

KUNO INITIATIVE : AN UPDATE (I) Samrakshan Trust, December 2000

Dear friends,

Here is the latest from the Kuno wildlife sanctuary, MP, where the govt. of MP is executing the lion reintroduction programme with assistance from the MoEF.

On the brighter side, a team of scientists from WII comprising of Drs. Johnsingh, Chellam, S.P.Goyal and Krishnaswamy visited the sanctuary and surrounding areas between 15th and 20th Dec to assess the possibility of translocating Neelgai to the PA to boost the existing prey base. The WII team also conducted a training programme for the staff at Kuno to equip them in basic skills of monitoring. With this step, the biological aspects of the project, that had so far been neglected, have also begun to be addressed. This adds further momentum to the project and is cause for optimism about the success of the project.

However, the current condition of the relocated villages is a cause for concern. Out of 24 villages (located in 18 clusters) inside the sanctuary, 16 have moved out. The rains have failed for the second year in succession, and as a consequence the relocated villagers are facing a lot of hardship in terms of poor harvest and low availability of drinking water. There is a risk that some of the relocatees may migrate away from the relocation site in search of wage employment to nearby cities. While distress migration of this kind is an established strategy for the tribals of this region to meet economic hardships, this could be checked if steps are taken to provide them with wage employment on-the-spot in the short run, and initiate effective and sustainable drought prevention measures in the medium to long run.

Last year, the forest department made tankers available on a daily basis to villages where water scarcity was severe, or where temporary water shortages arose due to mal-functioning of handpumps etc. However, it is very evident that for a long-term solution to this problem, what is needed is a series of well planned and well executed rainwater harvesting measures, implemented with participation of the local people.

Thus, a watershed management plan needs to be prepared urgently for the area (approx 4000 hectares) where the people are being rehabilitated. However, the physical and human resources and expertise available with us, as well as with the forest department, seem grossly inadequate to meet this urgent need.

We would be grateful for inputs/volunteers who would be willing to spend some time in the field in order to help our field team draw up such a plan. We will then be in a position to assist the local people in implementing the plan with support from the forest and revenue departments. We hope that the urgency of the field situation would generate an equally urgent response from the members of this list.

With warm regards,
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