

Wildlife Educators summer course at Chennai Snake Park

The Chennai Snake Park, Guindy, Chennai conducted wildlife educators summer course for students and general public focussing primarily on reptile biology and their conservation from April 16 to May 25. About 135 individuals participated in the summer course, of which most of them were students. The participants were from all walks of life and included age group from as low as 9 year old school kids to retired, senior citizens. The participants were from many educational and linguistic backgrounds. About 15% of the participants were from other states. Apart from students, the rest of the participants were from various professions, such as software and engineering, to business enterpreneurs, teachers and home makers. Among the college students too, there was this variation – from both zoology / life science majors (both as mainstream subjects or electives / allied / ancillary subjects) and non-life science discipline



Dr. S. Paulraj, IFS, Executive Secretary interacting with the summer course participants

students (like Arts, Business Managment, Commerce, Journalism, Visual Communication etc.). But yet, on many occassions, our programmes were speifically tailored in such a way that it meets the necessity of this mixed-audience groups, without compromising on subjects and contents.

This five day course consists of speical talks on need for wildlife awareness, natural history and biology of reptiles, bird watching techniques and methods, Snake bite management and first aid and amphibian conservation. Interactive sessions covering topcis

such as wildlife health monitoring, role of zoos in reptile conservation including hands-on learning experiences with professional experts were also in place. Out door activities such as reptile adapdation (star tortoise, monitor lizard, Iguna) and biology, snake identification (venomous and non-venomous) amphibian physiology and adapdation and vetinary care were





Students hop like a frog for the competition

conducted in the park premise. Additionally, all participants, guided by the Forest Dept. staff and the team experts took a nature trail eco-walk into Guindy National Park aiming to sight wildlife.

Apart from the theory sessions, the hands-on learning experiences were very effective. The participants, particularly students, were very enthusiastic about the practical sessions and leaping frog exercises. They were also very eloquent and spontaneous during the quiz competitions. From their feedbacks that were collected at the end, most participants,

regardless of age and occupation, unanimously stated that the trip inside Guindy National Park was the highlight. This was so for good reasons. With sightings of elusive animals like the jackal, palm civet, mongoose and the key-stone species of the region – the black buck, spotted deer in the wild, one has no hesitation in expressing their opinion. Additionally, other interesting animals like the star tortoise, rat snake, bronzeback tree snake, fan-throated lizards were also sighted by the participants. A multitude of birds such as green malkoha, pied crested cuckoo, babblers, bulbuls, koel, mynahs,

black-drongos, sun birds, bee-eaters, oriole, king fisher, hoopoe, woodpecker, coppersmith barbet, coucal, black-winged kite, black kite, spotted owlet and butterflies were a feast for their eyes. Fun apart, this was also an excellent opportunity for the participants to learn about spotting wildlife in natural habitats. Indirect evidences and signs such as scats and foot prints / pug marks of jackals, civet cats, jungle cats, mongooses as well as shed skins of snakes were encountered.

Therefore, the participants were quite enthusiastic about the course and many showed positive attitude on wildlife after attending the programme.

A special attraction was the frog jumping exercise and competition. Aside from fun, the participants were imparted with all the essential information on health benefits of such exercises and above all the uniqueness and abilities of frogs. The participants got many prizes in extempore and

written quiz competitions conducted during the programme based on the modules handled. It is hoped that the special programmes enhanced the public understanding and appreciation of reptiles and amphibians and wildlife in general by the public.

After completion of this programme, the participants had a chance to become "ZOO EDUCATORS" for Chennai Snake Park. This would allow the participants to have a free passes to visit the park 50 times in a year and also opportunity to educate about our zoo animals to school kids who visit the park. Our heartfelt thanks are due to the Chairman, Executive Secretary, Executive Trustee and Trustees of Chennai Snake Park Trust for encouraging this activity. We thank A.V. Sudhakar, MNS for inguarating the summer course programme. Thanks are also due to the Chief Wildlife Warden and Wildlife Warden, Guindy National Park for allowing us to create awarens in the vicinity of Guidy National Park. We



Briefing the importance of Guindy National Park

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**Submitted by
R. Rajarathinam,
S.R. Ganesh & G.
Kannan, Chennai
Snake Park. Email:
cspt.edu@gmail.com**