The Official Pench Tiger Reserve Magazine

PENCH STRIPES

Dispersing TIGERS

MEE results

TIGER AND PREY Estimation

KANHA-PENCH Walk

Era of LADY GUIDES starts in Pench

Third Volume
February 2016

Photo Courtesy : Sanjay Shukla

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Editorial
Pragati Mandloi

It has been two years of association with the forests of Satpuda Landscape and I am proud to bring out the third edition of this one of a kind magazine that stands for transparency between management and stakeholders. This edition marks the completion of one year of this initiative, celebrates the experience of various writers, appreciates the hard work of staff and showcase the happenings of the reserve. Hope this effort helps in involving more people in the conservation of this beautiful landscape.

Message by
Field Director

Subharanjan Sen

"Pench Stripes is an important part of our outreach programme and I am happy to be associated with it as Field Director.

This is my second stint here in this fantastic reserve, having been here earlier as deputy director between 2002 and 2005. It is heartening to find that some of the works we did in that period, especially augmentation of the water regime-over 30 earthen dams and the first two dykes were constructed during that time- has paid rich dividends and have actually transformed Pench.

This transformation is reflected in the consistent showing of Pench Tiger Reserve in the only All India objective evaluation of tiger reserves in India. The Management Effectiveness Evaluation (MEE) involves the evaluation+ of our tiger reserves on an objective set of parameters by a group of independent experts. There has been three cycles of this exercise in 2005, 2010 and 2014. In all of them, Pench(MP) has been amongst the very best. In the latest MEE, Pench occupies the second spot behind Periyar Tiger Reserve.

Also heartening is the fact that tigers which I saw as helpless just born cubs now rule the Park, contributing tigers by the dozens to the landscape. Collarwali and her littermate Baghinnalawali are examples of what tigresses in prime undisturbed habitats are capable of. It is indeed gratifying that Pench has made the difficult journey from a sink for tigers in the 1990's to a throbbing source tiger population now.

This success brings with it many challenges. Most of the young tigers bornin Pench have to perforce leave the protective confines of the park and venture out into the landscape to find their own territories. While this emigration is vital for the landscape, it is obviously fraught with innumerabledangers- from poachers to electric lines to highways with ever increasing traffic. It is therefore satisfying to see that tigers are still managing to disperse to other areas successfully. The emigration of four young tigers including two tigresses to Bhandara division in Maharashtra in 2015 is a case in point.

The success in Pench has been possible because of the hard work and dedication of our staff who are amongst the best anywhere and the pragmatic leadership provided by all the park managers before me. It shall be my endeavour to maintain and strengthen the good work done by everyone who has worked in or has been associated with the park.

Message by
Deputy Director

Dr. Kiran Bisen

"This magazine serves the purpose of compiling management practices and events, appreciating hard work of the staff and sharing all activities of the reserve with various stakeholders.

A proper channel for information dissemination minimizes all chances of confusion among stakeholders and help in correct decision making. 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. Hopefully this endeavor of the department will enable us to introspect about suggestions and ideas received from a wide spectrum of society.

Photo Courtesy : Subharanjan Sen

Blogger's Park

The rash leopard and the Tikari tiger

© Suhas Kumar
24.9.2009

Nestled in the sylvan, verdant slopes of Satpura hills there is a compact wildlife reserve – the Pench Tiger Reserve. The story which I am going to tell you today belongs to a time when this tiger reserve was a just born national park and I, fresh out of the Wildlife institute of India, had joined it as its Director.

The year was 1985, winter was knocking and the freshness that the jungle had donned after the rains was beginning to fade, the forest roads were strewn with teak leaves and some migrant birds had already begun filling the crisp air with their songs. Bhaiya lal and I were on the Bison camp –Tikari forest road; as usual he was driving the jeep, skillfully maneuvering the vehicle on a serpentine forest road that meanders through small hillocks and shallow valleys. I had taken on myself the task of scanning the trees for birds, the slopes for animals and the road for their footprints. While I was all eyes for details spread before me, at one bend in the road, on a young and tall teak tree - not more than 30 years of age- I saw scratch marks that ran up from about 5' above the ground and went up to the crown - some 25 feet above– a leopard had shinned up the tree in great hurry. I got down from the jeep to inspect the scratch marks. These marks were fresh for those were still wet and the exposed fibres quite supple. I went on to search the gravelly road and found some faint pugmarks of a leopard, following it were spoor of a male tiger. The imagery, of what transpired here some hours ago, began to form in my head - a leopard, young, inexperienced and impetuous had treaded foolishly in the resident tiger's royal domain and was caught red handed by the king himself, who gave a chase and the leopard scurried up the teak tree to save his skin– and succeeded. I told Bhaiya lal that this foolish leopard had only a few days to live unless he mends his ways.

Not very long afterwards, a messenger came from nearby forest office, as in those days there was no phone in my office, to tell me that the ranger Karmajhiri had called from Khawasa to report that a male leopard had been killed by a tiger in Tikari beat. The inevitable had already happened and the only thing left for me to do was to inspect the scene of scuffle and reconstruct the train of event that might have led to the untimely dispatch of the stupid leopard to arcadia.

When I reached Karmajhiri forest rest house around 3 P.M., the range officers and two of his guards were waiting for me. The two guards, young and energetic fresh recruits, at this time looked quite excited and in a hurry to recount the real life drama that had unfolded before their eyes and which, apparently, had wrecked their nerves. My task became easier as there were eye witnesses to this rare incident. What they had to tell me was - the two of them, were patrolling the jungle together for their beats were adjacent.

After walking for about two miles on the forest road they decided to leave it and take up an animal track that ran through a thick lantana patch as it was to save them half an hour to reach Kumbhababa patrolling camp.

As soon as they started on this animal track their senses numbed and legs stuck to the ground for they found themselves in the company of a huge tiger just a few yards from them. The tiger was looking away in the opposite direction towards dense lantana bushes and totally engrossed in whatever he was doing. His belly flushed with ground, ears cocked, tails twitching and eyes firmly fixed on a tangle of lantana bushes he appeared as an embodiment of a shooter hell-bent on making a hole into bull's eye. Gathering courage both guards tip-toed backwards looking for a tree that could save their lives. They were lucky – a moyan tree was only a few feet away - in great haste they scurried up and perched themselves on two sturdy branches.

Feeling safe they were ready now to witness a real life drama. In these few seconds the tiger had inched near an opening in the lantana bush and suddenly a great clatter and commotion began inside the bush, following

it a series of heart stopping roars, gurgles and hissing and snarling ensued. Till then, the shaken guards had no clue what was inside the lantana bush and why the tiger was so furious. And then they saw him – he was a young leopard and he was in deep trouble for there were no escapes routes open to him – the only opening was the one that the tiger had blocked. Knowing his life threatening predicament the leopard was determined to fight back – so this was how the guards sitting in the tree came to hear a medley of blood curdling sounds and watch a very rare and one sided brawl between two graceful beasts of the jungle.

The fight, if we may call it so, had ended a few seconds later but the tiger continued to vent his anger by attacking the body, turning and pushing it around and while engaged in this task he continued to make all sorts of noises he was capable of making. A few minutes later he severed the tail of the leopard and threw it aside and began eating at the rump. But, soon he lost interest in the leopard, sat there for almost ten minutes and then got up and moved towards Chchedia ghat. The guards, though safely perched in moyan tree were totally mesmerized and numbed by that dream like episodes they had witnessed a few moments ago. They took almost 30 minutes to gather courage to come down and after coming down, without looking back, they sprinted 2 miles to Karmajhiri to report the incident to their range officer.

After getting this eye witness account, I visited the spot where the leopard's body spread soulless on the ground - within a hollow under a lantana thicket - its torn tail lying by its side and a small portion of the rump chewed up. In this forest patch lantana was out of control, though for deer lantana poses some barrier to their free movement but for short sized animals it provides a labyrinth of tunnels underneath - tiger, leopard, bear, hyena, jackal, and wild pig use this excellent cover for resting, littering and ambush. The leopard that was killed in an ambush by the tiger was surely unlucky for he chose a wrong bush to rest – the bush I saw then was almost impenetrable except from one side and the Tikari tiger had blocked the only escape route. I saw the signs of the rampage the Tikari tiger had brought about inside the bush – some of the inner clumps were uprooted and torn to shreds and the ground soil was upset as if the soil at places were worked with a shovel - it was a scene of a battlefield where a fierce battle had been fought a few hours ago.

I was sad for the young leopard's untimely departure, but this is how the life goes on in the jungle – its denizens always live on the edge of a precipice – one slip and they go tumbling down to arcadia to rest in peace forever.

Suhas Kumar
Retired Principal Chief Conservator of Forest

A cloud of winged termites at a light source on the porch one summer night just after it had rained.

Photo Courtesy : Aniruddha Dhamorikar

Civilizations of the Undergrowth

by Aniruddha Dhamorikar, Kanha Pench Landscape Coordinator, The Corbett Foundation

The late summer showers trigger a peculiar phenomenon in the forests of central India. The air is moist; the sky a riot of blues and oranges separated by dark wobbly clouds, and the ground is moistened after a long spell of dryness. This sudden change in the temperature, humidity, and the moisture in the ground has signalled a sudden rapid change in the undergrowth.

Underneath the surface of the moisture-laden forests, a million animals await to form their own clouds. Vibrating and pulsating with fervid life, the winged termites, called alates, begin their nuptial flight, volleying into the sky as if on a mission. If you happen to be sitting in the veranda, you will witness an upheaval of countless wings silently rising upwards with the warm air that is expelled by the cooling land, gliding down to the lights on your porch, flying aimlessly in an infinite loop around an incandescent source of light. But their flight is not aimless.

These winged termites have risen from their underground civilizations, each representing their own colonies, from every corner of the forest, to intermingle with one another, mate, and start their own new colonies. They are the queens and the kings who have sworn to spread their parent colonies wider and wider, and the warm air currents of the late summer are just perfect for them to fly long distances.

Yet they are stymied by the light on your porch. And nobody knows why. Scientists have put forth several theories for this behaviour, such as for navigation, for warmth, because of their innate attraction to UV light, or because of confusing the wavelengths emitted by the light source for a mate; perhaps all of them are true, but the termites that revolve around an incandescent light are led into a trap – mantises, assassin bugs, geckos and lizards lie in wait to make a quick, easy meal out of them.

Mornings reveal a battlefield. Hundreds of dead termites and double the number of wings litter the surface. But in this war-torn zone of your incandescent light, many females have found males, and have mated. As soon as they are mated, the male dies, and the female begins the second, and more tiring, part of their journey. She breaks her long leathery wings using her hind legs, and seeks to bury herself in the undergrowth where the soil is ideal for building her own colony. This female, the queen, may then live for several years building an army of her own, with a fortress as tall as seven feet high and just as deep, and rest in peace in the heart of her fortress as her sister queens manage her colony. But she might even die by that artificial light or in the undergrowth because of exhaustion or might turn up in the jaws of predators that lurk beneath.

The colony is a walled city with roads and tunnels, halls and granaries, crèches and gardens. Each and every member contributes to its functioning – some grow fungus in the fungus gardens for consumption, some create a mulch of wood and soil to plaster walls – and some, like soldiers, guard the entrances– these soldiers are here for a particular reason.

A swarm of male alate ants is ready to take to wing at the onset of monsoon.

A 6 feet tall termite ant nest.

A group of weaver ants form a living bridge joining a small branch of Mahua tree with the main tree trunk for easy transport of food.

Crematogaster ants vs termites

Weaver Ant carrying Bark Scorpion

Photo Courtesy : Aniruddha Dhamorikar

Another social insect prowls in the undergrowth. Long, black, and glistening as though bathed in oil, the individual members of this colony march in a single long chain, one after another, which has given them their common name, the Procession Ant (Leptogenys sp.). They form multiple, criss-crossing highways in the undergrowth, and their colonies are usually underground, barely visible on the outside except for a small opening that is lined with soldiers standing with their mandibles stretched wide open.

A troop of Leptogenys is on a mission. They've gathered a force strong enough to march towards the nearest termite mound, to force entry into the fortress, and raid and kill. The soldier termites, the nasutes, gather around the opening so as to block it. A battle ensues. They squirt an acrid liquid that entraps and kills the intruder, or thrust their beaked heads into them like a sword. The mandibulated soldiers bite

and grind the enemies to pieces – and the ants downturn their abdomens to stab the termites by their poisoned knifes – they sting, bite and tear their enemies apart.
The ants breach the walls of the fortress, and kill whatever that stalls their path, but mostly the termites overpower the invaders by their sheer numbers, and the ants retreat with bodies of their enemies as food for their colony. I've often found such raiding parties carrying one or even three bodies of termites in their mandibles, all the way back to their nest.
Ants and termites are like sworn enemies. But their enmity is not the result of a feud or revenge – it is an ecologically-driven relationship where one social insect controls the spread of the other, and both compete with one another for resources such as food and space. Several species of the arboreal ant Crematogaster sp. have been observed raiding ground-dwelling termite colonies. It is said that the ants raid termites not with an intention to annihilate them, but as an attempt to control their population as much as it is I think to showcase their strength.
The undergrowth is a place hard to comprehend. It is seemingly quiet and uneventful. Just the way a calm grassland bursts into motion at the alarm call of a deer, so does the undergrowth. The alarm signal here is invisible, inaudible, and unscented to us humans.

It is a pheromone specific to a single species of an ant that helps them in finding their way to the battleground and back, and in changing their behaviour from docile to violent.
Ants fight among ants as well – mostly over shared resources –often these fights are long battles that last a day. Arboreal ants like weaver ants (Oecophylla smargdina) often attack hunch-back ants (Myrmicaria brunea), an ant which often nests at the base of large trees and blocks the movement of weaver ants. Ants also fight with ants of their own species belonging to different colonies. If a soldier ant of Camponotus sp. comes upon a dealate queen (a queen ant who has shed her wings) in its territory, it fights and tries to drive it away, but if the dealate belongs to its own colony, they leave her alone. Quite often, only heads of rival soldiers are seen pinching the legs of the victorious, like badges of honour.
The ecology of social insects is much more complex than we can imagine. The caste-system of ants and termites taught in schools is a mere simplification of natural facts.
The queen can be primary, secondary, or a gamergate, the worker can be a minor or a major; the major also acts as a transport medium for minor workers or plays the role of a soldier. Primary queens can be overthrown and assassinated by younger gamergate. Some species of ants enslave other species of ants. Some form living bridges between two branches, some boats to float on water, some chains to pull prey, and some form nests by linking their own bodies, head-to-tail. Some weave leaves together, some mulch wood, some dwell in rock crevasses, and some dwell underground – and some, rarely if ever, come to the surface except for their alates. Some hunt, some farm, some scavenge, and some domesticate.
One of the nomadic species of ants of Pench Tiger Reserve is the army ant, Aenictus sp., a rare treat to see in the teak forest undergrowth. They are large, dark bodied with a slender pale abdomen, long-footed ants known to form large raiding parties constantly on the move. They are blind, but they are one of the fiercest forces of the undergrowth – being able to take on insects, scorpions, even lizards, frogs, and small snakes. Their nomadic existence makes them hard to see, and once you've seen them in a particular place, they will be long gone until your next visit – they however tend to nest temporarily in places with an exposed tangle of roots and in rocky areas with many small crevasses, where chances of finding them are possible.
These little civilizations however are not as aggressive as they seem. Ants and termites, like

humans, largely lead peaceful lives. They go about their duties with dedication to their colony, and a majority of them seldom engage in conflict. The battles are rare occurrences, and only a few colonies face them perhaps because of a resource crunch. As many as five to six species of ants often live in one square meter area in a forest undergrowth, in complete harmony, and ignore one another as they go about their daily business just like in a large human metropolis.

The lone or pair of ants we often see in our veranda are scouting ants in search of a food source. Once the scout has found a food source, it estimates its size and goes back to its nest, communicates the information to its members, and follows back to the food source. On this second trip, often more than three and as many as twelve ants are at its tail, nudging the scout to proceed – a walk myrmecologists call 'in tandem' – to the food source and take it back to the nest.

There are some which have chosen the simple life of scavengers and harvesters. Some species of ants in the genus Pheidole are especially selective about their scavenging – they often scavenge bodies of the large Camponotus sp. of ants, and seem to decorate their ground nest entrances with the heads of these ants, perhaps as a grotesque warning to the enemy! Other species of Pheidole and the genus Monomorium are harvesters – they harvest the seeds of wild as well as domestic grasses such as rice and wheat,remove the seed from the husk, keep the seed in the granary and leavethe husks outside the nests in a pile. Thin, long highways of harvester ants radiating out from the stack of harvested rice and leading to a small burrow in the ground are common in agricultural fields in the month of November.

The sheer abundance of ants and termites has, quite naturally, led them to be exploited by other animals as well. Besides distinctly large mammals such as the sloth bear and the pangolin which feed primarily on ants and termites (animals which largely depend on ants for food are called myrmecophagous), the Rufous Woodpecker, a rare bird of Pench Tiger Reserve, nests in the arboreal wood-mulched nests of the Crematogaster sp. of ants. Several species of the blues family of butterflies (Family Lycaenidae) exploit an ant's sweet tooth for honeydew. Such caterpillars have special glands called myrmecophilus organs which open on their backs and secrete sugary liquid that attracts ants, and the ants in turn protect them.

Many species of jumping spiders in the genus Myrmarachne mimic ants, and are often species-specific mimics, like masked infiltrators that prey on ants. The antlions build sand traps in strategic locations where movement of ants is common, and some areas appear as minefields for ants – one missed step and they fall inside the collapsible walls, and into the wide jaws of this ambush hunter. Some insects, such as the hatchlings of broad-headed bugs mimic ants perhaps because looking like one offers protection. Some assassin bugs adorn dead bodies of their ant victims on their backs for camouflage. Some crickets and beetles even live inside ant colonies by mimicking their pheromones, and feed on food gathered by ants.

These infiltrators, imposters, and misfits dwell alongside such social insects largely because they gain something from one of the most efficient colonizers of the undergrowth. Many myrmecologists, evolution scientists, and even urban planners are turning to ants and termites to understand their efficient ways of societal cohesion, architecture, resource utilization, and even road traffic regulation.

If all the ants of the world were weighed, they would weigh as much as humans do, claimed E. O. Wilson. This is a direct attribute of their social life – living together. But this is not the only reason why ants are not only so common, but also successful; their success stems from the reason that an ant or a termite colony behaves as one single super-organism, its functions are in tune with the welfare of the entire society. Perhaps we should look down in the undergrowth to really understand our own societies, study the way we function, and how to function in a way that is in sync with the ways of nature.

We really need to lie down in the grass once in a while and observe these enchanting inhabitants of the undergrowth – see them go to work each day, greet each other with their inquisitive elbowed antennae as if shaking hands, clean their homes, and look after one another. In appreciating these small wonders we'll begin to understand the little threads that make the vast web of life, held together by an unseen force we like to call by many names, but more so to witness a force way simpler but ever so overwhelming – the force of oneness that binds us all, ant and human alike, together. ● Photo Courtesy : Aniruddha Dhamorikar

A day along Kanha- Pench Corridor

Dr. AJT Johnsingh

The freshly flattened grass patch half the size of a badminton court, the discarded leftovers of the stomach and intestine, spilled rumen contents, the skull and the terminal parts of legs with hooves and dewclaws of the boar indicated that the kill had been made by a large carnivore. The staff walking around and locating pugmarks confirmed that the kill was made by a tiger and they were evenabout the identity of the tiger — a mother with three grown up cubsthey had seen in the area few days ago. Red jungle fowls giving agitated alarms and flying up the trees hardly 20 meters from us clearly indicated that the cat family was nearby and possibly waiting for us to move away so that the remains of the kill can be eaten. The date was 30 October 2015, time was 09:40 hrs, and we were in the Ari Range of the Pench Buffer Division. The team included nearly 70 participants on the ambitious Kanha-Pench Walk 2015. Prominent persons in the team were Mr. Ravi Singh, Secretary General and CEO of WWF India Mr. JS Chauhan, Field Director, Kanha Tiger Reserve and Mr. S Sen, Field Director, Pench Tiger Reserve. This seven day walk which covers a distance of nearly 120 km was first conducted last year in the month of October, and aimed at highlighting the importance of wildlife corridors in the country primarily focusing on the Kanha-Pench corridor. . One should read about this corridor by referring to WWF India's well written report 'Lifeline for tigers: status and conservation of the Kanha-Pench corridor' by Jena, J et al(2011). The report is based on intensive surveys on foot by WWF India team. Briefly, the potential and the problems of the corridor can be summarized as follows. Kanha and Pench Tiger Reserves having about 120 tigers sustain one of the most important meta populations of tigers in central India. The corridor forests linking the two reserves are about 1700 sqkm of managed forests in five forest divisions in Mandla, Seoni and Balaghat districts. The corridor is characterized by diverse land use, forest protection regimes and forest dwelling tribal communities. It is used by animals such as sloth bear, hyena, dhole, leopard, tiger, common langur, barking deer, chowsingha, nilgai, wild pig, chital and sambar. Surprisingly there is no report of the gaur in the corridor area, which is found in both the tiger reserves. There are about 440 villages in the corridor forests and so livestock grazing (including by goats, which are enemies of forest regeneration), firewood and timber cutting are rampant around the villages. In fact during the walk, we often realized that we were nearing a village by hearing the ringing of the cowbells. Greater threat to the corridor comes from the road connecting Keolari with Balaghat via

and the one connecting Nainpur with Balaghat which runs parallel to Nainpur Balaghat railway line – they will be broadened as broad gauge and may even be converted into double lanes and the broadening of the NH7, east of Pench Tiger Reserve. Back to Day 1, the walk had started at 08:40 hrs from the cool environs of the Sakata Forest Rest House built in 1903, with a brief introduction by S. Sen about the importance of this corridor. This was followed by inspiring talks by J.S Chauhan and Ravi Singh. Both pointed out the importance of corridors and how public participation, working with the Forest Department and other government agencies can ensure the future of the corridors which are often threatened by growing development and subjected to immense biotic pressures.
The participants were wearing WWFIndia Tshirts, had binoculars, cameras, notebooks, water bottles and a tribal youth lead the way with a 'KanhaPench Walk 2015' flag in hand.The participants roughed it out willingly – camping in forest resthouses, schools and tents, wherethe Forest Departmentand WWF-India had organized their stopover along the trail.
I have visited Kanha and Pench Tiger Reserves but this was the first time I participated in the walk, albeit only for the first day covering a distance of nearly 22km ending in Kacchar. On the second day, I waited for the group with some forest staff on the bank of Derajhoranallah in the Lalbara Range but the group instead of walking uphill towards the bank walked along the nallah and reached the century old Sonawani forest rest house.
While in Sonawani I could see the teak tree planted by Dietrich Brandis, German forester, in 186768 who then worked with the British Imperial Forestry Service. I was also, taken by the staff to see a waterhole in a valley (sadly a tank was built with high walls rather than a saucer shaped water body).While on this trail I also witnessed fresh gaur dung. It was pleasing to see Mr. Ravi Singh leading the group and I was told that he continued to do so on the second day as well, trekking a total of 40 km with the team. On both the days, tiger pugmarks were observed in several places.
Yet my brief stint with the corridor gave me ample opportunities to understand the richness and the problems of the corridor. There was profuse regeneration of bamboo (Dendrocalamusstrictus), which, had flowered, in the early 2000. Abundance of giant wood spider (Nephilamaculata) in the forest was eye-catching. Many of the females were gravid with eggs and Mr.Chauhan said that soon the females will lay the eggs, perish and the spiderlings will appear with the onset of the next rainy season to continue the life cycle.
The villages we crossed had little of plastic, lots of goats, cattle, country chicken, children and the rivers although running low looked comparatively clean. The riverine vegetation dominated by tree species such as jamun (Syzygium cumini), arjun (Terminalia arjuna) and kadamb (Mithragyna parviflora) were cool and impressive. Many of the dhobin trees (Dalbergia paniculata) had a straight bole of 2025m in height which was notable.
Many of the mahua trees (Madhuca longifolia) were large and imposing. Grass growth in un grazed areas dominated by Heteropogoncontortus was impressive.
The walk brought two suggestions to mind — one about the landscape and other about the walk itself. About the landscape, the dependency of the villagers on the forests needs to be reduced as much as possible by growing firewood and fodder in the village lands and the adjacent forest lands set aside exclusively for this purpose. It should totally be a villagers program assisted and guided by the Forest Department and dedicated not for profit organizations like WWF India and Corbett Foundation.
As for the walk, to improvise on the existing concept, the participants can be provided with a laminated map, displaying the trek route, important locations, forest blocks, roads and so on. Hopefully, moving on, the participants would talk and write about the walk in all possible places so that the country becomes aware of the importance of corridors in wildlife conservation. ●

Dr. AJT Johnsingh and JS Chauhan

know OUR PEOPLE

Pench Tiger Reserve has a brigade of field staff that has served the Tiger reserve for around three decades.

Pench Management would like to appreciate the hard work, dedication and persistence shown by these soldiers in the service of wildlife and nature.

Indeed, they are the strongest soldiers who fought hardest battles in their lifetime.

Mr. Rambharos Pathak

Started his service from Pench-Mowgli Sanctuary, Mr. Ram Bharose Pathak has been serving the park for past twenty six years now. He has worked on different positions since then. In his long journey, Pathak was always appreciated by the officers as well as tourists for his incredible management of park tourism. He also did very sincere efforts in protection of wildlife. Under official supervision, he investigated many wildlife related crime cases and succeeded in them.

Remembering his past experiences of tiger encounters, Pathak says that when a man encounters a tiger in the wild, he is bound to be scared.

True understanding of one's bravery comes from of an encounter with tiger in the wild. He remembers involuntarily losing control over his senses and the adrenaline rush whenever he came across tiger.

Mr. Gautam Soni

Soni started his service as a guide and guard in 1984. Since then, he is serving the department. Now posted as a deputy ranger, Soni has a glorious past in the department full with appreciations and recognitions. He was also honored with Wildlife Protection award in 2008. Soni is deeply interested in researches and documentation as well. He provided depdepartment with the life story of famous tigress Collarwali since her birth, which was also published by the department. He also did a research study on Malabar Pied Hornbill at Sitaghat area of the reserve. He always worked positively by building a team with villagers and staff under the official guidance, for which he was also appreciated time to time.

Quoting an incident from his life, he says

"Once during February 2001, I was on a patrol to Kumbhadev beat with one of the chowkidaars. On the hill, under one of the rocks, water was constantly dribbling from one place and vanishing as soon as it touches the ground.

I checked for the reason, but water was neither getting collected somewhere, nor the soil was too damp. I decided to make a small chamber under the rock and then connected it to a bigger waterhole by a small pipe. Suddenly, the water that was vanishing now started collecting in the water hole.

Today it is one the major water source for Tigers, leopards, sloth bear, Cheetals, Sambhars and Guars. I later monitored the water from tumdiaer water source and also gathered season wise data. I was astonished to see that it flows by the rate of 2.4 liters per minute in summers, 5.5 liters per minute during rains and 2.5-3 liters per minute in the winters."

Photo Courtesy : Sanjay Shukla

Mr. Santosh Patel

Patel is yet another brave hero who is serving the reserve for 31 years. Appointed as Forest guard in September, 1984, Patel is now posted as Elephant In-charge and Range Assistant at Alikatta. Patel is one of those people who had seen development of Pench as a National Park and Tiger Reserve since inception and hard times when the whole community was against the formation of Tiger Reserve. He has been a part of a movement to create conducive environment for the tiger reserve in community. He is one of the first people who helped in putting on the brakes on grazing inside core, collection of fuel wood and other forest produces from the park and other activities which are banned inside the core of the reserve. During relocation of Chedia village from the core, Patel was on the front and worked on development of grassland in Chedia for herbivores. Today, Chedia is one of the best grasslands in the park. Patel describes managing local communities along with the Park as a very challenging task. It involved stopping people from using core forests as a way to commute from one village to another and also controlling illegal fishing from Totladoh dam which falls inside core. Illegal fishing is a still a menace in the park and staff is working hard to control it. Many operations of seizing boats, fishing equipments etc. took place successfully under Patel's guidance. He also had many confrontations with the fishermen where he fought bravely to safeguard his duty and responsibility towards Park.

Patel has been taking care of tourism management, grassland management, Wildlife monitoring, habitat management and protection part very effectively and efficiently along with other team mates. Pench management is happy and proud of such an efficient and brave staff.

MOWGLI UTSAV

Mowgli Utsav is celebrated every year as a festival for the

love of wildlife

at Pench Tiger Reserve.

State Government of Madhya Pradesh along with Pench Tiger Reserve in its endeavor to conserve the pristine natural forests and wildlife, organizes a three day event "Mowgli Utsav" every year to create awareness among the school students regarding forests and its inhabitants to inculcate the feeling of environment and biodiversity conservation.

It is a grand event in which school students and teachers from all over the State participate and learn and celebrate wildlife of Pench.

KANHA PENCH WALK

Source: WWF

The Kanha-Pench Walk -- a 100km trek into the forest corridors connecting the Kanha and Pench tiger reserves, undertaken by a motley team of nature loving city-dwellers – drew to an end on Thursday, 5 November 2015. In the course of the walk, the 40-odd youngsters from developed cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Pune and Ahmedabad, experienced the joy of living close to nature and learning from it. With limited access to technology, the nature enthusiasts were however amid a treasure trove of experts including veteran wildlifers, forest guards, forest conservators as well as with WWF-India's Satpuda-Maikal Landscape team.

Focused at raising awareness and gathering public support for securing the wildlife habitats not covered under the Protected Area regime, the walk attempted to highlight the rich biodiversity of the Kanha-Pench corridors. The participants were also introduced to tribal villages, where they could interact with forest dwellers and learn the ways of harmonious coexistence with wildlife. On the route, the participants experienced the thrill of sighting a leopard and encountering the remains of a tiger kill. They also observed several tell tale signs of the presence of wildlife – like tiger pugmarks; bison, leopard and sloth bear scats; and so on.

Photo Courtesy : Ajinkya Bhatkar

Tiger and Prey estimation

The regular estimation of Tigers, co-predators and their prey with a robust scientific methodology is one of the main activities in a tiger reserve. We have been implementing the Phase IV protocol as prescribed by the NTCA over the last few years. The Phase IV involves camera trapping to estimate the tiger numbers as well as estimation of prey in line transects. Phase IV was being carried out only in the Tiger Reserves of the state. The government of Madhya Pradesh has now decided that an estimation of Tigers, co-predators and prey will now be carried out every year in all the National Parks and Sanctuaries of the state. The territorial forest areas will carry out the exercise every alternate year. This exercise is the Phase I exercise normally undertaken all over India once in four years.

Accordingly, training for master trainers was organized at Kanha on 8th and 9th January 2016. The master trainers than trained the spearhead teams and the staff on the entire exercise. All trainings, maintenance of transects and distribution of the necessary equipments was done by 21st January and the actual estimation exercise was conducted between 31st January and 6th February 2016. Presently compilation of the data is underway and the final results are expected by 30th June 2016. This is an exercise by the MP forest department and the State Forest Research Institute is to play a key role.

VULTURE COUNT

A vulture count was undertaken as a state wide exercise for the very first time on 23rd January 2016. Extensive series of trainings and pre-surveys were conducted leading up to the actual vulture count from sunrise to 9AM on 23rd January. This winter count will be followed by a summer count and will be an annual feature. While Pench Tiger Reserve does not have any extensive roosting or nesting sites, what is encouraging is that all the 28 vultures sighted were of the highly endangered White-rumped vulture with a number of juveniles.

MEE (Management Effectiveness Evaluation) of Tiger Reserves

Protected areas (PAs) are the cornerstone of efforts to conserve biodiversity and the environment and provide associated recreational, economic and social benefits to humans. Evaluating the effectiveness of the management of these sites is one important way of ensuring that the investment of time and effort in establishing and managing PAs is delivering the benefits that society seeks.

Assessments enable managers and stakeholders to reflect on their experience, allocate resources efficiently and plan for effective management in relation to potential threats and opportunities.

A uniform theme has been provided to these assessments by the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) Framework for Assessing the Management Effectiveness of Protected Areas The WCPA Framework for Assessing Management Effectiveness is a system for designing PA management effectiveness evaluations with six elements:
context, planning, inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes

MEE RESULTS

The Top 5 Tiger Reserves

Rank	Tiger Reserve	MEE Score%
1	Periyar (Kerala)	91.13
2	Pench (MP)	89.52
3	Kanha (MP)	87.90
4	Parambikulum (Kerala)	86.29
5	Sundarbans (West Bengal)	85.48

DISPERSING TIGERS

For a demographically viable tiger population, a minimum 20 to 25 breeding tigresses have been found to be essential by modeling studies. However, many of our tiger reserves are small and already ecologically isolated from other populations. This effectively means that most of our tiger populations are of inadequate size and the tiger populations therein are doomed to die out over time. These local extinctions will only be hastened by even sporadic poaching or other accidents that result in removal of tigers, especially the breeding females.

In order to prevent this dire scenario it is important to ensure that the tenuous corridors that link our tiger reserves are kept functional. Connecting tiger source populations within the tiger landscapes by identifying, restoring and conserving habit corridors will ensure not only the continued existence of tigers in the landscapes but also help a multitude of other wildlife which will also use these corridors to remain genetically connected.

Kt22 a female, last Photographed in Pench in January 2014 appeared near Nagzira in January 2015

St2 a male, last Photographed in Pench in January 2014 appeared near Nagzira in December 2014

Habitat contiguity within tiger landscapes varies with the best connected being the Western Ghats and the north- eastern landscapes. The most fragmented landscapes are the Central Indian and the Shiwalik hills- Gangetic plains landscapes. Most of the connecting habitats in these landscapes are already lost to land-use changes and other developments.

With the recent increase in the use of camera traps to photograph tigers, extremely encouraging episodes of tigers using the corridors have come to light. One of the prime examples was a sub-adult male tiger photographed in Pench Tiger Reserve in 2008. Thereafter he disappeared only to appear in 2011 in the Mukki range of Kanha tiger reserve wherein he established a territory and reigned as the dominant male for over three years. This tiger used the well documented Kanha-Pench corridor.

More such hard photographic evidences have turned up but none more encouraging than four tigers that have completed the migration from Pench Madhya Pradesh to Bhandara division just outside Nagzira in Maharashtra. Until now it was believed that tigers migrating across long distances were exclusively males. As a pleasant surprise two of the four tigers that successfully negotiated the over 160 kilometers were females.

This vital exchange of individuals in between the tiger populations in central India is threatened amongst other things, by the expansion of two National Highways – NH 7 that cuts through the forests of the Pench Sanctuary and Pench buffer in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra and the NH6 that divides Nagzira from Navegaon and Tadoba Tiger Reserves in Maharashtra. Unless effective mitigation measures that allow for this exchange even after the expansion of these highways is put in place, several existing tiger populations in central India are doomed to certain local extinctions. That will be a huge disaster not only for the tiger but a multitude of other species and negate the huge human and capital investment made in these areas over the years.

WILDLIFE WEEK CELEBRATION

Wildlife Week is celebrated from the **1st to the 7th of October** by Pench Tiger Reserve in collaboration with Forest Circle, Seoni.

Wildlife Week is celebrated from the 1st to the 7th of October by Pench Tiger Reserve in collaboration with Forest Circle, Seoni. Around 500 students from 23 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 organized for the children. Oath was taken to conserve wildlife and nature by students, participants, their parents and others. 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 natural habitat and its inhabitants.

Era of LADY GUIDES starts in Pench

After rigorous training exercise, Pench Tiger Reserve has got its first eleven lady guides ever. Enthusiasts from the nearby villages participated in the training program of Pench Tiger Reserve and have secured their livelihoods in the park as nature guides.

One of the eleven lady guides is Vanita Vishwakarma. Vanita is a twenty three year old local girl who hails from nearby village kohka and holds a deep interest in forest and wild life. She has the formal education up to Twelfth standard. When she heard about the opportunity to work as a guide in the national park, she decided that she will not sit back at home and will build a career as a forest guide. She undertook a formal training provided by the park and started her work with the onset of tourist season on 16th of October. She is now very familiar will all the areas of the park and takes tourists on safari regularly.

She has sighted Tigers, Leopards and all other wild animals in the park and believes that no wild animal ever harms a human unless disturbed or threatened.

With Vanita and ten others, an era of lady guides has started in the park and hopefully more female nature enthusiasts will join in coming years.

Photo Courtesy : Subharanjan Sen

Wildlife LOSSES

Three tigers were found dead in the last seven months. In the first instance, a tiger was found dead near Potia in the Pench Mogli Sanctuary on 9th August 2015. Test results ruled out all possibilities of foul play and the young animal was determined to have died of injuries suffered in fight with another tiger.

In the second incident an adult male fell into a well without parapet overgrown with grasses in Simariya Village in the Buffer. The extensive scrape marks on the walls inside and the worn out claws of the tiger bore evidence to the desperate failed attempts made by the tiger to come out. We are expediting the process of covering up such uncovered wells in the buffer.

On 31st of January 2016, another male tiger was found dead in the Palaspani beat of the park. He turned out to be one of the males from the 2013 (5th) litter of the Collarwali tigress. The post mortem revealed an extensive septic wound in its right forelimb. The stomach and intestines were absolutely empty suggesting that the injuries were serious and debilitating enough to restrict hunting and possibly movement. Further test results are awaited in this case for a final conclusion.

In another incident the body of a partially eaten leopard was recovered from Baghdeo beat in the Park on 8th January 2016. The evidences suggest a confrontation with a tiger. Test results are awaited in this case for a final conclusion.

NATURE GUIDE TRAINING

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. Every year, Pench management organizes a training program for nature guides before the onset of safari season to make them ready for journey of new adventures of wildlife tourism. For last two years, The Corbett Foundation (TCF), an organization with nature and communication experts, is training the guides of Pench. In year 2015, 110 guides were trained including 11 lady guides. The prime focus of this programme was to enhance the knowledge of the nature guides, experienced and aspiring, on the biodiversity of Pench Tiger Reserve and improve their communication and guiding skills.

Photo Courtesy : Sanjay Shukla

Chichband PANTHER rescue

Sanjay Shukla

It was business as usual on 22nd May also. Finished office work, reached home and was going to have dinner. Mr R S Kori, DFO South Seoni Division called and informed me that one leopard has entered one house in Chichaldoh Maal village about 60 kms from Seoni, . It was about 10.00 PM when I got the information. In the meantime Mr Kori instructed his SDO, ROs and other subordinate staff to reach the spot. We started from Seoni immediately and reached the village by 11.45 PM.

As we reached the village, we found that a large number of people had already gathered. They all were standing surrounding the hut in which the leopard was trapped.

The leopard had entered the hut, which was of one old lady of the village, following the goats for kill. The lady is a widow and lives alone. She used to keep her goats also in the hut. When leopard entered the hut she was out. When she returned, she found one goat killed as she entered the door. Suddenly she could see the leopard killing the other goat. She rushed out immediately and with the help of the villagers she could close the doors and windows, trapping the leopard inside.

Firstly we decided to let the leopard make free so that it may escape to the adjoining forest area taking advantage of darknesst. But the villagers didn't agree to this, as they said that this animal is continuously moving in and around the village for last one month.They were not able to sleep out of their homes despite hot weather due to its fear. It had killed one more goat in the same hut where it was trapped a week back. Considering that if the leopard is let free, it may again be problem for the villagers and if any loss or damage to human life is done then it may turn into a law and order problem.

I discussed this issue with DFO, SDO, staff and villagers and decided to capture the leopard the next day. As capture may have required tranquilisation also, I discussed this with Dr Akhilesh mishra. As he was reaching Seoni in the afternoon, we planned the capture in the afternoon. During this period the difficult task was managing and controlling the crowd. SDOs, ROs and other field staff of Seoni and Balaghat Circle did a commendable job of controlling the crowd. Rescue team of Pench Tiger Reserve reached with their rescue vehicle by 3.00 pm and within one hour we could capture the leopard passively in the cage without any injury to it . We wanted to avoid the tranquilisation and we could do this. The rescue team did the capture operation to the perfection fearlessly. Immediately we left the village, and we did hold the animal not even for an hour. It was firstly examined by Dr Akhilesh Mishra and found to be perfectly healthy. It was let free in the Buffer area of Pench Tiger Reserve near Rukhad about 25 kms away from the place where it was captured.

Dr Akhilesh Mishra guided the entire release operation and leopard found a new home. It was an operation perfectly executed with the help and support of all the rank of foresters of Seoni Circle, Balaghat Circle and Pench Tiger Reserve.

WILDLIFE CRIME CONTROL

Pangolin

A big racket dealing with trading parts of big cats and other endangered species has been busted this year. An international racket dealing with Pangolin trade has been unearthed. The Pangolin trade involved several states including Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chhatisgarh, Odisha, West Bengal, Assam and Manipur. The materials were transported to Myanmar, possibly enroute to China. Investigation team, led by SDO Mr. Ritesh Sarothiya did great work and busted the racket with interstate and interdepartmental coordination. Pench staff led by Range Officer Karmajihiri Mr. Inder Kumar Bare worked hard on the case and achieved success in unearthing this international racket.

Photo Courtesy : Govind Sagar Bharadwaj

Tiger Bones

Four persons with tiger bones were arrested and were put behind bars, credits to strong informer network of the management team. In the endeavor of putting full stop on wildlife crimes in the area a local lawyer also got exposed. He was a mediator in the local wildlife trade and was involved in all sought of illegal practices involving several endangered wildlife. Due to good inter-departmental coordination, the lawyer was also jailed.

Leopard Poaching

A leopard was electrocuted near Karmajhiri in the Buffer on 2nd November 2015. Four persons, two each from the neighboring villages of Parraspani and Vijaypani were arrested and jailed for the crime.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Photo Courtesy : Subharanjan Sen

Cheetal Translocation

The recent relocation of dozens of villages and settlements from the core of the Satpura tiger reserve has freed up large expanses of area suitable for Chital. In order to augment and speed up the prey base of the area it has been decided to translocate a thousand chital to Satpura Tiger Reserve. The deer will be captured without chemical immobilization and released in batches in suitable habitats already identified. Similar operations are planned for translocating Chital to Nauradehi Wildlife Sanctuary as well.

> **Such translocations are healthy for habitat as well as species.**

PATDEV TIGRESS

The Patdev tigress named after the area she has made her home is one of the "Famous Five" cubs of Collarwalli's third litter.

She was born in October 2010.

She follows in her family tradition having successfully brought up her first litter of four cubs that are about 2 years old now and ready to disperse!

FIGHT TO DEATH

Antler Stuck Chital Stags

From the Archives

Text Subharanjan Sen,
Photographs NS Dungriyal

Deer stags sparring in apparently mortal contests are routine during the rut. I had heard of instances where two sparring stags got their antlers inextricably interlocked that led to the eventual death of both deer. However it appeared more fictional to me and I would usually dismiss such claims as products of fertile imaginations! I was therefore incredulous when I got the news that two Chital stags had died at Alikatta and that their antlers are inextricably stuck! The Field Director, Mr. N. S. Dungriyal too had got the news too and we hastened to Alikatta with the veterinary doctor, Dr. Akhilesh Mishra. We reached the spot just in front of the DD hut at Alikatta and sure enough, two Chital stags in prime health lay dead with their antlers interlocked!

There was no external injury in either of them. After the post mortem determined that they had died due to exhaustion and shock, Dungriyal sir decided that we will not burn the bodies as was the standard practice but leave it for the scavengers to feed upon. The two were therefore left in situ with the staff at Alikatta keeping a watch from a distance.

Sadly no vultures or even tigers or leopards fed on the stags. The honours were done by Jackals, Wild Boars and a few crows! Dungriyal Sir kept a diligent record of the state of the carcasses overtime as he was wont to do, and thanks to him, we have a wonderful photographic record of the stag carcasses over ten days.

On the tenth day, the kill was more or less scavenged but the interlocked antlers did not budge despite the feeding frenzy over ten days and the stag heads remained united in a deathly grasp!

Inauguration of a

DAY SHELTER

at Turia gate

Turia gate of Pench National Park is the most important gate for the park as the maximum number of tourists and vehicles enter in the park via Turia. Considering the importance of this gate from the management's perspective, it is definitely important to provide tourists with the basic facility like rest area. A day-shelter was started with the facilities to relax is started at Turia gate in the month of July. This shelter also contributes to education and awareness about wildlife by screening different interesting wildlife related movies.

Opening of a

SILAI CENTRE

Empowering women of Buffer villages, a Silai centre in one of the Pench –Satpuda Corridor Village Devri is started under Biodiversity conservation and Rural Livelihoods improvement project. Women voluntarily came forward for this initiative and management supported it. With two lady trainers and 26 trainees the Centre is fully functional and contributing to the livelihoods of the People.

Photo Courtesy : Arpit Dubey

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।। कुछ दिखा क्या ।।

सुबह–सुबह ''भारतीय राष्ट्रीय उद्यान'' के सामने बड़ा उत्साह दिखाई देता है। सभी लोग अर्थात् पर्यटक सिर्फ एक ही भाव लिए रहते हैं कि ''शेर'' कैसे दिखे ? कुछ गाइड से पूछते हैं, तो कुछ पुराने अनुभवों पर बातें करते हैं। अधिकतर पर्यटक, गाइड एवं ड्राइवर के साथ आँखें गड़ाए आगे बढ़ते हैं। उत्साह और हल्का सा भय दोनों मन में लिए आधुनिक कैमरे के साथ गाड़ियाँ आगे बढ़ती हैं। ड्राइवर एवं गाइड अनुभवों के आधार पर पर्यटक को आनंदित करने के लिए अपनी कहानियाँ सुनाते, तो कुछ, मकड़ी, पक्षी, बड़ी छिपकली, हिरन, सांभर आदि जानवरों एवं जंगल का ज्ञान का वर्णन करते हुए आगे बढ़ते हैं। पर सिर्फ कुछ भारतीय पर्यटक ही इन बातों को सुनते होंगे, अधिकतर पर्यटक इसे अनसुना करते हुए शेर पर अपना मन और आँखें जमाए रहते हैं।

विदेशी सैलानी एवं भारतीय सैलानियों में एक बात का तो बहुत बड़ा फर्क है। ज्यादातर विदेशी पर्यटक जंगल में पेड़, पत्ती, खुशबू, नदी–नाले, पहाड़, मकड़ी, पक्षी और किसी भी जानवर को बड़े उत्साह से देखते और आनंद लेते हैं।

हाँ कुछ देशी सैलानी भी विचित्र प्राकृतिक खुशबुओं में डूब जाते हैं। कुछ एक अजीब–सी शांति एवं अनुभूति में मदमस्त हो जाते हैं। मिट्टी की प्राकृतिक खुशबू, साल के वृक्षों से बाहर निकले लुभान की खुशबू, करोंदे के फूल की खुशबू, मन मस्तिष्क को लुभा लेती है। कुछ बुजुर्ग तो अपने बचपन की यादों की खुशबू को महसूस करते हैं। जंगल की भीनी–भीनी ठंडक कोमल त्वचा पर रोंगटे खड़ी कर जाती है, जब मोर और चीतल की आवाज एक साथ जंगल में गूंजती है। तो ये सब तन–मन को मदमस्त बना देती है। विचरण करते चीतल के झुण्ड के साथ, गिरे हुए वृक्ष की सूखी हुई डालियों पर बैठे बंदर, पंचतंत्र की कहानियों का ताजा वर्णन करते दिखते हैं। भागते हुए सियार, उड़ते हुए गिद्ध, जंगली कुत्तों का सड़क पर चहलकदमी करना, एक–दूसरे को काटते हुए लड़ना एवं लाड़ना (प्यार करना), एक पल के लिए तनाव मुक्त कर देता है। फोटोग्राफी का शौक ध्यान की अनुभूति से बढ़कर एहसास कराता है और उस पर मोबाइल फोन का कवरेज क्षेत्र से बाहर होना सोने पे सुहाने के समान है। इतने प्राकृतिक सौदर्य के बाद भी, पता नहीं कुछ लोग क्यों वृक्षाको चोरी–छुपे काटकर और वन्य प्राणियों का शिकार कर कैसे रूपया कमाना चाहते हैं ? शायद पर्दे के पीछे के आनंद से न तो ये लोग कभी रूबरू हुए हैं और न हो पाऐंगें।

जब कभी कई बार जंगल सफारी के दौरान दो जिप्सी आपस में एक–दूसरे को पार करती हैं। तब दोनों गाड़ियों की रफ्तार कम होती है। दोनों जिप्सी के गाइड की आपस में इशारों में बातें होती हैं। जिप्सी में बैठे मुसाफिरों के चेहरे देखकर आप कई तर्क निकाल सकते हैं। यदि चेहरे उदास हैं तो, मानो की जंगल सफारी नहीं किसी हार का सामना करके जा रहे हो। और उनके गाइड एक–दूसरे को इशारों–इशारों में कह देंगें ''कुछ नहीं दिखा''। कुछ पर्यटक तो वन विभाग को कोसने लगते हैं, तरह–तरह की बातों से अपने मन के उद्गार व्यक्त करते हैं।

सैलानी यदि वी.आई.पी. हो तो क्या कहने। खासकर ''वी. आई. पी.'' की धर्म पत्नियाँ। मोहतरमा का गुस्सा और भड़ास का क्या कहना। शेर नहीं दिखा तो बेचारे ''वन अमले'' पर जुबानी हमला हो जाता है!! कुछ मानसिक विक्षिप्त तो शेर के नहीं दिखने से प्रबंधन और प्रशासन को कसूरवार ठहराने से बाज नहीं आते। ''कभी–कभी तो शेर के दर्शन होना ही सफलता की कुंजी है''।

जंगल सफारी में शेर का दिखना महज इत्तेफाक होता है। ये बात शायद कुछ ही लोग समझ पाते हैं। पर क्या करें शेर तो शेर है, बस एक बार दीदार हो जावे, फिर तो कुछ देखने का मन ही नहीं करता, और फिर उल्टे पाँव भागना चाहते हैं ताकि गर्व से दूसरों को पूछ सकें, तुमको कुछ नहीं दिखा क्या ?

यदि आपका लक्ष्य सिर्फ शेर देखना है तो आप प्रकृति की सुंदरता का कभी भी आनंद नहीं उठा सकते, क्योंकि आप हर वक्त शेर को देखने की मानसिक गिरफ्त में रहेंगें। मेरा आपसे यही अनुरोध है कि इतना समय खर्च करके अगर आप जंगल आए हैं, तो जंगल की शोभा को निहारिए, अनूभूति कीजिए, भिन्न–भिन्न खुशबुओं का आनंद लीजिए। प्रकृति एवं प्राकृतिक सौंदर्यता को जंगली भैंसा, जंगली सूअर, सांभर व अन्य जंगली जानवरों के साथ निहारिए। कभी पहाड़, नदी–नालों, झाड़ियों, झुरमुटों का उन्माद देखिए तो आप जरूर महसूस करेंगे, ''हमें बहुत कुछ दिखा''

(डॉ. दिनेश बिसेन)

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.

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