

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION INTENSIVE TRAINING PROGRAM

25th Feb - 2nd March 2024

TIGER WATCH, RANTHAMBHORE

INTRODUCTION

Tiger Watch is an organisation of committed individuals who are re-defining wildlife conservation in Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve and its environs. Tiger Watch operates at ground zero, always on the front lines of the many battles taking place to protect not just the Tiger but the entire landscape. They have redefined wildlife conservation in Ranthambhore with its Mogyia Education Program, Bagh Mitra Awareness Program, Bagh Pari Vocational Training Program, and so on.

OBJECTIVES OF THE TRAINING PROGRAM:

The overall objective of the training program can be summarised as follows:

1. To gain skills and knowledge necessary for conducting wildlife research, including data collection and analysis techniques.
2. Knowing techniques for managing and restoring wildlife habitats to support diverse ecosystems.
3. Human-Wildlife Conflict Resolution.
4. Enhancing the skills and knowledge about wildlife professions.

TRAINING PROGRAM REPORT:

Day 1, February 25th

Wildlife Intensive Training Conservation Program was started on 25th of February at Rajiv Gandhi Nation Season of Natural History. The training program was formally initiated by *Dr. Dharendra Devarshi* – Former Principal of Government College and Dean of Science Faculty at MS Braj University, Bharatpur who shared the objectives of the training. Dr *Dharmendra Khandal* – Executive Director WCITP warmly welcomed the participants. Moving on, the organisers and supporters introduction was shared by *Ishan Dhar* – R&D Consultant, Tiger Watch. Participants were also asked to have an informal introductory session and to share their plans about developing a career in the field of conservation biology or any other field.



Dr Satish Sharma – Former ACF, Rajasthan Forest Department Consultant, Foundation for Ecological Services, took on the last session before lunch. In this session participants were introduced to the core concepts of the forest types of India and their classification with special reference to the forest types of Rajasthan, classification by Champion and Seth.



Post lunch, *Ishan Dhar* and *Dr. Khandal* took the session on historical occurrence of the caracal and cheetah in India.

Day 2, February 26th

In the early morning, all the participants visited Boli Forest, Sawai Madhopur.



This visit covered tracking wildlife in the Aravalli ranges, studying local flora and fauna, and learning about different wildlife conservation strategies used by the Rajasthan Forest Department in semi-arid watersheds to conserve water and reduce soil erosion.

The whole group was divided into two teams: team 1, guided by Dr Dharmendra Khandal, and team 2, guided by Dr Dhirendra Devarshi.

In the post lunch session, *Mr. Tapeswar Bhati*, Environmental Activist and Freelance Advocate, talked about legal solutions towards challenges posed by wildlife crime and how they can be implemented via RTI & PIL, the Wildlife Protection Act 1972, amendment, rules, and the National Green Tribunal (NGT).

Dr Dhirendra Devarshi discussed identifying birds using a pictorial key, including size, shape, colour, wings, beaks, legs, and claws.



Day 3, February 27th

Day 3 started off with previous day's recap, participants were asked to share the learning of first two days.

Dr Dhirendra, then invited Dr Dharmendra Khandal for his session on spider diversity and tiger ecology.

Dr. Khandal shared his journey and experiences, ranging from spider biology to active conservation with Tiger Watch. He gave a brief introduction to spiders and their diversity. He also talked about the origin of tigers and their distribution in India. Dr. Khandal discussed the comparative morphology, behavioural ecology, and conservation status of the tiger.

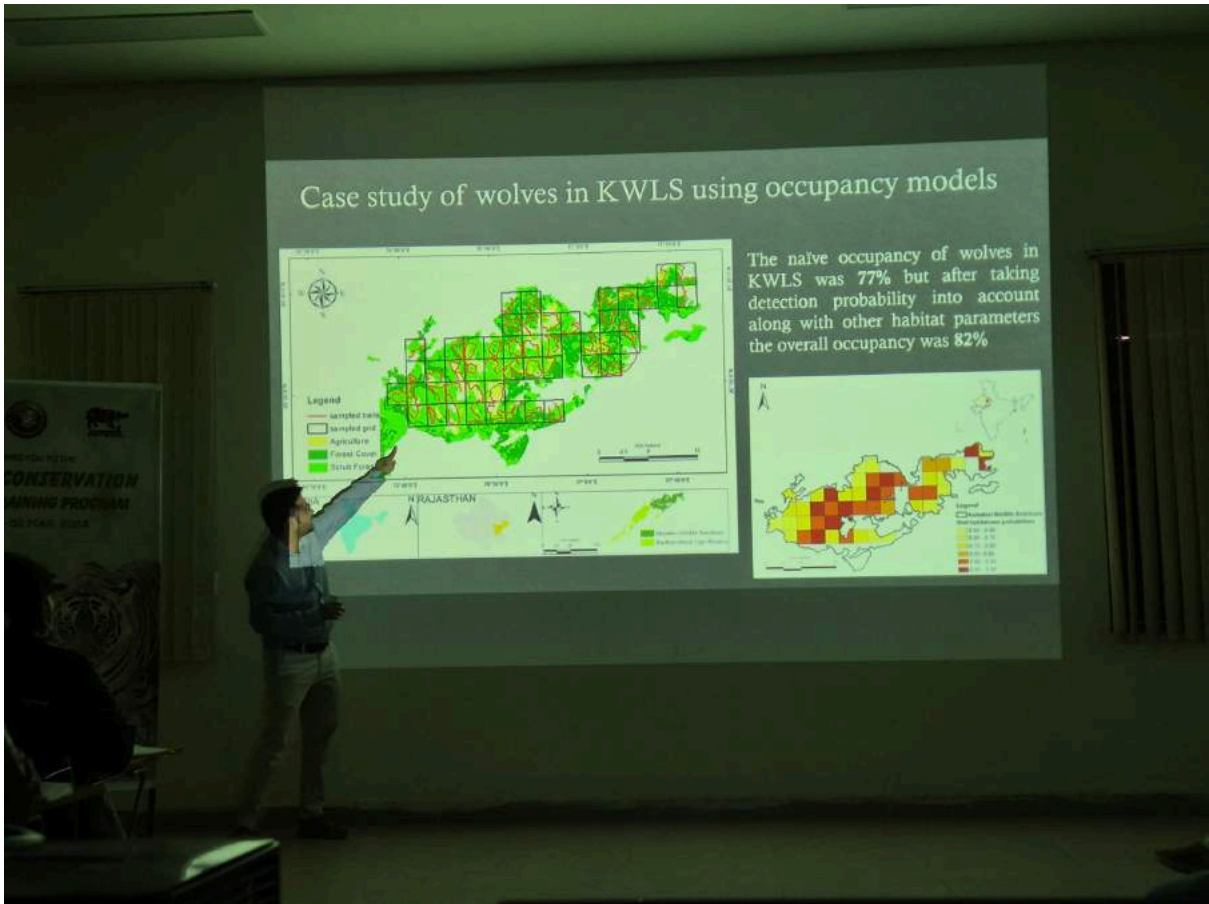


In the last session before lunch, *Dr. Praveen Kumar Verma* – Scientist D, Rajiv Gandhi Regional Museum of Natural History (RGRMNH), gave a short talk about the Rajiv Gandhi Regional Museum of Natural History and guided a tour to the museum’s crucial sections.





Post lunch, *Prashant Mahajan* – Faculty at the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) took a session on sampling methods and survey techniques for wildlife and discussed how to plan research projects.



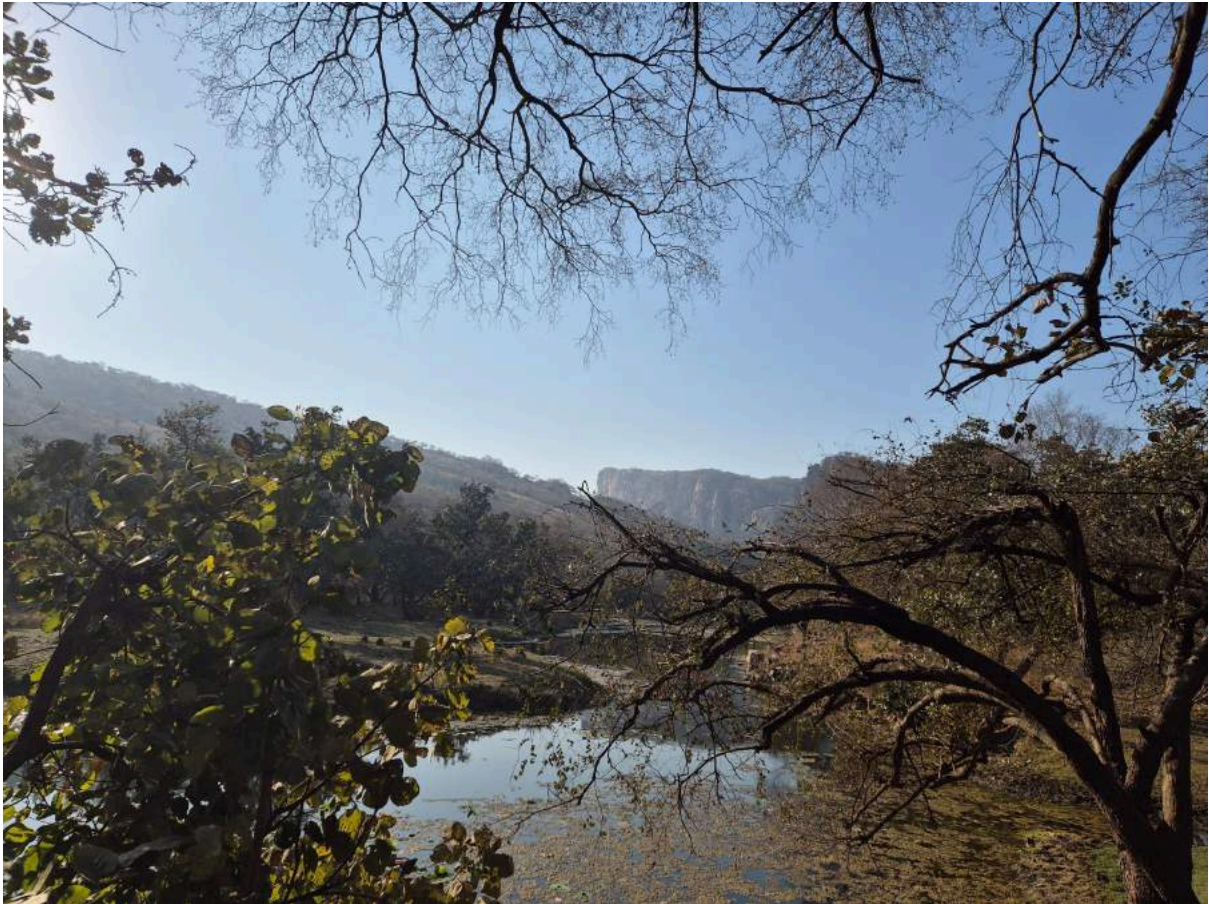
After the formal sessions, *Harimohan Gurjar* – Village Wildlife Volunteer, Tiger Watch, was invited to share his experience as a wildlife tracker.



Day 4, February 28th

The day started early in the morning; participants were taken on a guided tour of Ranthambore National Park in Zone 2. They talked about the forest type of Ranthambore, which is a dry deciduous forest.





And spotted many faunal species such as sloth bear, painted spurfowl, white-throated kingfisher, little cormorant, sambar deer, red-vented bulbul, rufous treepie, grey-headed canary flycatcher, spotted deer and its carcass, rose-ringed parakeet, chestnut headed petronia, Indian peafowl, jungle babbler, brown fish owl, marsh crocodile, pied kingfisher, grey-headed cormorant, red wattled lapwing, white-bellied drongo, Tickell's blue flycatcher, black winged kite, spotted owlet, Eurasian eagle owl and floral species such as Dhonk, gurjan, cyrus, eucalyptus, gum tree sterculia, jharkhedi etc.



In the afternoon, Mr. Prashant Mahajan took participants for a practical session on conducting a line transect survey in which all participants were divided into 5 groups and all participants downloaded the Locus Map App.

He then discussed how to operate it in the field. Following this, all participants in their teams took a 1 km area, divided the plot after 200m, made five plots, and identified indirect sightings of species such as pellets, pugmarks, canopy cover, and direct sightings. In addition, the data was collected and later analysed at the museum.

Mr Dieter Gutmann, a well-known philanthropist, gave a talk on global biodiversity loss and shared his and his wife's journey in wildlife conservation. He elaborated on their interest in wildlife and described how they started supporting Tiger Watch.



In the evening, participants had the opportunity to interact with *Bhajan Mogya*, a former poacher, who explained how he gave up a life of crime and collaborated with Tiger Watch.



Later around 8 PM we also had a Camera Trapping class by Prashant Mahajan and Hari Mohan Gurjar

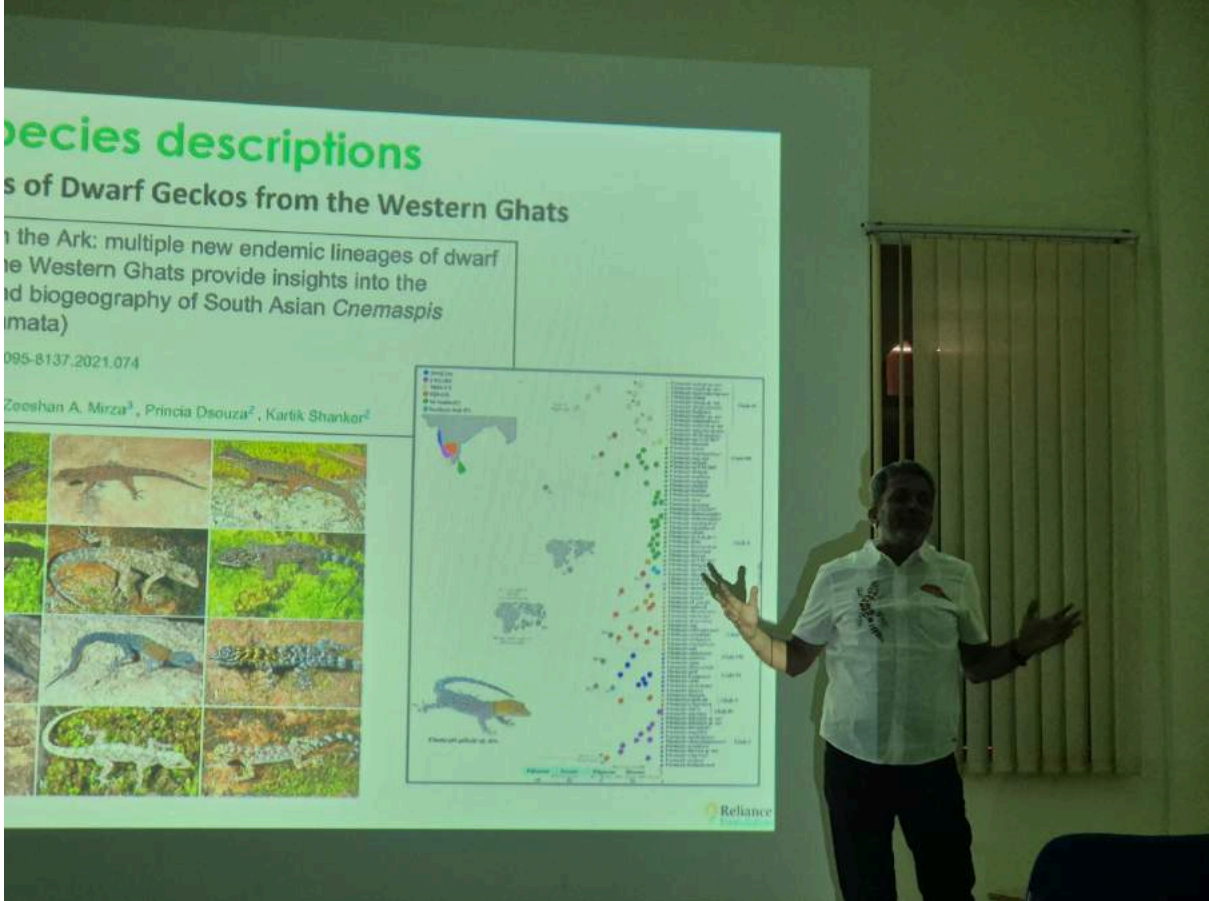


Day 5, February 29th

Ms Naaz Rizvi, Director, National Museum of Natural History (NMNH), and *Mr Md. Younis*, Director, Rajiv Gandhi Regional Museum of Natural History (RGRMNH), gave a talk about the museum's efforts in conservation awareness.



Dr Varad Giri, Head Scientist, Reliance Foundation talked about his journey from being an average student to a scientist studying herpetofauna. He discussed how asking the right questions made his career and life. He then discussed contributions to taxonomy through herpetology.



Dr Kshamata Gaikwad briefly discussed her groundbreaking children’s book on lizards titled “Scaly Tales” and introducing “unconventional species” to new audiences.



In the evening, *Mr Kishor Rithe*, Director, Bombay Natural History Society, gave a talk about his journey from being an engineer to a conservationist, his experiences and the problems he faced while focusing on the wild buffalo in central India. In addition, he discussed recent projects undertaken by the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) in conserving species such as the great Indian bustard, Indian skimmer, vultures and many more.



Day 6, March 1st

Dr Vidya Athreya, Director, Science and Conservation, Wildlife Conservation Society (India) gave a talk about the human-leopard conflict in the Sanjay Gandhi National Park in Maharashtra and how they minimised this conflict by spreading different theories of leopard interaction. She further talked about different career opportunities in wildlife conservation such as internships and fellowships at the National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS), ATREE, and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) etc.



Mr P. Kathirvel, Chief Conservator of Forests, Bharapur, gave a talk on how the Forest Department is working in wildlife conservation and management, what challenges they are facing, and how the youth can change the scenario.

He also shared the problems and solutions he faced when he joined Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve as Chief Conservator of Forests (CCF).



At last, the participants were invited to attend the 12th Fateh Singh Rathore Memorial Lecture and Wildlife Conservation Awards ceremony organised by Tiger Watch. At the event participants had opportunities to interact with and network with many prominent individuals in the field of wildlife conservation on the sidelines of this event.



Day 7, March 2nd

Participants got the opportunity to interact with prominent tiger conservationist and author, *Mr Valmik Thapar*, and ask queries about wildlife, issues of human-wildlife conflict in Ranthambore, Chambal, Sariska, and the solutions

The last session of the training program was conducted jointly by Mr. Ishan Dhar, Mr Prashant Mahajan, and Dr Dhirendra Devarshi. They had a interactive session on how to draft research proposals, and write management plans. They also talked about research fellowships and research grants. A few of the grants like Rufford Research Grant, The Habitat Trust Grants, WWF's Small Grant Projects, etc. were discussed in detail.



The participants were divided into 4 groups to make a research proposal in 15 minutes. Thereafter, the team leader of each group was invited to read out their proposal. Other teams reviewed the proposals and pointed out improvements, if any. Finally, the experts shared their review of each of the proposals.



At the end Dr Dharendra congratulated all the participants for successfully completing the training program, and each of the participants received a certificate of participation from Dr Dharmendra Khandal.

