Another Successful Teacher Training on South Asian Bears ... at Bannerghatta Biological Park

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Alertis-Fund for Bear and Nature Conservation, Netherlands has sponsored two Educator Skills Training programmes on South Asian Bears. The first workshop was conducted at Van Vihar National Park, Bhopal 28-29 July 2010. The second training was hosted by Bannerghatta Biological Park, Karnataka 29-30 September 2010. Bannerghatta has a bear rescue centre run by Wildlife SOS, coordinator of this workshop.

Twenty eight participants attended the educator training: Wildlife SOS staff including the Veterinary Officer, bear and other keepers of the zoo, NGO's, teachers from colleges and schools, volunteers etc. A simple inaugural attended by Sri Krishna Kumar, Dy Director and Asst Conservator of Forests, Dr. Arun A. Sha, Veterinary Officer, Wildllife SOS, and resource persons, Dr. B. A. Daniel and R. Marimuthu, ZOO.

Participants learned about four South Asian bears as well as the dancing bear problem in India through active learning methods, such as pre and post assessment tools to understand the knowledge level of participants before and after the programme about bears. Dr. Arun A. Sha, Wildlife Veterinary Officer, Bear Rescue Centre spoke about "The dancing bears of India", giving

Sloth Bear teaching guide and education packet introduced during inaugural

Testing participants pre knowledge on sloth bears

Dr. Arun A. Sha gives a talk on dancing bear problem of India

detailed information what is a dancing bear, the community involving in dancing bear shows, the agony of dancing bears used in the show, when and how they started to rescue the bears, what they do after rescuing bears especially their welfare, their food at captivity and the environmental enrichment they did at the rescue centre, rehabilitation packages for Kalandars. Even they offered jobs for them at the rescue centers and few of them working right now at the centre. Dr. Sha's presentation gave a very clear cut understanding about the dancing bear problem in India.

Taxonomy of bears and the four kinds of bears found in India (Brown bear, Asiatic black bear,

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Sloth bear and Malayan Sun bear) as well as characteristics of subspecies of bear was explained in detail with additional emphasis was given for sloth bear. To explain the dramatic population decline of sloth bears over the 200 years, a mapping activity was done with past and present distribution range maps. Through this activity the participants understood population and habitat loss of Sloth bears. Then participants were asked to make illustrations for time-line cards to understand the historical events related to bears from 1605-2050, with some predictions. Their posters were put up in an exhibition for the entire group to see. Participants were divided into groups to plan and carry out mini dramas.

The mini dramas were themed on dancing bear-trade, trapping, habitat loss and saving bears from dancing-bear shows. People around the world have different perspectives on bears. To understand how bears are a powerful symbol in our Indian culture, an activity was played by grouping the participants. Participants looked at different categories viz. advertising, art, folklore, stories/movies, songs, literature and mythology. They thought of many examples.

A debate was conducted on how to stop the dancing-bear racket. The activity helped participants to understand the difficulties faced by a government agency when they implement a new proposal. It was a mock exercise. The government initiated a financial assistance proposal to rehabilitate the bears from the Kalandars. The participants took the parts of Kalandars, public, trappers and traders, animal welfare NGO's, and human rights advocates in the society to consider the proposal and present their opinions to government officials. After hearing their views, participants in the roles of government officials announced whether government would approve the proposal, postpone it and/or add

Mini dramas themed on dancing bear problem, a boy saves dancing bear and bear habitat loss

society's view in the proposal and make it final.

Participants learned how to plan an education programme in the future for short as well as long durations by using bear education packets and bear teaching guide. They were supplied a pledge card and asked to write two pledges involving bear education programmes in the next two months. Participants toured the Bear Rescue Centre in a vehicle provided by Bannerghatta Biological Park while they were briefed by the Vet about rescuing bears from Kalandars and rehabilitating them as well as the Kalandars themselves. They also visited the bear safari attached to the bear rescue centre.

The valedictory also was conducted at the rescue centre and participants received certificates as well as fifty (50) bear education packets to use in their own education programes, and a bear t-shirt.

Debate on stop bear dancing

Drawing activity to know about bear history

Mr. Millo Tago, Executive Director of BBP visited and talked to the participants

Participants practising how to utilise ZOO's bear education packets

Map activity to understand sloth bear's past and present habitat ranges

Visit to the bear rescue centre and participants are briefed by centre's activities

Participants posing with bear t-shirts