

## Angels of the Dark -- ZOOWATCH watches bats in Thiruvananthapuram Zoo

Latha Thamphi\*

On April 5th the captive wildlife welfare organization ZOOWATCH conducted a workshop on bats in cooperation with the Thiruvananthapuram Zoo at the Museum Auditorium, Thiruvananthapuram Zoo. The title of the ZOOWATCH workshop was: "BATS – ANGELS OF THE DARK". This was a one-day programme aimed primarily at teachers and environmental volunteers in the Thiruvananthapuram District. Mr. Raajkaran Aravind conducted the workshop.

The registration formalities were followed by the inauguration and a talk by the Director Mr. Yalakki. Mr. Raajkaran began the workshop with an interactive session during which the awareness of the participants about bats as well as the local superstitions and attitudes of the general public were discussed in detail. From 11.45 – 12.30 Mr. Raajkaran used a Power Point Slide Show presentation using materials garnered from various sources to demonstrate the participants the fact that bats, far from being vermin, actually play a crucial role in the environment.

Unfortunately, bats as a species have a very negative image. They are usually regarded as either a nuisance or as a danger to human beings. For this reason, they are frequently hunted and killed, with the result that many species are now threatened and also face loss of their normal habitats. The ZOOWATCH presentation stressed the fact that bats are not pests or vermin. Bats play a crucial role in our natural environment, since they act as pollinators and also help to control pests. In this way, bats help our forests to survive. For example, without the humple fruit bat, cross-pollination would soon end and our forests and harvests would suffer. Insectivorous bats eat mosquitos and crop-destroying pests. Without them, our health would be endangered by a sharp increase in harmful insects. The aim of this ZOOWATCH workshop was to educate the educators and also the general public on the essential ecological role that bats play in our environment.

After the presentation Mr. Gangadharan, Education Officer, summarized the basic facts about the role of a modern Zoo which is no longer to provide entertainment but to promote conservation of endangered species and education of the public on important issues affecting wildlife and the environment. Following lunch provided by Thiruvananthapuram Zoo, workshop members were taken to visit two major bat colonies inside the Zoo. The main characteristics of Chiroptera were pointed out and this became a golden opportunity for the workshop delegates to observe bats and study at first hand their behaviour in a natural environment. On returning to the auditorium the posters and kits supplied by Zoo Outreach Organisation were distributed and discussed in detail. In addition, data on amazing facts about bats were handed out.

The workshop came to a close with the members expressing their appreciation of the unusual and fascinating information on bats provided by ZOOWATCH and the Thiruvananthapuram Zoo in the course of this one day programme. They also

expressed their interest in attending other similar workshops and in spreading the message about the positive role of bats among their students, neighbours and friends.

The coverage by the press was also quite extensive, both in the English language dailies and the Malayalam papers. The success of the ZOOWATCH programme was indicated when we received a follow up request by one of the participants to conduct a similar workshop, this time for school children

Shri Sebastian, who had attended our workshop, is a teacher at Kiriroor Government Higher Secondary School. On April 12, 2005, Shri Sebastian brought a group of school children -- 26 pupils in the age group of 8 to 12 and four teachers. Mr. Raajkaran Aravind (Assisted by Mr. Palalayam Babu and Mr. Praveen Murali of ZOOWATCH) conducted a programme on bats for this group. Mr. Gangadharan, the Education Officer of the Thiruvananthapuram Zoo began the programme with an explanation of the role of modern zoos and the importance of conservation efforts. At 11.30 am, Mr. Raajkaran of ZOOWATCH used a slide show to conduct an interactive session during which the importance of bats was discussed in detail. Subsequently the necessity of protecting bats was further stressed by the distribution of the bat tool kits supplied by Zoo Outreach Organisation and the tying of rakhis by the school children as a pledge of their willingness to disseminate the message about bats – the angels of the dark. Then children were given a tour of the Zoo and could view for themselves the two large bat colonies which are thriving in this protected area.

Mr. Raajkaran used these colonies to point out the major characteristics of the order of Chiroptera, the techniques of bat counting, how bats use echolocation to fly at night, etc. By the time the programme finally concluded at 5.00 pm, these school children had absorbed a great deal of valuable information about the essential role played by bats and about the functions of a modern zoo.

We at ZOOWATCH would like to express our special thanks to the Thiruvananthapuram Zoo authorities, Director, Mr. Yalakki and Education Officer, Mr. Gangadharan, for their help and cooperation. These two programmes are proof of the surprising success that can be achieved in public education when the staff of the zoo and an animal welfare organization work together to achieve a common goal.

We would also like to thank ZOO for the materials provided which were sponsored by Chester Zoo, UK, Flora and Fauna Intl. UK produced by ZOO and CCINSA.

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# National Zoological Park, New Delhi, Welfare of Daily Life Wildlife – 18<sup>th</sup> January 2005

A. K. Malhotra\*

The programme was organized with students through Centre for Cultural Research & Training (CCRT), 51 students with 2 teachers and coordinator from CCRT participated in the programme. The children were first taken around the park and were shown important species. They then gathered in a lawn in front of Pelican Pond. Packets specially made for the purpose were then distributed. Dr. A.K. Malhotra, Curator (Education) asked the children to tell about their experience of Wildlife and told the students that they should start right from their homes. Every one should contribute a bit for the cause of conservation. No matter the efforts may seem to be insignificant. He elaborated the importance of household insects, mammals, birds and reptiles, commonly seen in and around their houses and how they make a sustainable ecosystem.

Mr. R.A. Khan, Education Assistant asked the children to open the packets and wear the masks. Then they were asked to find the partner, and tie Rakhi with promise to save the Tiger. Then children then played game "Save the tiger" and Survival of the fittest.

In the first game, which was survival of the fittest, the children ran in a circle, which was further divided into 8 sectors. The conductor played music and stopped it at intervals. The children stopped running whenever the music and stopped and then the conductor, who had his back at the students, called out one sector and children standing in that sector were out of the game. In the end only one child remained and he was declared the fittest person and received a prize.

In the second game, which was race to conserve tiger, one student became Government Official and stood in one box on the racing track and on the other end nine students wearing tiger masks stood in a box. The Government Official was supposed to save the tiger standing in site by running on track saved all the nine tigers in his jurisdiction was adjusted the winner and received first prize.

## Nature Trail:

The park receives a number of migratory birds during the beginning of winter every year in its pond. These migratories stay till the start of summer seasons. Besides the migratories the local migrants also visit the zoo from time to time. These birds include King fisher, Stone Curlew, Red Wattled Lapwing, Mynah and parakeets etc. To encourage the children to watch the birds, an activity – birds watching— was planned for the children through National Museum of Natural History on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2005. They were given a book prepared exclusively for the purpose. On the pond the students were asked to count and record observation. The children then moved to second pond and this way they counted bird's species in all the four ponds.

In the end Dr. A.K. Malhotra, Curator (Education) and Shri. R.A. Khan, Education Assistant addressed the children and encouraged the children to take the pledge to save the wild

life. In the end the students and teachers thanked the zoo authorities and appreciated their efforts.

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Bat programme



Raajkaran Talk



Students tying Rakhi

## Valparai Ecosystem Education

Divya Mudappa\*

Divya Mudappa wrote about the material in part, "In Valparai we used the sets in conservation educational programmes to demonstrate the children the relationships in nature and as props in their school programmes. We have used some of the material as part of a play we conducted titled '*Lets be friends*' in English and Tamil to help spread awareness about the human- elephant conflict in the Valparai Plateau. By looking at some of the material you had sent us, the children got ideas to improvise on the props that were used as part of the play. This play was open to an audience of about 500 people including parents, tea estate managers, and estate staff. While using and showing the children the material, Zoo Outreach Organisation was acknowledged and we gave them an overview of the kind of work your organization is involved in. In the coming academic year we hope to concentrate on each of the animal groups that is part of the educational sets and have a detailed programme on each. This will include talks, slide shows, demonstrations, and nature walks.

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## Report on the 'Wild Life Awareness' programme in Shillong

Veena Tendon\* and K. C. Sharma\*\*

A Wildlife Awareness Programme was conducted for the children of Kendriya Vidyalaya, NEHU, Shillong in October, 2004. Zoo Outreach Organisation provided the material of the Wildlife Week without which the programme could not have been organized. We used 35 packets for this programme and will use the remainder material for the next programme that we plan to organize in June for another group of school children with the involvement of Centre for Science Education of North East Hill University. Thanking you once again for the support material.

With a view to generating interest among the children about the 'Wild Life', an educational programme on 'Wild Life Awareness' was organized by the Kendriya

Vidyalaya, NEHU, Shillong for the children of this school on October 26, 2004. A day-long outing was organized at the Ka Phan Nonglaid Park (the Lady Hydari Park), Shillong, which has a mini Zoo having many bird and mammalian species of Meghalaya. A group of 60 children of classes II to V accompanied with 4 teachers visited the Zoo. Thirty five packets of educational and fun materials (stickers, posters, friendship bands, caps and masks all with a



conservation message on them, art and play activities' brochures), which were provided by Zoo Outreach Organization, Coimbatore (TN), were distributed among the children as per their pertained to 'Helping Herps' (i.e. Amphibians and reptiles) – a special collaborative programme of ZOO, WILD and other specialist groups of IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) and covered 3 subjects – (1) Amphibians: Global Warming, (2) Go Gharial: Go back to survival, and (3) Freshwater turtles, tortoises and terrapins: Stop the Asian Turtle Crisis. Both children and their educators had lot of fun doing the various activities, eg. Friendship-tying, displaying or wearing their masks/caps and painting the sketches of turtles following the instructions.

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