

Wildlife Conservation Trust (WCT)

Kishore Kotecha*

WCT is a relatively new registered charitable trust working for protection and conservation of Gir Forest biodiversity and Asiatic lions. WCT focuses on problems such as poaching, deforestation, fragmentation, road networks inside Gir WLS, pressure to religious places, etc. They operate under the blessing of Late Shri P. P. Raval (Ex-DFO-WL, Sasan) who nurtured the seed of WCT to become a full grown plant. Their mission is to aid conservation of wildlife and forests with Gir forest and Asiatic Lion. WCT is based at Rajkot in Gujarat which is only 145 kms away from Sasan. WCT operates from the Trustee's own well-equipped office space at Rajkot, Gujarat. Some of their objectives are to :

- ♦ create awareness about Asiatic Lion and Gir conservation
- ♦ provide a one stop solution for any information on Asiatic Lion and Gir conservation
- ♦ coordinate, participate, motivate and assist conservation of Asiatic Lion and Gir conservation

Their team consists of:

- ♦ Kishore Kotecha, a premium builder by profession but wildlifer by passion
- ♦ Dr. M. G. Maradia, a Veterinary doctor and Zoo Superintendent with Rajkot Zoo since 1992; served Sakkarbaug Zoo & Gir WLS for more than two years.
- ♦ Vimal Raval is son of Late Shri P. P. Raval an IT professional. He has love for wildlife in his blood!
- ♦ Balendra Vaghela: service provider for Hewlett Packard for Saurashtra & Kutch region and social worker by hobby.
- ♦ Tushar Gokani, Advocate and youngest member of the team with innovative ideas to do a job better.
- ♦ Kamlesh Shah, Advocate and in wildlife activities since last one decade.

How we achieve our objectives?

- ♦ creating awareness of Asiatic Lion and Gir.
- ♦ involving local community as the best conservation policy.
- ♦ forming an apex body and thereby network local NGOs of Gir.
- ♦ networking of volunteer informers in each and every corner of Gir periphery to assist the enforcement agencies in the work of field investigations, raids and seizures.
- ♦ creating public awareness and to sensitize local people about need for conservation of Gir & Asiatic Lion.
- ♦ organizing camps at the time of festivals near temples inside the sanctuary to educate tourist.
- ♦ distributing information and awareness leaflets at check-post to visitors using jungle roads.
- ♦ approaching schools in Saurashtra & Kutch region to conduct more nature camps for their students.
- ♦ taking all measures to promote harmony between human beings and nature.

Projects and activities we have done so far:

- ♦ WCT has launched and manages www.asiaticlion.org. On this website one can find 'anything & everything about Asiatic Lion and Gir'.
- ♦ WCT manages and updates last minute news articles - Blog, <http://asiatic-lion.blogspot.com>. Archive of newspaper articles from 2005 onwards related to Asiatic Lion and Gir is also available on this blog.
- ♦ WCT supports and is moderator of <http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/AsiaticLions> a popular Yahoo Group amongst Asiatic Lion lovers.
- ♦ WCT nominated Late Shri P. P. Raval for prestigious 'Venu Menon Animal Allies Foundation Award' for 2007. Wildlife Trust of India chosen him for "WTI – Endangered Species Award".
- ♦ WCT requested ZOOS' PRINT magazine to publish a respectful tribute to Shri Raval and have helped Sally Walker get sufficient information to publish a special issue on P. P. Raval in focus to come during October 2007.
- ♦ WCT members also participated in lion census 2005.
- ♦ sent about 200 news updates to wildlifers and conservationists *via* email with latest news about Asiatic Lion and Gir.
- ♦ promoted Winnie Kiru's simple methods of rope technique to keep elephants away from farm lands.
- ♦ promoted solutions for open wells which are virtual death traps for Asiatic lions. The following designs are being tried: Galvanized Chain-link design using pre-cast cement poles; Poles & Planks design, RCC Slabs with hinge type joint;
- ♦ RCC slabs with steel-bar joints were tried and tested.
- ♦ actively participated in methods to find poachers of Asiatic lion and prevent further incidents through information collection and dissemination.
- ♦ participated in symposium on "Emerging Conservation Strategies for Endangered Species" organized by VHF at Ahmedabad on 27-28 Feb 2007.
- ♦ collected opinions and produced a report to the CM of Gujarat
- ♦ encouraged field staff and local villagers of Gir forest with 'Late P. P. Raval memorial awards'.

Projects and activities envisioned for future?

- ♦ to conduct a test study of 'Identification of lion by whiskers method' which may be helpful for lion census in future. Mr. Y. D. Jhala of WII has offered computer software help for this test study.
- ♦ priority project is to barricading open wells in villages of Gir. A project report is being prepared.
- ♦ Book on Late Shri P. P. Raval,
- ♦ filing PILs in high court demanding closure of Sasan-Visvadar Road.

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*Wildlife Conservation Trust, Rajkot
Email: info@asiaticlion.org Web: www.asiaticlion.org
Blog: <http://asiatic-lion.blogspot.com>