

## Winter Night Camp at Sundarvan and a Trip to Little Rann of Kachchh

What better way to spend the weekend than a night at the zoo! Sundarvan completed three successful batches of Winter Night Camp for 8 to 12 year olds. With the aim to create an outdoor experience and learn all about nocturnal creatures, the activities of this programme brought out a sense of adventure. The icebreaking started with a game where participants guess which animal card has been pinned behind them, using only yes or no questions. This was followed by an introduction to birdwatching which would take place early next morning. Geared and ready with flashlights and notepads, a night trail was conducted. Kids animatedly discussed the porcupines and hedgehogs in enclosures and free-ranging bats leaving their natural roost at Sundarvan. Excitedly running towards every new find, the kids discovered to their amazement how many tiny crawly creatures come out at night. Their discoveries ranged from two-tailed spiders, stink bugs,

secretly waiting wolf spiders, moths, nest building paper wasps all the way to Brooke's house geckos, bark geckos and northern house geckos out on a prowl. The night took on a new shade of orange as everyone huddled around the campfire for story telling sessions. The very dynamic, Sowmya Ramkumar also conducted a story-telling session for us. As the time passed some started to nod off while others wanted to stay up all night but everyone had to eventually go to their beds.



Getting ready for a night zoo trail with spider watch

Morning started with wonderfully power-packed Animal Yoga sessions conducted by Paresch Joshi whom we are extremely grateful to. With strained smiles and the most priceless expressions made by our participants during yoga, we heartily approached breakfast, all fresh and renewed. Birdwatching was the next session and lists ranged from rufous treebies and jungle crows to merrily chirping tailor birds and migratory grey-headed canary-flycatchers. Participants reluctant to leave and yet chattering away to their parents in high spirits collected certificates. All batches were possible owing to parents who live an urban lifestyle but still want their kids to understand and love nature and continual support from Sundarvan volunteers, Kunj Joshi, Kaushavi Patel, Rutu Gandharv, Neel Panchal and Kunj Parmar.

Trip to Little Rann of Kachchh: As Gujarat is a haven for migratory birds, Sundarvan plans a series of one day trips during the winter. These field visits encourage



Animal Yoga sessions at Sundarvan

birdwatching as well as focus on some of the mammals that share the habitat. On 18th Dec 2016, Sundarvan organised a visit to Wild Ass Sanctuary at the Little Rann of Kachchh for participants. Centre for Environment Education's (CEE) field office at Halvad was the group's first stop. Having learnt interesting information about the formation of deserts in Gujarat, participants were ready to venture into the Sanctuary. The first sighting for our lucky participants was a herd of wild ass and after a little while a herd of nilgai females with young calves and a healthy lonesome male some distance away from them. Wetland birds such as Common Cranes, Eurasian Spoonbills, Herons, Egrets, Sandpipers, varieties of ducks, etc. were also sighted. Apart from natural delights, the participants also got a chance to see and learn about salt pans and interact with the workers. They understood the process of how and where the salt comes from to the comfort of our homes and tasted some unrefined salt crystals.

The day was spent beautifully, understanding life in an arid ecosystem and appreciating it with an ever enthusiastic group. Binoculars and a spotting scope received as a donation from IdeaWild were also used for these programmes for enhanced learning. We thank Neel Panchal for capturing brilliant photographs during our events.

### Bat Awareness Programme at Sundarvan

Popularly known as 'Bat Shows', Bat Awareness Programmes at Sundarvan began with the aim to help people understand the often feared but very interesting animals, bats! One such programme was organised on the evening of 22nd Oct '16 at Sundarvan. The session started with a quick engaging ice-breaker which introduced participants to each other as well as the phenomenon of echolocation.

Sundarvan being a natural roost site provides an excellent place to observe the bats in their habitat. A discussion at the roost site about large bat colonies and solitary bats was followed by observation of bats taking off for the night. As bats are nocturnal creatures, people rarely get an opportunity to watch them feeding. At Sundarvan an artificial feeding table is set-up so that participants can observe their behaviour from a relatively closer distance. Thoroughly amazed by how bats hang upside down while they feed, participants got curious and many questions were answered.

Folklore, hear-say dramatic stories and vampire movies have painted a villainous picture of bats. An interactive presentation gave participants insight on the diversity, behaviour, ecological importance, threats, conservation and most importantly myth-busting related to bats. Interspersed with quick quizzes for children, this session led to people to be engaged and fascinated by bats. Correct answers also won them bat related education material from Zoo Outreach Organisation. Questions and appreciation from people made the programme a success and encouraged us to keep working towards shedding light on the true nature of these charming creatures of the night.

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Kids as well as adults participate in the games to understand 'Echolocation'