

Becoming Friends of Wetlands: 320 Young Explorers Discover Coimbatore

10 interactive workshops | 320 students | Grades 5–7 | Coimbatore

A CSR initiative of Bosch Global Software Technologies | School support by YI Thalir

The 'Friends of Wetlands' under the *LivelyWaters!* program by Zooreach has over the past three years striving to work with communities and children to help them understand why wetlands matter and encourage them to become informed participants in their conservation. In July and August 2026, 10 workshops reached 320 students from Grades 5 to 7 from Chinmaya Vidyalaya School, Vadavalli; Kikani Global Academy School, Perur, Chettipalayam; and Chinmaya Vidyalaya School, R.S. Puram facilitated by the Zooreach team. Through interactive workshops, games, education materials and hands-on activities, the children explored wetlands as living ecosystems connected to wildlife, rivers, landscapes and ultimately the ocean. The sessions, ranging from one hour to half day, used different entry points to build one larger understanding that everything in nature is connected.

The workshops began with simple assessments through the 'sit and stand game' to understand what students already knew. When asked what wildlife meant to them, many immediately named tigers, lions and elephants. The sessions then brought wildlife closer to home to birds in schoolyards, frogs, geckos, snakes, native plants and the species that depend on freshwater habitats. Payal and Priyanka used local wildlife to explore why snakes, frogs and geckos are important in Coimbatore's landscapes. Students shared their own encounters, including stories

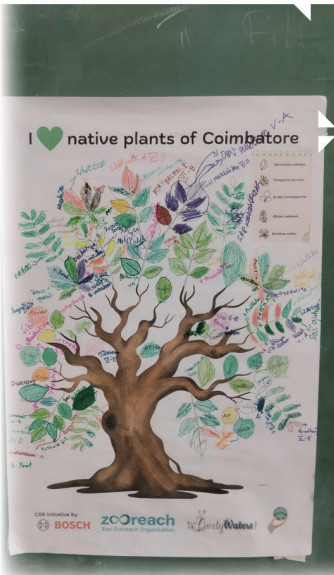
of roadkill and one memorable sighting of a pangolin. These conversations helped shift the idea of wildlife from something distant to something already present around them.

Sidharthan and Koshik introduced students to different freshwater habitats, including rivers, lakes, ponds, reservoirs and check dams, and explained the terms lotic and lentic for flowing and relatively still water. A lively movement game reinforced the concepts. Students jumped, moved their hands like flowing water or stood still depending on the wetland's name.

The Friends of Wetlands education packets extended the learning beyond the workshop, while friendship bands and pledges encouraged students to share what they had learnt with others. Birds provided another engaging way to understand wetland ecosystems. Neenu and Priyanka's 'Birds – Our Feathered Friends' sessions introduced identification through shape, size, colour, behaviour and habitat, along with resident and migratory birds and the work of Dr. Salim Ali.

The Flapping Game helped students appreciate the effort involved in migration and opened a discussion on why wetlands and other stopover habitats need to remain safe and healthy for visiting birds.

Other sessions introduced students to native and non-native plants, led by Sidharthan and





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Poojitha. Five plants native to Coimbatore – Indian Almond *Terminalia catappa*, Pongamia Tree *Pongamia pinnata*, Indian Silk Cotton Tree *Bombax ceiba*, Indian Rain Tree *Albizia lebbbeck*, and Flame of the Forest *Butea monosperma* were explored through plant cards and a creative leaf-painting activity.

The programme also helped students understand that freshwater does not exist in isolation. Rivers and wetlands are connected through watersheds and ultimately to estuaries and the sea. What happens on land and in freshwater can therefore affect the ocean.

Tandrili and Kritika using origami and the 'Magic of the Ocean' learning website of Zooreach helped the students connect the marine world with rivers. While making origami whales and crabs the students learnt about whales, including the enormous blue whale, baleen feeding and the role of the ocean in supporting life and regulating climate.

A carbon-sink game further demonstrated how fossil fuel use increases carbon dioxide while ecosystems such as forests, soils and the ocean absorb it. Students could see how increasing emissions create an imbalance and why healthy ecosystems are essential.

Taking the Learning Home

A key part of the 'Friends of Wetlands' programme is the specially designed education packet (Tamil and English) developed to help children continue exploring beyond the workshop. The packet includes an informative wetlands booklet introducing students to freshwater ecosystems and their importance with species found specifically in Coimbatore,

along with a photocard designed to help children frame and focus their photographs while observing and documenting nature around them.

The packet also includes a set of beautifully designed wildlife stickers, making the learning experience more engaging and giving children something they could continue to use and share. Three specially created posters focused on geckos, snakes and frogs, explaining why these often misunderstood animals are important to healthy landscapes. The posters also addressed common myths, fears and superstitions surrounding these species, helping replace misconceptions with simple, science-based understanding.

Together, the materials extended the programme beyond a single classroom session. They gave children tools to look, observe, identify, question and share, reinforcing the idea that being a Friend of Wetlands begins with paying attention to the living world around us.



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LivelyWaters!, Zoo Outreach Organisation, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India.

Citation: Purushothaman, N., T. Baruah, Sidharthan, D. Poojitha, P. Iyer, Rao. K.V & P. Molur (2026). Becoming Friends of Wetlands: 320 Young Explorers Discover Coimbatore. In *Zoo's Print* 41(8): 59–62.