

LIFEFORCE REPORT 2016

INTRODUCTION

Both LifeForce (LF) and the Satpuda Foundation (SF), based in central India, believe in a holistic approach to conservation:

'Grassroots' activities, including soil and water conservation, habitat restoration, organising of community anti-poaching patrols, assisting with forest fire fighting, and promoting sustainable organic farming practices in agriculture.

Education is a tool for resolving conservation problems and is targeted at both village children and adults.

Assisting communities in basic public hygiene and village cleanliness to address health and human-wildlife conflict issues (animals will scavenge for food scraps unhygienically disposed of and bring them into close proximity with humans).

Organising of skill-development programmes to enable unemployed villagers and women's self-help groups (SHGs) to set up small businesses or trades as livelihood options which reduce or eliminate their dependence on the forests.

Linking holistic local forest conservation with holistic global conservation programmes with programmes such as climate change mitigation measures and water conservation.

CONSERVATION WORK COMPLETED

Bullet point summary followed by some supporting details:

- Organised/participated in 126 patrols in jungles to stop or prevent poaching and other illegal activities
- Built a total of 38 check dams built; created 7 new waterholes; cleaned and de-silted 76 existing waterholes
- Dug 45 soak pits to address health and human-wildlife conflict issues
- Organised 60 anti-plastic programmes to remove plastic litter from areas adjoining wildlife habitats and also organised 84 programmes to clean wells and areas surrounding hand pumps to promote village cleanliness
- Dug 36 compost pits to promote organic farming and lessen impact of chemical fertilisers in areas adjoining forests
- Assisted in planting over 41,000 tree saplings in 53 plantation drives
- 654 visits to village schools to educate students about nature, wildlife and the need for conservation. Including repeat visitors, total attendance at these lectures exceeded 24,500
- Organised a total of 230 film shows on nature and wildlife conservation. Including repeat visitors, total attendance at these film shows was close to 17,000

- Organised seven 2-day residential nature camps in various Tiger Reserves for school students
- As part of 'livelihood support' activities; assisted 39 unemployed youths in getting jobs and organised 32 skill-development programmes which equipped 378 people with vocational skills
- Organised a total of 330 medical camps to give free treatment and medicines to villagers. Including repeat visitors, total attendance at these camps was approx. 11,700
- Arranged 41 Village Eco-development Committee meetings to discuss issues related to village development, human-wildlife conflicts and wildlife conservation
- Brought awareness of and implemented actions to fight climate change and conserve water in the villages of Satpuda landscape

Further details on selected programmes:

WATER CONSERVATION

A total of 38 check dams were built during the year, using locally available materials. These dams, mostly built on streams, help retain water and recharge the water table. They also provide drinking water to both domestic and wild animals. The dams were built by volunteers comprised of adult villagers, members of SHGs that we had supported and children from local village schools.

In other water conservation work, a total of 45 soak pits were dug across the landscape. The soak pits, dug next to wells/hand pumps in villages, collect spill over and run-off water and help recharge the water table.

To ensure that wildlife can gain access to water, 7 new waterholes were created. 76 existing waterholes located inside jungles across the landscape were cleaned and de-silted. These waterholes were clogged with organic litter and, in some cases; the water was barely visible beneath floating scum.



Volunteers standing on the check dam built by them at Matkuli in Satpura Tiger Reserve

EDUCATION

Education is one key tool to resolve conservation problems and promote the conservation agenda. A recent target audience was school-going children in villages adjoining 6 major Tiger Reserves in central India. The children were sensitised to the conservation message through a mix of classroom lectures, nature games with a conservation message, nature trails, bird spotting trails and nature camps. Visits to the Nature Interpretation Centres at the Tiger Reserves and safaris are also organised with the support of Tiger Reserve management. In addition, the children are periodically led on rallies through their villages so that the conservation message is conveyed to adult villagers also.

All the key days in the “eco-calendar“ such as World Environment Day, World Forestry Day, Wildlife Week etc. are also celebrated and a range of programmes is organised including quizzes, drawing, painting and essay contests.

During the year, our teams made a total of 654 visits to various classrooms, which were attended by a total of 24,500 students.



Pench Tiger Reserve (Maharashtra), Kolitmara - Students learn about nature during Wildlife Week

LIVELIHOOD SUPPORT TO VILLAGERS

Livelihood options for villagers are a major focus as most villagers in the areas of operations are very poor and dependent on forests for their survival. The Foundation’s experience has shown that communities with stable, sustainable livelihoods are more likely to be long term consistent partners in conservation. Unemployed villagers were assisted in getting jobs with both local businesses, such as tourist resorts, and with businesses in nearby urban centres. Skill-development programmes were also organised where villagers pick up skills to help them get jobs or start their own businesses or trades – all of which take them out of the forest, on which they are no longer directly dependent. These training programmes are, when appropriate, organised jointly with the Forest Department or with Village Eco-Development Committees. These programmes include:

Tailoring and embroidery
Training in becoming a beautician
Welding
Diesel engine mechanic
Electrician
Driving four-wheelers
Poultry farming
Data entry
Making products from lantana

A total of 39 unemployed youths gained employment while 378 people benefited from the various skill-development programmes.

COMMUNITY PATROLS

No matter how dedicated Forest Department staff may be, there are simply too few of them, and the areas to be patrolled too large, for complete security to be achieved. One of the most significant achievements has been the involvement of village communities in patrolling forests in a 5 km radius around villages to thwart poaching, fire setting, tree felling and illegal grazing by domestic animals. Thanks to the assistance given to village communities by SF and LF, villagers participate voluntarily in this crucial activity to protect wildlife and forests. 126 such patrols took place in Pench Tiger Reserve (Maharashtra) and Navegaon-Nagzira Tiger Reserve.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND WATER CONSERVATION

With the support of the European Climate Foundation, awareness has been promoted among the villages situated in the buffer zones of Tiger Reserves and inter-linking corridors about the impacts of climate change and village-level actions (e.g. water conservation programmes) which need to be taken to reduce the worst effects of the problem.

THE LARGER LIFEFORCE

This report opened with reference to conservation in India approached holistically by SF and LF. As LifeForce supporters will be aware, it is also essential to consider conservation and environmental protection in the context of the 'Larger LifeForce' i.e. as holistically as possible – up to and including the planetary level.

With regard to climate change, poorly educated and poorly equipped tribal people are taking measures against it, while Western well-educated and well equipped governments lag behind. The Paris Agreement on Climate Change came into force on 4th November 2016. By the end of 2016, 114 countries (79% of attendees) had ratified the Agreement including, significantly, China. The other most significant country is, of course, the USA but, post Donald Trump's election, also in November 2016, the most senior UN climate official has (as of March 2017) been unable to arrange a meeting with the U.S. state department.

(<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/mar/02/climate-change-trump-administration-un-paris-agreement>)

If LF supporters need a reminder, the LF Report of 2008 provided a concise summary of the dangers of excess carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and nature's original arrangements.

Climate change leads us to another issue of critical importance – the freshwater crisis (see <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/mar/08/how-water-shortages-lead-food-crises-conflicts>), which global warming aggravates in ways described below. Although almost 71% of the Earth's surface is

covered with water only 2.5% of it is freshwater. Of that, only 0.3% is present on the surface. Forests, amongst other essential functions, hold the water table in the land, making it available to surrounding or adjacent cultivated land or land 'developed' for industry or housing. Demand for freshwater is increasing (due to increasing populations and the increasing affluence of some of those populations) but planetary supplies are coming under threat since, amongst other environmental problems, rising sea levels due to global warming are contaminating some freshwater supplies with salt water, while climate change is predicted to increase droughts (higher temperatures increase evaporation from the earth). Freshwater supplies subject to human use suffer high degrees of wastage and can be subject to contamination by faulty waste disposal, medical and industrial pollutants and fertiliser run-off. As supplies become limited costs will rise and, inevitably, the poor will be most vulnerable as well as, of course, plants and animals. Depending on the degree of water scarcity, starvation, disease, political instability and armed conflict can follow.

With regard to freshwater scarcity, poorly educated and poorly equipped tribal people are taking measures against it, while Western well-educated and well equipped governments lag behind. Professor Peter Rogers is a senior adviser to the Global Water Partnership. He reports that, to a great extent, technologies and policy tools that can prevent a major water crisis already exist but that action is needed now from governments to agree and implement plans to avoid disaster for millions of people all around the world. While measures to address global warming are attempts to cure problems that could have been prevented, we still have a chance to prevent further serious problems; in this case a dangerous depletion of freshwater, but these opportunities are, at least at time of writing and as far as this author can discover, still being ignored (Rogers, Peter. Facing the Freshwater Crisis. Scientific American. August 2008 pp. 28-35 + <https://www.raconteur.net/sustainability/worldwide-water-crisis-is-looming> December 2016)

Obviously, in addition to voicing our concerns to our local MPs and government in general and considering voting 'Green', **we can ensure that we do not waste energy or water** – three quarters of the energy used in the home is for water heating and much of this is wasted. Not only does this waste your money but (due to heat being produced by burning coal, oil or gas) you are contributing to global warming and using up precious reserves of natural resources. Insulate where possible lofts, walls, windows, pipes, floors and hot water tanks. Only heat rooms and water when necessary, fit long-life fluorescent light bulbs (they are expensive to buy initially but more cost-effective in the long-term), switch off electrical appliances when they are not in use (leaving them on 'stand-by' also consumes electricity), take a shower instead of a bath, change your energy supplier - it's simple to switch to an electricity supplier offering a 'Green Tariff' that uses or produces renewable energy from sources such as wind-power, use the car as infrequently as possible and use public transport whenever possible, turn off the tap between brushes of your teeth, wash yourself or your crockery in a sink or bowl of water i.e. not under continuously running water, shower rather than bathe, water the garden and wash the car less frequently, repair leaking taps and pipes, and **educate your children to understand the priority of nature and the environment.**

'It is far better to light a single candle than to curse the darkness'

This saying is attributed to many sources and the original seems to be lost. LF supporters will know that it is quoted for the principle it expresses since candles made of paraffin wax, a product of petroleum refining, does not harmonise with the recommendations made above! (Even candles made of beeswax - a byproduct of honey collection – are still not ideal due to their combustion in air producing carbon dioxide).