



Staging Nature: Manipal's Theatrical Approach to Birding



I, Arjun, a member of Manipal Birding and Conservation (MBAC), Manipal, Karnataka, had the privilege of attending the "Art for Conservation - Theatre" workshop organized by Zooreach in Coimbatore from 29 April to 01 May 2024. As part of the outreach criteria for this workshop, my co-members Dr. Vrinda & Dr Ketaki and I conducted our session on 17 August 2024 in Little Rock Indian School at Brahmavara, Karnataka, involving school children. Students from grades 5 to 10 participated enthusiastically in the session, which aimed to raise awareness about birding and conservation.

We discussed the importance of the natural environment around us and the significance of preserving it for future generations. To make the session more interactive and engaging, we incorporated elements of theatre, which helped in fostering a deeper connection with the students. A little more interactive, incorporating theatre elements and mimicry making the students to replicate bird calls or animal sounds. The kids enjoyed creating art with nature that helped them feel closer to the earth in a beautiful, whimsical, and educational setting.

We would ask them to embody various birds and animals, moving as if they had become that creature – making noises even. This being interactive made the session interesting and fun also at the same time children were able to observe different characteristics of a species. I loved watching students get excited about the wildlife that is hiding in plain sight around them. Following the discussion, we conducted quizzes and activities where students identified bird species through their calls and shared their personal experiences of witnessing wildlife in their local surroundings. The interactive approach, combined with theatre techniques, made the learning experience enjoyable and effective.

The session provided a platform for the students to not only learn about conservation but also actively participate and express their thoughts, creating an impactful learning experience. This engagement reaffirmed the importance of environmental education at a young age and the role it plays in nurturing future stewards of nature.

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BRIDGING ECOLOGY AND DRAMA

As an ecologist, I am deeply connected to my surroundings and nature. My concern extends beyond just scientific research; it's about the impact human actions have on the environment, often without realizing it. My belief in the importance of effective science communication, especially to the public is really important.

While we focus on research, it's vital that this knowledge reaches everyone. I believe theatre is an excellent tool for bridging this gap. After attending the Zooreach Art for Conservation program, I gained valuable insight into expressing my concerns about conservation and climate change through drama. Inspired by this, I conducted two camps and workshops at schools under the Compassion Foundation, training over 100 students in conservation ideas through drama on 14 & 25 July 2024.

These workshops culminated in short skits that celebrated the harmony of forests and life. I feel fortunate to have participated in the Art for Conservation workshop, as it has allowed me to share my passion for the environment with the next generation, fostering both awareness and creativity.

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