

## Budding birders of Sundarvan



**At Godhavi - observation of heronry to learn about breeding in birds**

Birdwatching is a recreational activity and can progress to be a great contribution for citizen science. Encouraging children in birdwatching will help them develop passion towards nature appreciation. Now a days, children spend lot of time in watching televisions and playing video/mobile games. The outdoor exposure will provide good physical and mental health. So, time spent outdoor for useful hobby such as birdwatching make the children engaged in useful activity, which helps them grow healthy.

Fifteen students from Mahatma Gandhi International School (MGIS), Ahmedabad, joined in the “Budding Birders of Sundarvan” for 2017-18. Joon Sheel, the teacher in-charge of the programme is dedicated to mould these students as keen bird watchers.

This annual programme has four different sessions. Students were introduced to the world of birds through an interactive powerpoint presentation in the first session. Topics such as origin, general features, diversity, food and feeding, breeding, conservation issues, beak and feet adaptation, interesting facts, importance of birdwatching, etiquettes of birdwatching and introducing the common birds of this region were covered. Later, students were taken around to observe birds in the school premises.

A visit was made to the heronry in Godhavi to observe breeding activities of birds on 2 September 2017. Students were very excited seeing this colonial breeding phenomena of different birds such as Asian Openbill, Indian Cormorants, Night Herons, Black-headed Ibis and different species of egrets. Information such as tree species used for nesting, tree

height, nest height, number of nest on each tree, distance of nest tree from road, human habitation and water bodies, etc were collected for further discussion. “Birds of Peninsular India” – packet guide was distributed to all the students as resource material. Students tried their hand, identifying birds seen in this site. Introduction on nesting and various types of nests were explained to them before reaching the spot.

The third activity was carried out at Sundarvan Nature Discovery Centre on 17 January 2018. Nest making activity, using different waste materials was taught. A birdwatching session was also conducted for them at the premises. Students were encouraged to submit their bird list in online portal such as ebird.org to contribute to the citizen science.

The enthusiastic group gathered at Sundarvan early morning of 10 February 2018 for a bird watching trip to Pariej. A group of two adults and juvenile Sarus Cranes was the major attraction before reaching this fantastic birding site of Gujarat. A small squadron of Dalmatian Pelicans welcomed us in Pariej. The children were excited to see magical colours of Purple Moorhen, Bronze-winged Jacan and White-throated Kingfisher through



**Observation of Sarus Crane family on the way to Pariej**

spotting scope. A white morphed Paradise Fly-catcher with long tail was entertaining these budding birders by hopping here and there to capture flies for quite some time. The children could view over 50 birds including Caspian Tern and Small Pratincole. They were totally in to the birding by viewing them thoroughly, noting down the bird names, capturing them through lenses and asking questions to clarify their doubts. Joona told me that they have few more activities at school to sustain this interest among these kids and to pass this energy to other students. I strongly believe that this programme will have major impact to shape some future naturalists.

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