



Celebrating Wetlands with Music

This World Wetlands Day, WWF-India lifted the spirit of conservation to rhythmic heights. The celebration for February 2, 2009, started two days earlier, on January 31, with an acoustic-musical extravaganza called 'Aquasymphony' which invited high school bands from around New Delhi to perform their original compositions on the Ramsar theme: 'Upstream- Downstream: Wetlands Connect us All'. The performances were held at the WWF-India Secretariat office in New Delhi, where the auditorium was transformed from a meeting venue into a brightly-lit stage ready for our youth to display their musical talent and awareness on wetlands (and the threats they face). The audience, comprising students, teachers, WWF staff members and media personnel, was stunned into silence at the awe-inspiring performances which dragged out the conservationist inside each viewer. The panel of judges comprised eminent Indian musicians and music critics: Sam Lal, Editor and Chief, Blender magazine; Randeep Singh, Bass Guitarist, Menwhopause and; Gaurav Balani, Bass Guitarist, Crimson.



The judges from left to right: Sam Lal, Randeep Singh and Gaurav Balani

Out of the seven participating teams, the winning prize was bagged by Ryan International School, Noida, whose composition *Jal* (Water) compelled every foot to tap to the beat of the music and left a hum-along tune in every mind. The runner-ups included Laxman Public School and G D Goenka World School, who won the second and third prizes respectively. All the lyrics and melodies were originally written and composed by the students with help from their teachers and were performed using acoustic instruments. A 'Wetland Quiz' refreshed the performers during the break and theme-related t-shirts and resource kits ensured that they all took a piece of WWF with them when they left. The winning teams were invited to a formal prize distribution ceremony on Feb 2, 2009.



Second Prize Winners: Laxman Public School



Third Prize Winners: GD Goenka World School

World Wetlands Day on February 2 ensued with short visual presentations on WWF's wetland-conservation efforts with a focus on WWF's Regional Himalayan high-altitude wetland work. The threats these wetlands face was showcased beautifully through a film on Ladakh titled 'Living with Change: voices from Ladakh'.

The participants comprising environmentalists and students then witnessed the prize winning performances from Aquasymphony which was followed by the award ceremony graced by the Chief Guest of the occasion, Mr Rabbi Shergill. Mr Shergill is a renowned musician and film music director, who has blended Sufiana, Rock and Punjabi music to produce tracks devoted to themes of social concern. His own enthusiasm to conserve the environment was displayed during his address to the students about the devastating effects of anthropogenic activities in the name of 'development'. Picking examples from his home state, Punjab, Mr Shergill stated that the Land of Five Rivers can no more boast of free-flowing rivers as most of them have been dammed up. Its soil, crops, biodiversity and communities are not what they used to be and the state is merely living off past glory. Inspired by the musical performances by the students, Mr Shergill congratulated their efforts and encouraged them to further develop their talent for music and interest in the field of conservation.



Dr Gautam, Director, Freshwater and Wetlands Div, addressing the audience



Keen onlookers at the event



Mr Rabbi Shergill awarding Ryan International School



Mr Shergill performing with one of the students

The first prize is an overnight trip to Bharatpur Sanctuary in Rajasthan for the students and an accompanying teacher, while the second prize is an overnight camping trip to the Aravalli Biodiversity Park in Delhi and the third is a day trip to the Yamuna Biodiversity Park. The winning band would also be given the opportunity to come on air at a local FM channel, featuring on their 'Breakfast Jam' show.