

Project Update: April 2002

Village Agraa, Vijaypur subdivision, District Sheopur, Madhya Pradesh April 30, 2002

In a milestone towards conservation of the threatened Asiatic lion, the Madhya Pradesh forest minister, Mr. Harvansh Singh today gave out the inaugural "Simha Mitra" Awards (Friends of Lions), instituted by the NGO Samrakshan Trust. Speaking at the Awards function held in this remote village at the edge of Kuno wildlife sanctuary, Singh lauded the sacrifice made by the Sahariya tribals of 24 villages, who had given up their homes inside the sanctuary to make way for reintroduction of a pride of Asiatic lions from Gir in Gujarat to Kuno wildlife sanctuary.

Kuno is being prepared as a second home for the endangered lions, and it is likely that with 23 out of 24 villages now relocated outside the sanctuary, work on the lion reintroduction project would get fresh momentum. Three forest guards and two range forest officers have been selected for receiving the awards instituted by Samrakshan Trust. These are: Gayalal Dhakad, Sushil Kumar Parashar and Ramkrishna Narwaria (Forest Guards) and Rajeev Kaushal and Late Ramlakhan Singh Kushwaha (Range Forest Officers).

Each award consists of Rs. 15,000 in cash and a plaque. The awardees have been selected for exemplary performance in the rehabilitation of villages outside the sanctuary, and preparation of the Kuno forest for lion reintroduction. In addition, the medical officer of the local primary health centre, Dr. Lalaram Shakya also received a special appreciation award from the minister for his tireless services to this backward and remote tribal region.

Apart from the awards for frontline personnel of the forest department, an award has also been instituted for members of the local community. The community award consisting of Rs.50, 000 in cash is to be used to construct a community centre for the displaced villages. The minister laid the foundation stone of this centre.

In addition to the Simha Mitra Awards, Samrakshan is also equipping the entire frontline staff of Kuno with Anti-poaching kits. These kits are meant to ameliorate the trying conditions under which the frontline staff members carry out their duties. The DFO of the sanctuary received the kits from the minister on behalf of the sanctuary personnel.

During his address, the minister praised Samrakshan's effort in playing a constructive role between the forest department and the villagers. The Chief Wildlife Warden of MP, Shri A. P Dwivedi thanked Samrakshan for instituting the Simha Mitra Awards, which he felt will encourage other forest department personnel to emulate the awardees.