

Art takes nature as its model

To expound on the immortal words of Aristotle, a philosopher and with works across many subjects, art has truly been inspired by nature from the very beginning; be it the very first cave paintings from many thousands of years ago or the current works on impending world issues like the climate crisis! And in these years we have learnt that art in all its myriad forms, is an extremely powerful medium that has been used very effectively in the past to communicate social and environmental issues.

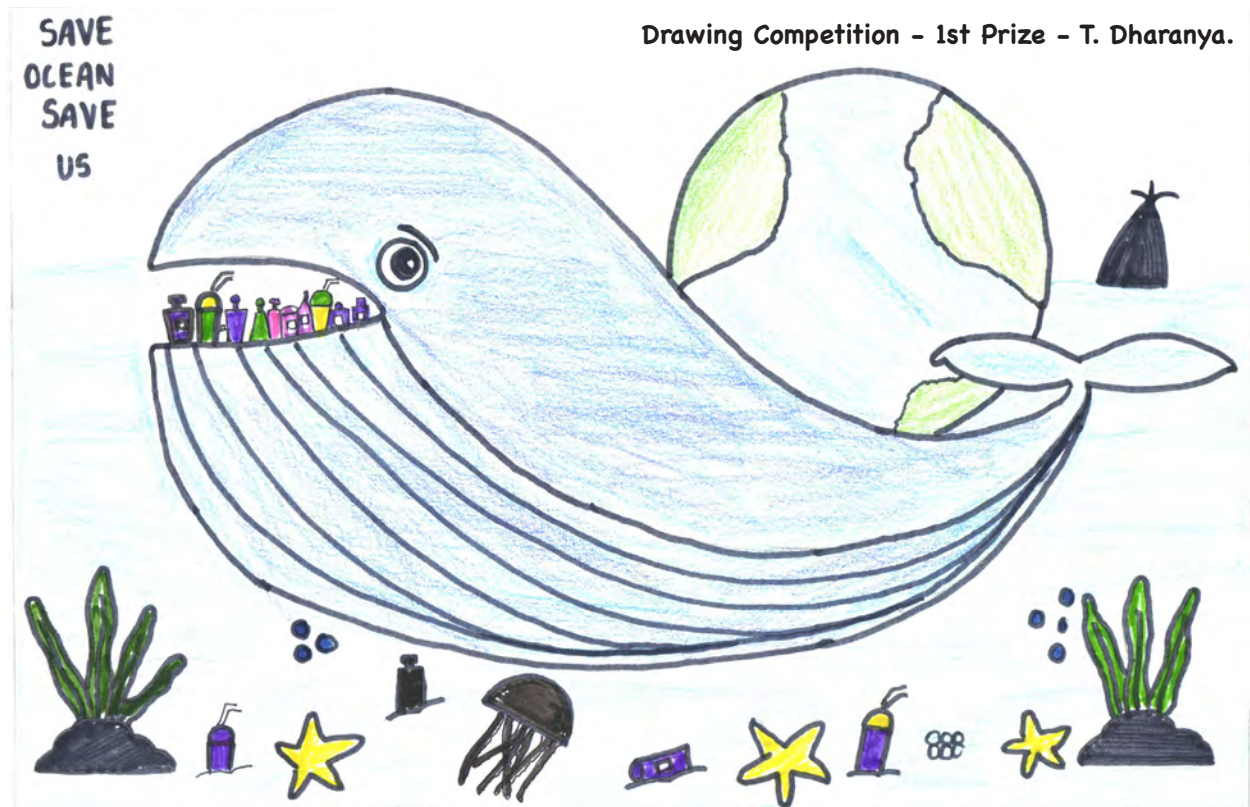
Understanding this, Zooreach launched the **Art for Conservation (A4C)** project on 1 September 2023 with support from the U.S. Consulate General, Chennai to communicate the interconnected global problems of climate crisis and species loss that is destabilising human lives everywhere!

To achieve the vision we collaborated with expert/experienced artists (Stephen Nash and Luci Betti-Nash for Illustrative art; Sunita and Chetan Shetty for Storytelling; Dharanidharan for Performing art (theatre)) to build and train over 30 budding artists through workshops to create effective artworks based on sound science that will create awareness and encourage wildlife conservation and climate action to bring people from various streams and demographics into the fold to amplify impact. The final culmination was an exhibition of all these artworks and bringing together other wildlife artists held on 21 & 22 September 2024!

The first day of the exhibition started with a Sketch Showdown! – drawing competition. Over 200 students belonging to private schools, tribal schools,



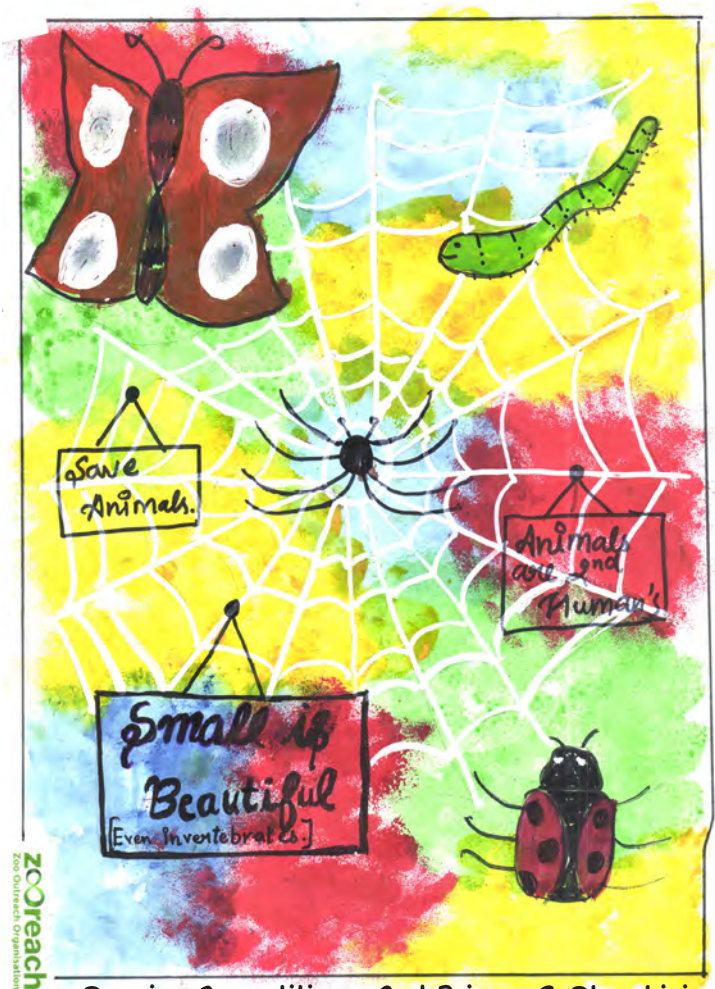
Zooreach activities



Drawing Competition - 1st Prize - T. Dharanya.

government schools, and individual participants participated in the drawing competition. The competition winners were - 1st Prize - T. Dharanya, National Model School; 2nd Prize - G. Dharshini, National Model School; 3rd Prize - Elakshi Mahika, CS Academy School; and Special Prizes by V.L. Sri Shakthi, National Model School; G. Sridevi, National Model School; A. Ananya, National Model School; N. Adesh Pravin, National Model School; T. Sanjith, National Model School; B.P. Harshini, National Model School.

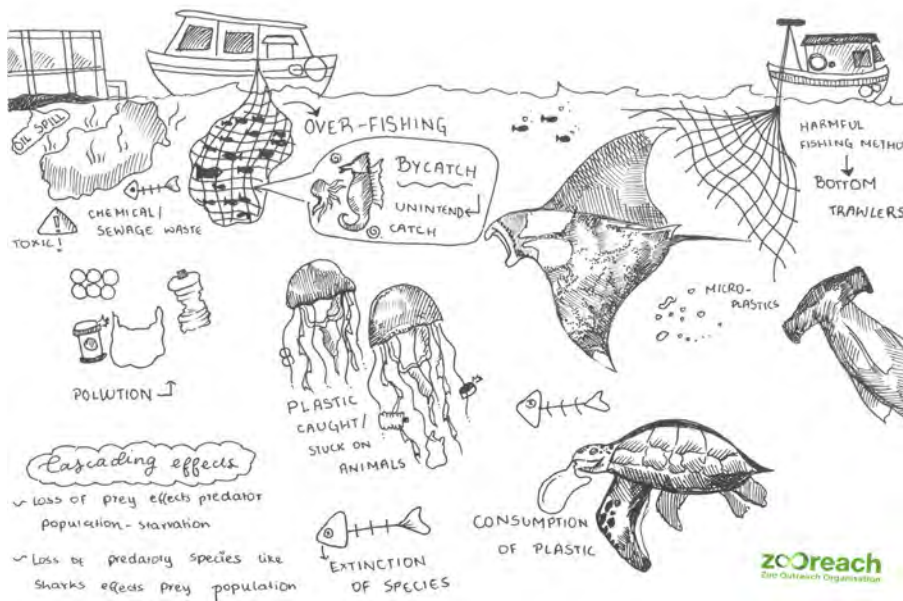
All the students also went through the art exhibition where there were about 25 art pieces exhibited on many topics involving human wildlife interactions, human perceptions of



Drawing Competition - 2nd Prize - G. Dharshini.

Zooreach activities

Drawing Competition - 3rd Prize - Elakshi Mahika.



fabric colours on cloth, acrylic on wood, ink on cloth, ink on canvas, digital prints, animation film, chalk sculptures, and water colour on paper. The art works were on display for both days from morning until late evening on both days of the exhibition.

The drawing competition was

followed by the official inauguration with Eric Atkins, Cultural Affairs Officer, and Gokula Krishnan, Project Co-ordinator, US Consulate General, Chennai Office; Aravindan S., Founder, Clusters Media College; and Sanjay Molur, Executive Director, Zoo Outreach Organisation. During the inauguration each of the guests spoke a few words to mark the occasion and shared their experiences with all the students, artists and general public.

This was followed by a fantastic theatre performance by the students of a primary government school trained by one of the theatre participants titled, 'Wildlife: The Beauty or the Beast'. This performance focused on the importance of co-existence with biodiversity (mainly elephants and snakes) around human habitations specifically focused on Coimbatore. The children did a fantastic

wildlife, threats to wildlife, ecosystems, caused by humans, and - **'Animism and the lives of little Tigers of nature: a unique perspective'**, and Chalk sculptures of tiny creatures by Anjali Pujari; **'Foxes and Jallikattu?'**, by Alaguraj Mathaiyan; **'Fashion and Wildlife'**, by Indira Naidu; **'Bycatch: Boon or Burden'**, by Elakshi Mahika Molur; **'Roads that Kill'**, by Janani Karthik; **'Percieve'**, **'Protection'**, and **'Slipp her Home'** (animated film), by Maya Santhanakrishnan; **'Gibbon moves'**, **'Sharing'**, by Sambita Modak (artist) & Ishika Ramakrishna (Researcher), and **'Divartify'** by Sambita Modak (artist) & nature art enthusiasts of Indian Institute of Science; **'Grass is Always Green on the Other Side'**, by Megha Kashyap; **'Sightseeing or Strangling Biodiversity'**, by Athulya N.K. (Artist) & Nithin Divakar (Researcher, KFRI). These art pieces (some were series) were of different styles including cartoons, acrylic on canvas,

Zooreach activities

job of understanding animals to build co-existence between humans and wildlife through the medium of theatre.

The next performance was an animated children's story by Chaithra Shree J. titled, 'Atthi Are you lazy?' on a conversation between the mighty fig tree and the little ants. From the little ants, storyteller Senbaga Poonguzhali took us into a story of Rudyard Kipling titled, 'Toomai of the Elephants' where Toomai is a young elephant Mahout/trainer who has a rare opportunity to observe elephants in the wild and realises how much elephants suffer in captivity and lose their essence as wild animal.

The afternoons on both days were dedicated to the screening of the animated film 'Slipp her Home' which tackled human perceptions towards cockroaches through a thought experiment of role reversal with a cockroach and see life through its eyes; and other documentaries on projects run by Zoo Outreach Organisation to create awareness about conservation work happening spanning the length and breadth of the country.

This was followed by a Gen 'Z'-centric play by Padma and Santhosh that showcased a fantasy conversation between a young social media influencer and a snake that speaks and expresses facts that bust myths and superstitions commonly believed regarding snakes by many people. From snakes we moved to

majestic Himalayas heard the wonderful story by Lalitha Shankar of the Ghost of the mountains – the snow leopard and importance of tolerance and co-existence with wildlife in shrinking landscapes and habitats.

The next theatre performance titled, 'A Black and Golden Rosette' was by Ashritha and Abhishek of Holematthi Nature Foundation and students of Government Higher Primary School, Kannuru, Karnataka was focussed on the real life challenges of some of these children and their families in relation to human leopard coexistence, causes for increased interaction and its inherent challenges and possible solutions.

From the fiery forests we dove deep into the oceans with Lovekam: A wasted world – a theatre performance by Meenakshi on the importance of responsible disposal and segregation of waste and more importantly the ability to refuse items that we do not truly need to reduce waste generation in the first place. And the final performance for the first day was 'Groove Theatre: The Sea Turtle's Last Journey!' by Arjun Samudra Manthana and team was a lovely combination of dance movement combined with theatrical narrative poetry describing the journey of sea turtle back to the beach where she was born and finding it polluted with plastic and why this needs to change.

All performances and stories were followed up with conversations and

Zooreach activities

discussions with the audience on the specific subject to flush out the topic further. And address any doubts or refer to local context of the regions that the audience and artists had come from, making the whole day an extremely fertile space for conversations and inspire actions around wildlife conservation.

The second day started with a repeat performance of well-enjoyed 'Black and Golden Rosette', 'Lovekam', and 'Toomai of the Elephants'. A fresh story narrated on Day 2 was 'Palming off the Rainforest' by Vardhini Suresh shed light on the growing issue of palm oil plantations replacing original forests and loss of biodiversity.

This was followed by meaningful conversations with some representatives of the original inhabitants of the Nilgiris – few members from the Irula and Kurumba communities on their disappearing nature-connected life practices and eroding memory of age-old traditions. But one clear understanding that remains is that, wildlife and ecosystems will not harm humans if left to go about their own daily schedules.

After hearing from the original inhabitants it was organic to follow it up with conversation and coffee with scientists and researchers – H. Byju, Achuthan Shrikanthan, Boominathan, and Sanjay Molur on growing human wildlife co-existence in India and specifically southern India focussed on various taxonomic

groups such as elephants and snakes, threats causing decline of wildlife and growing concerns of climate crisis and how it is a very real and looming danger for humankind.

The event closed with thanks and remarks by Gokula Krishna, Project Coordinator, US Consulate General, Chennai Office; a fantastic performance by SWORD – Adhiyaman Kalaikuzhu on Human Elephant Co-existence through traditional Tamil folk arts and the final message of wildlife conservation sent across by Vijay TV star Shalini to her many fans of all age groups.

Some of the other events by young school kids concerned with this cause were violin performances by Elakshi Mahika Molur on both days at different times and a lovely donation drive by four school girls – Sanjana Sathish and team.

On the whole the event reached out to thousands of people across the two days from all age groups and all strata of society which was the vision and dream, and we hope that this event becomes a regular feature of the Coimbatore calendar every year to keep reminding the community about the need for making sustainable life choices that can make the difference towards a healthy a safe future for humans and wildlife!

Priyanka Iyer, Researcher, Zoo Outreach Organisation Trust, Coimbatore 641006, Tamil Nadu, India.



Gibbon moves by Sambita Modak (Artist) & Ishika Ramakrishna (Researcher)



Sharing by Sambita Modak (artist) & Ishika Ramakrishna (Researcher)



Protection by Maya Santhanakrishnan



Interactive art on Gibbon distribution & threats.



Sightseeing or Strangling Biodiversity comic by Athulya N.K. (Artist) & Nithin Divakar (Researcher, KFRI)



Chalk sculptures of tiny creatures by Anjali Pujari



Perceive by Maya Santhanakrishnan



Roads that Kill by Janani Karthik



25th Year Journal of Threatened Taxa Cover illustration.



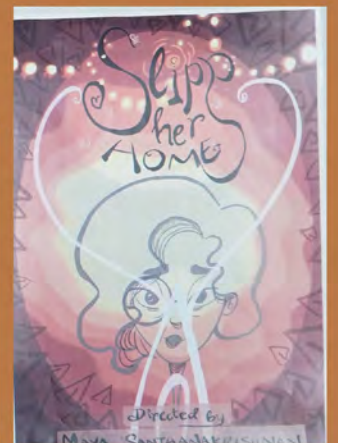
Grass is Always Green on the Other Side by Megha Kashyap



Animism and the lives of little tigers of nature: a unique perspective by Anjali Pujari



Donation drive art piece



Animated film: Slip her home poster



Foxes and Jallikattu? by Alaguraj Mathaiyan

Sightseeing or Strangling Biodiversity

The Devastating Impact of Irresponsible Tourism on Wildlife

This series of artworks by Athulya N.K. shines a light on the impact of tourism on biodiversity, using the Malabar Tiger's Trail (MTR) as a focal point.

THE TOPIC
The alarming consequences of unchecked tourism and human activities on wildlife are escalating rapidly, threatening the delicate balance of our ecosystems. Each species faces unique problems, and the spotlighting of the Malabar tiger's trail as an endemic and vulnerable species.

The Malabar Tiger's Trail: A Vulnerable Species
Endemic to the Western Ghats, the Malabar tiger trail is listed as vulnerable by the IUCN. Its habitat stretches across forest, streams, rocks, and rivers, making it a significant threat. Located in Kerala's Western Ghats, Wayanad's Kallada River stream and 800 km² forest habitat are home to this endangered species. In an area of 1,200 meters above sea level, the area witnessed a drastic surge in tourism post-2015 and COVID-19. And the unemployment and zero credited tourism started affecting the Malabar tiger trail along with other animals, especially the elephants.

THREATS
It's uncontrolled development activities, habitat fragmentation due to unplanned construction of buildings, roads, and bridges without environmental considerations, a habitat mosaic, water, soil, water, pesticides, and landfills, and human encroachment.
SOLUTIONS
Tourist responsible to a plan, respect the habitat and wildlife, Drive safely, search for wildlife, Clean public spaces, Make policies to control tourist activities, Give awareness to the tourist, tour planners, and public, Unmanaged tourism buses, overcrowding buses, by social media.

ABOUT THE ARTWORKS

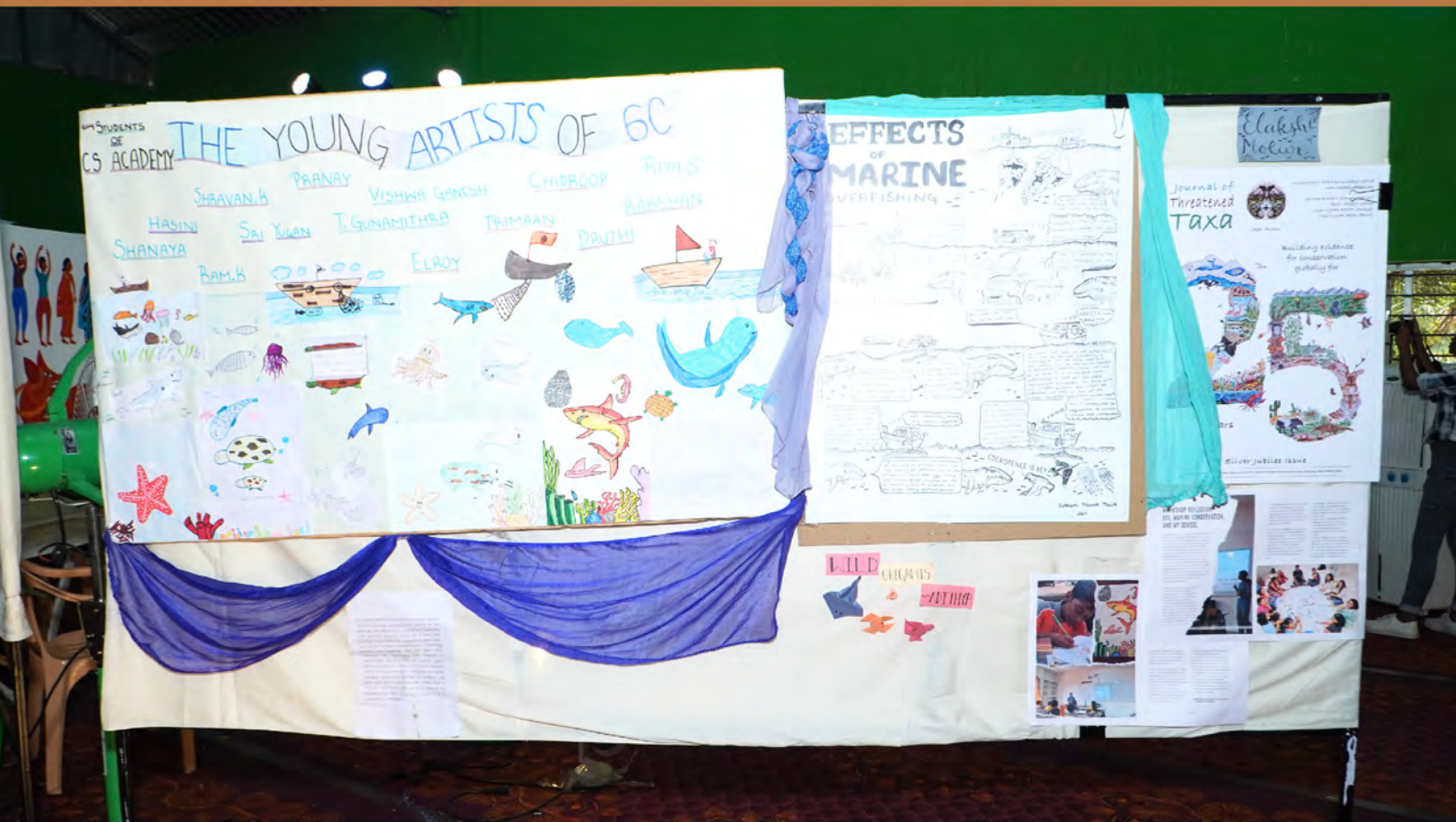
1. Habitat Harmony - Acrylic Painting
Inspired by the vibrant world of the Malabar tiger trail, this vibrant painting depicts the lush, endemic habitat. The intricate painting invites you to appreciate the beauty and fragility of nature, highlighting the trail's precarious relationship with its environment.

2. A Day in My Life
Join the Malabar tiger trail on a thought-provoking journey, exploring the unintended consequences of tourism on biodiversity. This funny illustration encourages viewers to reflect on their actions as tourists and consider the responsibility that comes with enjoying the natural world. This is a digital print on a board (wood).

ABOUT THE ARTIST
Athulya N.K. is an artist and avid researcher on the Malabar tiger trail, based in Kerala (India).



Sightseeing or Strangling Biodiversity by Athulya N.K. (Artist) & Nithin Divakar (Researcher, KFRl)



Bycatch: Boon or Burden by Elakshi Mahika Molur



Birds in Nature

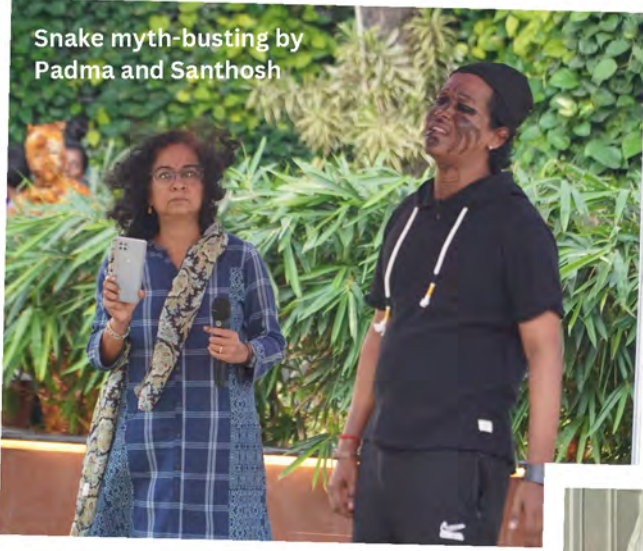
Government Higher Primary School, Kannuru, Karnataka's students, artists, Eric Atkins (USCG), Gokula Krishna (USCG) and Sanjay Molur.



Lovekam: Wasted world by Meenakshi



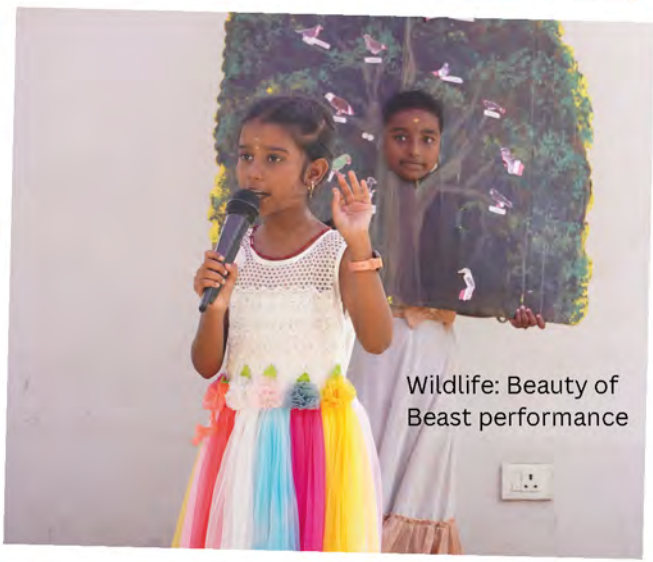
Snake myth-busting by Padma and Santhosh



Groove Theatre by Arjun and team



Wildlife: Beauty of Beast performance





Expert panel coffee with conservationists



A Black and Golden Rosette performance



SWORD Human-Elephant Coexistence performance



Ghost of the mountain story by Lalitha Shankar



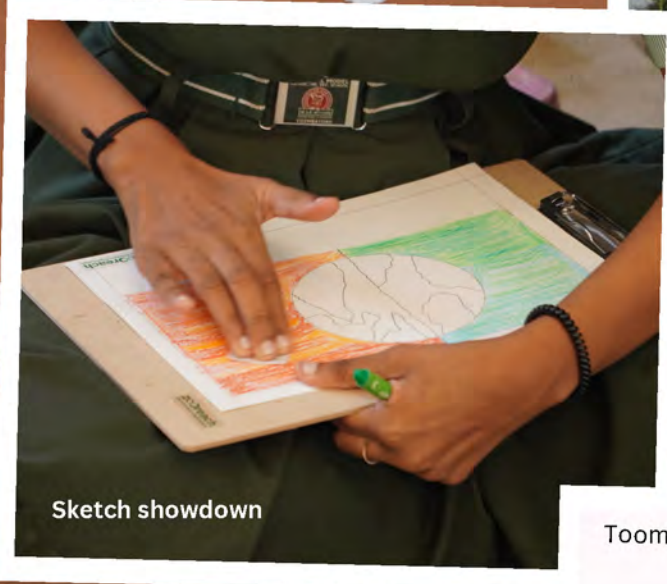
Padma translating Kannada play into Tamil



Selfie time with Eric Atkins,
Cultural Affairs Officer, USCG



Illustrative
artist Megha
interacting
with kids



Sketch showdown



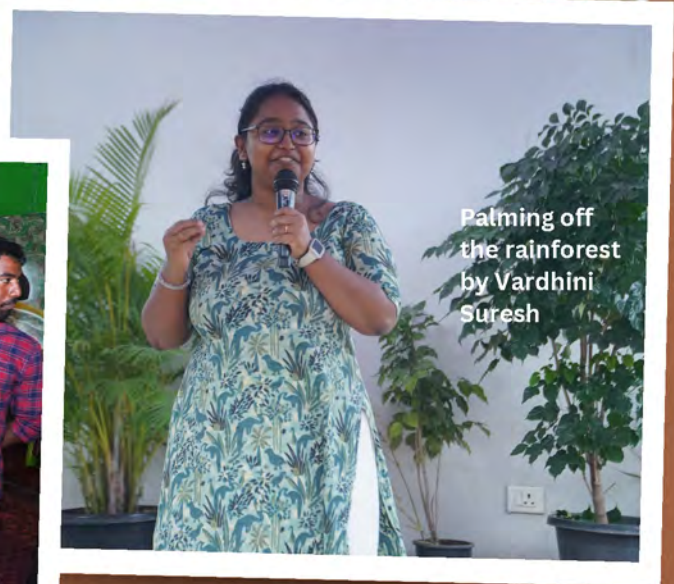
Toomai of the Elephants by Senbaga Poonguzhali



A few of the drawing
competition judges



Donation drive artwork with students



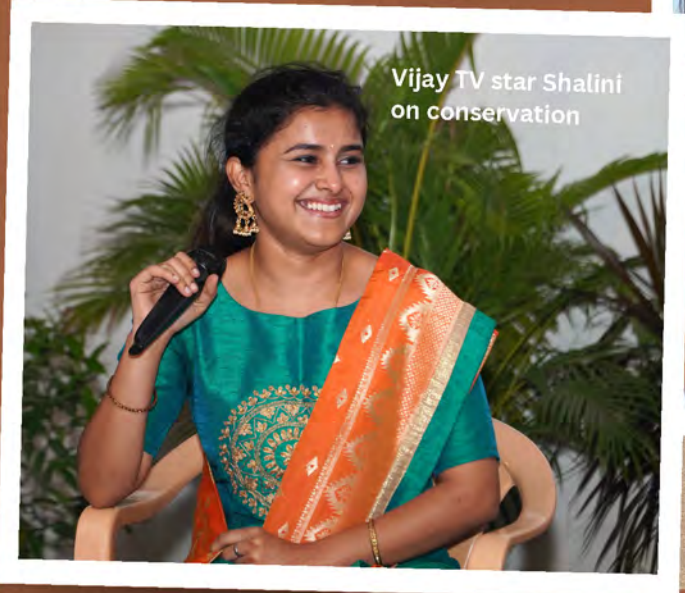
Palming off the rainforest by Vardhini Suresh



Fox Jallikattu by Alaguraj



Illustrative artist Maya interacting with audience



Vijay TV star Shalini on conservation



Zoreach team at event closing

Atthi Are you lazy? story by Chaithra Shree J.



Irula and Kurumba community members.

Elakshi Mahika Molur violin performance



Illustrative artist Janani interacting with Herpetologist Achuthan