

Creative works on the field trip

HunMyCoorg Trip

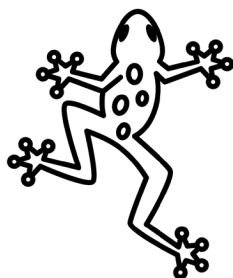
After a day of classes and packing
 And after a night of soiree,
 RHATC fellows 22-23
 We're set to start the party.

Knowing Sally's roots in the children's fave
 Was warm, encouraging and fun.
 The Mysore zoo with Tanuja
 Was nostalgic for some.

Mahseer in the museum,
 And Mahseer in Kaveri;
 Sreenivas and Neethi sailed
 The educational ferry.

The Liana Trust and Gerry were raw
 With night walks and tracking in the day.
 And all I can say after meeting Rom is:
 "Sri Rom... Janaki... baithe hain, mere scene
 Mai!"

After Mysore and Hunsur, came the
 highlight
 "The Rainforest Retreat in Coorg".
 And My Oh My, the beauty there
 Took away all our sorg.



The streams, the walks, the cottages,
 The composting and getting tired.
 All of it was taken care of
 By Sujatha, food and bonfire.

The best day was with Abhishek:
 With cuts and blood and leach bites
 But all of us recovered from these
 With Arya, coffee and orchids at Sholai.
 With conservational wisdom of LTM,
 Mewa enlightened us all.
 And camping at Arjun and Abhay's place
 Is a great memory to recall.

With spottings and injuries and
 lifers and bonfires,
 With jagaratas and dancing like a mess,
 The HunMyCoorg Trip out and out,
 Was an absolute success.



Akansha Mishra, RHATC Fellow 2022–23, Zoo Outreach
 Organisation, Coimbatore, TN, India.

Kritika



Side-1

I have tried to draw the things and places that influenced me the most during the field trip. The highlight I clearly remember and what I feel is the best part about the trip is the trek led by Abhishek.

It was an entirely new experience for me as I have never trekked in my life. And also I like water bodies so crossing the stream to get to the trekking spot was also a very new and amazing experience as I have never crossed a stream.

At the beginning of the trek, it seemed very challenging and I thought I can't make it or I might end up falling but by following the people who went before me and receiving some help I was able to climb up to the shola grassland and I remember thinking that the climb was worth it. Returning back to the bottom seemed even more challenging to me as I couldn't see any track and there were no trees to hang on to, but to my surprise, the grass were strong enough for me to hold onto them and climb down. I had a feeling of accomplishment when I finally reached the ground.

P. Kritika, RHATC Fellow 2022–23, Zoo Outreach Organisation, Coimbatore, TN, India.

Side-2

I drew a bunch of different things which has had an impact on me or the things that are burned into my memory. One such thing is the leeches, I was surprised by how fast they can detect us and how fast they can climb onto and attach to the body. My initial fear vanished into thin air after handling a few of that leeches.

I held a snake in my hands for the first time, I had mixed emotions of fear and excitement before holding one, and after it was just amazement at how its epidermis actually is.

I have a slight fear of animals that make sudden movements or whose movements I can't predict and one such thing is a frog. I have seen some before but I never dared to touch or even go near one, this time I build up my courage and touched a frog and it wasn't so bad.

I really love walks and that too on calm and dark nights are the best - gives me real peace.

A bunch of other things which were the highlight of the trip were - the cicadas I saw for the first time, those large black tadpoles in a group at Abhishek's farm, and the heteropoda spiders roaming around in and out of the cottage.



My first ever nocturnal walk

Growing up as a girl in a conservative Indian family was difficult for me. I always wanted to explore nature at night, spend time in observing beautiful creatures. But never got the freedom. As part of our Coorg trip, we met Gerry Martin at the Liana trust situated at Hunsur, Karnataka. I took an instant liking to that place. The wilderness and ambience of the place felt like a scenery painted by a great artist. It can't be explained in words. The wooden floor, with basic but comfy seating arrangement, one can't feel even in 5-star hotel. After lunch, we got to know that we were going on a night walk. It felt surreal, because I had been waiting a long time to experience this. I was impatient for the night to arrive and could feel every minute ticking by.

After all these years, what I have dreamt about was finally going to happen the night walk in search of beautiful creatures of nature. As we were on our way for night walk, I could hear loud the frogs, crickets. I felt Like they are also celebrating my freedom. We spotted Sri Lankan painted frog was peeking out of the guava tree trunk, many snails, bull frog, crab spiders, crabs in the stream, rodents on trees, katydid, Hawk moth caterpillar, etc. It was awesome experience indeed, which I am unable to put in words more than this, just lived in that moment.

Pooja Ramdas Patil, RHATC Fellow 2022–23,
Zoo Outreach Organisation, Coimbatore, TN, India.



The 10-day field trip to Mysore, Hunsur and Coorg opened new vistas for me, literally and figuratively. Whether it was the leopard we saw at Mysore Zoo, the Chequered keelback at Hunsur, the damselflies at Kaloor river or the frogs and crickets at Rainforest Retreat, a muted feeling of gratitude was my travel companion. However, these feelings were quickly followed by a sense of despair and guilt. What moved me the most was listening to the ever-punctual Malabar Whistling Thrush, calling at 530 AM and 530 PM. Its carefree song felt ironic to the rapid destruction of forest habitats.

There's a lot of work to be done. What I hope to do with my observations and my experience is to take it back to people and communities oblivious to biodiversity loss – one of the critical planetary boundaries. I have created two tongue-in-cheek posters, in familiar frames, to subtly bring in awareness on the adverse environmental effects that casual consumerism causes.

- The first poster is an advertisement that we see from users of forest raw material, in this case, a wholesale furniture manufacturer. The ad displays the hidden value of the tree used to make the furniture.



INR 72,00,000

Built from the native tree species, Nandi tree ((*Lagerstroemia lanceolata*) that grows in the Western Ghats. These species help rehabilitate disturbed lands through its quick invasion and rapid growth.

Think about your next purchase.



Companies are usually not transparent with product lifecycle information and this poster asks the buyer to be more careful while making purchase decisions.

- *The second poster is a food menu that lists popular dishes consumed in certain parts of India. The usual descriptions of the method of preparation are replaced with information on the animal's ecosystem value, urging the end consumer to reflect on their choices as basic as food.*

This trip summary would be remiss if I didn't mention the solidarity of the RHATC team – both tutors and fellows. Even though our unified goal is towards conservation, our observations on the trip were very different. I look forward to seeing us grow together and spread the joy of seeing life around us intact.



Lakshmi Ravinder Nair, RHATC Fellow 2022–23, Zoo Outreach Organisation, Coimbatore, TN, India.



A Magical Fireplace

A Magical Fireplace: Locusts were calling from far end, we were sitting together, trying to soak heat. That night was magical because that night I found a place of warmth and warmth came not from firewood but from people around me. People who were strangers just a month before, I felt were now were tied together by unseen and unbreakable thread. Interactions with others, myself and food were unforgettable experiences in this Coorg trip. That day I experienced freedom because a platform was for anyone to step up and perform right in front of us, without any obligations, without any judgements and without any critics.

Freedom

You were there breaking stereotypes,
Saying it aloud what was forbidden,
From the shame and guilt
You chose to stay free,

Free from sceptical glances
And tabooed stares
From those booing sounds
You chose to stay free,

It was difficult to witness you liquify
Those rigid norms of patriarchy
From Admiration or criticism
You chose to stay free.

Those flamboyant gestures
Shape of your pneuma
From your own body
You chose to stay free.

The thoughts of identity
Defined by your perceived past
You broke that shrewdness and
You chose to stay free.

Seeing you free made me realise
Some force was holding me back
Thinking what was supposedly necessary
But you chose to stay free

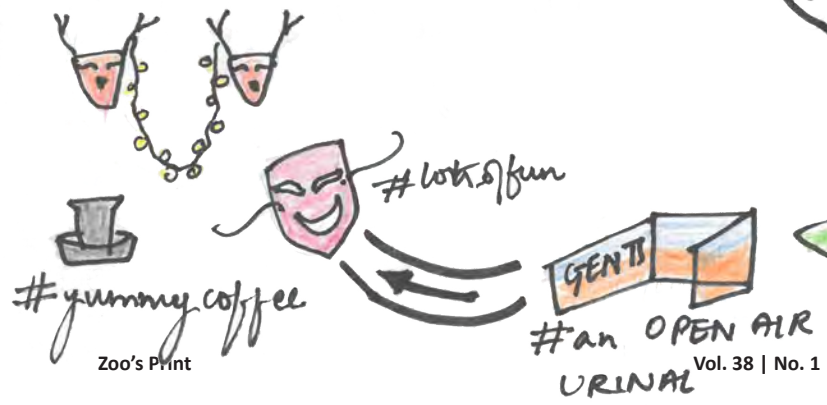
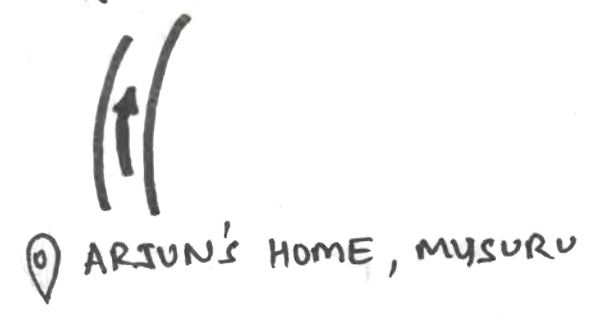
All the time I was calculating
Boundaries that kept me from exploring
Even when I Showed off my caged freedom
You chose to be absolutely free.

With every minute passing it felt like a loss because I never wanted that night to end, the connection felt like sensation that may never return like a granule of sand that slips faster, the harder we try to hold it. Love I gave was not mine, love I got was not mine. No matter how badly I wanted I could not possess Love nor could I store it in any vault, it seemed like a chemical that needed to be freshly prepared. Then I found joy in letting it pass because the experience had carved beautiful memory for me.

Aishwarya poured her heart in her songs, Trisa teasingly danced, we joined the chorus and cheers, we ran, we laughed for no reason at all. The fireplace blazed and so did my existential crisis, suddenly my thoughts, my struggles, became ordinary there was no need of any effort now. That place offered comfort, security and acceptance, all I needed was made available for me. Sense of inner peace made me aware of everything but nothing in particular, then I started to hear internal and external sounds vividly, and abstract images were visible in that fire. I became afraid, or maybe I labelled experience as fearful.

What's the hurry I ask,
Labelling and categorising all along,
Why the deliberation I ask,
The need to prove yourself
Why do you have to be perfect I ask,
These interactions and experiences
Can they be purchased I ask,
Love and compassion being the answers
Why do I ask?

Soham Parnaik, RHATC Fellow 2022–23, Zoo Outreach Organisation, Coimbatore, TN, India.



Memories bring back, memories bring back you!

The night of 26th October 2022 was unlike others. Taking pride in my packing skills, I was relaxed that I would be able to get in my stuff in no time. And it did happen so; just that I had not realised that I had no time and we had to leave in an hour/two. Thankfully, I managed to get a quick good 'midnight' sleep. While I was still in the delusion of having enough time to catch up a little more bedtime, I was startled by a mad thud on our room's door. That was a nightmare. I thought I had overslept and was late and, Sanjay had banged the door in anger. Rajib, our friend, however, was to be blamed. Nothing agitates me more than someone breaking my sleep this way.

It was 3:30 A.M., we all stuffed our luggage onto the van and were now ready to start the journey. I tried to catch up a quick nap to overcome the frustration of having lost a peaceful sleep to

Rajib's devilish door thuds. Soon, we stopped by a restaurant, primarily with the intention to empty our bladders. The sun had now risen.

By 8:00 A.M., we had reached the Sathyamangalam Range. The greenery thrilled me. What excited me even more was the fact that I was finally in the famed place that was once used by the 'mighty' Veerappan. I desperately wanted to visit the temple dedicated to him but could not. Well, that's saved for some other day. On our way, we caught glimpses of wild boars, chitals, hill mynas and a dozen other birds which took off in flight even before I could identify them. We stopped at a place for breakfast. After some of us were done, we decided to roam in the backyard of the eatery. This is when an Open air urinal for gents caught my attention. We wondered which architect had they hired to design it.

SATHYAMANGALAM



Zoo's Print



Mahishasur's own city

The farm

We reached Sanjay's friend Arjun's place in Mysuru. After a warm welcome and coffee, (thanks to Arjun's wife, Geetha for it) we headed to our halt for 2 days- Arjun's farm. I could not help but stare at the starry sky. It looked magical, like white paint sprinkled on a black canvas. Soon, we all pitched in to pitch our tents. It felt really good! That satisfaction of having our tents ready under the starry sky felt so good! What added to our excitement was that Geetha had baked a yummy chocolate cake to celebrate the birthdays of two of our friends.

The famous zoo

Next morning, we headed to the famous Mysuru Zoo. Ms. Tanuja, a naturalist, took us around the zoo and shared some amazing information. Listening to her and Sanjay talk about the legacy Sally had left behind made me wish I had known her before. Experience here was quite different from my previous zoo tours. None of the previous had been so insightful and fun at the same time. We had also managed to pull a crowd and educate a few there when all went into a frenzy on seeing a tarantula spotted by my friend, Melito.

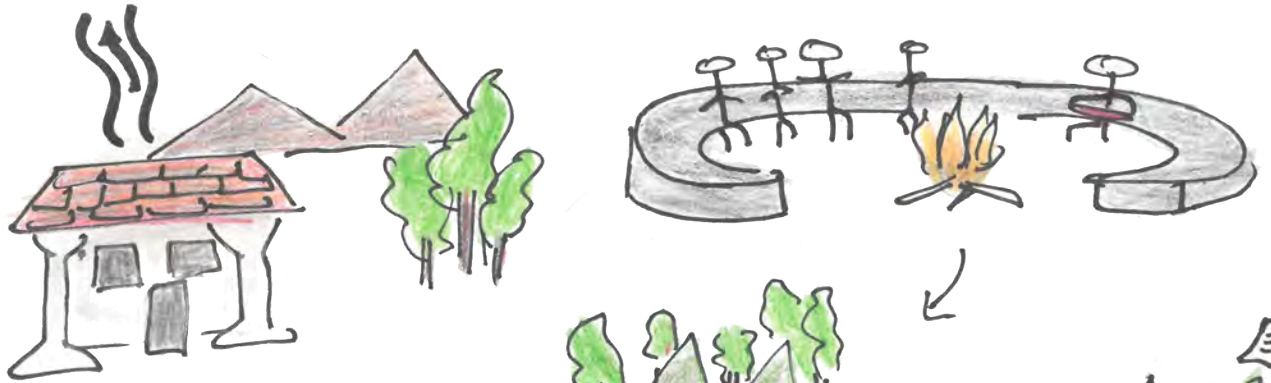
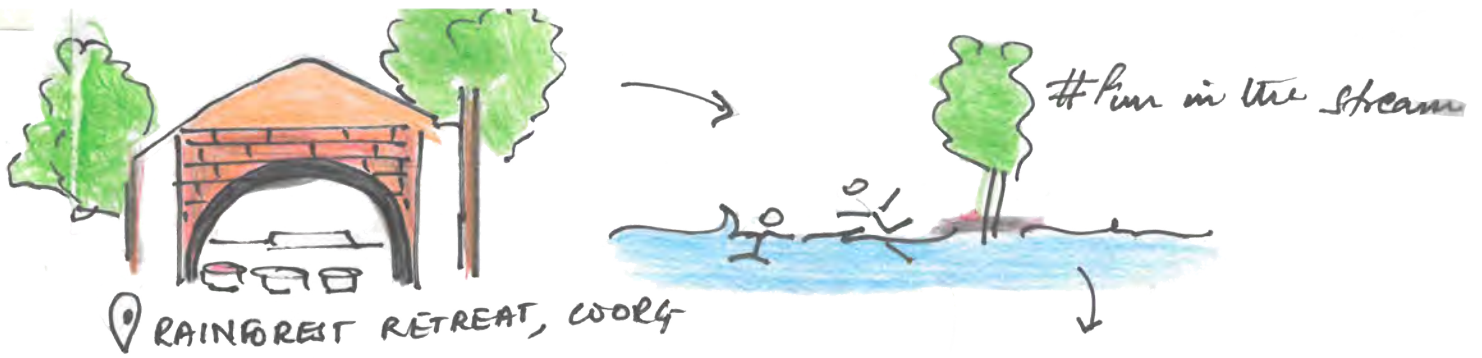
Explaining it to the crowd gave a sense of confidence and also a sense of responsibility.

The men- Mewa and Mahishasur

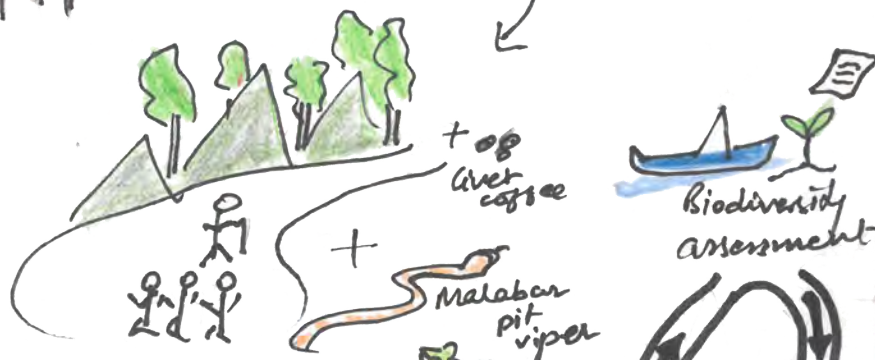
The University of Mysore was our next destination. The next visit was the best. I had my dream-come-true moment. As we walked in the corridor, I read the board- Prof. Mewa Singh. I had expected to see a tall man but there he was, a cute little man in front of me. Finally, I was standing in front of one of my favourites!

In the seminar hall, I could not stop myself from staring at him in awe. I was lost and words slipped my tongue. All I could do was to shout out loud, "Mewa, I love you". What followed next would always be close to my heart. Payal slowly pushed me closer to Mewa and asked me to pose for a photo. I asked Mewa if I could hug him and as soon as he agreed, I held him tight. My joy knew no bounds.

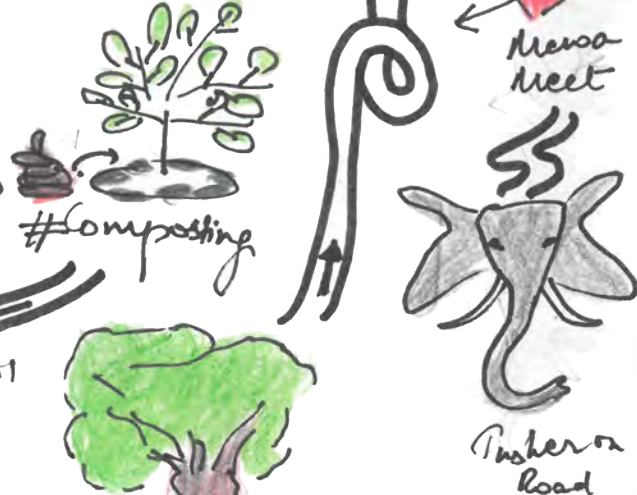
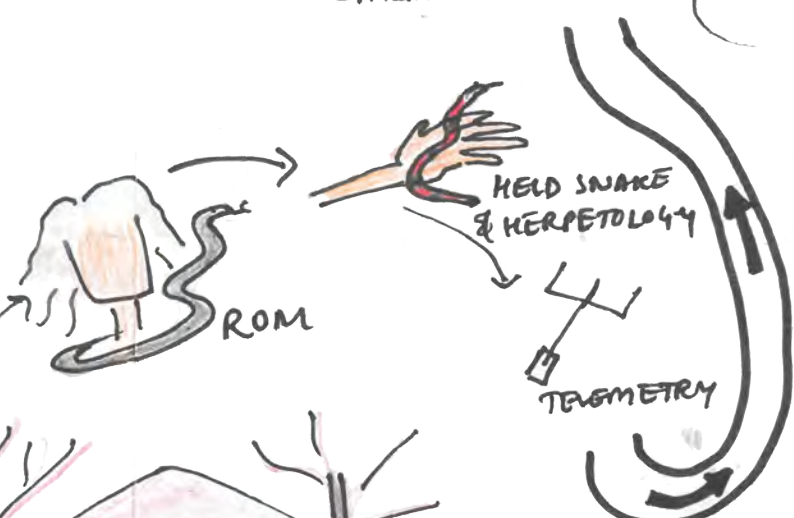
After the 'Mewa Madness', we next left for a history tour. Ever since I had heard from Sanjay of the fact that Mysuru city been named after Mahishasur, I had wanted to visit this place which adorns the statue of this 'people's dear demon'. But when I saw it, none



KAJU KATU
FIELD MARSHAL
CARIAPA'S HOME



HERPING @ night



of it matched my expectations. I had imagined of a statue which was well maintained and was revered much. However, all I could see was an isolated statue built in the middle of a road, just for the sake of some selfies. Nonetheless, definitely the talks we had shared regarding Mahishasur and his worship continue to inspire me.

After a super tiring day, we had a gala night at Arjun's farm. Drinks, music and dance made the environment magical. The next morning, we started our journey to Hunsur, Gerry Martin's place. This was the day we saw the legendary Romulus Whitaker in flesh! I very vividly remember Rom entering the scene soon after Gerry had introduced him. A tall man in a white shirt and shorts, with his hair let loose, walked towards us. He had an aura of his own. The next thing I remember is my friend crying. This day also marked some of my firsts- like holding a snake and herping.

The Coorg calling

Field Marshal Cariappa

"Coorg has many contributions to the Indian military", said Sanjay. The place undoubtedly takes pride in it by having named roads named after and displaying statues of many noted military personnel. I

had heard of one of these Coorg military men, the famous Cariappa, whose name adorns a place in Delhi- called the Cariappa Marg. Never had I imagined that I would one day get a chance to visit his home. Interestingly, Sanjay and Payal know the Cariappas and we as fellows had a chance to visit his family, see their beautiful home, play with their dogs, and eat some really yummy Kaju Katli that Ms. Beena Cariappa got for us. This marked the beginning of our Coorg journey.

Rainforest Retreat (RR) and Magnolia Mist

After passing by a number of green places, we finally reached our next stop which hosted us for the next 5 days. Splendid, mind-boggling.. the list would go on if one would started describing this resort which stood within an agroforestry land. After filling our tummies with a wholesome meal, we headed to the stream nearby. I played my heart out here. Leeches crawling onto my body, the ice-cold water, none bothered me. All I enjoyed was, that moment.

Here we befriended a few people. Post the dinner, the place around the bonfire immersed itself in the sound of some tribal instruments. Mahika like every time mesmerized

us with her violin. Over the next few days, we had a ridge walk (which opened our eyes to many flora, fauna, and fun) and walk through restoration sites at RR. The place also saw some adventures like me tasting poop after being fooled by Sanjay who told me they're civet coffee beans; my knee bleeding out after I fell on the road during our usual night walk after dinner and the adventure of joining in to add compost to coffee plantations.

The adventure which followed the next day will remain closest to my heart. We had the most adventurous and amazing trek to the Sholai grasslands! The climb and descent were equally exciting! While we all enjoyed every moment, a lot of learning kept happening too. We also went walking upto the Kalur river and got our feet dirty in mud. It was here that I saw the first time I had seen a Magnolia tree. This one at Magnolia Mist, however, was special in a way that it was over 1500 years old. Also, enchanting was the aroma of coffee in the processing house.

The way back

Neethi Mahesh and freshwater

We started our journey back. Just few days in the wet and green Coorg and our eyes had got

already too used to them. This only troubled us when we reached the Dubare Reserve Forest, a deciduous forest with patches and empty cleared space (in the vicinity). Small humble huts of the Jenu Kuruba tribes, who stared at us strangers in their place, found place inside the forest.

Neethi's biodiversity assessment was real fun with us non-natives struggling to ask the locals the common names of plants. We also sat and drew the landscape. I can't possibly put those emotions into writing. This was also the day Sanjay decided to go adventurous and tripped and injured himself on the banks of Cauvery.

Mewa, tents and tuskers

As we made our way back, we met Mewa and had an amazing talk with him. Too tired, that night we slept without pitching any tents. Rolled in our sleeping bags, us all sleeping on the floor reminded of Egyptian mummies laid down next to each other. We bid adieu to Mahishasur's city and so did we to the tuskers of Sathyamangalam, who paid us a visit before we parted ways.

Aishwarya S Kumar, RHATC Fellow 2022-23,
 Zoo Outreach Organisation, Coimbatore, TN, India.

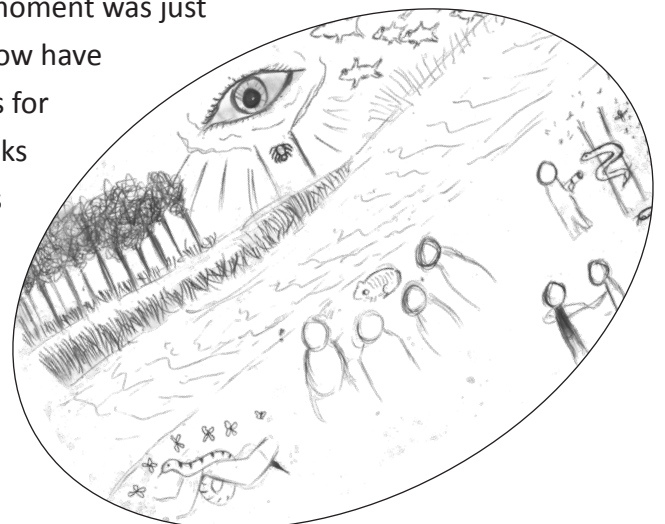
The rainforest retreat experience

In this weather, I'm feeling so cold,
 Hey, are your hands free so that I can hold?
 Come on let's go, for this place is to explore,
 There is diversity in life at every step more and more,
 Hey, did you see that frog jump?
 Isn't this a forrest without gump?
 We are not Dora the explorer with the Swiper,
 But, we were lucky enough to see the Malabar pit viper!
 Sujatha is the organic farming lady,
 Her words of wisdom are true and not shady.
 Hey Cyan! What new Katydid today did you find?
 Can you tell me a bit about it if you don't mind?
 Hey Vansi, can we hear another tribal song?
 It's all tribal knowledge, what could possibly go wrong?
 Composting was an activity that taught us hard work,
 When your efforts are appreciated, isn't that the perk?
 Magnolia is a tree that's standing strong and tall,
 I sincerely pray that an evil person wouldn't make it fall.
 Abhishek's orchid collections are simply awesome,
 Dear mother nature, please make conservation values in everyone's heart blossom.
 The four days of our stay went so quick and dime,
 I can't wait to go back to this place again,
 Because it was an experience of a lifetime.



Interpretation

The eye represents my naturalist's eye being opened from being only focused on birds, and below lies the tarantula that made it all happen. The 4 heads surrounding a frog represent the moment me and 3 others closely watching a nyctibatrachus species. In a situation where I was hoping to see at least one night frog, I found tons of them, the moment was just indescribable. The flying frogs depict how the frogs now have caught my attention, and they have become new birds for me. The river represents the Cauvery river, on the banks of where we spent memorable moments. The grasses depict the shola grasslands that we visited. Two people holding hands depicts me holding hands with my fellows for support during trekking.



Melito Pinto, RHATC Fellow 2022–23,
 Zoo Outreach Organisation, Coimbatore, TN, India.

COMPOST JENGA LAYERS

We are often taught that composts should have “delicate balance of organic materials”. With this comes two questions firstly, what exactly, does this mean and secondly, how do students remember what to use while making compost. The problem can be addressed by giving students a tangible model of compost and have them experience what could happen if a component of that organic matter were removed and which microorganisms help in formation of the compost. Through a modification of the popular game Jenga a hand on-knowledge based activity that visually demonstrates the concept of delicately balanced compost that will ultimately produce a healthy plant could be prepared. The name of the new game would be Compost Jenga Layers.

Preparation

Jenga is a popular block-balancing game. Small wooden pieces are stacked together to form a tower. Players remove pieces until the tower falls. This activity works best with small groups (four to eight students), and therefore multiple sets are necessary. For compost jenga layers, Jenga sets were modified to represent the different layers of compost with each layer having information on the microorganisms that assist in the composting process. To make the game more colourful we could paint the ends of equal numbers of blocks red, blue, green, yellow etc. to represent different layers of the compost. Following are the different names of the layers of the compost jenga layer game:

- The first level -sticks, twigs
- The second level - grass, leaves
- The third level- Animal house waste
- The fourth level-Oil cake (neem, pongam)
- The fifth level- Vegetable waste
- The sixth level- leaves and grass
- The seventh level- cow dung and wood ash
- The eighth level- a healthy plant

Objective of the game:

This activity will allow students to learn about composts in a tactile way. Although a field trip to an actual organic farm is ideal however, not all students have this opportunity. This activity gives students a concrete and tangible model with which they could work.

The objective of the game is to

- Make students observe how each layer is different and that it took the removal of more, less or different blocks to not form a healthy plant.
- Knowledge on how microorganisms work together in different layers of the organic materials to produce compost and ultimately a healthy plant.

Rules of compost layers jenga game:

1. The tumble tower set comprises of 36 wooden blocks that is built into a tower.
2. The aim of the game is to rebuild the compost layer without losing any of the blocks or causing the tumble tower to topple over in the process. Any number of players can join in a game of tumble tower and it can also be played alone.
3. The blocks should be stacked in threes and each alternate story is laid in cross ways direction so, for example, if the blocks in the first level lie lengthwise in a north-south direction, the second level blocks should be positioned so that they lie east-west and so on.
4. The loser is the player who causes the tower to fall – it may not be their fault but if the tumble tower falls during their turn, this player is counted as the loser.



Tandrali Baruah, RHATC Fellow 2022–23,
Zoo Outreach Organisation, Coimbatore, TN, India.

This trip gave me a lot of lifers, from seeing golden mushrooms to seeing Malabar Pit Vipers both in captivity and in the wild. This drawing is an attempt to capture a few of my favourite travel memories as well as a few occurrences that left a profound impact on me.

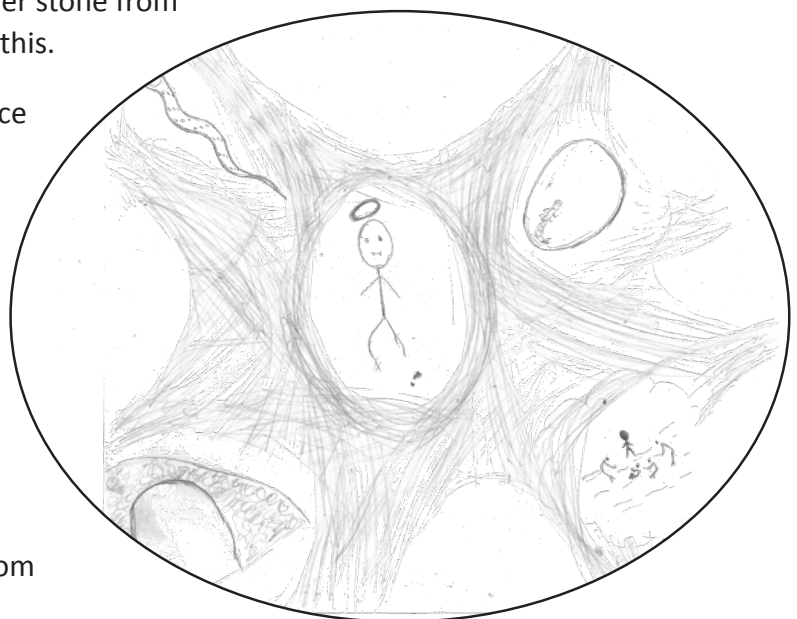
The first thing that we did as soon as we reached the rainforest retreat was to have a splash battle in the stream in front of our cottage. The freezing stream water hardened and strengthened the bond between us.

I have seen videos of landslides before on news channels and social media. All the videos just showed the loss of homes and in a few cases the loss of the lives of people who had the misfortune of getting struck under the landslide. I never thought beyond this until I saw the site of a landslide that happened in 2018. The fact that trees and plants thrive only on the top soil of the land which is only about 1 or 2 feet was very shocking to me. Even though it has been almost 3-4 years since the event took place the site was still not able to recover its topsoil to date which means that there is no vegetation growing there too despite many attempts to change this.

Next comes the time we spent at a river about 3kms from the place we were staying. It was a really beautiful river which hasn't yet been polluted by humans. We jumped in and started playing in the river. The innate monkey gene instigated us to hold a stone-skipping competition. A small insect-like organism, later identified as a damselfly nymph, crept out of one of the river stones I had taken for this purpose. Discussions with Sanjay and Priyanka about this made me aware of the repercussions of the stone skipping and how I might be disrupting this ecosystem even if it is on a relatively small scale when compared to fishing using dynamites. I never lifted another stone from the river or the riverbank after this.

This trip also gave me the chance to see a Beddome's keelback with prey in its mouth for the first time.

I know that these incidents will now remain ingrained in my memory like an insect caught in a spider's web. I have tried illustrating these events inside of a funnel spider web, seeing which was also a lifer for me from this trip.



The city life is filled with daily chaos, hustle-bustle, pollution and city life is very busy, which I never liked. In this fieldtrip we RHATC fellows are spending some of our days in western ghat, where we got to know about the beauty of mother nature and learned many new things about nature which made me fall in love with nature again. Nature helps us to rid of stress and anxiety. It is hard to explain the power of nature in relieving my physical and mental stress. Nature is an open classroom where you can learn and know something new at every step. I tried to express my feelings in this illustration which I felt there.

Rajib Saha, RHATC Fellow 2022–23,
Zoo Outreach Organisation, Coimbatore, TN, India.

This is Not Life

This Is Life

