywhere and everywhere, displacing indigenous species. No animals seem to consider it food (although goats may nibble it) and it appears to have no use. Villagers in Pench M.P who were making furniture from teak wood (an indigenous and valuable part of tiger habitat) were persuaded to change their raw material to lantana.

One lantana training programme was organized during May 2009 at Turia, (Pench T.R.) after which the EC team selected 4 trainees to carry out the work on a permanent basis. One trainee received an order worth Rs 2500/- during the training period itself, which provided good motivation.

In June, three people from Sawara village in East Pench showed interest in learning the craft. The EC provided transport to take them to Turia, where the previous month's trainees were already working. The 3 Sawara villagers – teacher Manoj Kumar Mankar, Vaishali Kumre and Resiya Uikey – learned the craft from the Turia trainees and have started to make items at Sawara.



Lantana products work in progress at Sawara



Vaishali from Sawara with the lantana furniture she has made

Self Help Group (SHG) Training programmes

SHGs are groups of volunteers who co-operate to produce goods that can be sold. The initial capital outlay to set the group up in business is provided by a loan. Sales revenue gradually repays the loan and leaves something for the members to share amongst themselves. The goods can range from, for examples, furniture, food, crafted goods and incense sticks.

The government has indicated that it intends to incorporate well-established and trained SHGs as fundamental parts of its rural development programmes. In response to this news, EC workshops were conducted wherein SHG members were trained in development and management of SHGs. One sequence of workshops was attended by 35 members from 10 SHGs.

The Employment Cell team also conducted follow-up meetings with two SHGs of local villagers at Adegaoon (TATR). The SHG members discussed a number of possible self-employment options and finally asked the EC to provide training for them to work with honey bees. Within only a few months this had been arranged and provided.

Other Activities

- Assisting five unemployed people to submit applications for the supply of sewing machines from the Tribal Welfare Department. So far two of the villagers, Prabha Masram and Kusum Uikey, have received machines.

- Training on vermi-compost (using earthworms to aerate and fertilise soil and thereby avoid use of artificial fertiliser) completed at Hoshangabad (Madhya Pradesh).
- A one-month training programme on ‘Nursery Maintenance and Vegetable Science’ completed successfully.
- A one-month 4WD training programme was started at Sillari, Pench T.R. The training programme will benefit 20 youths living in and around the Tiger reserve. After the successful completion of the training programme, the youths will be assisted in getting gainful employment.



Drivers training interview in progress at Sillari (Pench T.R.)

- A tribal dance group from Sawara (Pench T.R. (M.P.)) has been formed and was provided with a vehicle for transportation to their first performance at the nearby Tuli Resort, Turia, where they received their fee of Rs.2500/-.



Tribal dance group at resort Tuli

All the above activities and placement programmes have been accompanied by educational film shows and lectures on the importance of conservation. Although a cynic may consider the latter component as the obligatory and token 'add-on', politely tolerated by the recipients in order to secure employment, such cynicism might need adjustment in light of the real and important results it has produced. The following is a summary of three postings on the LifeForce website 'updates' page and relates to the forest adjacent to and continuous with Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve, called Lohara (Tiger Reserve boundaries are usually only lines on maps - no fences or physical barriers exist on the ground). Lohara forms an important part of the essential 'corridors' connecting Reserves. Central government allocated Adani Power Limited (APL) a 'coal block' at Lohara - 1750 hectares of core jungle area on which it could start mining – beginning with the felling of 1, 200 000 mature trees. This would have disastrous consequences for wildlife and the local environment in general. On July 20th 2009, a brave local conservationist named Bandu Dhotre began a fast unto death in opposition to the mining operation. As his hunger strike entered its ninth day, conservationists, social organizations and political parties (Congress, BJP and Shiv Sena) in the nearby town of Chandrapur, united and collectively called for a general strike in his support and for the mining permissions to be revoked. Traders in Chandrapur kept their shops closed in the main market in the morning. Students were turned away from schools and colleges. Even petrol pumps and cinemas closed (emergency services such as hospitals and medical shops remained open). No support for the cause came from government offices or banks, where attendance was normal.

By 1st August 2009 LifeForce received news that brave Mr. Dhotre could break his fast since permission for the mine had been officially revoked!

It is so heartening when people organise themselves to oppose the actions of governments and big business which fly in the face of the majority will, if not common sense.

Another encouraging episode reminds us of the power of education and the dedication of the NGO with which LifeForce is currently collaborating (the Satpuda Foundation (SF)). This time the target was PENCH Tiger Reserve through which the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) planned to build a multi-lane, two-way road (the NH-7 expansion). Politicians arrived at the relevant rural areas in support...of the road!!! In addition, the NHAI provided funds for the agitation of local people in support of NH-7 expansion and against NGOs for conservation. Whatever amount and type of education can be provided, money and rabble-rousers can always generate social unrest. Some locals made a roadblock at Seoni-Nagpur junction and also protested against the Satpuda Foundation and PENCH Tiger Reserve authority. For months, all SF personnel were under great stress and their offices and vehicles (including the EC vehicle) under threat. However, other local villagers who had benefited from the EC stood up in support of conservation. They said that the politicians come once in 5 years, but that the EC stayed with them and cared more than anybody else. **The locals actually said that they “believe the tiger can give us jobs and not this highway”**. Only due to their intervention was the immediate crisis successfully resolved for conservation. The situation now awaits government decisions but we are hopeful for a favourable final result.

All credit is due to the staff of SF for their courage and determination. The situation may not seem much, compressed into a few sentences in this report, but LifeForce personnel know what it can be like on the ground. It only takes one spark to ignite a tinderbox and lost or damaged lives or property can so easily result. It is also a tonic to see that the education programmes have connected tigers and employment in the perception of the locals. Many so-called ‘well-educated’ people the world over (including those comprising governments) do not understand the essential connections between ecology and economies.

LifeForce is currently in discussion with the Satpuda Foundation with regard to the future and further conservation programmes, while 2010 will see the completion of another LifeForce project, as described below.

The Larger Life Force

The year 2009 saw some major setbacks for the environment in general and the tiger in particular; in addition to the failure of Copenhagen, China (prior to and quite separately from Copenhagen) legalised the trade in tiger body parts. Although the new legislation applies only to ‘farmed tigers’ (a questionable practice in itself), the relaxation will, of course, make the laws protecting wild tigers virtually unenforceable.

Tigers suffered a further setback when, after years of effort (mainly by NGOs) to get Sansar Chand jailed, this notorious trader of poached tigers has been released on bail and one wonders about his connections in influential circles.

With regard to Copenhagen, some commentators have suggested that it represents a success, insofar as all the participating nations agree that climate change is a serious threat and also that alternative sources of energy need investigating and investment. The level to which our collective expectations can be reduced is surprising, if not amazing. That we can class the actions of any nation so far, in relation to the environmental crisis in general or climate change in particular, as a success, almost beggars belief. Now that climate change is irreversible, we have a meeting where it is agreed that the threats posed are severe and that we should be doing something about it – but we can't agree to do something about it, such as setting legally binding targets for CO₂. This is our 'success'. This successful failure is due to the possibility of one nation or corporation losing a profit or advantage to another - so all risk losing all. Like greedy, deeply unpleasant children unable to risk losing one sweet lest another have more, Mother Nature is going to take all sweets from all, probably accompanied by the severest, globally proportioned, smack in recorded history. Nor will Mother Nature be holding any meetings prior to correction. Literally and metaphorically, the waters are rising, Pacific islands are disappearing and the waters are deaf and indifferent to whom or what they will engulf.

Last year's report referred to an unspecified LifeForce effort trying to positively contribute to this whole sorry situation, on which and without exaggeration, all our lives literally depend. This effort has taken the form of a book. It has taken years to put together and still more of 2010 must be spent to complete it (finalise text, copyright permissions for text and images, editing of images, bibliography and credits, finalising layout and design) but it is hoped that it will be ready for publication during summer 2010. As any further revisions to the book's Introduction before publication will only be minor, it is reproduced here:

INTRODUCTION

Whilst this book provides information about real, physical tigers (including scientific material published here for the first time), and suggests innovative techniques for their conservation, its tigers roam far beyond the jungle, and the reader is invited to track these tigers through personal, psychological and philosophical terrain. The trails lead through some unexpected territory but, by the time we reach the final chapter, we will find all paths lead to the same place. This book does *not* cover the standard 'tiger topics' of geographical distribution, life-history, size and weight, fossils, art and advertising etc. - assuming the reader interested in tigers has access to this information many times over.

Before we begin our journey, it will be helpful to consider your current viewpoint - from where you currently view what we call a 'Tiger'.

What does the tiger represent to you? As you are reading this book, you likely have an interest in tigers but, perhaps, the word 'interest', whilst true, sounds too tepid for tigers. Tigers are usually associated with higher temperatures and burn bright beyond Blake's forests of the night. Finding the exact words to describe your reaction to, or the impression made by a tiger, might be difficult and, even if words are found, they probably can't quite capture the tiger or your feelings. For now 'passion for' might be preferable to 'interest in' and, from a romantic perspective, be clearly seen.

Yet, passion cannot be seen from a scientific perspective and you might see a tiger in terms of biology, ecology and genetics, a refined product of what some scientists consider to be aeons of evolutionary blindness and natural selection.

You possibly stand somewhere between the romantic and the scientist, somewhere between mysticism and reason, recognising functionality at the same time as aesthetic beauty and sensing something of mystery and unanswered questions. Even from a purely romantic viewpoint, you may still see ecological connections and the tiger's role in a greater scheme while, at the other extreme, a scientific view might see something silently challenging any claim that a tiger can only be form and function.

All these views can be seen from trails leading through the following chapters. Some of our questions and the difficulties we have defining our reactions to a tiger, might be answered or resolved along the way. However, complementing these, you might find that we can learn as much from questions that remain unanswered, such as those of William Blake's. Poems in addition to Blake's have relevance for our journey and, rather than relegate apt verses of poetry to decorate chapter headings, they feature in the text where they convey meanings more effectively than prose.

From wherever you view the tiger, there should be something in this book to interest you and, perhaps, something tempting you to try another viewpoint. For readers most interested in tiger biology, chapter II offers a series of 'notes', views and observations, the content of which, to this author's knowledge, has not been published before, and will therefore be, hopefully, of fresh interest (readers not particularly interested in tiger biology could omit most of chapter II, picking up at subsection 'Notes on Innate v. Reasoned Behaviour'). Jim Corbett accompanies us on much of the journey, and he is the main topic of chapter III, where we rest at his place for a while, taking a break from the exclusive rule of reason. This marks a mid-point and from there onward we consider points of view not completely constrained by logic and reason - without dismissing those that are. Viewpoints complementary to scientific ones are viewed from chapter IV where we look into some of nature's mysterious mirrors. Although chapters IV and V are not all 'mainstream', readers sincerely interested in preventing the tiger's extinction would be advised not to omit them, since the tiger will not be saved without addressing the issues they raise. As we approach our journey's end in chapter V we see that, while each perspective has its own validity, each relates to a single truth. One aspect of this truth is that the futures of tigers and humans are intimately linked. This is brought into sharp focus by considering the critical importance of tiger conservation in particular and the environmental crisis in general.

Trying to halt and reverse the decline of tigers, or any other species, without addressing our other environmental problems is of limited value or a waste of time, comparable to trying to save a leaf on a tree while the trunk is being sawn through. Although there seems to be an endless array of problems to address (environmentally and otherwise) many of them, when examined, do reveal common connections. In terms of the analogy just used; tracing sufficient 'leaves' backward leads us to branches, boughs and then a trunk. This book attempts to identify a number of leaves, branches, a few boughs and a major portion of the trunk. Assessment of such a broad range of topics requires sufficient detail to avoid bland generalisations and, at the same time limited detail, to avoid too much information obscuring the whole (if the reader will forgive the obvious but nonetheless apt proverb - not being able to see the wood for the trees!). The

author hopes to have struck the correct balance, on at least a few occasions, to clearly illustrate crucial connections. Other constraints include time, most importantly that remaining to the tiger, and then to us, as a species.

Experts on leaves or branches may well note omissions or inaccuracies. For whatever maybe lacking, it is believed that the most important portions of the boughs and trunk have been identified. Their critical importance in supporting all else demands their inclusion in radical and rapid remedial measures, without which we have no hope of saving the tiger and little hope of our surviving the environmental crisis in anything like our current population numbers. Readers are provided with references and suggestions that might assist them tracing the portions of those boughs and trunk supporting their own lives. Hence readers have no need to rely on information presented here and are encouraged to make their own assessments and act accordingly. Our current problems are as old as humanity but, unlike previous generations, the scale of our effects is now global and critical and, as we have nowhere else to go, we need to finally address them and do so without further delay. Although the most important of the solutions are of equal vintage, the suggestions presented here offer some fresh perspectives and, if these new labels on old bottles prove appealing and prompt an active response, their contents will bring benefits to the tiger, the environment, and the reader.

END OF BOOK PREVIEW

The book will be self-published and printed as a large (approx 200 x 270 mm) high quality hardback, with many colour images, and printed on paper sourced from sustainable plantations, and which is acid-free (paper that will not yellow or brown with age) Hence its price will probably have to be £29 - £30. Even at this price, the costs of production and the commission taken by retailers (50 – 60% of the cover price) mean that this is not a profit-making exercise. In fact, it is possible it could make a loss. To minimise this possibility, please try to sell a copy or two to your friends and ask them to purchase it through the LifeForce website. As the future of LifeForce has always been precarious if, for whatever reason, it is not possible to purchase through the LF website the next best source will be the publishers, whose details will be sent to you when the book is available. It will also be available through the large retailers but their level of commission explains why sales through the two sources just referred to are preferable.

If profits are far from guaranteed, why has it been written? The best answer is to read it! For now, in summary, it presents some suggested solutions to our collective predicament. It also offers readers views of life extending far beyond, but not forgetting, conservation and environmental issues. Some readers may discover new ways of assessing their lives, their values and priorities. As the world will only be healed by each person's healthy contributions (like those of the people of Chandrapur) this book tries to illustrate, from many perspectives, the importance of positive peaceful action, both physically and spiritually. Finally, if any lift to the LifeForce profile results, and LifeForce still exists to utilise it, it will have been achieved by a means of communication LF believes is 'healthy'. We shall write to you again when it is available.

Many thanks for your continued support.