

WILDLIFE WEEK -- DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT

Indian Wildlife Week is, to my knowledge, unique in the world. I don't know of any other country which conducts a week-long festival devoted to its wildlife that is so successfully patronised. Wildlife Week may even be unique in India. I certainly don't know another topic or issue which brings such a diversity of individuals and institutions out to celebrate the event by conducting programmes and activities.

Why do we have it? Why is it so successful? Is it really successful? What determines our measure of "success"?

The minutes from the first Indian Board for Wildlife meetings claim that the IBWL set up Wildlife Week primarily **to raise awareness** of the importance of wildlife. I don't think anybody would disagree that today this is still the purpose of Wildlife Week ... to teach people of all ages, with children prioritised of course, the importance of wildlife and the need of every citizen to contribute to what has become a monumental task to insure that all species and subspecies of wild animals and plants continue to survive in the wild. Daily we see or hear news of more problems for wildlife and its habitat. On the basis of such news it is clear that, overall, we are not winning the struggle to save species and habitats. On the contrary, for every so-called "success", such as a new Protected Area (PA) created, or species delisted or downgraded to a lower probability of extinction or category of threat there are an exponentially larger and more pressing number of problems and needs ... needs for more PA's, for more effective protection in PA's, for more implementation of existing wildlife and land policy and legislation, more people who do **not** do things which threaten wildlife and habitat, etc., rather, **ETC**¹⁰⁰⁰. There are many, many needs.

Lets talk about people. We need more people who do **not** do things which threaten wildlife and habitat AND more people who do things which enhance the probability of long term survival of species and habitats. Another of saying that is that we all need to give up bad habits that threaten wildlife and adopt good habits that enhance long term survival and diversity of species, populations, habitat, etc. How do we do this? Simple ... we raise awareness.

Lets talk about needs. We all think we need certain things to survive and thrive, but in fact many of the things we need are actually luxuries. Who wants to be first to give up their luxuries? Nobody. So in our minds we convert them from luxuries to necessities. I do it too, no doubt about it, maybe more than most. **So, lets not talk about that. It is too uncomfortable!**

What just happened? We reached a point of going no further because our logical process just showed that raising awareness alone doesn't save species and habitats.

Lets talk about "raising awareness". How many of you became wildlife advocates sitting for hours in a "function" waiting for a dignitary to arrive, or listening to one. If the dignitary was Jane Goodall or Ulhas Karanth, maybe, but normally we don't learn much from such functions. We might learn a few facts if we are listening carefully but do those facts change us. I think, rarely.

What changes us is a "peak experience", an experience which involves our emotions as well as our intellect, an experience that brings about change in our attitudes and our behaviour. Sometimes this can happen when we listen to a very good speaker who is not only knowledgeable and experienced but passionate as well. Those kinds of speakers are hard to find. So what do we do to bring about awareness that includes attitudinal and behavioural change? There are extreme things but those are often spontaneous ... what can we rely on? We in ZOO have some methods, thanks to several of our teachers in times past. Here are some:

1. helping learners to identify with other sentient beings who are in trouble is one way.
2. appealing to a learner's higher nature is another way.
3. generating insight (aha!) into the basic nature of a problem or behaviour and reinforcing that insight
4. leading learners to see the flaws in their own thinking and actions with lighthearted demonstrations and humour
5. leading learners to change their attitudes and behaviour by introducing them to "the other side" of their beliefs and fears.

This Wildlife Week, if you are planning a programme, try something different ... something other than a long sitting and listening session. Try getting people up and active. Zoo Outreach Organisation's educational materials and techniques contain several items which, if used the way we recommend, will generate at least a small amount of emotion, higher thinking, identity, insight and even, possibly a little attitudinal and behavioural change.

ZOO's educator training is all about educators of all kinds generating attitudinal and behavioural change. If you have not participated in one of our training workshops, and want to learn different teaching methods, contact us (zooreach@zooreach.org).

In the meantime, try a different kind of Wildlife Week programme using our active learning guidelines and packets. We can't promise miracles but you will be surprised how much more your audience enjoys and learns

Sally Walker, Editor Emeritus