

Wildlife Week in India ... 55 years old

Wildlife Week is an official designated annual event from 1-7 October created by the Government of India Wildlife Advisory Board 55 years ago. It is going strong and has been for decades and is growing year by year and should be given a global venue. Wildlife Week falls on Gandhi Jayanthi celebrated in India.

All our reports are good but I am particularly touched by the first one about children afflicted with Leukemia celebrating Wildlife Week in Kerala. Some purists may say that we should focus more on policy makers so things would get done, but educating children demonstrates, at least, that we have some hope for the future! Also if we do have a future in the climate changing, ocean acidification, emerging diseases, politically unstable world, it will be brought about by the behaviour of today's kids.

And that is not enough, then, from the article itself "it was an enriching and uplifting experience not only for the children and their parents, as well as the organizers." We find that children take things back to busy parents and they learn about some important issues first from their kids.

And if that is not enough, surely nobody would object to giving kids with leukemia something to love and feel good about. Congratulations to Dr. Geeta Govindaraj, Asst. Prof. of Pediatrics, Medical College Calicut, Kerala. Email: geetakkumar@gmail.com for this activity and her report. Congratulations to all of the many people who celebrated Wildlife Week/Day under whatever auspices.

Zoo Outreach Organisation has been preparing and providing educational materials for zoos and ngo's, etc. for 2.5 decades, since 1985 with 2010 to be celebrated as our Anniversary. In 1997 we joined with the International Zoo Educators Association and in 2000 or thereabouts began representing the South Asian region.

Our taxon, thematic and institutional networks have suggested directions in education and also provided important themes, such as Threatened Amphibians-AArk, 2010 Save Biodiversity, Wildlife Welfare, Daily Life Wildlife, Conservation Conscious zoos, and many others following PHVA and CAMP workshops and WAZA meetings. For this Wildlife Week, we tackled Climate Change, a joint initiative of CBSG and WAZA, by creating a packet calling attention to aspects which might aid in altering the attitudes and behaviour of kids toward developing Earth friendly habits. All the educators who ordered these packets were asked to evaluate the impact of them on their target audience of children. Coming up is Year of Biodiversity 2010 and we will be developing a range of materials to relate all our old taxon based materials to this important topic and our 25th year anniversary.

Editor Emeritus.

Children with Leukemia celebrate Wildlife Week, Calicut, South India

Wildlife Week was celebrated among children undergoing treatment for leukemia at the Institute of Maternal and Child Health, Calicut on Gandhi Jayanthi day, 2009. The programme was conducted by the Department of Pediatrics, Medical College, Calicut and a charitable organisation looking after the needs of children with cancer and chronic illnesses, C4CCCI. There were twenty children in all.

This was made possible by the very generous and thoughtful support of Zoo Outreach Organisation and South Asian Network of the International Zoo Educators Association SAN-IZE. For a brief while the Leukemia ward came alive with animals in the form of posters, face masks, rakhis, placards and stickers and there was laughter and frolic all around. Children gained valuable insights into the need to save wild animals wherever they may be and forgot their pain and suffering for a brief while.

Dr. Rajmohana, Scientist at the Zoological Survey of India, Western Ghats Research Station, Calicut was the chief coordinator. She introduced children to the concept of wildlife conservation through stories and interesting anecdotes. The response was enthusiastic and spontaneous. A short movie on wildlife conservation was shown to the children.

A picture colouring session was arranged and several of the hospital beds were joined together to form a large dais. All the children coloured the butterfly picture provided in the packets handed out. The enthusiasm was palpable. One child, who was unable to sit up due to a fractured spine, did the colouring lying down.

Children paraded around wearing their butterfly masks and holding placards aloft, though several of them had intravenous cannulas on their wrists. All in all it was an enriching and uplifting experience not only for the children and their parents, but also for the organisers.

We thank Sally Walker and her crew at ZOO as well as SAN-IZE and look forward to working together in future to make the world a better place for sick children and, of course, for wild animals as well!

Submitted by: Dr. Geeta Govindaraj, Asst. Prof. Dept. of Pediatrics, Medical College Calicut, Kerala. Email: geetakkumar@gmail.com

Photos on the following page. See them in colour on our website at www.zoosprint.org



The Leukemia ward came alive when children gained valuable insights into the need to save wild animals



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ZOO WATCH education for snake conservation during Wildlife Week

On October 2, ZOOWATCH conducted a very interesting public education workshop on snake conservation at the Trivandrum Zoo to mark the beginning of Wildlife Week. This is actually the first time such a training programme for the public has been held in Trivandrum Zoo on the topic of snake conservation. This workshop is especially relevant because today in India, snakes have a very negative image. They are frequently hunted and killed because most people regard them as dangerous vermin. There are also many superstitions about snakes which are believed by the public, eg. that snakes can dance, that they can take revenge, etc. These foolish ideas encourage people to kill snakes and as a result, snakes are seriously endangered.

The truth is that snakes are actually crucial elements of our natural environment. Without snakes, our farms and houses would be overrun by rats and mice. In many parts of the world, snakes are considered the farmer's best friends because they help to save the crops that we will eventually require. Many people kill snakes, but very few know that under Indian law, (Wildlife Protection Act) all snakes are protected. Snakes are our servants and our best friends since they eliminate rats which cause hunger and disease.

The objective of this workshop was to convince the public, especially the younger generation, to prevent the unnecessary killing of snakes. We also wished to alter public misconceptions about snakes in general and to instill respect and understanding of the essential role that they play in the environment. It was quite difficult to convince many people that snakes should not be killed at once! We were very fortunate to have a senior veterinarian surgeon, Dr. Ramkumar present who conducted a session just for schoolchildren.

To maximize the effect ZOOWATCH used for the first time snake flex boards to convey the message of snake conservation. These were very effective because they condensed the basic information about snakes for all levels of society. The programme was very well received. TV coverage was very detailed. Also a report on our programme appeared in the Hindu the next day. Heartened by the success of this edutainment session, we plan now on taking our boards to schools and colleges in and around Trivandrum.

ZOOWATCH takes this opportunity to thank the Zoo Director, Ms. Vijayakumari, the zoo superintendent Mr. Sadashivan and the zoo staff for their generous support. **Submitted by: Dr. Latha Tampi, Vice-President, ZOO WATCH, Trivandrum, Kerala. Email: lathatampi@yahoo.com**

Vijay Ranjan Singh*

Indian Wildlife Week is being observed from 1-7 October 2009, as usual every year. This year being the 55th Wildlife Week, the zoo has planned to carryout many awareness programmes, besides free entry to school children, birthday celebration, zoo in-reach, zoo out-reach, naming ceremony of zoo young animals and photography competition and exhibition for the benefit of large section of the public involving students, zoo volunteers and NGO's is organized.

The inauguration of the photography exhibition was held on 1 October 2009, and altogether 150 photographs of amateurs and professionals were displayed, much to the appreciation of the visitors and photographers, especially display and lighting aspects. Some of the rarest photographs displayed which inspired the visitors to care nature and wildlife, and they could have glimpse of both the zoo and forests.

October 4 was the luckiest day, to celebrate 'world habitat day' coinciding with the wildlife week, involving about 54 students of youth club members and specially invited 42 students of Shreekantha Girls High School, led by our zoo volunteer Smt. G. Suma, the teacher of that school, to the zoo.

It was a great occasion to make use of the awareness materials received from Zoo Outreach Organization. The materials like mask, placards, rakhi, were appraised about the importance of wildlife, and how to appeal and inspire the visitors to create awareness.

The students performed a good skit on elephant and human conflict, in two different places, where visitors gathered more in number. The members with great enthusiasm worn the mask and enjoyed to the fullest brim, and exchanging greetings with another and expressed the need to conduct such programmes. The visitors witnessed the show appreciated the kids. Some girls were chosen, who have big louder voice for the male character, and then both the team got together and exchange their thoughts about the skit. It was a good exercise which helped to learn lot of things; finally the students took a rally inside the zoo which was watched by huge holiday crowd.

Mysore zoo extends sincere thanks to Zoo Outreach Organisation for providing materials for a good cause and it was a great learning experience to both the students and teacher.

**Executive Director, Sri Chamarajendra Zoological Gardens, Mysore, Karnataka. Email: zoomysore@gmail.com*

