

LIFEFORCE REPORT 2013

INTRODUCTION

LifeForce continues its important financial support for its partner, the Satpuda Foundation (SF) based in central India. The conservation policies of LifeForce and SF are identical and one reinforces the other, both in principle and practice.

CONSERVATION WORK COMPLETED

Village Relocations

Last year's LF Report referred to ten villages having been relocated between Jan. 2012 and March 2013. This important conservation process has continued and from April 2013 to December 2013 two more villages have been moved out of Melghat Tiger Reserve. While it is the State government of Maharashtra which funds and ultimately carries out the physical re-locations, the preparations in general and discussions with the villages in particular are much and valuably assisted by SF, the continuous support, advice and co-operation of which has been essential to the operation. As usual, the villagers have received Rs 10 lakh (one million rupees) per adult, free land for a house, and better access to markets, education, health facilities, public transport, the courts, police and the tahsil (village headman).

Any remaining families from Churni and Vairat villages (relocated the previous year) have now also been moved, along with 350 families from Amona (At Kasod), Nagartas and Bharukheda, which were also moved in 2012. One of the villages relocated in 2013 (in November) is Somthana Bujruk.



Villagers of Somthana Bujruk in dialogue with SF personnel and government officials before their re- location out of the Tiger Reserve in November 2013

Herbivores rapidly return to the sites vacated by re-located villages, and predators soon follow. The benefit to conservation is great, not only in terms of the increased resources and connected habitat available to animals but also due to potential poachers being unable to claim to Forest Guards that they are visiting relatives in villages that no longer exist.

Community Patrolling of Tiger Reserve Borders

Many villages are situated around the borders of Tiger Reserves. Ideally, villages do not completely surround Reserves since, if they do, the animals are not free to move along migration routes or to establish new territories away from those of their parents (especially important for young male tigers). In some cases villages do surround a Reserve, such as at Ranthambore Tiger Reserve in Rajasthan, which is an 'island' in a 'sea' of cultivation. This is another reason why LF supports conservation initiatives in the Tiger Reserves of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra (Satpura, Melghat, Pench, Tadoba-Andhari, Kanha and Bandhavgarh) which are still (but only just) connected by forest 'corridors' and are not, as yet, surrounded by villages. This is another aspect to the policy of village relocations as reported on above.

Usually, the presence of humans is a negative feature for Protected Areas (PAs), even at the border or boundaries. However, as the numbers of Forest Guards are never sufficient to patrol all areas adequately, villagers could represent important additional man-power for patrolling - if they are motivated to do so and are met with co-operation by the Forest Department.

Due mainly to the efforts of SF, Pench Tiger Reserve (PTR) has effectively established a link between local communities and wildlife conservation by persuading local villagers living on the fringes of the Reserve to patrol its borders. The Principal Secretary (forests) of the government of Maharashtra, Mr. Praveen Pardeshi, was highly impressed during his recent visit to Pench Tiger Reserve to see the ways in which SF has established community support for wildlife protection. Mr. Srinivasa Reddy, Field Director of Pench Tiger Reserve has assured SF that he will involve other villages as well and plans to financially reward volunteers. A fund of Rs 50,000 has been kept for this purpose from Pench Tiger Foundation.

On January 17th (2014), a new patrol found a dead tiger due to poaching in Harnakund nullah (ravine) in the buffer area of Pench in the Deolapar range. In the absence of previous regular patrolling, the remains of the putrefied carcass lay at the spot for nearly a month.

Satpuda Foundation has organised and mobilised this support by the local community and PTR administration and provided financial assistance to its staff for running the programme. It has been a great success and has actually stopped the intrusion of outsiders into many areas of PTR during 2013.



Village volunteer team patrolling around a pond near Kolutmara village

Reducing the Harmful Effects of Infrastructure Projects

The LF Report of 2012 highlighted the dangers to animals posed by irrigation canals.



Reminder of the obstacle these channels represent to animals - especially when dry

Other infrastructure developmental projects such as highways and power lines also represent dangers to wildlife and these issues (and the accidental deaths they cause) were raised by SF personnel at the meeting of the Maharashtra State Board for Wildlife (MSBWL) in January 2013. The irrigation canals in particular were causing a huge and adverse impact on the wildlife of Satpuda landscape. SF personnel made a convincing presentation before the MSBWL. Finally, the MSBWL asked the Irrigation Department to budget for and plan mitigation measures for existing canal networks passing through wildlife habitats. The Irrigation Department submitted its budget and plan in October 2013. Around 110 crore (one crore = 10 million) rupees will be required to implement the mitigation measures on existing canals passing through key wildlife habitats of the Satpuda landscape. The department also installed some overpasses for tigers and prey species in Bor sanctuary in November 2013. This is a big achievement for wildlife conservation in central India.



A mitigation measure constructed in Bor sanctuary of Maharashtra State

Addressing Increasing Human-Wildlife Conflict Issues

The great efforts of the NGOs and the government of Maharashtra inside as well as outside protected areas (PAs) has resulted in a local increase in tiger and leopard populations. For example, there are around 40-50 Tigers inside the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) and an equal number of tigers outside TATR in buffer areas and 'wildlife corridors'.

However, the communities living in buffer villages and 'wildlife corridors' have neither taken a serious note of this significant increase nor changed their practices, especially the forest dependent families (landless) which extract fuel wood, bamboo, mahua flowers and tendu leaves - collectively known as minor forest produce (MFP), who have not reduced or modified their visits to the forest to collect it. Cubs of carnivores growing up in core areas of Tiger Reserves such as those of TATR have little or no experience of humans. As they reach maturity and seek their own territories they disperse into the buffer areas around the Reserves and encounter people, usually the collectors of MFP, for the first time. These situations can result in surprises for both parties and provoke defensive attacks by the carnivores which result in death or injury to the unfortunate people involved. From 2007 to 2013, there have been around 83 human deaths due to these situations, and (from 2008) approximately 5861 deaths of livestock recorded in the Chandrapur district of Maharashtra alone (as compared to 223 human and 21,775 livestock deaths in Maharashtra State during 2007- Dec.2012)

These troubling figures demand preventative steps rather than simply paying compensation after the fact. On 17th April 2013 SF personnel wrote to the then Prime Minister of India & Chairman, National Board for Wildlife, Government of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh, asking for special provision for human-wildlife conflict prone landscapes to implement 'alternate livelihood programmes' for MFP and livestock dependent families living in 'buffer villages' and in 'wildlife corridors'. Under such programmes, 'village micro plans' can be implemented by village eco-development committees (VEDC) or joint forest management committees (JFMC)

In addition, in order to help prevent human-wildlife conflict, SF designed a training programme for Forest Department staff. Several workshops on Human-Wildlife Conflict Resolution were planned. The first such workshop of 30 forest staff from Amravati forest circle was arranged by Chikhaldara Rangers Training College and Nature Conservation Society, Amravati (NCSA) jointly, in October 2013 at Muthawa community Resource Centre of NCSA near Harisal in Melghat. The forest staff from Amravati, Buldana and Akola District were given training in this workshop. Apart from indoor lecture sessions, participants went to villages suffering human-wildlife conflict and talked to people affected by it. Later, participants analysed the collected information and discussed remedial measures. The second such workshop was conducted for forest staff of the Yawatmal Forest circle in December 2013.



Human-Wildlife Conflict Resolution workshop in progress 2013

THE LARGER LIFEFORCE

Due to its limited resources, LifeForce has concentrated its efforts on the largest area of tiger-occupied tiger habitat left on Earth, as identified above. This does not mean we undervalue any other remaining natural habitat, or other remnant populations of any species. Sumatran tigers are now down to as few as c.400 individuals in the wild.

The Spring 2014 newsletter from Greenpeace UK carried an article entitled 'How do tigers end up in your bathroom?' The sequence begins with the destruction of their habitat. Vast areas of the Indonesian rainforest are being cut down to grow palm oil on illegal plantations. Traders buy this oil and sell it to manufacturers of consumer goods. Manufacturers including Proctor and Gamble buy this 'dirty' i.e. illegal palm oil to make products such as 'Head & Shoulders' shampoo, Oral B toothpaste and Gillette shaving gel.

As explained in the LifeForce book 'Framing Fearful Symmetries' we can implement the most powerful conservation strategies by spending our money selectively. Please contact Proctor and Gamble and tell them that you will not buy their products until they can guarantee that they only use legal palm oil from sustainable resources. It only takes an email. However, if you would prefer to join an organised campaign please go to www.protectparadise.org/dirtysecret



picture of a Sumatran tiger from the Greenpeace newsletter – dying out due to shampoo and shaving foam!

Consumer pressure is also our best hope to avoid being force fed Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs). Earlier this year LF wrote to all its supporters urging them to oppose the growing pressure on government to relax restrictions on large scale cultivation of GMO. The letter explained the dangers of GMO in detail. LF personnel also wrote to suppliers, MPs and supermarkets. However, we are losing the fight and GMO is gaining ground (no pun intended!), mainly due to ignorance and/or apathy among consumers. It is via your M.P. and supermarkets that you might exert most effect: please congratulate Waitrose for its stance in opposing GMO – even guaranteeing non-GMO produce in the animal-feed of the various meats it sells. LF could find no such assurances from other supermarkets and their replies were intellectually vacuous. Nonetheless, it is important for you to add your voice to the opposition. Currently, this is the most powerful way we can prevent the growing dangers of GMO.