

Igniting young minds: outreach at Keeranatham Panchayat Union Middle School, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu

Zoo Outreach Organisation (Zooreach) in collaboration with BOSCH embarked on a corporate social responsibility (CSR) project that plans to not only breathe life back into the Nallusamy Check Dam and Sambrani Kuttai in Keeranatham, Coimbatore, but also aims to revive forgotten bonds and ignite newfound kinship between the locals of that region and the wetland. The Zooreach team recognized that restoring the wetland also meant reconnecting the students of that community with their natural heritage to foster a sense of belonging and guardianship. According to the team's research, it was found that the majority of the community's young minds studied in Keeranatham Panchayat Union Middle School. With this insight the Zooreach team consisting of Priyanka Iyer, Payal Molur, and Swaathi Na conducted an outreach program in the school campus of Keeranatham Panchayat Union Middle School on 27 July 2023.

It was a sunny afternoon when the team reached the model school grounds ready to welcome a group of eager students to the workshop. Twenty-nine students from classes 6, 7, and 8 were gathered in the school's classroom. Priyanka and Swaathi kicked off the workshop with an ice breaker activity to evaluate the attitude of the students about the wetland and the different biodiversity present near them through the 'Smiley Face' game. Based on the questions asked to the students,

they had to run towards any of the smileys (happy, sad, fear, confused, angry) that most appropriately described their emotion to the question. The game had everyone giggling and expressing themselves, breaking down the initial shyness. The game provided insights into student's attitudes towards wildlife for example, many of them were afraid of bats. Understanding such emotions helped us tailor educational experiences for them.

Students learnt about adaptation such as opposable thumbs that differentiates primates from other mammals through a game, leading to laughter and a newfound appreciation for their own remarkable abilities. The 'Bat' game helped students understand the extraordinary adaptations of bats, their vital ecological roles in pollination and reducing disease-spreading vector populations, and dispel myths about them.

After the whirlwind of activities played with the students, with passion and expertise, Priyanka delved into a captivating presentation about various bird species. Her presentation painted vivid pictures of the habitats, behaviors, different flying patterns and challenges these birds faced. The presentation aimed to not only help them identify birds at a broader group level but also kindle a love for the diverse birdlife in and around their homes and Nallusamy Checkdam. During the presentation



Students gain insights into the adaptations of bats through the bat game.



Students delve into a game exploring adaptations like opposable thumbs.



Eager minds engrossed in attentive curiosity during the presentation.



Priyanka enchants the students with a presentation, unraveling the vibrant world of diverse bird species.



Students engage in the 'Smiley Face Game'.

we were joined by the long term volunteers of the BOSCH team who were engrossed in the presentation and took part in the activities.

As we came to the end of the program, a playful 'Bird Hand Flapping' game filled the air with joyous laughter. It was a moment of lighthearted fun to end the workshop.

To conclude, the outreach program had been a resounding success based on the feedback

received from the school students, igniting a spark of awareness through myth busting and curiosity regarding biodiversity in semi-urban areas. The young participants left with smiles on their faces, eager to share their newfound knowledge and inspire others to join them on this path of new knowledge discovery.

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