

PENCH STRIPES

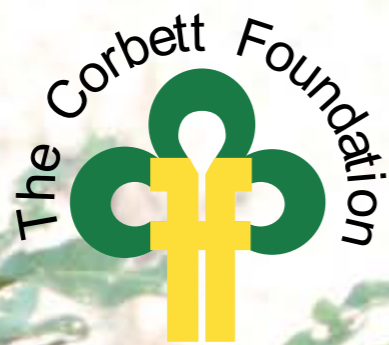
A HALF-YEARLY MAGAZINE OF THE PENCH TIGER RESERVE



NOVEMBER 2014

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A MESSAGE FROM THE FIELD DIRECTOR



“Pench Stripes” is an endeavour to compile the important events that take place throughout the year in the Pench Tiger Reserve (PTR). We intend for this magazine to convey all managerial issues, eco-development aspects, tourism and protection concerns and other social and cultural happenings of the reserve to the public. It will also serve as an important database for future managers, being a repository of all major events happening at Pench.

Pench Stripes will serve as a channel for disseminating information and ideas, so that successful activities can be replicated at other areas of operation with suitable modifications. This magazine will help the media, policy makers and planners to know the actual happenings in at Pench. We hope that this medium will help us spread our knowledge to the world and at the same time enable us to and introspect about suggestions and ideas received from a wide spectrum of society.

Alok Kumar
Field Director
Pench Tiger Reserve

A MESSAGE FROM THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR



I would like to take this opportunity to recognise the dedication, commitment and hard work of the Pench team, led by Field Director Mr. Alok Kumar, that has contributed to the success of Pench Tiger Reserve. “Pench Stripes” is a venture to compile events, management practices, ecotourism and eco-development initiatives, protection issues and wildlife awareness programmes along with other important information.

At Pench, we have carried out some of the best practices and some are yet to be implemented. We succeed only when we are clear about our directions, have accurate background information and plan out our strategy before implementing them. All successful plans start with studying the facts, inviting possibilities and altering the things that don't work. “Pench Stripes” is a platform to seek suggestions from and to highlight our management practices to the outside world.

Dr. Kiran Bisen
Deputy Director
Pench Tiger Reserve



EDITORIAL

It has been six months since I stepped into the beautiful, extravagant reserve that is one of the best tiger habitats of the country – Pench Tiger Reserve. I have always been awed by the magnificence of the tiger and its habitat, but only in these six months have I truly understood it. At Pench, I have seen the untiring efforts of the forest staff in the conservation and protection of what is undisputedly the biggest gift from nature to us – the forests and all that they shelter. The contribution of these people is indeed noble, and is hardly recognised by the general public. My heart goes out to these unsung heroes who patrol the jungles and guard the natural heritage of our nation. The Field Director, Mr. Alok Kumar, is the most crucial source of inspiration for the dedicated staff and excellent management.

The sad testimony to the need for such management and dedication is in the fact that it has taken us only a century to go from fifty thousand tigers in the wild to less than two thousand. It is also more critical now than ever to conserve and protect our forests, with the looming threats of climate change and the multiplicity of its effects, as also the worsening quality of the environment that we live in, where most of the people on our planet are exposed to some form of pollution or the other. It is now essential to conserve this species along with its habitat for the very sustenance of human kind and life as we know it.

It is not only for the earth that we need to conserve our forests and its wild inhabitants, but for our own sake as well. We are but a speck of dust in the larger scale of things. For the earth to continue having suitable conditions for our survival, we must act now. If we want our children to be able to marvel at the magnificence of this beautiful planet, we must act now. If we want that nature be our ally in the fight for survival, we must act now. This is the point that the populace and its leaders need to understand before it is too late. To achieve our goal of conserving this iconic species (and ourselves in the process), we are working towards better wildlife management policies, building partnerships with local communities and promoting awareness.

Here at Pench, with the little experience I have, when I cannot even say that I understand the term “conservation” completely, I am inspired enough to dedicate myself to save the wild stripes. I owe this profound passion to the magic of the natural world and the surreal majestic tiger that calls it ‘home’.

Pragati Mandloi
Consultant
Pench Tiger Reserve

NDTV'S SAVE THE TIGER CAMPAIGN



NDTV has been a strong supporter of tiger conservation in the country since 2010. As a part of its 'Save the Tiger' campaign, NDTV has chosen Pench, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, as the location for the Kids for Tigers' National Camp. Kids for Tigers, an initiative by Aircel and Sanctuary Asia reaches out to thousands of children across the country, spreading awareness about the urgent need to conserve our country's diminishing wildlife. Each year, Kids for Tigers inspires bright, young, budding environmentalists of the country and is an excellent platform for them to learn from some of our nation's finest conservation leaders. This year, these enthusiastic tiger ambassadors interacted with starlet Dia Mirza, and discussed the major conservation issues our country is grappling with amidst the rich biodiversity of the Pench landscape. The forest staff, the real guardians of the wild, who have to brave adverse conditions to protect our forests, were congratulated and thanked for their unrelenting determination and courage. The children learnt about the significance of saving the tiger and other wild animals, implications of climate change, the importance of forests for our water supply, and several other facts about wildlife in the camp.

SAMARPAN



"Samarpan" is a unique initiative undertaken by the Pench Tiger Reserve which aims at creating a strong network of informers in the buffer zone of the reserve. The vision is to generate an atmosphere of trust and integrity between the department and local communities. There is a strong potential for forest-dependent communities to become informers for the department, and this initiative aims at gaining their trust, help and cooperation in conservation efforts. Around 200 adults and children from each selected family were given umbrellas, school bags, lunch boxes, water bottles and torches. The forest department staff and members from village panchayats were present during the programme which served as a platform for both sides to interact and discuss ideas. The selected members of the community shared all their grievances, concerns and experiences related to the forest and villages, and were briefed about the channels through which they can offer their help to the department in saving the forest. The programme generated goodwill, motivated community members, and was successful in garnering their commitment towards reporting any harmful and illegal activity they observe in the forest and participate in conservation efforts. These motivated individuals will be the very strength and backbone of the forest department in the future.

KANHA-PENCH LANDSCAPE MEETING



On the 23rd of August, 2014, a meeting for all stakeholders working in the Kanha-Pench Landscape was organised in Kanha Tiger Reserve. The meeting served as a platform for researchers, conservationists and NGOs, working in the Kanha-Pench Landscape to share their perspectives and findings, and develop networks for collaborative future work in the region, and work together towards the shared-vision of a landscape where man and wildlife can live in harmony. Officials of the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department along with teams from many organisations like FES, RBS Foundation, Pradan, The Corbett Foundation (TCF), WWF-India, Pratham, Gram Oorja Solutions Private Limited, Wildlife Conservation Trust (WCT), BASIX, NRLM, attended the meeting.

WWF-India, one of the pioneer organisations working in the landscape, shared its past work and future plans in the region. WCT talked about its work on education initiatives and its focus on vocational training. TCF shared information about its livelihood training programmes in the buffer zone of Kanha and in the Kanha-Pench Corridor in Balaghat district. BASIX emphasised on building the capacity of local farmers and creating a network

of local resource persons in villages. The RBS Foundation is working in the area with an objective to enhance the income generation capacity among local communities and to support conservation efforts of the government and other organisations. The RBS project supports 10,000 families in 175 villages located in the Kanha-Pench landscape and works in collaboration with the government for programmes that address community welfare and ecosystem restoration. A team of professionals from the Foundation for Ecological Security (FES) and Pradan are working on the issues of livelihood generation, fisheries, poultry, bamboo crafts, agri-interventions and related issues in around 28 villages of Mandla district. A team from the budding organisation Gram Oorja Solutions Private Limited presented a few brilliant energy ideas to fulfil basic sustainable energy needs of villages where electricity is still not available. Their work on rural electrification has shown positive results in other parts of the country.

The meeting was a great platform for the convergence of different organisation with different expertise working towards a common goal of conservation and sustainable development.

BUFFER BOOM

New destinations have been opened up in the buffer zone of Pench Tiger Reserve to reduce tourism pressure on the core zone of the park and with the objective of providing ecotourism related livelihood options to the people belonging to villages situated inside the buffer zone.

WOLF TRAIL OPEN FOR TOURISTS

One such new destinations is the wolf trail of Khawasa. This ecotourism zone is near the main entry gate of Turia. The area is engulfed in scenic beauty and is rich in floral and faunal biodiversity, and many tigers are known to tread on its paths. Wolf sightings are very common in this zone. The large reservoir in Kohka village in the area is a hotspot for birdwatchers. Safari drives have also been initiated here and around six villages in and around this zone are benefitting from tourism.

RUKHAD

Rukhad is a small forest village situated on the Jabalpur-Nagpur highway; nearly 20 km south of Seoni. The town has been immortalised by Kipling in *The Jungle Book*. The forests of Rukhad are now a part of the buffer zone of the Pench Tiger Reserve. Although these forests have been famous for their wildlife for a long time, they have been recently opened to regular ecotourism under the aegis of the Madhya Pradesh Ecotourism Development Board (MPEDP). In Rukhad, one can opt for a wildlife safari, live at a tree house and engage in activities like bird watching, nature trails, boating, picnics, and others. The forests of Rukhad are among the most beautiful and serene places in Pench Tiger Reserve.

SAKATA

Sakata is yet another amazing destination situated in the Pench buffer zone. Situated in the middle of the forest, with no disturbances from the outside world, you can relax in the rest house which was built over a century ago. Sakata is a very small tribal forest village with around 15 households where one can interact with the villagers and learn about the local tribal culture. MPEDP has opened various camping and other recreational activities at this site as well.



THE FOREST TREE HOUSE AND THE LAKE VIEW FROM THE ROOM



TOURISM DEVELOPMENT



ARCHERY



PAINT BALL



CAMPING



MPEDB TEAM

RESTORING BIOGAS PLANTS



The India Eco-development Project has installed biogas units in the villages in the buffer zone of Pench Tiger Reserve to ensure access to sustainable and renewable sources of energy to villagers way back in the early 1990s, but due to lack of awareness on how to maintain and repair these plants, and lack of proper monitoring, they became dysfunctional and were eventually abandoned. The Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) surveyed these villages and identified 450 plants with a scope for restoration. These plants were repaired, restored and are now fully functional owing to the efforts of the BNHS team. The team also monitors these plants on weekly basis to ensure their functionality.

MONSOON PATROLLING



During monsoons, the Forest Department gears up to patrol the most interior and sensitive parts of the jungle to manage and protect it. Forests are most vulnerable to illegal activities and poaching during the monsoon, and poachers try to take maximum advantage of the unfavourable weather conditions. At such times, everyone, from watchers to the Field Director, patrols sensitive areas of the jungle. At places where vehicles cannot enter, they patrol on foot. Pench Tiger Reserve has trained its staff for patrolling and equipped them with accessories like raincoats, shoes, vehicles, and medicines.



BUSTED: LEOPARD POACHING

A racket dealing with trading parts of big cats has been busted in Gondia, Maharashtra. Nails of leopards were seized after the Pench Tiger Reserve received details from an informer that the nails were smuggled from Vijaypani village located in the buffer zone of Pench Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh. After receiving the information, the department employed an investigation team comprising of staff members posing as prospective buyers. When it was confirmed that these villagers were suppliers to the international wildlife market, they were arrested on the spot, taken into custody and interrogated. They confessed to electrocuting the animal. A dog squad was summoned to further investigate the whole area. According to a report by TRAFFIC India, four leopards have been poached every week in India in the last 10 years.

HARASSING TIGER CUBS

In Kurai, a forest village in the buffer zone of Pench, six people were arrested for harassing and teasing tiger cubs. They were caught on camera by an informer of the forest department. After the information reached the Field Director's office, the criminals were arrested within 24 hrs. Looking at the seriousness of the crime, they were denied bail. This move taken by the department has spread the message in the whole area that such atrocious and harmful activities will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

INITIATIVES AND NEW DEVELOPMENTS

HARYALI MAHOTSAV



A plantation drive was undertaken on Hariyali Mahotsav on the 31st of July, where saplings were planted across 243 sites in the buffer zone and villages around Pench, in places like schools, colleges, forest areas and private lands. This initiative was an attempt to create a world record. If it gets registered, it will serve as a remarkable symbol for nature conservation efforts in the state.

LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND CONSERVATION

A unique initiative has been undertaken in the Pench to involve locals in park management activities. Villagers from all 107 villages in the buffer zone will be taken on a visit inside the park on a rotational basis; every year one third of the villages will be covered. This initiative will be replicated in the entire state from next year onwards. Through this activity, the forest department wishes to help create sense of belonging amongst villagers, and garner their support and active cooperation in conservation efforts.

WTI TRAINING SESSION



All front-line forest staff have been trained by the resource persons from the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI). The training focused on detection and prevention of forest offences with sessions on handling of court cases. It was an excellent interactive training programme with various mock exercises, classroom and practical sessions.

TIGER CONSERVATION PLAN

On the 31st August, 2014, the Tiger Conservation Plan of PTR was submitted to the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA). Pench is first tiger reserve in the state to complete and submit its tiger conservation plan for the core, buffer and corridors. It will be implemented for ten years, i.e. 2015-16 to 2024-25, and is prepared as per the guidelines of NTCA. It extensively covers all important aspects necessary for saving wild tigers in the area. Special attention is given to ecotourism in the buffer zone to enhance livelihoods and to boost conservation efforts.

LEGAL ADVICE AT PENCH

The Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) has always extended its support to the Pench Tiger Reserve. This time, WTI is providing legal assistance in the prosecution of wildlife crime cases. To facilitate legal support, WTI at its own cost, has assigned a practicing lawyer, Mr. Yash Kumar Soni from Umaria, who is providing his valuable legal assistance to park authorities. He is helping in proper preparation, filing and advising in efficient prosecution of trial court cases registered under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

CATTLE IMMUNIZATION DRIVE

A cattle vaccination drive has been conducted to protect cattle against diseases like foot and mouth disease, black quarter and hemorrhagic septicemia in villages situated in the buffer zone, with the help of the animal husbandry departments of Seoni and Chhindwara districts of Madhya Pradesh. The cattle population in buffer villages is around 50,000, out of which around 40,000 cattle have been vaccinated.

LOCAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (LAC)

The Local Advisory Committee of Pench Tiger Reserve formed in 2014 is now fully functional and has started working on developing tourism activities in the park. Meetings are held at regular intervals in Jabalpur under the chairmanship of the Divisional Commissioner. The committee has made rainwater harvesting, waste management and solar water heater installation compulsory, and has also banned barbed wire fencing in hotels and resorts in the area.

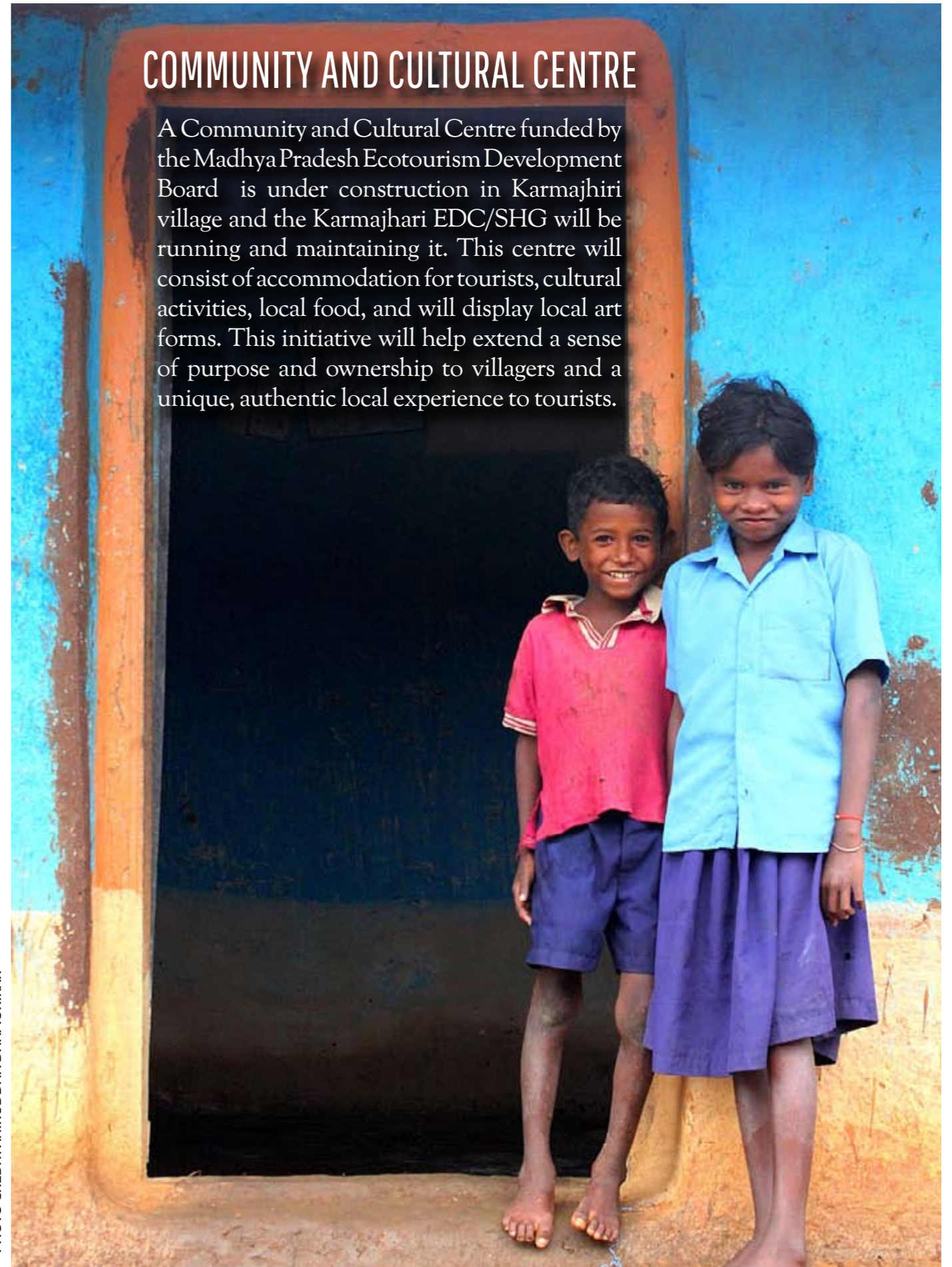
RESTORING BAMBOO FORESTS

In order to restore the degraded bamboo forests, 100 bamboo clumps were donated to each of the 774 beneficiaries from the Self Help Groups (SHG) of eco-Development committees. This was an effort to link livelihoods of villagers with conservation efforts.

COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL CENTRE

A Community and Cultural Centre funded by the Madhya Pradesh Ecotourism Development Board is under construction in Karmajhiri village and the Karmajhari EDC/SHG will be running and maintaining it. This centre will consist of accommodation for tourists, cultural activities, local food, and will display local art forms. This initiative will help extend a sense of purpose and ownership to villagers and a unique, authentic local experience to tourists.

PHOTO CREDIT: ANIRUDDHA DHAMORIKAR



A responsible nature travel experience is one that contributes to the conservation of the ecosystem while respecting the integrity of host communities and wherever possible ensures that activities are complementary, or at least compatible with the existing resource usage pattern and revolves around the principles of sustainability.

TCF TRAINS NATURE GUIDES



PHOTO CREDIT: ANIRUDDHA DHAMORIKAR

The Corbett Foundation (TCF) conducted a Skill Development and Capacity Building programme for over 90 nature guides in Pench. The 5-day training session organised by the Pench Tiger Reserve was held at the forest department's training complex at Khawasa from the 23rd to 28th September, under the guidance and active participation of the Field Director, Mr. Alok Kumar.

Nature guides play an important role of being messengers of the forest and its wildlife. A three-hour safari in the forest can help leave a permanent



impression on the minds of people in favour of wildlife conservation. And a well trained nature guide can enhance this experience. Nature guides are an important interface between the general public and wildlife, and can play a much larger role in conservation than just providing information. Every year, lakhs of tourists visit India's tiger reserves and carry back memories, and thereafter consciously or subconsciously and directly or indirectly play a role in the protection of tigers and other wildlife species. At the end of the training, certificates along with books and uniforms were provided to the guides. The guides were motivated and refreshed to embrace the new tourism season.

MOBILE HEALTH SERVICES



The Satpuda Foundation is an NGO working on community based wildlife conservation modules in various protected areas and tiger reserves in Central India.

The organisation is providing medical support to tribal communities in remote areas in the buffer zone of Pench for the past eight years. A fully equipped medical unit conducts three-day medical camps in the villages. This mobile health unit is accompanied by a well qualified doctor from Nagpur and an inventory of medicines, which are distributed to the villagers and the forest department officials working on field as well, as they often do not have access to basic healthcare facilities.

WILDLIFE WEEK CELEBRATIONS



Wildlife Week was celebrated from the 1st to the 7th of October by Pench Tiger Reserve in collaboration with Forest Circle, Seoni. Around 400 students from 28 different schools participated in the programme. Over the course of the week, various events like painting, extempore debate, essay writing and quiz competitions, and bird watching excursions were organised for the children.

The purpose behind celebrating this internationally significant week was to create awareness about conservation amongst children, and inspire them to become the future protectors of our nation's fragile wildlife and its inhabitants.

GRASSLAND RESTORATION



Grassland and meadows in Chedia, Alikatta, Paraspani, Jeerewada and some other areas were restored by removing woody growths, weeds and unpalatable species. The restored grasslands are now catering to the needs of a large prey base in Pench.

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

Many bright young scholars dedicated to wildlife conservation from institutions like the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), Aligarh, are currently working in the jungles of Pench.

Ms. Anandhita Chatterjee from WII is currently working on monitoring of tigers in the core zone of Pench.

Mr. Abdul Haleem (PhD. Scholar) from the Department of Wildlife Sciences (AMU) is currently working on the "Conservation status and ecology of ungulates with special reference to resource partitioning". His work on the feeding habits of Chowsingha *Tertraceros quardicornis* in Pench has been accepted for presentation at the annual International Conference on Ecology, Biodiversity and Environment (CEBE, 2014) at Singapore.

Mr. Shaheer Khan (M.Phil Scholar) from the Department of Wildlife Sciences (AMU), is working on the 'Status, distribution and ecology of Wild Boars in Pench'. His work on the feeding habits of wild boars has been accepted in the Tropical Ecology Congress at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.



PHOTO CREDIT: ANIRUDDHA DHAMORIKAR

PENCH IN PICTURES

BY SANJAY SHUKLA



Sanjay Shukla, Chief Conservator of Forests, Seoni Circle, has a deep-rooted passion for wildlife and these spectacular images taken by him capture Pench's wildlife in its most pristine form.

He believes that wildlife photography can be used as a medium to spread awareness about wildlife and conservation issues, and can help connect people to nature.

AT A GLANCE



PHOTO CREDIT: ANIRUDDHA DHAMORIKAR

- A healthy tigress has been translocated to Panna Tiger Reserve.
- The patrolling camps are now well-equipped with all necessary items like torches, raincoats, mosquito nets, malaria testing kits, first aid boxes, and basic medicines to ensure the safety of forest guards.
- 2.6 kms of super sensitive electric lines have been insulated in the last two years. More insulation work is in progress. This has significantly reduced the electrocution cases in Pench.
- A challenging rescue operation was undertaken in Balaghat district, where a tiger that had entered a house in a village was rescued.
- Camera trapping work in the buffer zone is scheduled to be started soon with the help of WCT.
- Phase IV monitoring work has been completed on time.
- Medical assistance from the development fund of Pench Tiger Reserve has been provided to daily wage labourers who are members of JFMC for major ailments.
- An e-education base camp has been established at Turia Interpretation Centre for environment and wildlife education for local students of nearby villages with 100% financial assistance from the Urvi-Ashok Piramal Foundation.
- The old Interpretation Centre at Khawasa has been renovated and revived. Several training programmes are now being conducted here.



PHOTO CREDIT: PARTH JHA

HELP SAVE TIGERS

Tigers are threatened by habitat loss and poaching, and today, they inhabit merely 7% of their historical range. Madhya Pradesh is home to 25% of India's tigers and nearly 10% of the world's tiger population.

The Madhya Pradesh Tiger Foundation Society is a not-for-profit organisation working towards conservation of wildlife (with a special emphasis on tigers). All its income is tax free under section 12 of the Income Tax Act. Donations entitle the donor to claim income tax exemption under section 80 (g) of the Income Tax Act.

**SUPPORT TIGER CONSERVATION EFFORTS IN THE STATE BY DONATING TO
THE MADHYA PRADESH TIGER FOUNDATION SOCIETY**

WWW.MPTIGERFOUNDATION.ORG