

Two Weeks in the Life of WCS Intern

B.A. Daniel *

I was very happy when the Asian Regional Representative of IZE, Sally Walker, confirmed my participation to take up the Wildlife Conservation Society / C.V. Starr Environmental Education Fellow Programme from 10th-25th October 2003 at Bronx Zoo, New York. Mr. Tom Naiman, Director Curriculum Development and International Education and Mrs. Nalini Mohan, International Zoo Educator, Bronx Zoo in collaboration with Zoo Outreach Organisation, Coimbatore, India conducted a series of 'Teachers for Tigers' workshop in South India, which gave me a platform to involve myself in this programme.

Gigi Joseph, education officer from Periyar Tiger Reserve, Kerala; Anand Pendarkar from Mumbai, Maharashtra and B.G. Mridula, programme officer, Centre for Environmental Education, Tirupur also joined me for the programme. The two-week-long programme was unforgettable and more useful since it directed the course of my education tactics that I had been using in the local education programmes conducted by my organisation.

First day at the education department

The agenda heightened my curiosity about the programme. Tom gave a brief introduction about WCS and its conservation objectives. He gave us a general idea about the living institutions associated with WCS i.e., Bronx Zoo, Central Park Zoo, Queens Zoo, New York Aquarium and Prospect Park; St. Catherine's Island Breeding endangered programme highlighting education and research. We received a set of materials and literature carefully compiled by Nalini for the programme. We got a good picture about WCS/Bronx Zoo when we went around the exhibits. The lunch with all the staff of the education department was a good ice breaker to get to know one another. Annette Berkovits, IZE President welcomed us.

During the course, we were given opportunities to attend as observers in various education programmes conducted by Bronx zoo and other institutions. 'Mommy and Me' meant for II-IV grade children, 'Gorilla Kindergarten' for kindergarten children, 'Adventures in Wildlife Science' a high school programme, 'Distance Learning education', and, 'Bronx River Module and River Walk' were some of the programmes from which we learnt.

Visit to living institutes

We visited Bronx zoo, Central Park Zoo, Queens Zoo, and New York Aquarium. Mr. Tom Hurtubrise, Curator of education gave us details about Queens Zoo. The Botanical aspect of Queens Zoo has been given equal importance. The exhibit to explain extinct species that looked like a graveyard was excellent.

We got an opportunity to watch a special demonstration of theatre programmes at the Central Park Zoo. Designing the programme according to the needs of the visitors was its speciality.

Discussion with education / conservation experts

We got ample opportunities to meet experts in education

and conservation that gave us a remarkable exposure to understand various trends related to science, environment and education. Ann Robinson, Director, National Programs, Sarah Gruber, Senior Curriculum Developer, Colleen McCann, Curator of Mammals, Janine Silversmith, Coordinator, Girls for Planet Earth, Lee Livney, Don Lisowy, Curator of Education, Claire Deroche, Volunteer Coordinator, Erin Fitzgerald, Distance Learning Coordinator, Johnny Fraser, Director, Tiger Mountain, Patricia Wynne, Teachers for Tigers artist, Josh Ginsberg and Linda Krueger, Asia Program Day with FOZ, Lisa Synoradski, Dale Brooks, Development Department, Diana Reiss, Bob Sikora, Curator, Central Park Zoo, WCS Senior Research Scientist were some of whom we met and had a detailed discussion about their interest and programmes.

Presentation for the Trustee

We were asked to give a brief presentation on what we did on education to the trustees. I briefed the gathering on how Teachers for Tigers programme served Indian zoo audiences. During my presentation I spoke on the number of Indian zoos involved in the Teachers for Tigers education programme and using the education packets produced by Zoo Outreach Organisation. The importance of providing methods and materials-based training, like Teachers for Tigers program, to Indian zoo educators and the role of Zoo Outreach Organisation in Teachers for Tigers Project was also discussed. Mridula explained about her role in the workshop and how she felt about it. Gigi Joseph explained his experience in hosting a workshop at Periyar Tiger Reserve, Kerala while Anand explained the value and impact of Teachers for Tigers workshop and other environmental education for urban audiences in India.

Special lectures

During the course we attended various special lectures. Some of them were: "Environmental Justice and the Market: The Politics of Sharing Wildlife Revenues in Tanzania" by Dr. Schroeder from Rutgers University, 'Can Ecosystems Be Restored? Humpty Dumpty Revisited In The Colombian Andes' by Dr. Carolina Murcia, WCS Regional Coordinator for the Northern Andes, 'Marine Mammal Behavior' by Dr. Diana Reiss, WCS Senior Research Scientist.

Although all the programmes that we attended were very useful, few are highlighted. 'Distance education' attracted us a lot. It will be a good tool in Asia especially India that has a good mass with a need to be educated at local level. It will be more effective as the technology is available in India. Ms. Erin Fitzgerald deserves special appreciation as she could manage the entire presentation single handedly.

Visit to the school is another activity that we enjoyed a lot. The visit gave a good picture about the education trend in US so as to compare it with our country. This definitely helped us to modify some of our education methods.

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The family programmes and class room activities were very creative and fascinated us a lot. We saw a good number of programmes including 'Mommy and Me', 'Gorilla kindergarten' etc. After seeing the programmes with the participants, we gained confidence that we can develop similar programs on various themes in India. The class room education programme for poor school students to learn more about animal science was appreciable.

In the two-weeks program we learnt about recent trends in education, various education techniques including assessment and evaluation methods. We also got an opportunity to discuss topics such as grant writing that helped us to learn more about framing proposals and sharing experiences on curriculum development.

The family programmes, class room activities, developing curriculum on wildlife themes and planning an education programme are some that can be practiced in our future programmes with definite modifications according to the local situation.

Education is one of the very important functions of modern zoos. More and more zoos are upgrading their ability to

support the conservation of biodiversity by educating the public. Zoo education in India is gaining importance now-a-days as it is evident from the many South Asian zoo reports appearing in *ARNIZE News*. Education programmes in Bronx Zoo are more informal and at the same time build a life-long impact on the visitor and develop an interest about animals and environment. It is important to note that well-trained educators conduct all education programs. Teachers for Tigers is a good module that can be followed not only for tigers but for the friends of Tigers.

In the midst of this busy schedule we also found time to visit Natural History Museum, do some shopping and go on a one day visit to New York City. We were also invited as special guests by many staff of the Education Department. My special thanks are due to Mrs. Annette Berkovits, Mr. Tom Naiman and Mrs. Nalini Mohan for arranging this programme for us and particularly Ms. Sally Walker for her encouragement and efforts.



The Rainforest Initiative

The Rainforest Initiative is an active and vibrant organization committed to conserve the biodiversity of the rainforests. The Rainforest Initiative is a Non-Profit Public Charitable Trust (Reg. No. 235/2003). The Rainforest Initiative's personnel are a motivated team with a high level of enthusiasm to fulfill this commitment. Dr. R. Krishnamani, a primatologist and rainforest ecologist, and his team, are set to blaze a new path in the field of rainforest conservation. He and his team are guided by a panel of renowned ecologists.

The office of The Rainforest Initiative, located in Coimbatore, southern India, provides library, infrastructural and logistical support and coordinates the Organization's conservation-oriented research projects in various parts of southern India.

The Rainforest Initiative was formed as a Registered Non-Profit Public Charitable TRUST (Registration No. 235/2003) by five committed people on the 19th day of February 2003. Subsequently two more people have joined to make the team seven. These seven members are the Trustees of this Organization.

Objective:

To conserve the flora and fauna (including the abiotic components) of the rainforest and its allied ecosystems.

Anybody interested in conserving the rainforests, irrespective of their caste, creed, religion, sex and nationality, are welcome to join us. The activities of The Rainforest Initiative are presently confined to southern India, especially the Western Ghats, but will eventually be expanded to other areas like the northeastern Indian and Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

The Rainforest Initiative has launched and executed a number of research projects in different parts of the Western Ghats and southern India. Based on the results of this research, The Rainforest Initiative designs and implements conservation programs.



**The
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The Rainforest Initiative believes in reaching out with the results of its research and conservation to a wider audience encompassing the scientific fraternity, policy-makers, and the public, to bring about awareness and catalyse action needed to conserve India's rainforest flora and fauna. The work of The Rainforest Initiative has resulted in a number of publications in international journals.

Research

- Feeding habits of the bonnet macaques
- Geophagy (soil eating) in the bonnet macaques
- Phenological observations in the rainforests of southern India
- Woody plant surveys in the lion-tailed macaque (*Macaca silenus*) habitats
- Database on the rainforest trees of Western Ghats
- Status and distribution of the "Hanuman langurs" in southern India
- Restoring the riparian forests of River Noyyal

For more information check out
<http://www.rainforest-initiative.org>