

# Discover Bats – A Bat Awareness Programme at Sundarvan, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India

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Bats are one of the most diversified animal groups that play a vital role in various ecosystems to maintain ecological balance. Though many bats live around us, most of us never realize their presence and almost we never bother about them; however, they do wonderful services to us without our knowledge. There are lot of myths about bats.

If the way some horror movies describe bats was true, there would be regular news on casualty of human due to bats, but this rarely happens. The fear of bats is needless and is due to our ignorance. At the same time, luring people to create interest awareness about bats is a huge challenge.

A small roost of about 300 *Pteropus giganteus* can be seen in the premise of Nature Discovery Centre of Centre for Environment Education (CEE), called Sundarvan. Sundarvan is located in Ahmedabad, Gujarat; it is a mini zoo recognized by the Central Zoo Authority.

Considering this roost as an opportunity for education, Sundarvan presented "Discover Bat" – a bat awareness programme on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2011. Shri Karthikeya Sarabhai, Director, CEE, was the inspiration behind this. Twelve such awareness programmes were conducted for general public, school children, teachers, etc till June 2012.

A feeding table was put up close to the roost site at the height of about 20 feet to tie fruits to observe feeding of bats during the awareness programme. A short movie on fruit bats of Sundarvan was screened for the participants. Besides these, a presentation containing bat diversity, distribution, ecological services, myths, threats and conservation efforts was delivered. Apart from these, a temporary bat tattoo with "Be My Friend" message was imprinted on the hands of the participants, especially for children. A bat mask was also supplied to the children to involve them in the programme. Mr. Rajendrasinh Jadeja and Mrs. Meena Nareshwar, CEE and Dr. Rajal Thaker, volunteer put their best effort to bring out these wonderful education materials.

The programmes were conducted during evenings to observe the dispersing bats from the roost. The huge wingspan of the flying fox was a real surprise for the participants. Though our resource materials contain all the general facts about bats, the interactive question and answer session throw more light on specific topic and it shows curiosity of the people on the subject.

With the available data, age group of the participants was analyzed. A significant amount of young children below 10 years took part in the programme (Table 1). Even, schools wanted to bring their young children

for this event. Hence, we are working on a special package to create awareness through puppetry, art and craft, etc for this age group.

This is a unique programme on a non-charismatic animal group which runs successfully. Altogether, the response we have been receiving from people from different walks of life shows that we are moving in the right direction to bring change.

**Table 1. Age group of the participants**

Age group	Number	%
5-10	16 (34%)	34
11-20	12 (26%)	26
21-30	6 (13%)	13
31-40	8 (17%)	17
41-50	2 (4%)	4
51-60	1 (2%)	2
> 61	2 (4%)	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>100</b>

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The photograph shows various activities of the "Discover Bat" programme.