

Conservation Educator Training for Bat Friends and Educators of Nepal

B.A. Daniel¹, R. Marimuthu², Geeta Shrestha³, and Hari Adhikari⁴

Bat Conservation International (BCI), USA sponsored two bat conservation educator skills training workshops in Nepal during August and September 2008. The primary target groups were members of Bat Friends of Nepal and selected teachers of Kathmandu. These two-day training workshops were conducted by ZOO/WILD/SANIZE in



association with NATURE, Nepal and Bat Friends, Pokhara, Nepal. The first bat education training was conducted at the Institute of Forestry, Pokhara from 29-30 August 2008 for 28 Bat

Friends members who are students of forestry and management. The inaugural programme was attended by the Dean, Assistant Dean and Head of Wildlife Department, Institute of Forestry. The Bat Friends Club, which has its office at the Institute campus, gets full support from the staff to take up research work and education programmes in and around Pokhara and other parts of Nepal.

The second workshop was organised at Administrative Staff College, Jawalakal, Kathmandu from 5-6 September 08 for 32 selected teachers from different schools and one participant from Bhutan. The programme was inaugurated by the chair of the CEC Regional Councillor of IUCN, Nepal, Dr. Arzu Rana Deuba.

The objectives of the training were to teach a variety of "active-learning" tools to teach more effectively about bats and to educate trainees about the bat biology, ecology and their conservation; to teach about the importance of bats and its conservation; bat habitats and the need to preserve them and; to train participants and bring out their creativity by giving them opportunities to prepare learning materials and mini-dramas. These activities also help trainees to cooperate and become involved in group activities and discussions.

The activities included assessment strategies, drama, games, debate, drawing activity, discussion on culture, introduction of bat clubs and a pledge.

Participants received workshop materials that included bat education packet, drama kit and



samples of bat club materials. The agenda for the training was basically same for both the workshops but with some necessary minor changes suitably made to fit the participants' interest particularly with reference to school teachers.



Before getting into actual content of the workshop, the subject of the training topic was explained to the groups. The agenda was also discussed briefly so that participants could understand the programme and be ready for the activity. As the subject of the training was bats, the programme began with a pre-workshop assessment of the knowledge that the group already had on the subjects of threats to bat and conservation. This assessment was done using 'Brain mapping'. In order to understand the attitudes of participants towards bats, an attitude assessment activity was conducted. The objective of this activity was both to teach the much-neglected subject of evaluation to teachers so

that they also could assess their audience and also learn the attitudes of the teachers and how the programme had changed them. They could then understand



¹Scientist, ZOO. Email: badaniel@zooreach.org

²Education Officer, ZOO. Email: marimuthu@zooreach.org

³NATURE, Naya Baneshwor, Nepal. Email: rabigeeta@hotmail.com

⁴Bat Friends, IOF, Pokhara, Nepal. Email: harisubash2002@yahoo.com



why evaluation was important and use it for their regular teaching.

As part of the programme basics of bat taxonomy and the numbers of bats recorded in South Asia were introduced. Then Bat education materials were used to introduce classification and the basic difference between insect-eating bats and fruit-eating bats. Bat education material developed by ZOO with the support of BCI is a tool carefully designed so that it can be used at different stages of education programme.

To introduce aspects of bat biology and conservation, mini-dramas were designed. Different drama themes on bat biology and ecology such as habitat loss, restoration of bat roost tree, hunting of bats for meat and prevention were performed. Before assigning the theme, instructions were given to select one director among the group. The trainees used a variety of props made by themselves and also used masks provided by the organizers to play the characters. It took about 90 minutes to practice and perform the drama as a team. The drama helped participants to understand the theme that was assigned to them, and also helped them to identify the creative talents within them. At the end they felt satisfied about their performance. As a continuation of drama they were encouraged to develop their own drama on animal and conservation issues. Each one received a set of drama guidelines and a kit.

In order to teach them about the biology of bats, an illustrated story activity was tried. This is a modified activity with a timeline. The participants were asked to find partners and make pairs according to their choice. Each pair was given a portion of the story called 'The story of Echo the bat'. They were asked to illustrate the story description into an illustrated colour poster. They took 30 minutes to make a poster. At the end of the stipulated time they displayed a series of beautiful colour posters on the wall in the order of the story line and that made an illustrated story. Before display, the participants

explained some details of the drawings. The drawing activity was much appreciated by the participants and they could learn the life history of bats.

At different times where ever appropriate, energizer activities such as 'writing your name on the air', body writing, and bear walking were performed.

The first day ended with an outdoor game 'Bat and snake game'. The game which is also an energizer teaches the prey predator relationship and also helps us to understand the concept of team spirit.

The second day of the training started with a debate about bat conservation. Debate is a hypothetical situation and the concept was to stop bat hunting that is in practice by professional village hunters. The government put forward a proposal to stop this illegal and unethical practice and in the proposal the government offer attractive alternate livelihood support for the hunters. According to the government proposal the professional bat hunters should stop bat hunting and support planting host plant of bats. If so the hunters will get financial and other benefits that will help the trappers to find an alternate livelihood and ultimately that supports bat survival. In the debate the participants represent different social community and they give their opinion about the proposal in favour or against it. The government listens to the community opinion and finally passes or post-pone the implementation of the proposal. The participants were divided into groups to represent government officials, bat



hunters, human rights activists, scientists, public, media, and forest officials. The group had to act from their own perspective as creatively as they could. This activity helps the participants to see the issue in different perspectives.

In continuation to this 'Bats in our culture' was conducted. Bats influence human culture in many ways. This activity is to make them understand what will happen to the cultures that we gained from the animal, if the animals become extinct. There is a dangerous situation those cultures could also vanish. To understand this, an introduction was given for them to know how bats are linked to different cultures around the world. Then the participants were divided into different groups and

each group was asked to look for examples of bats being used as a symbol in different cultures. They were asked to list out examples under the following categories: advertisement, stories, songs, movies, sports, literature, animal, plant or place names and etc. This activity was turned in to a completion. The group that listed highest number of examples was declared as the winning team. During this exercise all the groups worked very hard to find out more number of examples. As a token of appreciation all the participants received colour posters of bats.



The main cause of species decline is habitat loss. The participants learned about habitat loss by playing a game. A dancing animal game that is played with newspapers helps us to understand habitat loss over the years and explain how habitat loss leads to bat decline throughout the world. In the game the participants form pairs and each pair represents a bat population. They were also given a full news paper which represents forest or habitat of bats. The participants were made to dance on the news paper spread on the floor and if they step out of the paper they are out of the game. Each time the organizer will ask the players to fold the paper into half and that denotes decline of forest by 50% over a period of time. Music can be played when they dance. At the end who ever manage to dance with out stepping out of the paper is considered to be the bat population that survived until the end.

Another game named 'threats' was played to explain different kinds of threats that affect species



loss. Both these games being out door activity, serve as both energisers and teaching methods.

It is important for the educators to practice what they learned. A detailed discussion was conducted highlighting aspects of planning an education programme. Planning strategies to be considered while organising short duration and long duration education programmes were discussed.

Bat clubs of ZOO is an activity sponsored by BCI. Owing to the interest shown by the bat club members and educators guidelines to start a bat club was explained. Samples of bat club materials were shown and the ways to obtain these materials were discussed. Most of the participants showed interest to start a bat club and to become a member of CCINSA, Chiroptera Conservation and Information Network of South Asia.

ZOO supplies free education packets particularly for bats. A step by step instruction to use ZOO's bat education packet and South Asian Bat Colouring book was conducted. The participants went through all the bat packet materials, tying the *rakhi*, marching with placard saying slogans to save bats. They also made two promises that they could fulfill in the next six month. At the end the post workshop brain mapping activity was conducted to know the knowledge that they gained during the two days programme.

Hari Adhikari, final year student of B.Sc Forestry and Coordinator of Bat Friends of Nepal produced a booklet in Nepali called 'Bat Conservation in Nepal - an educational kit' created with funds from Bat Conservation International BCI was released by the authors and distributed to participants.

All the members received a participant certificate. Ms. Kanchan Shrestha, NATURE, during the valedictory of the second workshop thanked ZOO and BCI for the support and encouragement extended to plan and organize this programme. She also thanked all the participants and their institutional head for allowing the teachers and educators to attend this programme.

Participants made commitments of what they would do to follow up their training.

