

## Naturalists of Sundarvan



**A young naturalist closely examines a bee hive**

Sundarvan team strives to conduct awareness programmes using the zoo as a living outdoor classroom and extends beyond its role as a zoo, popularly known as 'A Nature Discovery Centre' situated in the heart of the city. This winter, we introduced an annual membership programme for schools – 'Naturalists of Sundarvan', especially for students of 6th to 8th class. Aimed to create connect between the kids raised in an urban environment with their natural surroundings, this initiative banks upon nurturing the innate curiosity within every child. This helps

to generate an interest and awaken the naturalist within through three unique sessions each focussing on three different animal groups, namely – insects, reptiles and birds. Each programme is planned at a different location and is packed with hands-on learning modules, resource materials and immediate help of experts.

Our first batch of 70 young naturalists from St. Kabir School was enrolled for the academic year 2016-17. First of the 3 sessions was 'Zoo to School with Interesting Insects' wherein Sundarvan team visited the school and

introduced students to the amazing world of insects. The session began with an interactive presentation about insects during which identification, evolution, adaptation, diversity, communication, social behaviour, etc. was discussed through experience sharing, videos and quick quizzes. 'Importance of Pollinator' kits by Zoo Outreach Organisation were given as prizes to encourage maximum participation. With eyes in wonder touch-table artefacts such as insect nests, egg cases, exoskeletons, bee hives etc., were observed and felt.



**Observing the house gecko up close**

The session was concluded with a walk to identify various insects in the campus and students were given take home insect-assignments with art projects, observing regular visitors to campus, collecting facts and more which would be submitted during the next session.

The second session within this initiative was 'School visit to Zoo' which would include information on 'Reptiles' at Sundarvan. We began this session with a different approach of talking about the reptiles found at home and in the neighbourhood, their

stories, which participants fear them or find them icky. This sparked their interest and as experiences poured out, we even found few students intrigued by these crawling creatures. Being able to observe African slender snouted crocodiles feeding on fish, compare the monitor lizard with a house gecko's body, look at the gecko's lamellae up-close with magnifying lenses, and variety of snakes; changed the look of fear to fascination in many students. While ones that felt snakes were slimy, soon rushed forward to feel the slough and also have a close

look at its preserved skeleton. Myth busting, questions about reptiles that had been shown on TV and then understanding their ecological importance gave the students a brighter perspective on reptiles. A quick presentation on birds and the art of birdwatching was also included as a preparation for the next session, which was to be a field trip for birding.

Designed with a 'Let's go birdwatching' theme, the next session was all about understanding our feathered friends. Starting early morning by bus gave us a good opportunity to do a re-cap on

previous sessions, talk about dos and don'ts of birding and discuss insect-related assignments from the first session. Pariej was chosen as the bird watching destination as it is a wetland of national importance, which supports many resident and migratory birds. Geared with basic bird identification guides by Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF), the students tried to identify birds on their own. Record keeping was encouraged through the announcement of maximum birds in a list gets a prize – Vulture Awareness Kit by Zoo Outreach Organisation. Observation was enhanced through binoculars and spotting scope received as donation from IdeaWild as students learnt about forest birds, waders, breeding plumage, display, migration etc. As the programme concluded, discussions and feedback sessions followed on the bus ride back.

This holistic initiative was a great help to students as they also had resource material for extra reading, more than one session for questions and take home assignments to maintain a link. The school would also receive the benefit of having a team of advisors if they may want to plan any long-term urban wildlife initiative at their campus. Students were

encouraged to observe, keep a field diary and upload data on citizen science platforms. The membership programme proved crucial to augment learning through experience, as students of this fast paced world need to be introduced to nature early on in order to inculcate appreciation, which cannot happen through textbooks alone. With the support from excellent teachers like Savithri Raman, well wisher Ramjee Nagarajan and enthusiastic volunteers, Kunj Joshi, we completed an entire programme for our very first 70 members. By reaching out to more and more students, Sundarvan aims to create a cadre of naturalists who will be able to choose consciously and become responsible decision makers.

#### Birdwatching for adults:

During the winter, Sundarvan conducts many field visits for mixed groups to introduce the recreation activity of bird watching. A trip to Pariej was also organised for delightful mixed group, which included homemakers, naturalists, students, a chartered accountant and a businessman among others. Such groups make sure that our reach is not limited and the impact is on a wider audience. Learning about the importance of wetlands along the way, we reached Pariej early, while

it lay still, covered in fog. As the haze slowly lifted, we spotted mammals in the nearby fields – nilgai being chased by stray dogs. After a discussion on conflict with stray animals, we climbed onto a watchtower to spot birds. Excellent observation of common pochard males, northern pintail, Eurasian spoonbill, purple heron, greater flamingoes, sarus cranes, the beautiful purple moorhen and more was made possible through the spotting scope. The brilliant session raised our hopes of adding more people to the birding community.

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## Awareness on Biodiversity & Wildlife Conservation by TATA Steel Zoological Park



**Breakaway session on “Animal Management” being conducted by Sanjay Mahato**

In order to arouse a general awakening in the young generation in favour of protection of India’s wildlife and by bringing them closer to nature, the Tata Steel Zoological Park initiated a Residential Nature Camp for orienting the school children. The objective of the camp is to promote each girl child’s personal development, to inspire the young women of today to become environmentally responsible and conscientious citizens of tomorrow.

Tata Steel Zoological Society is organizing the Residential Nature Camp for Girl Students on Awareness on Biodiversity & Wildlife Conservation for the

past 9 years since April 2007. It forms part of the educational initiatives planned by Tata Steel Zoological Society’s mission to achieve AICHI Target -1 of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity Conservation 2011-2020 of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Every year we promote each girl child’s personal development by giving them opportunity to act on their own, be self-reliant and try things for themselves through providing fun, friendship and leadership in a supportive and non-competitive environment away from home. We believe that we have been able to inspire and make a difference in the minds of young women of today,

the inheritors of the earth, in their love for nature and the environment by providing them a self-teaching platform in the form of this Residential Nature Camp for Girl Students on Awareness on Biodiversity & Wildlife Conservation.

The camp was organized from 20 to 22 December 2016 in which 48 girls and four teachers from three schools – DAV Public School, Bistupur, NML Kerala Public School and UMS Hathinada, Chandil participated. Various educative sessions and field visits were conducted during the course of the three day residential camp. The day-wise details of the camp are as follows:

The camp began with the registration of participants and the distribution of camp kits at Nature Education Centre, Tata Steel Zoological Park, Jamshedpur on 20 December 2016. The Chief Guest Malathi Pande, MD, Steel City Press, formally inaugurated the camp by lighting of the lamp. Mrs. Pandey addressed the participants and appreciated the initiative taken by Tata Zoo to educate the girls and stated about the needs of conservation of biodiversity. Thereafter, the Camp coordinator Seema Rani - Biologist cum Education Officer, Tata Steel Zoological Park explained the schedule, rules and regulations of the camp to the participants and what they may expect from the camp.

The completion of Inauguration Ceremony marked the beginning of the Educational Sessions which commenced with a presentation on "Tata Steel Zoological Park and its role in conservation of Wildlife- Butterfly as a case history" by Sanjay Kumar Mahato, Curator, Tata Steel Zoological Park. Usha Shukla - Principal, Graduate School College for women, conducted the last interactive session for the day. Her topic "Number in Nature" resonated well with the participants. She requested



**Breakaway session on "Research & Education" being conducted by Seema Rani**

to the participants to involve themselves in understanding the nature and its beautiful creation.

On the second day (21 Dec), the camp had an early start to the day with a yoga session, within the pristine premises of the Tata Zoo, conducted by Anusha Karmakar from Karmakar Yoga School. The camp participants were taught various 'Asanas' and how health and wellbeing while being close to nature was beneficial for the human body and mind.

After breakfast, the camp participants were divided into three groups for breakaway sessions "Animal Management" led by Sanjay Kumar Mahato - Curator and "Education & Research" led by

Seema Rani - Biologist cum Education Officer. For half a day, the teams were attached to these Zoo officers who took them on a field visit within the Zoo and demonstrated to them about their daily activities in the Zoo.

Thereafter, post lunch a workshop on Skill development- "**Exercising the creativity and develop valuable life skills**" amongst participants by using different arts was organized by Ruchi Bansal. This was followed by yet another skill development workshop by Seema Rani on "**Making of Herbarium**", this was also included techniques of collection of plants for Herbarium preparation. In the evening there was a very interesting and interactive session on "Animal Welfare"

by the city's renowned animal activist, Kishore Oza. The day ended with dinner around a campfire where the campers enjoyed themselves singing and dancing around the campfire.

The third and final day (22 Dec) began early with the campers setting off for a birdwatching session within the wild environs of Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary. The participants were taught to identify different kinds of bird species, which they came across with the help of the "Bird Identification Sheet" which had pictorial descriptions. Sanjay Kumar

Mahato along with Amitabh Goswami, passionate birdwatchers, helped the campers identify a variety of passerine and non-passerine birds.

After the bird watching session, the participants were taken on a guided tour to the Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary. The Sanctuary is home to Asian Elephants, Sloth Bears, Barking Deer, Rhesus Macaques, Indian Giant Squirrels, Wild Boar and many other bird, reptile and amphibian species. The campers then enjoyed lunch at the Forest Guest House at

Makulakoacha.

The participants were presented with certificates and each of them was also presented with a Zoo memento. The participants, on their part, shared their three days' experiences with all present and how the camp had made a difference to their perception about wildlife and biodiversity.

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**Campers during bird watching session at the Dalma Wildlife Sanctuary**

## Workshop on Wetlands for Disaster Risk Reduction

One-day workshop on World Wetland Day was conducted to 50 Eco club in-charge teachers from Madurai, Melur, Usilampatti educational districts at O.C.P.M.G.H.S.S., Madurai on 2 Feb 2017. G. Angelo Irudayasamy CEO, Madurai supported the programme. The co-ordinator Jessie Jayakaran welcomed the participants. P. Leela Manohari, Headmistress delivered the introductory talk. She explained about various types of wetlands found in Tamil Nadu and also added the uses of wetland in disaster risk reduction. The co-ordinator gave a detailed report by power point presentation about wetlands and their presence globally, types of wetlands, wetlands in India and Tamil Nadu and the need to conserve them.

The values of wetlands and how the wetlands help the human beings and the need to conserve them were dealt with detailed information. The existing threats like draining and land filling, over exploitation of fish resources, pollution, suffocation by industrial waste etc., were explained and the need to educate the students and the general public in the risk



**Group activity on pond life, weather, tsunami and people's role**

reduction.

V. Paul Jeyakumar, the retired P.G. teacher of Pasumalai B.H.S.S, Madurai explained about the inland wetlands i.e., ponds and lakes, riverbed and estuaries. The participants actively interacted in this session and planned to actively do the follow up by forming wetland protection team, popularizing the wetland and its conservation among the local community etc.,

The afternoon sessions consisted group of activities on the topic pond life, weather, tsunami and peoples' rule. The leaders of each group shared the result at the end. With much

**Jessie Jayakaran explains about wetland conservation to eco club teachers**

concern the Headmistress of O.C.P.M.G.H.S.S., helped by providing a school van to the participants visit river vaigai to have a keen observation of the river. Muniyandi, District Co-ordinator, Eco-Club proposed the vote of thanks and instructed all the participants to do the follow up with the Eco Club students.

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