

DUDHWA



On January 13th, 2011 departed for Dudhwa National Park. After collecting my luggage and changing my money at the airport, I was to meet a person who was to collect funds on behalf of SAVE THE STRIPES, an organisation that works in Bandhavgarh, the funds are to help the family of Pancham Baiga who was killed by a Tiger in Bandhavgarh area. We had decided jointly to give funds as an initial payment, and then also support the family over the next 12 months; we would then assess the situation at the end of that period. It was important to support the family, as it was not the Tigers fault,

we also wanted to show the family that we are sorry for their loss, and that we wanted to help their future. The person gave me a receipt for the funds, I then left after another hour for the railway station.

At the railway station, I met a person from Ranthambhore, as we were helping with some footwear for the forest guards, a repair to a roof at a school we help on the peripheries of the national park, also collecting some DHONK items to take back to UK, for a charity in the UK, selling them helps to promote Dhonks work, who work with Tigerwatch, to rehabilitate Mogiya hunting community in Ranthambhore and giving them an alternative way of making a living rather than hunting.

After the meeting, my train arrived and I met up on our coach with Avantika Chandra and her mum, whose name is Debbie. They were to come to Dudhwa and spend four days there. Our train departed on time at 18.50 and was due in at Shahjehanpur at 12.50; it arrived about 30 minutes late. We were met by Anurag and a couple of his team at the station.

We then had a 2.5 hours drive to Bansinagar, which is on the peripheries of Dudhwa National Park, arriving at 04.00. We went straight to Tiger Den, the hotel that Avantika and her mum would stay at; I then went with Anurag to the camp, which is 5 minutes away. I was to stay at the camp. also getting to see the motorcycle we had given to help Vision Dudhwa in their work. After we went for a drive around the local fields in the area of where Anurag and his team work, after about 30 minutes the car got bogged down and we walked back to

camp, after a cup of chai, I went to get some sleep as it was 06.00 and had been up with little sleep for 2 days. I slept until 09.00, at the same time receiving a call from Indrajit Sengupta, who had arrived at Tiger Den, he was to spend the nine days with us, to learn more about the work in the area. He had travelled from Kolkata. We then went for a walk up to the Nahua river, which is close to their area. On the way in one of the ditches we observed some Tiger pugmarks, about 2 weeks old.

After the walk, we had some chai and a little food, then went to the Tiger Den to meet up with Avantika, Debbie and Indrajit. We then took the short walk back to camp. The children were outside with the teacher reading, a short time later I gave out some t-shirts I had bought with me from the UK. They were made by a school in Loughborough, Leicestershire. They had a Tiger conservation message on them, also showing that children from UK care about Tiger. We took some photos, so as to be able to add them to Tiger Awareness website when back in the UK. We all then went for a walk around some of the area covered by Vision Dudhwa Samati, meeting some daily wage staff on the railway line by the bridge crossing. I asked what their pay per month is and the reply was 2500 Rupees. We then walked down the side of the Nahua river, noting as we looked back a young man up a tree with an axe, cutting off a dead part of it, the daily wage staff had moved on at this time.

As we continued down the river edge we noted four people with bundles of wood on their heads, once they observed us,

they dropped them and ran off, the wood was not fresh, and they had picked it up loose from the ground. Around 5pm, we went to Tiger Haven, which was the home of Billy Arjan Singh. We asked for permission to go onto the property, we met Jairaj Singh, who made us aware of what is happening with the changes. He made us aware that there will be a rehabilitation centre where vets will be able to hopefully release animals back in to the forest. There is to be a museum to Billy Arjan Singh, a learning centre also for researchers, this is all expected to be finished by March 2012. They are using some of the old buildings and some new brick buildings, it has improved since my last visit in May last year. In the evening I decided to move into Tiger Den hotel also. After making some notes I went to bed around midnight.

On Sunday January 16th, up at 05.45 as we were to go on safari after some breakfast. On the way to Dudhwa Forest Rest house, which is where you book tour safari, observed the train going past us into the forest core area, this happens 14 times per day. The forest department have recently lost a court case in Lucknow to get it removed, as it travels too fast, kills many animals each year, including Tiger.



After booking our safari, we went to Sonaripur to see if Kaushlendra Singh, relative of Billy Arjan Singh was available to talk to, though at this point he was out in the forest area with other friends. We then decided to go to Salukapur, we went on a safari on elephant, this lasted for 2 hours and we observed rhino with calf, chital and some swamp deer in a lake area, did not observe any forest guards patrolling in the forest area, at the end of the safari the fog lifted. After the safari we went to Sonaripur and met up with Kaushlendra and G.C Mishra, former field director of Dudhwa national park, also present was deputy director of Dudhwa. In the conversations we had, it was mentioned that the CONSERVE DUDHWA project would look to ask for 100 crore Rupees to help Dudhwa go forward , a report would be put forward to Jairam Ramesh, Minister for environment and forests.

The talk was very encouraging, hoping that the funds can be found to help Dudhwa go forward with projects such as removing lantana weed in the forest, removing the trees fallen at monsoon time, the funds from this can be put back into the forest or given to the locals to stop villagers encroaching in the forest, lowering the chance of man – animal conflict, also looking to fence the core area, many other ideas were put forward. I also gave Kaushlendra some items I had brought for him from the UK, he also told me he would drop off the booklets from the commemorative meeting on January 1st in Lucknow, which was to remember Billy Arjan Singh and proactive ways forward for Dudhwa, these were dropped off later in the day. In the afternoon we went on a safari to Sathiana area, the bridge has been fixed over the river recently. The grasslands that were so full, of wildlife a few years back, were totally void of any at this time, observing a few wild boar, chital, macaque monkeys, on the last part of the route, we also noted villagers leaving the forest area with wood and grasses for thatching. We had some chai, and then went into Palia, which is 9kms away from Bansinagar area. We went to get some supplies, also some stationary and medical items to help Vision Dudhwa, these were purchased by Avantika, Debbie. This will be big help for the school and team over the next six months. After getting back to camp, we had some food and then went back to Tiger Den at around 9.15pm.

Next morning January 17th, we had no safari , as in the afternoon a meal had been organised so we could meet more of the villagers, the meal was paid for by Tiger Awareness. In the morning we had breakfast at Suresh' s house, he is one of the Vision Dudhwa team, he does most of the cooking for the team at camp. After breakfast we went for a drive around the local area covered by Vision Dudhwa, we observed a couple of jackals, 2 dead buffalo left out by villagers for the predators, though at this time were being eaten by local dogs.

We then went back to camp, arriving back at camp, we met with a few Tharu guides, who were looking for some support for their work, as they are struggling to get regular work in the forest area, as Dudhwa does not get the visitors like the more popular national parks such as Bandhavgarh and Corbett, it has one full time guide, they were to ask deputy director if they could start up nature walks in the surrounding areas of the park. I said that I would look at the situation, Avantika was a big help by translating for me. The rest of Anurags team were preparing the food for the meal later in the day. Shortly after Naveed Jamaal and 2 other people from Tuskers Society arrived, we spoke for about 15 minutes and then departed to a village, to visit a young man who had been in conflict with Tiger in the forest last May, he had lost alot of blood at the time of the incident, also scarred, though good to know he had made a good recovery, this happened when Thale had gone into the forest area close to his home .

The family held no animosity towards Tiger, though were frustrated that the laws are set up for the animals, they get no compensation for loss of crops also that they got little compensation and not much support at the time of the incident, also no visit by the forest department. A Tiger had been seen 3 days before, we also found pugmarks in one of the rice fields . We left the area thanking the villagers for the food, chai and information, we returned to Bansinagar to have meal with local people. Anurag had also organised a play by one of his friends, the play was about people going into the forest, getting forest people to cut down trees and the hunters killing Tiger, how promises of more money , ends up with more conflict due to human interference. We gave them some money as a donation and suggested it could be made into a DVD and also taken around local villages and schools. After we had some food, we then went into Palia, to get a few items then going to see if any Tiger / leopard were eating the buffalo we had seen earlier, also to see if any people were about illegally . On this occasion there was jackal and dogs eating the carcass, we stopped for a short time, as we could hear chital alarm calls off in the distance.

January 18th, we went to the Nepal border, on the way we stopped at the forest rest house at Bankati. We had some chai, also noting a Tharu village close to this area. We then moved off to a village called Kajaria, which is on the border with Nepal. We had some more chai, then took a short walk to the river's edge, which is the border between India and Nepal.

It is so easy for people to move across the border with animal trade , despite a border post five hundred yards further up the road. After we went for some lunch which was being cooked by Suresh and gave the villagers some money to pay for the food they had given us, then left to go back to Bansinagar. On arriving back we decided to go to Kishanpur , which is a 30 minute drive, if the railway line is clear over the river. On arriving at Kishanpur we were lucky to meet the local forest officer, who gave us permission to go into the forest as it was later than you would go for safari .On the safari, we did not see any Tiger, though we did spot pugmarks. We also observed some prey species. We did not see any forest guards in the area at all on patrol. After getting some items in Palia, we then headed back for our evening meal. After the evening meal we went for a patrol around the local area in the car, to see if any people were out hunting, also to see if we could spot wildlife at night , we spotted jackals and some dogs finishing off the buffalos from previous days.

January 19th, we should have had a morning safari ,this was cancelled due to the fog, and visibility was down to around 20-30 yards. After some breakfast we had a drive around the Bansinagar area, we had to get back to Tiger Den, as Avantika and Debbie were to fly to Delhi, from Lucknow, which is five hours from Dudhwa by car. Avantika gave me some funds to use to purchase some blankets for the chaukidars who work in the sugarcane fields. They also gave some funds to help the teams work. There support had been invaluable in many ways.

After Avantika and Debbie's departure, we then went for a walk around the area, we met four forest guards, Anurag asked one of the team to go back to fetch some torches to help their work, these were donated by a donor in UK, we gave the torches to the guards and then carried on our walk around the local area, observing crocodiles on the route back to camp.

On the afternoon safari, we had no sightings of Tiger, though we observed pugmarks of Tigress and cub. After safari we went back to Tiger Den and had some food, after Anurag met us at the hotel and downloaded some photos on to his laptop. After the food, we went for a drive around the local area, then went back to Tiger Den and spent some time catching up writing up my notes on the trip. January 20th, our morning safari was cancelled once again due to the fog. We then went for a drive around the another part of the local area covered by Vision Dudhwa, close to Tiger Haven, which leads onto the Sathiana area of the national park, less accessible by car as it had deep ruts, though would be good by jeep . We entered on foot, there is a small wooded area and grassland, and we observed no Tiger or herbivores. We then went into Palia town and used the cybercafé to do some updating and letting people know what is happening.

We then went back to camp, meeting up with Siddharth Singh, his father was a previous field director of Dudhwa. After Anurag and Siddharth had been for a drive, we then went to for safari.

We observed Rhino on different occasions, also chital, we also went to the forest guard's base camp at Salukapur. The camp and forest guards need some support, how they are expected to their jobs with little equipment and supplies is beyond me. I am hoping we can get some support for them, Tiger Awareness will look to help them also next time we visit. After the safari we went back to Tiger Den, had some soup and chai, then after a talk, Siddharth had to drive back to Lucknow. We later had some food at camp, then going for a patrol around the area, we observed nothing and arrived back about 45 minutes later.

January 21st, In the morning I went for a walk around the local area, looking for pugmarks , the camp dog came with me, a female , she had been at the camp for two years, would always greet you. I became attached to her like my own back in the UK. We did not spot anything, then went into Palia and used the cyber cafe again and a few supplies. In the afternoon we met up with Prashant Pandey, a journalist who works in the area, he was with his family and we spoke for about 30- 40 minutes, as they were on the way back from a family wedding.

After we went for a walk around 2 other areas covered by Vision Dudhwa, we spotted some pugmarks that were about 1-2 days old. After some food in the evening we went out in the car to give some blankets out to the chaukidars in the sugarcane fields, these would be of big help, as at night it was very cold, the funds were donated by Avantika . Some of the blankets were also given out next morning and leaving 3 spare to give out in the future.

Next morning, we went to an area close to Tiger Haven, finding the skull of a buffalo and other bones, we then also went to an area close to Chandan Chauki. On the way back we then went to meet the village head of the 5 villages, Tanda -1, Tanda small, Bharoi Ghat, Bilahiya and Farshaiya, he had been in the position for 3 terms covering 15 years. The Five villages cover six hundred families, four thousand people. He said that hunting and poaching had stopped in the area, also adding that education needs to improve at school, though attending, they are not learning much education. After lunch, we went to Kishanpur wildlife sanctuary. We had no Tiger sighting, a little more prey, though not enough to sustain many predators. Though we had a forest guard accompany us for some of the visit, did not observe any more at any time on patrol.

January 23rd, last day at Bansinagar and Dudhwa area. We went for a walk around the local area to meet some of the villagers, we went to a local government school. After visiting the school which has 69 pupils, we went to Palia and purchased some sports equipment for the children of Vision Dudhwa and also left some for Anurag to give to the government school. After playing some games with the children, we went off on the motorcycle to TIGER HAVEN, to take some photos, we met Jairaj, I explained that I had started a TIGER HAVEN facebook page and that would add these to this, as I feel it would show people the changes that are happening.

After we arrived back Tiger Awareness gave a donation of 10,000 Rupees to help Vision Dudhwa with their work. After some food we left Bansinagar for Shahjehanpur, which is two and half hour drive away, on arriving there, we checked on the train situation, had a cup of chai with Indrajit who had a room for the night as he would get his train next morning to Kolkata. The train departed at 00.50 and was to arrive Delhi at 07.00, I said my thanks and good byes to Anurag , Indrajit and team members, who had shown us much on our visit. I arrived in Delhi about 10 minutes late, meeting up with Avantika and mum at the train station. We went to Avantika's place of work, having coffee and a chat about the visit. After saying good bye for now to Avantika, Debbie and I went to the international airport, this took about thirty minutes. I said good bye and thanks for coming to Dudhwa. I returned to UK, that afternoon.

CONCLUSION.

The visit to Dudhwa was my second in seven months, the work being done by Vision Dudhwa is proceeding forward. They have come along way in this time.. Tiger Awareness is looking to support them in the future for education, nature education and further developing them to challenge any hunting in the areas close to them.

Anurag and Mukesh will be going on an anti poaching course in Ranthambhore sponsored by Tiger Awareness at the end of February. The course will be useful in challenging people in

this area. I would like to say a big THANK YOU, to Anurag and team for taking us to the areas also the organising he did for us on this trip. It was great to meet up with Indrajit Sengupta, who spent the whole time with me there, he is keen, supportive and now has started to do some good work to help Vision Dudhwa, raising funds in Kolkata. The donations and support from Avantika and Debbie were very helpful, also their support in helping translate. Avantika is also helping so much in making people aware of Tiger Awareness work, which is a major support for us.

