

Learning Beyond Classrooms: a 3-day expedition into the wild and cosmos at Mudumalai

After a few expeditions with the Mango education team, I joined another 3-days journey—this time to Mudumalai, along with the grade 4 and 5 students of Samskaara Academy. Although I was tired as I had just returned from a previous expedition of visiting communities along rivers in the Western Ghats, I was enthusiastic to share and gain knowledge from the students and the place. With this enthusiasm, the journey to Mudumalai began.

Obuli Chandran and Sricharan from the Mango Education team, and I representing Zoo Outreach Organisation as a wildlife educator, started our journey at around 5 am on 24/03/2025. Sricharan and I joined the students on their buses, deciding it would be best to travel with them to build a stronger rapport, something especially important when working with younger students like those in grades 4 and 5. We each joined different buses to engage with the children more personally.

Along the way, I began interacting with the students, helping them feel more comfortable and excited about the journey. We stopped for breakfast in Ooty and visited Cosmic Ray Laboratory, where we had a session with experts and had a lot of discussion. The students were very much interested in knowing more and learn about space and light. After a wonderful session, we proceeded to Mudumalai and

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arrived at the Tiger Track Resort around 2:30 pm. The students were very hungry and tired due to the long journey. So after lunch, we let them relax and asked them to gather at 5:30 pm. From our treehouse room at the resort, we spotted three Malabar Giant Squirrels, a herd of Spotted Deer, Grey Junglefowl, and Grey Langurs—all visible right from the balcony. It was a magical moment and one of the highlights



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of the trip. In the evening, I led a brief session on birdwatching—how to observe and identify birds—and then facilitated several interactive educational games like ‘Spots and Stripes’, ‘Bat and Mosquito’, and other observation-based activities. The students enjoyed themselves while learning through game. As night fell, Obuli Chandran conducted a stargazing session using a telescope. The students were thrilled to observe planets, constellations, and stars. As the night progressed, the sky grew even clearer, allowing us to see celestial objects with the naked eye against the deep black sky.



During the walk, we encountered 10–15 Malabar Giant Squirrels, numerous species of birds, and many butterflies. Our trail ended at a peaceful stream, where we spent some time relaxing and enjoying the serenity of nature. In the afternoon, around 2:30 PM, we headed out on a safari in the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve. The experience was incredible—we saw a herd of wild elephants with calves from just 15 meters away! Other sightings included Spotted Deer, Sambar

The next morning, we woke up around 7 for birding. Although the weather was misty and cloudy at first, it soon began to clear, and the forest came alive with bird calls. The students and I observed and identified around 20 bird species in the area. After breakfast, we set out on a nature walk through the forest behind the resort.



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Deer, Indian Mongoose, Peafowl, Indian Roller, Changeable Hawk-Eagle, and, as we neared the end of the safari, a Red-headed Vulture flew low over us—an unforgettable finale. We then visited the Theppakadu Elephant Camp, the oldest in Asia. This camp is known for its trained elephants, or 'Kumkis', which assist in mitigating human-wildlife interactions, drive wild elephants away from interphase zones, support forest patrolling, wildlife rescue, eco-tourism, and education. We interacted with a forest officer who shared insights into the camp's history, the elephants' routines, and their vital role in conservation. After this memorable visit, we returned to the resort. Following some rest, we had a short space observation session and dinner. The students ended the night enjoying a campfire and soft music, bonding and sharing stories. On the final day, we travelled to Ooty, where the students did some shopping. After lunch, we returned to Coimbatore.

This Mudumalai expedition was one of my most cherished journeys, where I learned, observed, and shared knowledge about wildlife, conservation, awareness, and the importance of reconnecting with nature. It was a meaningful experience that continues to shape my growth as a conservation educator.