



## Nilgiri Biosphere Nature Park, Coimbatore, T.N.

.....in 2012

Nilgiri Biosphere Nature Park NBNP, just outside Coimbatore, is a unique and charming, garden-like facility located in Anaikatti with a full view of some Nilgiri Hills. It is not full of structures as are many animal facilities but is meant to generate a relaxed and happy mood among visitors that morphs into a greater appreciation of nature and a lesson about wildlife.

The Park has evolved from an idea embraced by a group of Coimbatore industrialists who were not satisfied with the city zoo, primarily because it was small and yet surrounded by roads and shops as well as visitors. The visitors seemed impoverished in their sense of nature, as much or more at the end of their visit as, in the beginning as the animals looked anything but natural in their tiny and shabby cages.

The Coimbatore Zoological Society was formed with a dream of displaying animals in as near natural conditions as possible, so visitor could see a bright, healthy animal against a background of near nature. They leased some 100 acres and purchased adjacent sites in or near Anaikatti, a village in beautiful hills.

Design concepts flew over the years until finally it was decided that the modern zoo concept would not be appropriate on such a pristine piece of land and the name was changed also to reflect the greater area in which the zoo land sat, e.g. the Nilgiri Biosphere. Instead of a zoo and all that implies, the facility would be a nature park with free-ranging animals in real trees and grounds. Visitors are lured into a 1.25 km walk in a piece of forest focused on natural rather than manmade nature.

Actually this also was a piece of manmade nature but through very careful and precise Ecological Restoration that took 20 years to achieve. Instead of cages, many natural displays help visitors understand man's use of nature in the right ways while also providing for their comfort as they trek through the NBNP showcase.

An example of this can be seen in the several bamboo water fountains that demonstrate ancient water harvesting which shows how the balancing chute drops down as the water weight goes up. When the chute is empty it automatically settles into position.

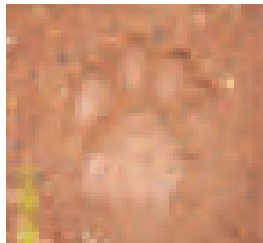


1. Map of NBNP

2. Peacock about to pop

3. Innovative Bamboo water Fountain





1. Veurcher cow
2. Malabari goat
3. Falabella horse
4. Leopard pugmark
5. Passion flower
6. Hooded grasshopper



### Rare Breeds display

Also known as the domestic animal farm, this section of the zoo provides a way for visitors to get up "close and personal" with some animals that will not be frightened or otherwise offended by human presence. It is a surprise to many visitors to know that all of these breeds are rare, just as endangered species of wild animals are rare. Decades and even centuries ago when mankind was just learning to live a better life on earth, the early agriculturists created their own breeds either by design or by accident. Today many zoos in western countries include an exhibit of some of the domestic breeds, both to teach visitors about this surprisingly little known group of animals and also to let the curious children get close to some animals. This is a better way of teaching kids not to go close to wild animals. Even if non-carnivorous wild animals, such as deer, squirrels, hares, etc. are not normally dangerous as are some wild animals, if approached and frightened in a non-protective setting, they can cause serious injury to human beings through no fault of the animal. The Veurcher cow is a rare breed of (*Bos indicus*) cattle named after the village Veurcher in Kottayam district of the State of Kerala. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has listed the Veurcher cattle as the World's smallest breed.

Apart from the Veurcher cow, Malabari Goat (Thallicherry goat), Falabella miniature horse and Cock were also added to the Domestic animal farm at the NBNP. The unique Domestic Animal Farm work is in progress. It is the only display of its kind in India.

### Free ranging wildlife at the NBNP

The wild animals at the Park are not so easy to see unless they are the more "social" invertebrates, and the deer provide visitors with a glimpse of their stately beauty from time to time. There are 100 species of birds, and still counting as with reptiles, amphibians, and plants species.

Although everyone wants to see a leopard, they will have to be satisfied with a leopard pugmark, carefully taken in plaster when it was found in the soft earth. Seeing a leopard might prove to be more exciting than visitors really want! It is no pleasure to be sighted by a hungry carnivore. So far no problem at the Park as the leopard knows its ticket into the Park is good only at night. Likewise, elephants, who are so large and so powerful that they don't worry about their "ticket" -- they just come when they want.

Just imagine if a Hooded Grasshopper were as big as an elephant. We would marvel at him also. So ... why not marvel at its beauty and uniqueness despite the size. We marvel at the beauty of flowers even though they are small ... why not grasshoppers!

**Education & Public Awareness**

Educating and raising public awareness on the importance of biodiversity is a primary main aim of the Coimbatore Zoological Park Society. Two awareness programmes in 2011-2012 were particularly outstanding. These were World Environment Day and Amphibian Ark Celebrations. In addition from April 2011 to March 2012, more than 7000 students from 46 institutions visited the NBNP as part of their institutions' Environmental Educational Programs. In addition over 4000 people, casual visitors and also 14 corporate sectors have also visited the park.

There is a Nature Trail of 1.25 km at the NBNP where visitors can socialise, exercise and experience the wonder of seeing rare plants, birds, snakes, butterflies and other insects...even the occasional deer, squirrels, hares, etc. Observed in the Park are over 100 species of birds, 20 species of reptiles, 22 species of amphibians, 18 species of mammals and 300 plus invertebrates. All these have been recorded.

In order to maintain the Park and have someone to train educators and explain to visitors, Mr. B. Rathinasabapathy, Project Coordinator attended the training on 'Innovative Techniques in Urban Forestry' organized by the Institute of Forest Genetics and Tree Breeding (IFGTB), Coimbatore on 01.03.12. The aim of the training was to create a platform to pool knowledge and experiences in the field of Urban Forestry and to impart the same to the practicing foresters, officials of Highways Department, Public Works Department, residential colony associations and GOs who are involved in urban tree planting. A total of 200 participants attended the training.

The NBNP initiative is supported and promoted by well known industrialists and philanthropists of Coimbatore. As a result the Park has successfully restored and grown plants of many vegetation types. Over 25,000 plants of 430 species can be found there. Some 85 species are endemic to NBR and 30% of the collections are endemic to Western Ghats. In fact, the Park's collection of threatened plant species has been recognized by the national Botanical Research Institute (NBRI) Lucknow, India and the iconic Botanical Garden Conservation International (BGCI) in United Kingdom.



1. Photo and learning opportunity with lovely Lime butterfly
2. Drama at your fingertips ... Human Elephant Coexistence event
3. Cactus garden at NBNP





**Many people have been helpful to NBNP. The Park thanks to the following persons for their support by giving expertise and also plants in the last couple of years**

**Signage:** Mr. K. Maruthachalam, Photo Center; Ms. Sally Walker, Mr. R. Marimuthu, & Dr. B.A. Daniel from Zoo Outreach Organisation; Mr. Eric Ramanujam, Pichandikulam Forest Consultants, Auroville.

**Plants:** Dr. N. Krishnakumar, Director, IFGTB; Dr. S.P. Periyasamy, Ramya Nursery; Dr. R. Tolstoy, PSG Hospital; Dr. S. Pornima, Botany Dept. PSGRK College; Mr. P. Vincent, Secretary, Coimbatore District Ornamental Tree Growers Association; Mr. Seshadri Ramaswamy, Bangalore; Mr. D.S. Raman, PRO Arsha Vidya Gurukulam

**Assorted:** Dr. R. Krishnasamy, Dean, PSGRK College (Govt. funding Scheme); Dr. Ezhili Natarajan, Zoology Dept. PSGRK College. (Project proposal); Mr. K. Myilsamy, Siruthuli (Water conservation project)

**Testimonials from Visitors**

"NBNP, it is a learning experiment for school students, to familiarize themselves with plants, plant taxonomy and taxonomist are becoming a rarity. We need such center of forest genetics resource conservation to give importance to *ex-situ* conservation and for better understanding of the local flora. The centre should have strong links with BSI, IFGTB and other plant conservation centre, for providing education to students and for scientific endeavor, including extension and research". **Dr. N. Krishnakumar, IFS, Director of the Institute of Forest Genetics and Tree Breeding (IFGTB), Coimbatore**

"The park is so well developed and well maintained. It required some boards to have in English explanation, so that non Tamil people will be benefited. It provides an excellent area for outdoor classes. Do ask paper like "Hindu" to give a nice write-up". **Vidya Vanam School, Thuvaipathy Road, Anaikatti.**

"We teachers from St. John's School came and visited the NBNP. Really it is an enthusiastic and knowledge gaining trip for us. So many rare plants and trees we have noticed. Guide gave us so many explanations about the plants and animals. The atmosphere is very cool and the members helped us very much my best wishes for this process". **St. John's Mat. H.S. School, Press Colony, Coimbatore.**

"Very informative, the nature study gave great benefits to both teachers as well as to the students. Park gives good atmosphere for children". **GD Mat. Hr. Sec. School, Coimbatore.**

"The Park gives us mind relief from tension, good physical motivation and had a feel that we had spend good time with calm living organisms means our nature friends". **PSG College of Nursing, Coimbatore.**

"The work done here is wonderful to save our Mother Nature. Hats of to the thoughtful person's behind it". **Trenz Pruca, Le Meridian Hotel, Coimbatore.**

