

Classrooms for Coexistence

(Dailylife Wildlife, Magic of the Ocean and Living with Elephants)

A csr initiative by



Introduction

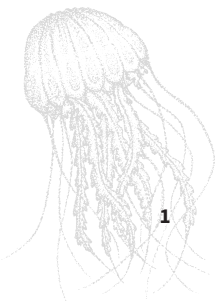
The Classrooms for Coexistence program grew from a simple question: how do we help children rebuild a relationship with nature they are slowly losing? From millipedes in your school grounds to monkeys near temples or on the roadside to elephants near your village or town, wildlife is all around. Yet fear, misinformation, and inherited myths create negative encounters. Wildlife is persecuted and children live in revulsion or fear.

Zoo Outreach Organisation, supported by Coromandel International Ltd., set out to change this using curiosity, stories, and hands-on discovery with the 'Classrooms for Coexistence' program. Through early, accurate, and engaging education, we know we can equip children to better understand, respect, and coexist with the wild world around them.

This is the story of our journey across Tamil Nadu from coastal towns to inland cities, misty slopes of Ooty, and the forest-fringe schools inside the Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve.



Students play Jenga game to learn about food chains and ecological balance.

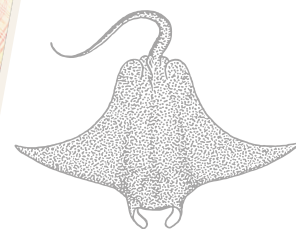




Students read the pledge with our mascot, Dr. Manta Ray.



Students read the 'Daily Life Wildlife' booklet from their learning packet.



The Cuddalore Schools

The journey to our first destination was to Cuddalore involving PUMS Thiyagavalli, GHS Periyakuppam and PUMS Mathoppu schools where 30, 111 and 55 students participated, respectively. The workshop began with an introduction and a brief about the program. Then Dr. Manta Ray on a flex, as the mascot of the IOcean Program, was unfurled.

Taking a pledge the students were initiated into looking at conservation of the ocean as important to them. An attitude survey known as KWL (Know, Want, Learn) was done where the students were given post it notes and asked to write what they know and what they want to know about daily life wildlife. This gave us a sneak peek into what the students understand about wildlife and what we could teach. Our team member R. Marimuthu explained to the students how wildlife is not necessarily found only in forests and it need not be big charismatic animals like tiger, elephant and gaurs, but could be found around our day to day life, animals such as millipedes, spiders, birds that are witnessed on a daily basis are also wildlife. This was followed by a session on ocean conservation where the Zooreach Team taught the students of the various aspects of ocean conservation, why it is needed and also questioned them as to what they think are the threats to the ocean. The answers were almost all correct which showed they are aware of the issues. However, one observation that fascinated the team was that none of them considered noise pollution as a threat.

This was followed by conducting different games with the students. A game that all the children found fun and challenging was that of the Dichotomous key. Nestled in our 'Magic of the Ocean' E-learning portal, the kids were in high competition to complete the activity correctly. The dichotomous key provided an opportunity for them to identify organisms (plants, animals, insects, fungi, etc.) by following a series of two-choice steps. It helps you identify an organism based on its characteristics and guides you through paired statements (like "has wings / has no wings").

Another game that the students played is the Jenga Game. The Jenga game represents the entire food chain of the ocean, and the blocks represent the species within it, and by removing one species. This activity was designed to help students understand the importance of balance in nature, and it is a collective duty of everyone to protect the ocean.

In addition to that, students were also thrilled about the bio-mapping activity where they were assigned 2 trees in their school and each group had to observe their respective tree and surrounding area for the daily life wildlife that they might find.

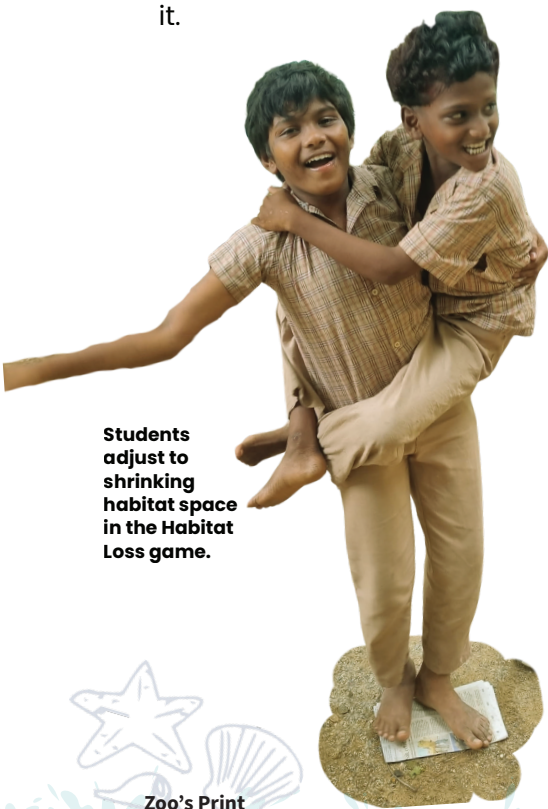
The students observed the beetles, the bugs and the other wildlife which they would not have considered earlier. Nature journaling became the star activity. Groups fanned out across the playground, crouching near unfamiliar plants and discussing leaf shapes, textures, and the mysterious insects tucked inside the grass. The outdoors became their classroom, and curiosity took over.

At the end, each school was given group homework, which will be looked at when the team revisits the schools next year. Some of the respective homeworks that were given to them were an article on the role of the ocean in their day-to-day life, a skit on different ocean-related topics, and nature journaling. And in the last school they were to come up with a skit or a drama using the pictonary game in which the teams guessed ocean related words while playing it.

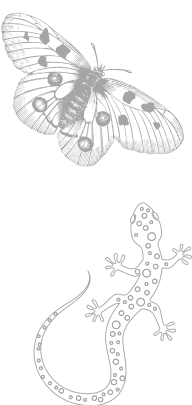
Ranipet Schools

The team's visit to Ranipet was delayed only by a day due to rain, however the next morning, with the sun finally out, the team arrived at the school. The principal introduced Marimuthu, Tandrali and Koshik during the morning assembly, and they then held two lively sessions — one for classes 6 and 7 in the first half, and another for class 8 later. Through their presentation, they discussed the wildlife that students often encounter in their daily lives. Soon, the classroom turned into a cheerful chaos during the butterfly and insect stamp game as everyone tried to guess the animals from the clues. A total of 100 children participated in the program. It will be exciting to see what they present from their learning in the next session in January 2026.

On the 24th of October, the sessions were conducted at the Government ADW Higher Secondary School in Karai, Ranipet. With the Diwali holidays around the corner, there were fewer students, but their enthusiasm made up for it. The teachers stayed throughout the session and actively listened in. The students desire to learn more about elephants was heartwarming. Using the education packets and information the team introduced the students to daily life wildlife like Geckos and frogs and gave them a special presentation on elephants, which they listened to with great interest. The program ended by playing the habitat loss game — a fun and engaging activity with newspapers through which the students not only enjoyed themselves but also learned something new about habitat loss and the solution by planting native plants. Around 45 students participated in the sessions and at the end of the session they promised to spread awareness amongst their family and friends.



Students adjust to shrinking habitat space in the Habitat Loss game.



Zooreach team presents 'Daily Life Wildlife' on animals in everyday surroundings.



Students explore their learning packets.



Students play a hands-on activity about India's coastline.



Priyanka explaining the role of geckos



Chennai Schools

The sessions were conducted at the Government HSS, Kathivakkam, Chennai, on 27th October. Despite the rain forcing the program indoors, the energy remained high. Around 115 students participated in the activities, and the room was filled with laughter and excitement. The Jenga game was an eye opener for them as they were divided into different threats like plastic pollution and so on. The jenga blocks represented the food web and an ecosystem. The children pulled out the blocks one by one and when the tower tumbled, they blamed each other and then realised that they all played a role in bringing down the jenga tower. The day ended with the children promising to be more observant of wildlife around them and to ensure that they make a change in their lives.

Eklavya Matriculation Residential School, Ooty

Amidst the misty blue hills of Ooty, the Classrooms for Coexistence program had its 7th workshop at Eklavya Matriculation Residential School in Ooty. The two-day workshop, conducted by Payal Molur, Priyanka Iyer and assisted by Nethra, brought together students from Grades 6 to 8 to explore the fascinating diversity of wildlife

around them and understand the importance of coexistence. The first day dawned cold and rainy, but the enthusiasm inside the classroom more than made up for the weather. Priyanka began the session with the Lion-tailed Macaque, the children immediately recognized it as the Singa Valu Kurangu – literally lion-tailed monkey – and animatedly described its thick, mane-like hair. Their local knowledge about the animals behaviour was good.

The session then went on with Payal and Priyanka assessing the knowledge and perception of the children towards different animals. During the smiley face attitude evaluation most children expressed fear or indifference toward insects and reptiles, when we showed frogs on the screen there was visible disgust and revulsion.

The children were then guided to answer the 'Ocean opinion map' questionnaire survey to assess their knowledge about the ocean. None of the kids had ever been to the sea and many found it difficult to even comprehend the questions. The team then had the kids up and on their feet with a tiger stretch and playing games to understand adaptation. The bat session proved to be a highlight. Most students had seen bats before but didn't know there are two different types of bats (fruit-eating and





'How I Feel' attitude survey

insect-eating species). What echolocation is and how it is used to communicate or find prey was particularly fascinating. Every child wanted to be a blindfolded bat trying to catch mosquitoes! The fact that one tiny pipistrelle bat can eat 300 mosquitoes in one hour was greeted with wonder and awe. This brought up the discussion on the ecological roles of animals. The students confidently explained how butterflies help plants. The students were particularly intrigued by a fly that mimics a bee, a perfect example of nature's adaptations for survival. While some mistook it for a real bee, the conversation helped them understand the concept of mimicry.

When shown the dung beetle, the room filled with excitement and amusement—especially when they learned that the beetle's 'ball' was actually dung. The students quickly grasped its ecological importance in nutrient recycling. The jewel beetle too sparked interest, with one observant child noting that these beetles are usually seen in pairs. The day ended with playing the observation game and the pledge to protect animals and share their knowledge with others.

Day two welcomed clear skies and bright sunshine—perfect for the outdoor activities planned with thirty seven 8th graders. The students began by introducing themselves and eagerly asked Priyanka about her work with sharks—"How big are they?" being the most popular question.

The assessment activity had the children show their emotions towards a topic by 'throwing their arms' in the air for happy, 'sitting down' for sadness and boxing hands for anger. Interestingly the children of grade 8 had shown the same aversion to frogs and geckos as the younger grades. In fact, there were also a number of children who expressed anger if a frog or gecko jumped on them. The children expressed joy at seeing elephants or gaur and several had seen elephants in Mudhumalai. The day's activities encouraged students to express their emotional responses to animals through games and gestures. Elephants, gaurs, and leopards were met with admiration, while snakes and frogs provoked discomfort.

The discussion soon deepened into issues of habitat loss and Human wildlife negative interaction. One student shared that wild animals, which rarely entered their village before, now often attack their dogs—an observation that reflected a direct experience of ecological imbalance. This led to a conversation about the role of forests in maintaining balance and how conservation efforts can help both humans and wildlife coexist peacefully.

The session continued with a slide presentation and learning games introducing concepts such as amphibians, pollination, compound eyes, food chains, and echolocation. While some students found the reading portions of the educational packets challenging, they remained curious and engaged. As the session drew to a close, students participated in the newspaper game, a lively group activity that reinforced teamwork and quick thinking. Their



Students play 'Become a Bat'

discussions reflected a growing understanding of conservation themes— replanting trees, protecting habitats, and reducing harm to wildlife.

Sathyamangalam Schools

The C4C awareness program then moved to the Government High School, Germalam, and Government Tribal Residential Higher Secondary School, Hasanur, located within the Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve on the 5th and 6th of November. A total of 28 students from GHS Germalam and 58 students from GTRHSS Hasanur over two days each were introduced 'What is Wildlife?' and 'DailyLife Wildlife'.

The educational packet materials were received with much joy and exclamations of 'look at this animal' or 'I have seen this before!'. They then played the 'Who Am I?' cards. Within 30 minutes the knowledge base of the children with regards to some of the species was enhanced and their curiosity also piqued.

To further this an observation game was conducted to enhance students' ability to focus and pay attention to details in their surroundings. This was followed by the blindfold game to demonstrate how bats use echolocation. Every child wanted to be a bat especially after they learnt how cool the animals are. The only mammal to fly, how it regulates its system to handle being upside down and how there are two groups of bats - insect eating and fruit eating.

In the concluding session, using the elephant booklet and a PowerPoint presentation, students learned about elephant biology and behaviour, human–elephant conflict, mitigation strategies, and the do's and don'ts for people living in forest fringe areas This was a very important component of the

program as many of the children live in villages that have seen elephant and human negative interactions. The children and the teachers appreciated the workshop as it gave them practical tips on how to stay safe and why it is important to coexist with nature.

Coimbatore Schools

For Vidhya Vanam and Global Pathways Schools the team worked directly with the teachers to ensure maximum reach. Ocean and dailylife wildlife themed lesson plans were imparted for the teachers to take to their classrooms.

The whole team will be revisiting all the schools in January and February for a refresher and to have the students showcase what they have learnt or what they would like to highlight.

Zooreach team member plays the observation game with students."



Students spot changes in their peers to sharpen observation skills.



Students tie rakhis pledging to protect wildlife and spread conservation awareness.



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