



WWF for a living planet

September-October 2007

Mruthika

News Letter of WWF - India, Kerala State Office, Thiruvananthapuram 695 035

FROM THE STATE DIRECTOR'S DESK

Kerala State has very less problems of natural disasters. But to compensate for that, we are creating more and more man made disasters around us. All the man made disasters may not be purposeful. But the major reasons to be attributed are negligence and neglect. This is very much clear from the recent incidents of the penstock pipe burst leading to loss of lives and property worth crores of rupees and the death of two nuns as a result of heavy building bricks falling on them from great heights. If we look around us carefully, we can see many disasters like these waiting to happen. I myself have been witness to a few in the past recent days. A few days back I was driving along a busy road in the City with a carriage auto in front of me. On encountering a gutter on the road, the spare tyre loosely kept in the back carriage of the vehicle popped out and fell onto the road right in front of me. Just because there was some good distance between the two vehicles and I could steer away, avoiding a major accident. The police personnel nearby just screamed on the auto driver to take the tyre and move ahead. I was so surprised to see that the auto driver was not even fined for the neglect of putting the spare tyre loosely in the back carriage rather than being kept tightly bolted in its designated space under the carriage. Just two days later, when I was driving home from work, I saw a damaged bike being taken in a passenger auto. More than half of the bike was protruding out of the auto posing great threat to passing vehicles. On the way there were so many traffic police and nobody stopped this negligent adventure. Yesterday as I was driving to AKG Centre Junction, a convoy of police vehicle accompanying a VIP just overtook me and just drove ahead on a red signal. If we observe closely around us, we can see that our administration is more keen on implementing and inaugurating new projects. The maintenance and monitoring of existing infrastructure and associated rules and regulations is never a priority. If the monitoring agencies had done their jobs with regard to ensuring that rules and regulations are kept, conducting quality checks, carrying out regular maintenance work, implement precautionary measures etc, these kinds of man made disasters could be avoided. This is very similar in the case of the environment also. Maybe we are negligent, because we feel that all these may not be a problem in the immediate future and that we may not have to suffer. But then think about our children and the future generations.

Renjan Mathew Varghese
State Director

IMPORTANT NEWS ON ENVIRONMENT AND NATURE

GLOBAL

The return of the parrots

Two centuries after a dazzlingly feathered parrot called the Rimitara lorikeet disappeared from the Cook Islands, a breeding colony of the birds has been re-established with the help of the islands' royalty. About a century ago, after the parrots died out on the Cook Islands, the queen of Rimitara Island issued a royal decree, that local people say, saved the last naturally occurring population of the lorikeet, one of the Pacific's most beautiful parrots. That decree prevented lorikeets from being caught and removed from Rimitara.

But now her royal counterpart, Queen Rongomatane of Atiu in the Cook Islands, has accompanied 27 of the birds on the journey back to her island. Already, the birds have spread over the whole 30 sq km of Atiu, a coral atoll also known as Enuamano (land of the birds) 187 km northeast of Rarotonga, the capital of the Cook Islands. Four days of celebrations followed the bird's return to Atiu, which has 570 people, starting with a giant feast led by Queen Rongomatane and dignitaries from Rimitara. "Every night and every day they feasted and sang songs and made up poems about the bird," (Source: *The Hindu*, Friday, Sep 28, 2007)

NATIONAL

2005 Rajiv Gandhi Award for Deputy Director, Kanha Tiger Reserve

The Rajiv Gandhi Wildlife Conservation Award in the individual category for the year 2005 has been given to Dr. HS Negi for his significant contribution to wildlife conservation as Deputy Director Kanha Tiger Reserve, buffer zone and Kanha National Park. He is credited with resolution of the issue of opposition to the creation of a buffer zone forest division of Kanha National Park, convincing the target villages of the importance of the buffer and motivating them to be a partner in wildlife conservation. Dr. Negi is presently Director of the Kanha Tiger Reserve. (Source: *PA Update* Oct.07)

Maharashtra for denotification of Jayakwadi WLS

The Maharashtra State Government has decided to approach the Supreme Court for the denotification of the Jayakwadi Sanctuary to facilitate *galpera* (draw-down) agriculture by project affected families. The issue had come up for discussion in the State Assembly in July following which the State Chief Minister called a separate meeting of political leaders of the region and forest officials. The proposal will have to be first approved by the National Board for Wildlife following which it will have to be cleared by the State Assembly. (Source: PA Update Oct.07)

Tiger rescue centre in Sunderbans

The West Bengal State Government has again brought up the plan for setting up a Tiger Rescue Centre at Jharkali Island in the Sunderbans. To be spread over 100 acres, it is hoped that this centre would then also become a major tourism attraction. The discussions in the matter were held recently between the Land and Land Reforms Minister, Abdur Rezzak Mollah; the Sunderbans Development Minister, Kanti Ganguly; State Forest Minister, Ananta Ray and Irrigation Minister Subhas Naskar. It has also been pointed out that the State Government has already earmarked the Jharkhali island for refugee rehabilitation. The Fisheries Department, too, is planning to set up a fishing harbour. This plan for the rescue centre had earlier been announced in May 2005 and it had been said at that time, that it would be completed within a year. (Source: PA Update Oct.07)

Handmade paper from elephant dung

A project for the manufacture of handmade paper from elephant dung in north Bengal's Cooch Behar forest division is at an advanced stage of completion, the required infrastructure is being put in place and the process of imparting training to the staff is underway. It would be the first of its kind in the country, Raman Sukumar, Professor, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore, and an internationally acclaimed expert on elephants, told *The Hindu*. The project would not only solve the problem of waste disposal but would also provide alternative earning opportunities to villagers. The raw material would be collected from the waste of captive elephants in the sanctuary, M.C.Biswas, Divisional Forest Officer said. Presently, there are 59 such elephants there.

A feasibility study for setting up a similar project in the vicinity of the Gorumara National Park is on, for which technological know-how has been sought from World Wildlife Fund's [WWF] offices in South Africa, WWF's Senior Programme Coordinator, Sikkim and north Bengal, Dipankar Ghosh added. (Source: *The Hindu Monday, Oct 22, 2007*)

STATE

Athirappilly project subject to 19 conditions

Electricity Minister A.K. Balan has said the Athirappilly hydroelectric project will be implemented subject to 19 conditions set by the Centre. Speaking at a press conference, he said, the conditions required the Kerala State Electricity Board to maintain the waterfall and flow of water downstream of the river. Tribals in the area would not be displaced. Mr. Balan said a Central Expert Committee would be watching the compliance with the stipulations. (Source: *The Hindu Wednesday, Sept. 26, 2007*)

Reclamation of wetlands sees a spurt in Thiruvananthapuram

Reclamation of wetlands continues in several parts of the district, defying government orders and ignoring protests by local people. The failure of the district administration to crack down on diversion of paddy fields has made a mockery of Chief Minister's assurance that the remaining wetlands in the State would be protected. The fallow fields at Chittattumukku near Kazhakuttam were the latest to fall to the real estate industry that is gobbling up land in the Kazhakuttam-Kadhinamkulam areas for the construction of apartment complexes and residential townships. Real estate developers are acquiring large tracts of farmland anticipating the spurt in demand for housing once the Technocity project near Andoorkonam takes off. There has been a steady fall in the area under cultivation as commercial and industrial projects claim large chunks of the once-fertile paddy belt. While one section of the local residents has fallen for the lure of big money offered by land sharks, another group fears that conversion of wetlands will cause irreparable damage to the environment, impacting on their livelihood. (Source: *The Hindu Saturday, Oct 20, 2007*)

Move to include buffer zone in Silent Valley

Chief Minister has said that the government will consider the demand to make the recently declared 148 sq km buffer zone of the Silent Valley National Park part of the park to provide full protection for this unique tropical rainforest. He said that after his visit to the SVNP on September 23 to declare the buffer zone, there were numerous demands from nature lovers and organisations to make the buffer zone part of the national park so that non-forestry activities could be banned in the area.

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“Such a decision is required to enlarge the area of the national park of just 89.5 sq km. If the 148-sq km buffer zone is also added to the national park, it will have a total area of 237.5 sq km,” he said. The government would recommend to the Central Government to include the buffer zone part of the Silent Valley National Park, he added. (Source: *The Hindu Monday, Oct 22, 2007*)

Action sought against cola companies

Leaders of the Plachimada Anti-Coca-Cola Agitation Committee and the Anti-Pepsi Cola Agitation Committee submitted a petition to Chief Minister demanding action against the companies for alleged exploitation of groundwater and pollution of the environment. The memorandum, submitted by Plachimada Anti-Coca-Cola Agitation Committee Chairman Vilayodi Venugopal, said the government had promised to convene a meeting of the departments concerned to initiate action against Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages Pvt. Ltd. for “polluting the groundwater and environment of Plachimada area affecting the local population.” The government had promised to hold a joint meeting of the Ground Water Department, Pollution Control Board and Health Department, the memorandum pointed out. It urged the Chief Minister to take appropriate steps to conduct the case against the company pending in the Supreme Court by providing legal experts. (Source: *The Hindu, Monday, Oct 22, 2007*).

EXCLUSIVE ARTICLE ON PROTECTION OF THE OZONE LAYER

The Ozone layer

Although ozone (O₃) is present in small concentrations throughout the atmosphere, most ozone (about 90%) exists in the stratosphere, in a layer between 10 and 50km above the surface of the earth. This ozone layer performs the essential task of filtering out most of the sun’s biologically harmful ultraviolet (UV-B) radiation. Concentrations of ozone in the atmosphere vary naturally according to temperature, weather, latitude and altitude. Furthermore, aerosols and other particles ejected by natural events such as volcanic eruptions can have measurable impacts on ozone levels.

The Ozone Hole

In 1985, scientists identified a thinning of the ozone layer over the Antarctic during the spring months which became known as the “ozone hole”. The scientific evidence shows that human-made chemicals are responsible for the creation of the Antarctic ozone

hole and are also likely to play a role in global ozone losses. Ozone Depleting Substances (ODS) have been used in many products which take advantage of their physical properties (e.g. chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) have been used as aerosol propellants and refrigerants).

CFCs are broken down by sunlight in the stratosphere, producing halogen (e.g. chlorine) atoms, which subsequently destroy ozone through a complex catalytic cycle. Ozone destruction is greatest at the South pole where very low stratospheric temperatures in winter create polar stratospheric clouds (PSCs). Ice crystals formed in PSCs provide a large surface area for chemical reactions, accelerating catalytic cycles. The destruction of ozone also involves sunlight, so the process intensifies during spring time, when the levels of solar radiation at the pole are highest, and PSC’s are continually present.

Although ozone levels vary seasonally, stratospheric ozone levels have been observed to be decreasing annually since the 1970s. Mid-latitudes have experienced greater losses than equatorial regions. In 1997, the Antarctic ozone hole covered 24M km² in October, with an average of 40% ozone depletion and ozone levels in Scandinavia, Greenland and Siberia reached an unprecedented 45% depletion in 1996.

Environmental and Health Effects

The amount of UV reaching the earth’s surface has been shown to correlate with the extent of ozone depletion. In 1997, UV-B levels continued to rise at a rate of 2% per annum. Increased UV levels at the earth’s surface are damaging to human health, air quality, biological life, and certain materials such as plastics. Human health effects include increase in the incidence of certain types of skin cancers, cataracts and immune deficiency disorders. Increased penetration of UV, results in additional production of ground level ozone, which causes respiratory illnesses. Biologically, UV affects terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, altering growth, food chains and biochemical cycles. In particular, aquatic life occurring just below the surface of the water, where plant species forming the basis of the food chain are most abundant, are adversely affected by elevated levels of UV radiation. The tensile properties of certain plastics can be affected by exposure to UV radiation. Depletion of stratospheric ozone also alters the temperature distribution in the

atmosphere, resulting in indeterminate environmental and climatic impacts.

Future Perspective

Despite existing regulation of ODS, there continues to be severe ozone depletion and maximum stratospheric levels of chlorine and bromine are predicted to occur only during the next decade. Without further measures the ozone hole will continue to exist beyond 2050. However, the success of the Montreal Protocol has already been observed in terms of changes in the concentrations of man-made chlorine-containing chemicals in the troposphere (i.e. the rates of release of ODS to the atmosphere have been reduced). Additional measures are currently being proposed by the European Commission to accelerate the phase out of various ODS and thereby to provide much-needed additional protection for the ozone layer.

What you can do to protect the Ozone Layer

Try to find out as much as you can about the problem from publications, schools or public libraries. The only way to mend the ozone hole is to stop the release of CFCs and other ozone depleting substances (ODS) into the atmosphere. European legislation aims to achieve this by phasing out ODS as soon as viable alternatives become available, and where no such alternatives are available, restricting the use of these substances as far as possible. However, there are a number of practical initiatives which can be taken at the individual level to help protect the ozone layer:

- Try to use products which are labelled "Ozone-Friendly"
- Ensure technicians repairing your refrigerator or air conditioner recover and recycle the old CFCs so they are not released into the atmosphere.
- Vehicle air conditioning units should regularly be checked for leaks.
- Ask about converting your car to a substitute refrigerant if the a/c system needs major repair
- Help start a refrigerant recovery and recycling program in your area if none already exists.
- Replace halon fire extinguishers with alternatives (e.g. carbon dioxide or foam).
- Suggest school activities to increase awareness of the problem and to initiate local action.

ACTIVITIES OF WWF-INDIA, KERALA STATE OFFICE

1. Friday Forums September

Friday forum, the monthly interactive forum for school/ college students of Thiruvananthapuram was conducted at Museum Auditorium, Thiruvananthapuram on 7th September and 5th October 2007. Since September 16th was the International Coastal Cleanup Day, the topic and discussion for September was on *Environmental issues along Kerala coast*. The topic was presented by Dr.ASK Nair, Scientist from Center for Earth Science Studies, Thiruvananthapuram. 260 students from six different education institutions participated in the programme.



October

As October first week is the Wildlife Week, the topic was *Elephants and its Conservation in Kerala* and was attended by 400 school students. Dr.Easwaran, Veterinary Surgeon of Kerala Forests and Wildlife Department presented the topic with visual clippings and was very interesting to the students. The interactive sessions which followed these presentations also was very active with the questions and doubts from the side of participants.

2. International day for the Preservation of Ozone Layer 2007

WWF-India, Kerala State Office and Kerala State Pollution Control Board jointly organized a One Day Awareness Programme and Competitions for school students on 17th September 2007 at Vanasree Auditorium, Thiruvananthapuram. Sri.Jayaprasad, Member Secretary of KSPCB inaugurated the



programme which was attended by 200 students from ten schools. He asked the entire crowd to stand up, raise their hand like holding up the sky and to pledge saying “we won’t allow the sky to fall down, we will hold it up for ever”. This activity made every one dynamic and interesting. Sri.Renjan Mathew Varghese of WWF-India welcomed the guests and participants to the occasion and briefed on the events of the programme.

The first session was on Global Warming & Climate Change by Sri.Renjan Mathew Varghese. The Quiz competition on Our Atmosphere was mastered by Sri.A.K.Sivakumar from WWF-India. Kum.Arati Anil and Arya Thampi from Carmel GHSS, Kavitha Krishnan, Mekhana, Anjana and Vidya from Chinmaya Vidyalaya bagged the first, second and third prizes respectively.

Sixty five students participated in essay writing competition and Kum. Kavitha Krishnan of Chinmaya Vidyalaya, Lekshmi.S.H of Carmel GHSS and Anusree. S.S of GHSS Venganoor bagged the first, second and third prizes respectively.

In the afternoon session, Dr.A.Bijukumar from Dept.of Marine Sciences, University of Kerala led the technical session on Ozone Layer & Need for it’s Preservation.

In the valedictory session, Sri.V.S.Varughese IFS, Chief Wildlife Warden of the State appreciated the effort taken by WWF-India and KSPCB to sensitize the youth about environmental problems. He distributed the awards for the winners.

International Coastal Clean up Day

World Wide Fund for Nature – India (WWF – India), Kerala State Office with volunteers and nature club members observed Coastal Cleanup Day 2007 with the

beach-cleaning programme from 7am to 9.00 am at Shanghumughom Beach on September 16th 2007. The team collected 4 bags of litter along a unit stretch of the beach, which was then sorted and counted and data compiled into an internationally followed data sheet. Out of the waste collected and analysed, the major contribution was from cigarette covers, buds, match sticks and tobacco packings (25%). The second major contributors were icecream sticks (20%) and disposable plates and plastic cups (20%). Plastic carry bags contributed 15%. The remaining contribution was from food wrappers (10%), mineral water bottles (5%), and unsegregated (5%). This data collection component makes the International Coastal Cleanup Day unique.



Nature Club Adviser meeting at Kottayam

NCA meeting of Kottayam district was held at Arcades, Kottayam on 20th September 2007. Education Officer briefed on the strategy of district level coordination system and the capacity building programme for District Coordinators held at Ernakulam. Sri.Mathew M.Kuriakose and Mr.Sebastian Joseph were nominated as District Coordinators for Kottayam. Following the introduction, Sri.Mathew M.Kuriakose further led the meeting and decided to conduct a series of awareness programmes at district level like Green Gathering and Single day sessions.

Interactive session with students

Education Officer conducted an interactive session on Nature Conservation at Ebenezer International School, Kottayam on 29th September 2007. About 65 students participated in the programme and the basic introduction on the topic was done with a power point presentation and the students interacted very well.

Wildlife Week 2007

Wildlife Week 2007 was observed by Kerala State Office with two different programmes at Thiruvananthapuram and Ottappalam.

Thiruvananthapuram

The Signature Campaign on Tiger Conservation was inaugurated by Sri. Binoy Viswom, Hon. Minister for Forests and Housing, Kerala. It was in the inaugural occasion of Wildlife Week Celebration 2007 organized by Kerala Forests and Wildlife Department. The State level Wildlife Week programme was inaugurated by Sri. S. Reghupathy, Hon. Minister of State in the Union



Ministry of Environment and Forests in the function presided over by Sri. Binoy Viswom. Sri. V.S.Varughese IFS, Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) during his welcome speech appreciated WWF-India's initiative for searching public support for the conservation of our majestic national animal.

One lakh bookmarks were printed with the help of the Kerala Forests and Wildlife Department to distributed to the people who participate in the Signature Campaign. Sri. S. Reghupathy released the bookmark and was received by Prof.M.K.Prasad. Exhibition of panel boards on Indian Tiger and Tiger facts was also arranged.

Ottappalam

As part of the Wildlife Week 2007, one day awareness programme was conducted at NSS Training College, Ottappalam, for the Nature Club Members of Palakkad district. The programme was inaugurated by Sri.Shaji, DFO Special Investigation and Protection,

Palakkad in the inaugural function which was presided over by Sri. A.K.Sivakumar. Sri. Rajagopal, Staff Adviser of the College welcomed the guests and participants and Dr.Sreerenjithkumar, Coordinator for Nature Clubs of the district proposed vote of thanks. Sri.Shaji, during his inaugural address briefed on the importance of Wildlife Week and the need for wildlife conservation.

The technical session on Wildlife of Kerala and its conservation was led by Sri.A.K.Sivakumar. An activity session was organized in the afternoon session in which participants selected a species or conservation issue and did a presentation. As it was followed by discussion it turned into an exchange programme of knowledge on the theme. The event came to an end with vote of thanks by Sri.Biju from NSS College, Ottappalam.

Teachers Training Workshop, Mavelikkara

A Teachers Training Workshop was conducted for the teachers from Teacher Training Institutes and selected Higher Secondary Schools of Alappuzha District on 4th October 2007 at Peet Memorial Training College, Mavelikara. Thirty seven teachers participated in the workshop that was jointly organized by CPREEC, Chennai and WWF-India, Kerala State Office. The objective of the workshop was to enable the participants to spread the message of nature conservation and environmental protection through conducting Environment Education (EE) activities and running Nature Clubs (NCs). As majority of the participants were teachers from teacher training institutes, this workshop envisaged multilevel outputs.

The workshop was inaugurated by Smt. Anne Paul, Principal of the college. Sri. Abraham Thomas, Nature Club Adviser of the college welcomed the participants and resource persons from WWF-India. Education officer of WWF-India briefed on the objectives and schedule of the workshop. A brief outline on WWF-India and CPREEC was also given. Mr. Anoop, volunteer and participant of Teachers Training Workshop in the last academic year proposed the vote of thanks to the organizers and participants.

Technical sessions on Environment Education, How to run Nature Clubs and Methods of Ecosystem Interpretation were led by Ms.Shyni Suresh, Guest Lecturer in Environmental Science from All Saints College, Thiruvananthapuram, Mr.Sreejith and A.K.Sivakumar of WWF-India.

Based on these three sessions the participants were



asked to prepare a draft action plan for this ongoing academic year with an objective to ensure their as well as their students participation in EE and conservation activities.

Teachers Training Workshop - Kozhikode

WWF-India, Kerala State Office and CPREEC, Chennai jointly organized a Training Workshop on Environment Education for the Teachers of Kozhikode district on 10th October 2007. Twenty teachers participated. Dr.Sabu.P.G of MAMO College, Mukkom and A.K.Sivakumar led the technical sessions on Environment Education, How to run Nature Clubs and Ecosystem Interpretation. The open sessions were active and dynamic.

2. Nature Club Advisers Meeting - Kozhikode

NCA meeting of Kozhikode district was held at St.Josephs College, Devagiri on 9th of October 2007. Education Officer briefed on the strategy of district level coordination system and the capacity building programme for District Coordinators held at Ernakulam. Sri.N.J.Sebastian of Savio HSS, Devagiri was nominated as District Coordinator. Following the introduction, Education Officer led the discussion and a series of awareness programmes at district level including the World Ecology Day 2007 were planned. Two day Green Gathering and thematic sessions will be organized in the coming months. All the Nature Clubs of the district were requested to contact Sri.N.J.Sebastian or the Education Officer for the guidelines to run nature clubs.

3. Roar of the Tiger – Signature Campaign

As part of the nation wide signature campaign – Roar of the Tiger which is aimed to generate public support for saving the national animal, WWF-India, Kerala State Office organized signature campaigns at various locations in the State. Sri Benoy Viswom, Honourable Minister for Forests and Housing

inaugurated the Signature Campaign on 2nd October 2007, at Kanakakunnu Palace during the Wildlife Week celebrations. Following this, Signature Campaign programmes were organized from 4th of October 2007 to 23rd of October at institutions such as Peet Memorial Training College, Mavelikkara, Zoo and Museum premises, Holy Angel’s School, Nanthancode, St. Mary’s Higher Secondary School, Pattom, Trivandrum International School St. Josephs Higher Secondary School, Thiruvananthapuram, Christ Nagar School, Thiruvallom, Carmel Girls Higher Secondary



School, TVM, Cotton Hill Higher Secondary School, Trivandrum College of Agriculture, Vellayani and All Saint’s College, TVM. Simultaneously, signatures were collected from Employees of Government Secretariat, Kerala in association with “Greens”.

On 14th October 2007, Signature Campaign was arranged at Shankumughom beach, Trivandrum. More than 800 people volunteered for signing the banners.

The bookmarks printed for the campaign was distributed among the students and general public who participated in the campaign. In totem, the signature campaign programme attracted many number of people from various walks of the society casting their signature to show their support for the conservation of national animal.

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