

Hunters now turn entrepreneurs

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Aug. 31: Nasipur is a small hamlet of about 20 households, belonging to the Pardhi tribe in the Ratapani sanctuary near Bhopal and close to Bhimbetaka, the world heritage site famous for the prehistoric rock paintings.

Forest sub-division officer Ramakant Dixit told this newspaper that Ratapani is the only protected area in the country, which is not a national park but has an estimated tiger population of eight adults and five cubs.

When this correspondent visited Nasipur village on Monday, the villagers, who were all Pardhis, were excit-

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ed and happy about a revolving loan of ₹10, 000 given to each Pardhi family through the initiative of the forest department. This help was aimed at motivating them to completely give up their traditional poaching activity and pursue other vocations for subsistence.

The Pardhis, found in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, have inherited the art of hunting and are well trained in trapping and hunting animals. The state agencies and NGOs, working among the Pardhis, have carried forward the campaign to bring the Pardhis into the national mainstream in districts like Betul, Sehore, Vidisha and Raisen over the last few years. Jairam, a Pardhi youth from Obaidullganj, who acted as a bridge and was the interpreter at Nasipur, is a successful entrepreneur. He has vivid memory of the time he had spent with his father and community elders hunting wild animals as a young boy. Now he makes a living

running two cabs acquired with the help of the State Antyavysai Nigam. He is all for the Pardhis joining the mainstream and said that it would be wrong to dub the Pardhis as criminals.

Bareilly Sab, the Nasipur village headman, and another elderly Sunderlal had a lot to recount about their poaching activity. They said that earlier they used to kill spotted deer, sambhar and different species of birds for food. They were also killing tigers, leopards and crocodiles for their skin, which used to fetch them good money. Now they have taken to marginal farming, they said adding "life was much better when they were hunting animals".