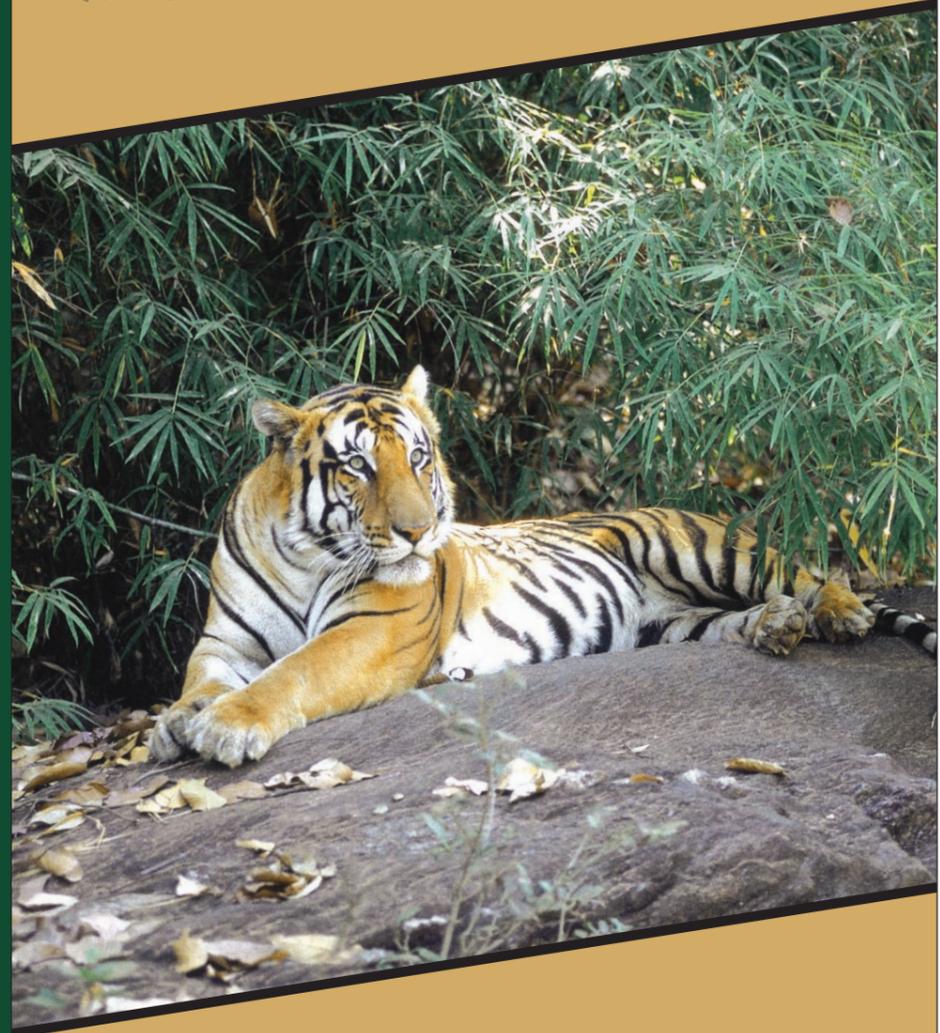
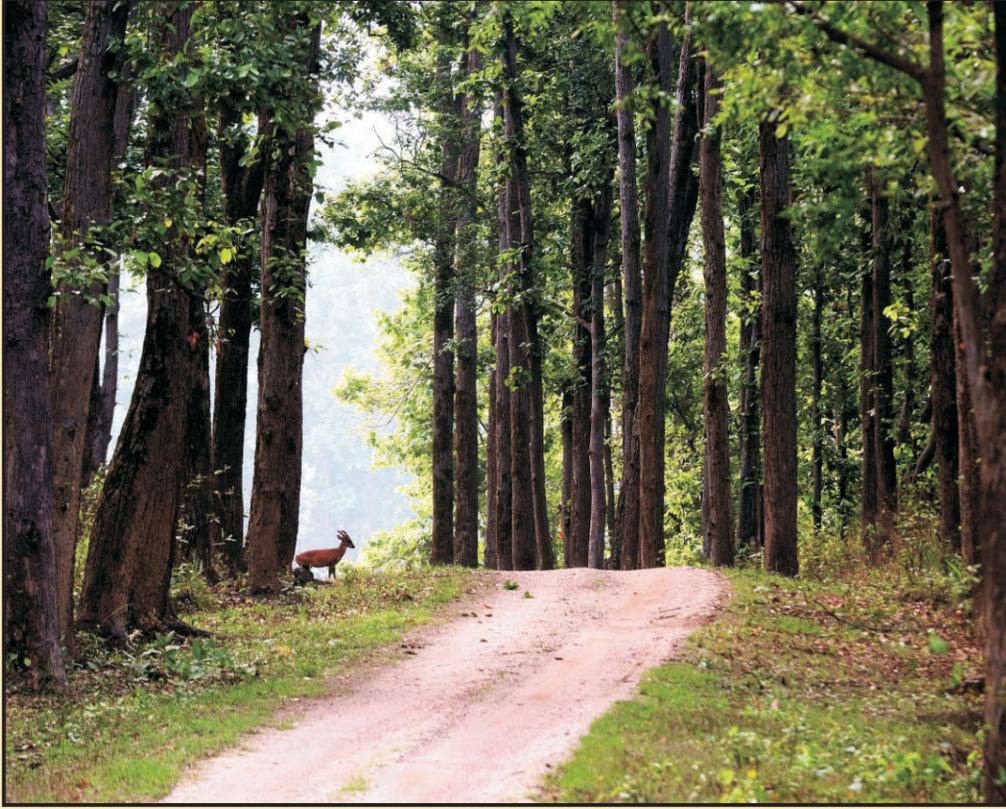
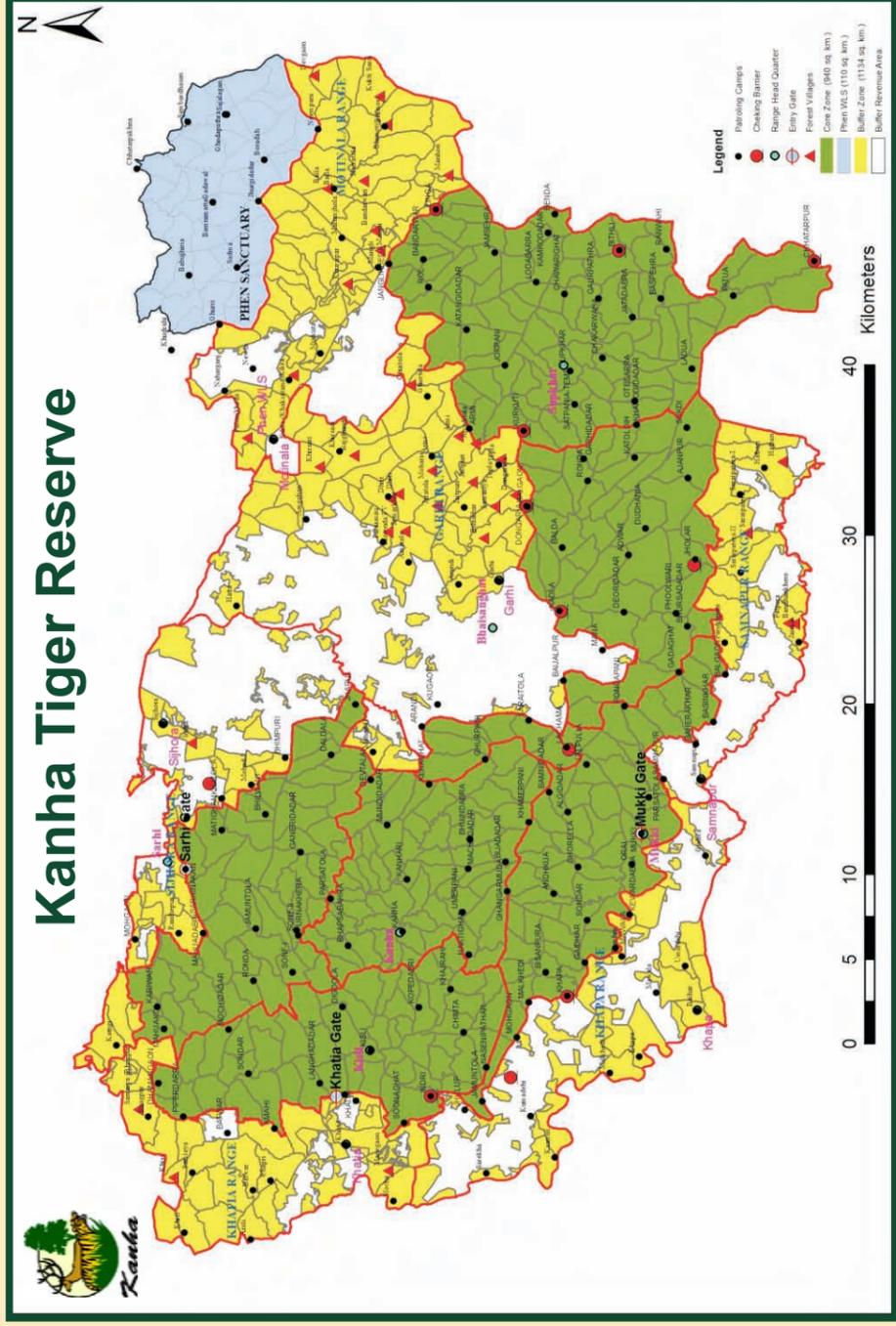


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Innovations and Best Management Practices

Kanha Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh, India



Recognition for Kanha

- ☞ 1977-78: Indian Board for Wildlife, Chairman's Challenge Trophy for the Best Managed National Park/ Sanctuary
- ☞ 1999-2000: National Tourism Award "Best Maintained Tourism Friendly National Park/ Wildlife Sanctuary
- ☞ 2006: First among nine "very good" tiger reserves of the country in the "Management Effectiveness Evaluation of Tiger Reserves in India"
- ☞ 2011: Madhya Pradesh State Tourism Award "Tourist Friendly National Park Director"
- ☞ 2012: National Tiger Conservation Authority Award for Excellence "Habitat Management" for 2010-11
- ☞ 2014: India-UNDP Biodiversity Conservation Award
- ☞ 2015: TripAdvisor Certificate of Excellence Award Winner



Innovations and Best Management Practices



Kanha Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh, India

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Recognition for Kanha



water bodies in the area. This water conservation awareness programme involving sharing of local knowledge and expertise, with locally available material, will go a long way in the buffer zone. This initiative is very satisfying and will inspire more such endeavors in public participation.



We never know the worth of water till the well is dry



Creation of Kanha Development Fund (Kanha Vikas Nidhi)

The fund, known as the “Kanha Vikas Nidhi”, is used for the development of tourism infrastructure in the tiger reserve. Besides, every year a certain percentage of this fund is also used for the development of forest villages in the tiger reserve. The main beneficiaries, in order of preference, are those forest villages which have been relocated outside the tiger reserve. After these forest villages come other forest villages of the national park and buffer zone followed by select revenue villages. This fund is used for the development of these villages, which include a host of rural upliftment activities. Besides, needy villagers are also given soft-loans from this fund to set up their own small businesses. The Kanha management has deposited, as credibility fund, Rs. 5,56,64,400.00 with ecodevelopment committees.

Water Regime Improvement

The Kanha management involved ecodevelopment committees to ensure water conservation for communities and wildlife in the buffer zone, and to spread awareness about this initiative. The highlight of this crucial initiative was voluntary labour (*shram dan*) and resources from local community, with, of course, support from the Kanha management.

So far, we have created around 55 such conservation structures, and done extensive work for creating water awareness and maintenance of



Before



After



Kanha Tiger Reserve

Amongst the first nine tiger reserves launched during 1973-74 in India, the Kanha tiger reserve forms part of an eco-region once renowned internationally for its rich floral and faunal attributes. Nestled essentially on the northern slopes of the Maikal hills of the Satpuras in central Indian highlands, and falling administratively in the Mandla and Balaghat districts of Madhya Pradesh, the present tiger reserve and its surrounds were proud witnesses to an amazing era of conservation history. The Kanha landscape of sal (*Shorea robusta*) and mixed woodland interspersed with grassy expanses chronicles a glorious history of wildlife conservation, and is potentially rich in natural heritage. Besides a viable population of tigers and the only world population of the hard ground barasingha, a wide spectrum of plant and animal species considerably add to the significance of this landscape. The tiger reserve consists of a core (Critical Tiger Habitat) of 917.43 sq. km. and a buffer zone (Multiple Use Area) of 1134 sq. km., and is being managed under a core-buffer strategy. Presently, there is no village inside the core, and 161 villages in the buffer.



Habitat Management

Regular improvement/ restoration of wildlife habitats in the Kanha national park is a very important conservation practice. Different wildlife habitats in the protected area sustain thousands of wild ungulates, which in turn support species of carnivores, including several endangered species. Past history of forest management, anthropogenity of grasslands, total rainfall and its pattern, ecological succession and natural intricacies have a strong bearing on the vegetal status of these wildlife habitats. The stated objectives of conservation and management of the national park include increasing population growth of the endangered hard ground barasingha that depends exclusively on grasslands and to manage the overall diversity of wildlife habitats, including grasslands/ meadows, and ensuring equitable distribution of water for supporting a good prey base for carnivores, specially tigers. In this way, managerial interventions become all the more important to reverse or stabilize degradation/ regression of wildlife habitats. The management practices incorporate annual and perennial weed eradication, brushwood/phoenix eradication, restocking of grassland and water development. The National Tiger Conservation Authority, New Delhi, Govt. of India has recognized this management practice and awarded the tiger reserve the NTCA award for excellence (Habitat Management) for 2010-11.



Phen Wildlife Sanctuary

The 110.740 sq. km. wildlife sanctuary under the unified control of the tiger reserve management commands immense ecological importance as far as the philosophy of corridor connectivity is concerned. Over the recent years, the protection of this protected area has been strengthened considerably, with an effective network of patrolling camps, forest roads, and intensive patrols by the frontline staff and ex-army personnel. Eight illegal but permanent cattle camps were amicably evicted in 1996 and later in 2014, the only forest village Sajalagan has also been relocated outside to reclaim a large chunk of forest land, which is being developed as an excellent grassland for herbivore in general and the hard ground barasingha in particular. The Kanha management also plans to reintroduce the barasingha into this wildlife sanctuary. The management is also augmenting the spotted deer population in the sanctuary to expedite the recovery process. The construction of a small field training center with a hostel is also underway to train the frontline staff in field-craft and to generate conservation awareness amongst students/ villagers. A detailed ecotourism plan for the wildlife sanctuary has also been prepared, and regular tourism has also started to ease tourist pressure off the core zone of Kanha tiger reserve. The Kanha management eventually wishes to include the entire Phen wildlife sanctuary into the Critical Tiger Habitat of the Kanha tiger reserve.



Bamhni Nature Walk

To create a sense of ownership among the local communities and to provide livelihood opportunities, a nature walk was initiated along the bank of the Banjar river in the buffer zone in March, 2015. This nature walk is fully managed by the Bamhni EDC and all the tourist-fee earned through this initiative goes into the EDC account. Here boys from Bamhni village work as porter-cum-nature guide. This not only provides them with a source of income, their continuous presence also insures better protection in the area. Needless to add, this 5 km. long nature walk also ensures a tremendous wilderness experience for tourists.



Facilitating Education for Staff Kids

This is a tremendous initiative to help the Kanha staff provide its children better academic opportunities through the Kanha Workers' Society with donation from the Adit Jain Foundation. The Foundation is striving to facilitate and motivate the school going children of the Kanha staff. Every year the KWS distributes school bags, water bottle, lunch box to kids studying between 1st and 5th standards. Depending upon the performance in annual examinations, scholarships from Rs. 1000.00 to Rs. 6000.00 are also given to these kids of 6th to 12th standards. For the collage-goers the KWS also operates a book bank from which book are issued to the needy students.



Special Conservation Inputs for Barasingha

The central Indian barasingha is a majestic endangered deer species whose population had steadily been declining since the 1930s. The population declined to an all time low of 66 animals in 1971. The resurrection of this cervid from 66 animals to now around 650 is regarded as an amazing conservation success. The conservation of this deer species requires a long-term strategy based on the past and present experiences and observations recorded by the management. The following special initiatives are underway for the conservation of endangered deer:

- ☞ Habitat improvement:
 - Weed eradication
 - Eradication of woody species
 - Maintenance of tall grasses
 - Grass exclosures for relieving pressure
- ☞ Shallow water points
- ☞ Swamp/ marsh creation
- ☞ Wallows
- ☞ Daily monitoring
- ☞ Mortality survey
- ☞ Surveillance of epidemics
- ☞ Translocation of barasingha to its historical range
- ☞ Special enclosure for multiplication
- ☞ Translocation for reintroduction

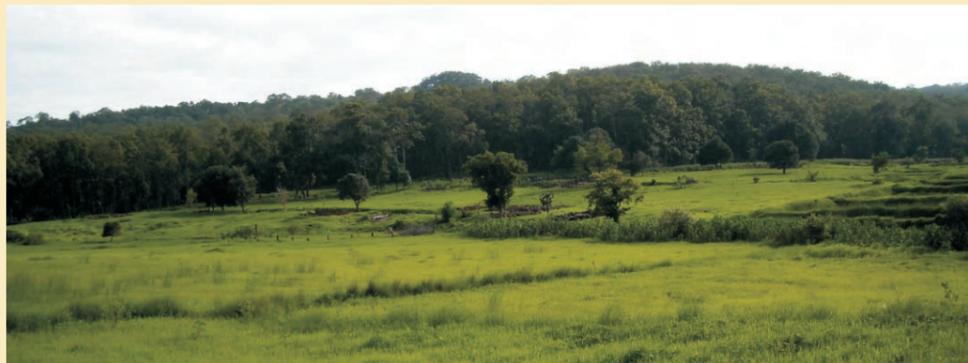


Village Relocation from the Core

As many as 35 forest villages have been relocated from the core area as per the guidelines issued by the Govt. of Madhya Pradesh and the NTCA, New Delhi, with due compensation package. During the past four years seven forest villages have been relocated under option-1 of the National Tiger Conservation Authority. Presently the core is completely free from biotic pressure. Village relocation has helped in reclaiming a substantial chunk of plain land for improvement as grassland for ungulates.

Improvement of Reclaimed Village Sites

Special effort has been launched to convert these abandoned village sites into quality grasslands. Initial site restoration works such as land leveling and disposal of non-biodegradable material etc. was taken up by the Kanha management to facilitate rapid reintegration of these abandoned lands into the typical wildlife habitats of the core zone. These abandoned village sites are gradually getting morphed into excellent grasslands. The response of wild ungulates is on the expected lines, and these areas are now being used. These additional grassland habitats are also very crucial for dispersal of the endangered hard ground barasingha whose survival solely depends on grasslands.



Health Care of Staff & Villagers

Considering the conditions/ eventualities for remotely located personnel in the protected area, a forest dispensary has also been set up at Mukki. The forest dispensary is modestly equipped, with a fulltime physician to examine the staff and dispense medicines. The physician also tours the protected area and visit patrolling camps on fixed days for health check-ups. The tiger reserve has three ambulances, and if required, these vehicles carry the sick and indisposed to hospitals at Mandla, Balaghat, Jabalpur or Nagpur for specialized treatment. The physician also treats the villagers of the buffer zone free as and when required. Besides, in collaboration with several NGOs, the tiger reserve also organizes health camps for the staff as well as villagers of the buffer zone. At these health camps, physicians examine all the registered patients and dispense them medicines free of cost. Serious patients are asked to visit them again in district places for follow-ups and sustained treatment. The ambulance services are also extended to the sick and indisposed villagers of the buffer zone.



Kanha Workers Society

One of its own kind, the Kanha Workers Sakhari Sakh evam Kamgar Samiti Maryadit, Kisli was formed under the Society Act, 1960 for the welfare of the Kanha staff. Every serving individual of the tiger reserve, including daily wagers, are the members of this Society. The members have to pay annual membership fees of the Society. As service conditions, specially in the core zone, are very difficult, and most are non-family postings at



remotely located patrolling camps, the staff sometimes has to go 15–20 km. for weekly market to buy household goods. In this way, the Society provides the remotely placed wildlife personnel with the essentials of the household at concessional prices. The Society also gives almost interest free soft-loans to the frontline staff and daily wagers on easy installments. Besides, scholarships for topper students have also been arranged. Moreover, the Society also caters to the needs of tourists at Khatia and Mukki entry points of the core zone. It makes arrangements for breakfast, meals and basic daily needs on payment basis at both the entry points. Through its sale counters, the Society also deals in mementos and other reminiscences of the tiger reserve, which include: t-shirts, caps, key rings, winter jackets, scarves, silver jewelry, badges, stickers, cards, posters, the Kanha literature etc. Presently, the total asset with the Society is Rs. 22004629.00 lakh as fixed deposits and loans to the staff.

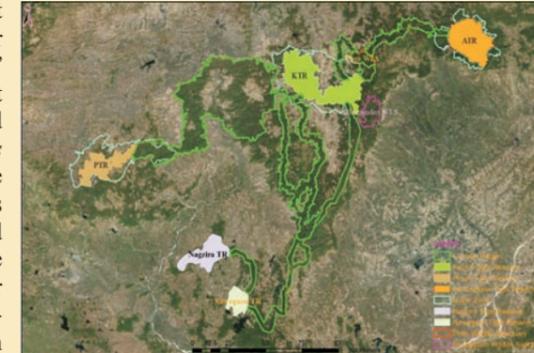
Health Insurance Scheme for the Staff

Kanha Workers' Society is carrying out several staff welfare activities, and health insurance for its members is one of the most important measures. Under this scheme all members of the KWS are insured for Rs. 1.00 lakh medical claim benefits. This measure is a novel effort in the field of wildlife conservation in India as most of field staff is very low-salaried and working in adverse field conditions. So whenever any one falls sick, treatment and medicine become a big burden on his pocket. After the implementation of this health insurance scheme, the treatment of staff upto the cost of Rs. 1.00 lakh is borne by the insurance company.



Corridor Connectivity Planning

Kanha tiger reserve is one of the most important tiger habitats in central India for the long-term conservation of the “flagship” species – tiger. It also harbours the last world population of the highly endangered central Indian swamp deer (*Rucervus duvaucelii branderi*). The tiger reserve encompasses diverse vegetation, and has natural linkages with several other protected areas in the region, viz. Pench tiger reserve in Madhya Pradesh, Achankmar tiger reserve in Chhattisgarh and Nawegaon-Nagzira tiger reserve in Maharashtra. Though the connectivity between Kanha tiger reserve and these protected areas may be weak, there is ample scope for ensuring gene flow from the Kanha core conservation unit by resorting to appropriate site-specific restorative management. Thus, Kanha tiger reserve has considerable significance as a conservation nucleus. Besides, it affords scope for fostering eco-regional development to complement the conservation initiatives. The Kanha management has prepared these corridor conservation plans which are under submission to the National Tiger Conservation Authority, New Delhi.



Reintroduction of Blackbucks

One of the common antelopes, blackbucks (*Antelope cervicapra*) were once distributed on plateaus to the east of the Banjar river passing through the Baihar tehsil, and in several valley villages in the Kanha landscape. Till a few years back, even the core zone also supported a small population of the antelope. The population, however, had declined steadily since 1975, and the last animal was seen in 2004. The local extinction of the blackbuck from Kanha was regarded as a blow to biodiversity, and the Kanha management decided to give it a try and reintroduce some animals into extensive areas of short grass with low density of shrub and woody species, which would serve as



good rehabilitation sites for the blackbuck in the core. Some of these sites are: Matigahan, Yusufdadar, Silpura, Mundidadar, Deoridadar, Adwardadar and Dulhadadar.

The Kanha management planned the entire capture operation with a retired forest officer, credited with successful translocations of about 7000 blackbucks in Andhra Pradesh. The select field staff of the tiger reserve was also trained for the entire operation of capture and translocation. Special wooden crates were made to safely shut individual animals for transportation. In November 2011, the entire operation was carried out in agricultural fields close to Seoni town.

Instead of releasing the blackbucks straight into the wild, they were kept in an enclosure at Kanha. The idea was to keep them under observation/ monitoring for any health eventuality and also to let them get acclimatized to the new environs. In this case the basic objective of this translocation exercise was to build up a population in Kanha and not just to translocate the crop raiding animals. To achieve this objective, the released animals needed to be monitored on daily basis and this was possible only in an enclosure. The in-situ enclosure was specially erected and developed for the multiplication of barasingha. The release site was also prepared for the blackbucks well before the actual release. In the past also, this enclosure had already supported a small population of blackbuck for some years. The area of the enclosure is around 50 ha. and it harbours typical grassland habitats of the core with a range of grass species. Most of the enclosure area supports short to medium height grass species. Some animals, however, also died due to capture myopathy. The population is now thriving and will be released into the wild shortly.



Translocation of Gaur

The Bandhavgarh tiger reserve is one of the most beautiful protected areas in the state, and harbours lush forests of sal, bamboo and miscellaneous species. Till around 15 years back, the protected area also supported a small population of the Indian gaur (*Bos gaurus gaurus*), regarded as the largest species of wild cattle. This small population rose to 38 animals in 1990 and later a steady decline was recorded coming down to 30 animals in 1995. And after this, no herd was seen either in the national park or in the surrounding areas. The local extinction of this species was a blow to conservation and caused serious concerns.



Home-Stay Scheme through Community

The protected area is also regarded as one of the finest tourism destinations in the country, and receives an average of around 1,30,000 visitors every tourism year. While Kanha offers a wide range of tourism attractions, many visitors also want to stay with local communities in natural surroundings. Such visitors interact with villagers and are interested in knowing about their customs and culture. Considering the potential of such tourism activity for the benefit of the local community in the buffer zone, the Kanha management has also helped locals to set up a home-stay facility. The management has acquired financial support from the State Rural Livelihood Mission, Mandla and started a two-room home-stay facility at Sarhi village of the Sijhora forest range of the buffer zone division. This ecotourism activity is being conducted under the Damini Livelihood Women's Self-Help Group. This women self-help group is being benefited directly by this scheme under the technical supervision of the Kanha management. Currently, the project is very successful and the Kanha management hopes that more such voluntary groups will be encouraged in other villages to come forward for such joint ventures. The idea was to boost the confidence of locals that they can also do it and become an important stakeholder in tourism.



Education Foundation to select such youths and train them all in a number of batches for the next three years for developing hospitality skills. This training is being imparted at the Khatia hospitality centre. The district administration has also supported this project financially. After the completion of this training, these youths are expected to get good opportunities for employment. The Kanha management is also making efforts to start training for the jobs of mechanic, electrician, and mason etc. for these boys and girls. It is also looking for support from other resource-institutions for such trainings. So far, 165 youths (boys and girls) have been trained in hospitality skills and all have been employed in star hotels at various locations in the country. This effort will continue and the next batch of about 40 youths will undergo training at Khatia training center.

In Security: The management has also collaborated with a renowned private security agency of New Delhi to train young men of surrounding villages for employment. This agency is also a service provider to several sectors, including big industrial houses. Kanha management has provided the basic infrastructure/ facilities for the one-month security training at Khatia. These young men are currently under training imparted by retired army officers. As soon as the training is over, all these trainees will be employed as security guards at different places through this agency.

In Masonry and Electrical Maintenance: Considering the demand for employment of skilled personnel in these sectors, the Kanha management has also taken initiative to have select youths trained as mason and electrician. Through PRATHAM, an NGO, the first batch of these youths has finished its module and now working at various construction sites in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Chhatisgarh. The second batch of 14 youths is undergoing a training course in masonry at Kurud (district Dhamtari) in Chhatisgarh.



It had already been decided that in future the gaur population in the protected area would be restocked. In South Africa, the translocation of large mammals is very common, and such undertakings need multi-disciplinary involvement. Accordingly, many experts of different disciplines in India and South Africa were contacted. Ideas and modalities were discussed, mutually agreed terms and conditions of actual field operations finalized, and all concerned were encouraged to discuss the same among themselves for preparations. Nothing was left to chance.



These actual field operations involved a wide range of preparations, including finalizing a detailed protocol, procurement of all sorts of veterinary drugs and equipment, the making of specially designed large recovery and transportation vehicles and holding boma (large steel cages used in South Africa) and training of field personnel for discharging assigned duties and ensuring mutual understanding/ coordination etc. As the tiger reserve had a sizeable population of the Indian gaur, and the management had modest exposure to such teamwork in the past, it was naturally the first choice for these operations. Eventually, in January, 2011 and March, 2012, field operations were carried out to capture, restrain, load and translocate a total of 51 gaur to the Bandhavgarh tiger reserve. This was remarkable reintroduction undertaking and received profuse accolades from all quarters. These animals are currently doing well.



Translocation of Hard Ground Barasingha

Amid national and international applause, the successful conservation of the hard ground barasingha had slowly but steadily increased its population in Kanha. It was, however, also keenly discussed that this small population was still faced with several threats, including local extinction due to some epidemic. Besides, more populations at geographically different places were always considered better and safer than one population restricted to only one place. Reintroducing some barasingha into some other protected areas to enhance their biodiversity status was another consideration. In the backdrop of these opinions and considerations, it was decided that a few barasingha should first be introduced into the Van Vihar national park by non-



Skill Development Training

There is a vast number of villages in the tiger reserve. The majority of villagers belongs to the Gond and Baiga tribes. The Baiga, specially, are regarded as one of the most primitive tribes in the country. Though strongly built, hardworking, and courageous, these tribals are basically simple, gentle, reserved and mostly keep to themselves. These populations have also contributed to the success of the Kanha tiger reserve as one of the finest protected area in the country.



Though these people are coming to terms with gradual departure from their hunter-and-gatherer lifestyle, a lack of higher education facilities and opportunities for vocational trainings have hindered their way to a better life. While most villages have middle schools, there are only a few villages with higher secondary schools. Boys and girls of this region try their best to avail of the existing education facilities and finish their respective certificate courses only to be hampered by their economic status to continue their education at tehsil or district places. Expanding families with limited marginal agricultural scope also present other dimensions of economic constraints. Once out of school, such youths have to face unemployment, and resource crunch of his family, and a very depressing and miserable future. After some time, these limitations trend to cause sheer frustration and hopelessness and manifest in many types of waywardness, including drunkenness and propensity for easy money, which is very harmful to society in general and the family in particular. These disoriented and unemployed youths are vulnerable to insurgent ideologies, or they involve themselves in illegal activities. The reserve management, therefore, deliberated over this problem and also roped in several hoteliers and NGOs to start skill development training for such eligible youths.

In Hospitality: The Kanha management has made a novel effort to help select youths from within the tiger reserve procure employment opportunities commensurate with their education/ skill. The management has entered into a tripartite agreement with the Indian Hotel Company Ltd. and the PRATHAM



Translocation of Tigers

The Kanha management has successfully undertaken the following translocations to different protected areas:



- ☞ 15 May, 2008 : Tiger to the Van Vihar national park, Bhopal
- ☞ 09 March, 2009 : Tigress to the Panna tiger reserve by helicopter
- ☞ 26 March, 2011 : Tigress to the Panna tiger reserve
- ☞ 12 November, 2011 : Tigress to the Panna tiger reserve
- ☞ 17 March, 2014 : Tiger to the Van Vihar national park
- ☞ 23 March, 2015 : Tigress to the Satpuda tiger reserve



invasive capture without using drugs/ chemicals, and after refining and improving upon the entire operation, some animals be reintroduced into the Satpuda tiger reserve. This tiger reserve had, till several decades back, also supported a small population of this sub-species, and still had good habitat. There was, however, some anxiety about the success of this venture due to past failures of reintroduction resulting in several mortalities of these animals. It was already an endemic and Schedule I animal, and its being the state animal of Madhya Pradesh only added to the unease and concern.



When the majority of decision makers was agreed to take this calculated risk, a comprehensive capture, transportation and release protocol was prepared to the minutest details and nothing was left to chance. Specially designed in-situ enclosures with improved barasingha specific habitat were erected at Van Vihar and Satpuda. Rigorous mock drills were conducted in the field and long sessions were held to discuss every eventuality and assign specific duties to the staff.

Inspired by the South African capture and translocation technique, already used successfully for the translocation of several Indian gaur, the boma method was employed to capture barasingha in the barasingha enclosure itself at Kanha. A large transportation truck was also customized to carry around 15-20 captured barasingha comfortably. The truck container was also fitted with CCTV cameras to monitor the animals in the driver cabin during transportation.

The transportation truck was closely fitted to a ramp camouflaged with plastered soil and grass to make it look natural to the animals. In this way, the transportation truck, the ramp and the chute of boma became one composite structure at the capture site. This structure had been installed several days before the actual capture operation in the field so that the animals might get habituated to its presence and could freely enter and exit it. Four non-invasive capture operations were carried out in January, March, 2015 and January, 2016, and several animals were successfully transported to the Van Vihar national park and Satpura tiger reserve. It was remarkable that no mortality took place in these operations.



Chital Translocation

The chital is the most numerous of ungulate species and forms the main prey base of tigers in the Kanha tiger reserve. Ever since the village relocation programme was started in the late Sixties of the last century, these abandoned village sites have been the main focal points for habitat/ wildlife management. As a result of priority based intervention and excellent management, the Banjar valley gradually registered a steady increase of chital. Village relocation was also started in the Halon valley in the mid Seventies of the last century. The abandoned village sites in this valley, however, did not show such remarkable increase in chital population. Tall grasses, absence of mega herbivores and lack of similar intensive grassland management practices in this valley could be the cause of this relatively small increase in the ungulate population. Consequently, the low prey base population has also affected the number of carnivores, including tigers, in the valley. The management decided that as several villages had been relocated over the recent past, and the abandoned sites were gradually getting integrated into natural grassland ecosystem, the release of several hundred chital at these sites would accelerate an early build-up of ungulate population. Several select sites for the release of chital in a phased manner are: Bithli, Benda, Rol, Ajanpur, Jholar, Linga, Sukdi, Jami and Sajalagan. The Kanha management has obtained permission from the competent authority to translocate 500 chital from the Banjar valley to the above evacuated village sites. This proactive management practice will not only allow the evacuated sites to recover faster but will also provide enough prey to carnivore population. So far, around 325 chital have been shifted to the Phen/ Halon valley sites.



School for Rewilding Tiger Cubs

In the backdrop of the discovery of orphaned tiger cubs due to infighting or death of mother-tigresses in the tiger reserve, the idea of rearing, training and rewilding such cubs took shape several years back. Accordingly, a specially designed large in-situ enclosure was constructed in the Mukki range. The enclosure supported a good chunk of typical tiger habitat with a permanent water body. Initially, when these cubs were small, they were fed on milk, egg and meshed meat and live small-sized goats. Later, when they became large and were released into this enclosure, they gradually started killing chital and pigs, specially driven into the enclosure. Their hunting technique gradually refined to perfection, and were considered fit for release into the wild. The first batch of two such trained tigresses were reintroduced successfully into the Panna tiger reserve, and in the recent past, two animals (male and female) were rewilded into Kanha itself, and a tigress was released into the Satpuda tiger reserve. In this way, all these animals were spared the confines of a zoo, so dreary a life for such magnificent animals.

