

Awareness Campaign Against Ritual Hunting - Sumansa v/v Vishu Sendra

Participation of Tata Steel Zoological Park, Jamshedpur in association with Forest Department, Government of Jharkhand against ritual hunting (Vishu Sendra) at Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary by NGO Sumansa

Seema Rani*

Sumansa, the NGO dedicated towards raising awareness and conservation of wildlife and biodiversity in and around Jamshedpur concluded awareness campaign led by Ms. Seema Rani, Biologist cum Education Officer – Tata Steel Zoological Park along with her team of Zoo Volunteers – Mr. Sandeep Raj Singh, Mr. Rahul Tiwary and other wildlife enthusiasts against Vishu Sendra, a ritual hunting festival held in Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary. Mr. S.K. Mahato, Curator, Tata Steel Zoological Park was instrumental in coordinating the meetings of the Sumansa team with the villagers in and around the Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary.

From 9-12 May, 2014, the Sumansa team supported by the Forest Department, Government of Jharkhand, had been visiting villages in and around the Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary and meeting the villagers – especially the women and children to explain them about the importance of wildlife in our lives and the disadvantages of hunting wild animals in the Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary at a time when the number of animals and species has depleted in the recent past. The team visited a number of villages.

Day 1 - Kutimakuli and Bhadudih

The Sumansa Team met with Mr Mangal Mardi, President – Eco Vikas Samiti, Kutimakuli and Mrs. Padmavati Mardi, Ward Member, Kutimakuli and gathered the villagers in order to address them about the impact of biodiversity degradation and the ill effects of Sendra. About 30-40 villagers including men, women and children participated in the meetings.

The villagers in Kutimakuli also spoke about the urgent need for a school in their village.



Team Sumansa addressing villagers in Kutimakuli on the adverse effects of ritual hunting



Seema Rani speaking to Padmavati Mardi, Ward Member, Kutimakuli village

***Biologist cum Education Officer, Tata Zoological Park, Jamshedpur. Email: cmarani00@rediffmail.com**

Day 2 - Jiradongri, Sasankocha and Bonta



Team Sumansa addressing women and children in Jiradongri

On 10th May, the Sumansa Team visited Jiradongri, Sasankocha and other tolas in Bonta village and spoke to villagers on their source of livelihood. Few of them were involved in bee-keeping. Seema Rani, Sandeep Raj Singh and Rahul Tiwary narrated small stories to the village women and children sensitising them on how Sendra is detrimental to the eco-system around their village and how the biodiversity in Dalma needs to be protected. Most of the villagers were in agreement with the view that mass hunting is not beneficial as it has adverse effects on the delicate balance in nature in the Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary.



Jiradongri villagers showing their bee boxes to Team Sumansa

Day 3 - Sasankocha and Jalandih

On 11th May, the Sumansa Team also invited volunteers from Graduate College, Jamshedpur who got first-hand experience of the challenges faced by the tribals and their means of livelihood and they in turn explained to the villagers the importance of protecting and preserving wildlife in and around their villages so that forest resources are available to their future generations.



Volunteers from Graduate College, Jamshedpur along with Seema Rani in village Sasankocha



Team Sumansa with villagers in Sasankocha speaking to village women and children

The organisation has been organising awareness drives during the period prior to Vishu Sendra and they accompany the Forest Department officials on patrolling on the day of Sendra.

On May 11th, the team from Sumansa met and updated the awareness activities undertaken during the past three days.



The Sumansa Team with PCCF Mr D.K. Srivastava

Day 4 - Mirzadih, Bhadudih, Haludbani, Patipani, Asanbani, Kanderbeda, Saharbeda, Makulakocha, Pindrabeda, Dalma Top, Majhla Bandh, Badka Bandh



Team Sumansa with village groups

On the day of Sendra, May 12th, Team Sumansa split in two teams to cover more areas during patrolling to keep a watch on Sendra Birds in Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary and to alert the Forest Department officials in case any sightings were made.

One group proceeded by road to cover Asanbani, Kanderbeda, Saharbeda, Makulakocha, Pindrabeda, Dalma Top, Majhla Bandh and Badka Bandh while the other group trekked up the hill between Patipani and Haludbani. En route, the first group stopped and spoke with village groups they found on the way. The second team kept a watch for hunters on the hillside and near the water body between Patipani and Haludbani. Any sighting was duly reported to the D.F.O and R.F.O. Some sightings were reported from the hills above Patipani and some from the water body between Patipani and Haludbani.



Sendra Birds camping near water body between Patipani and Halubani



Team Sumansa keeping a watch on the hill side near Patipani

"The effects of the awareness campaigns are visible as the number of hunters over the years has reduced and villagers in and around Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary have now started understanding the need to protect flora and fauna around their villages and how protecting wildlife increases the biodiversity of the region and ultimately has positive bearing on their livelihood," said Ms. Seema Rani, Biologist cum Education Officer – Tata Steel Zoological Park. The observation from this year's awareness campaign against Sendra was that there has been a marked reduction in the number of tribals participating in Vishu Sendra and this has led to lesser hunting in Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary. The Sumansa team met with four groups of Sendra Birds but none of them had managed to hunt any animal.

Further, during our discussion with villagers in and around Dalma Wild Life Sanctuary, there was unanimity amongst them that Sendra was not beneficial for their surrounding ecosystem and that they no longer endorse or participate in ritual hunting these days. Mangal Mardi, a resident of Kutimakuli village went on to say that this year for Sendra, their village people were planning to offer a Puja by sacrificing a Red Cock near the Dalma foothills and not participating in a hunt as the number of wild animals in the hills is reducing. He also added that animals too have a right to live which is why he villagers will celebrate their festival but not hunt wild animals.

In fact, Mangal Mardi and his wife, Padmavati offer food and water to a male Peafowl which can often be seen atop houses and trees in Kutimakuli village. This shows their tendency of peaceful co-existence with wildlife in the Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary area.



Sendra Birs returning empty handed near foothills at Patipani

Conclusion

The awareness campaign has been a success and the endeavour should be that such initiatives should run all year round instead of organising them occasionally. More campaigns should be organised for the villages in and around Dalma Wild Life Sanctuary involving education, entertainment, livelihood subjects after an in-depth study of the relevant needs of the villagers vis-a-vis their ecosystem so that they feel inclusive with the community development efforts of the Forest Department.

Without any tangible investments in community development it will be difficult for the villagers to believe our point of view that development efforts in these areas by the Forest Department are inclusive and for their benefit. It will also be extremely beneficial for the villages if certain genuine demands of the villagers are met – such as setting up and refurbishment of schools, opportunities for sustainable livelihood, more involvement of women in village development efforts etc are met.

We thank the following for their support to the awareness campaign:

P.C.C.F. (Jharkhand) Mr. D.K. Srivastava (I.F.S.) for his support and encouragement. C.C.F. Mr A.K. Pandey (I.F.S.) for his support and encouragement. C.F. Mr. A.T. Mishra (I.F.S.) for his guidance and support. D.F.O (Wildlife) Mr. Kamlesh Pandey for inviting us and providing us the opportunity to conduct the awareness campaign and believing in our efforts. R.F.O (Dalma Range) Mr. Mangal Kachchap for organising the necessary wherewithal for conducting the awareness campaign. Director – Tata Steel Zoological Park Mr. Bipul Chakrabarty for releasing Ms. Seema Rani - Biologist cum Education Officer, Sandeep Raj Singh – Zoo Volunteer and Rahul Tiwary – Zoo Volunteer from their duties at Tata Steel Zoological Park to be part of this awareness campaign.

Photo below: Peafowl seen in Kutimakuli

