

Project Update: May 2016

So far we have achieved:

- (i) Identifying the area where to focus our awareness activities in the areas where the pressure to capture leopards is high based on forest department inputs.
- (ii) We have been able to work with the artist to develop the awareness material.

We also participated in a science exhibition which was held on 28th and 29th February 2016 at Khodad, Junnar by Giant Metrewave Radio Telescope organisation. This gave us an opportunity to present in front of 3000-4000 students from the schools and colleges in the rural and semi-urban areas and districts of Western Maharashtra which are all areas where leopards are present. We conducted the following activities at this exhibition: explaining research methods relating to leopard biology, a large art board was placed in the stall illustrating the leopard's landscape so that the children could colour it, we explained the functions of camera trapping and even made a tunnel inside which a camera trap was placed so that the children could see how it works, and we distributed radium stickers for the children cycles which had a symbol of co-existence between leopard and people.



We came up with an innovative idea to use the medium of local folk performances to put across our message. Tamasha is a local art form that often show cases social issues, and is watched by rural people in very large numbers. We approached the managers of the Tamasha groups and screened to them the movie (made with Rufford support in a grant to Vidya Athreya) "Waghoba Cha Khatla" so that they can incorporate some of the awareness points in their Tamasha shows.



World Forest Day, 21st March 2016 was celebrated in a local school with Social Forestry Department and Forest Department officials. Our aim was to introduce the use of research methods relating to the study of leopards to the students and makes people aware of how to take precautions in leopard area.

We identified tribal settlements near Junnar, Tungreshwar Wildlife Sanctuary and Sanjay Gandhi National Park via interviews with elder people of resident Warali, Mahadev Koli and Thakar tribes. We tried to obtain information on the leopard deity Waghoba and traditional methods of dealing with

leopard presence that they use. People worship Waghoba as a deity of the Jungle and it seems from the interviews that if the locals believe that if they worship Waghoba, big cats do not harm their livestock.