

Teachers for Tigers: a Programme for Educators

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Synopsis

The Teachers for Tigers programme was conducted by ZOOWATCH and Trivandrum Zoo with support from Zoo Outreach Organisation (Z.O.O.) and Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) on the 04th and 05th of October 2003 during the Wildlife Week Celebrations at Museum and Zoo Auditorium, Trivandrum.

Though we wondered where the participants would come from, there was wonderful response to the call and we had a total of 24 participants who were able to attend this programme.

We were fortunate to have Mr. B.C. Choudhury, Senior Reader, Wildlife Institute of India, who graced the inaugural function and helped set the tone for the whole programme. A special thanks to Ms. Avanti Mallapur, Wildlife Biologist, who despite her tight schedule was able to help us during the course of the programme on both days. She also chipped in with a few games and puzzles for children. Her support was invaluable. Participants were provided a 'kit' whose contents were note pad, training manual, tiger tool kit, pen & pencil and ID tags. Photocopying pages from the 'Teachers for Tigers' and 'How Nature Works' manuals, created a manual of approximately 75 pages. Ideally we would have preferred to have both the manuals duplicated in whole but couldn't do the same due to budgetary constraints.) Common supplies required included sketch pens, scotch tapes, art knife, rulers, erasers, sharpeners, art paper etc.

The Teachers for Tigers programme wouldn't have been possible without the support of Mr. C. S. Yalakki, Director, and other staff of Trivandrum zoo. The zoo also funded substantial amount to conduct this programme. The participants also were issued certificates of participation. These colorful certificates were designed based on the format prescribed in the Tiger Training Manual. Shri. T. M. Jacob, Hon. Minister for Irrigation, who is also in charge of the zoo, distributed the certificates⁹ during the closing ceremony of the Wildlife Week Celebrations. Also present on the occasion was Shri. T Balakrishnan, Secretary, Tourism Department, Government of Kerala.

First Day

Registration (30 mins)

As the first programme of its kind for ZOOWATCH, all the members were very excited, looking forward to the Teachers for Tigers Programme. The day officially began at 10.00 am, with registration, and by 10.30 am almost all the participants had completed the process of registering. Meanwhile, Mr. C.S. Yalakki, Director, Museums and Zoos, Trivandrum had already arrived and we were all eagerly awaiting the arrival of Mr. B.C. Choudhury, Senior Reader, Wildlife Institute of India who was our special guest.

Inauguration (30 mins)

Once Mr. Choudhury arrived on the scene, we got underway and the formal functions started. We began with an informal

inauguration where Mr. Raajkaran from ZOOWATCH welcomed the gathering and stated the purpose of this programme. This was followed by an address by Mr. C.S. Yalakki, who among other things emphasized upon the role zoo's place in conservation.

Thereafter the gathering was treated to an enthralling talk by Mr. B.C. Choudhury who gave us an insight into the scope and need for conservation education among the masses to sustain conservation itself. Mr. Choudhury's talk really helped in setting the tone among the participants who began to look forward to the Teachers for Tigers programme.

Introduction/Icebreaking (45 mins)

After tea, everyone settled in and we got into the 'programme' mode. We began with the participants briefly introducing themselves to the gathering. It is here that we discovered that we had managed to put together a very interesting mix of people. We had teachers as well as students, social workers and servicemen and even had businessmen, all coming together because of their common interest in conserving nature.

Theme/Survey/Concept Map (30 mins)

Now we got on to the main course. Mr. Gangadharan, Zoo Education Officer and Mr. Raajkaran got the programme underway by explaining the concept of taking the tiger as a focal point in conservation education. We also ran a survey and concept map exercise from the tiger-training manual to evaluate the level of awareness among the participants. The findings of these exercises was most interesting.

How Nature Works/Adaptation/Food Web (45 mins)

Mr. Gangadharan started with a brief from the *How Nature Works* handbook with particular reference to the tiger habitats around the world. This was followed by a brief on Adaptation by Mr. Raajkaran. Next followed the 'finger challenge' exercise from the same handbook. This set the ball rolling for the rest of the programme in the sense that we could get the participants interested in the "learning" aspect of the whole programme.

See a good illustration of 'finger challenge' exercise on our website (www.zoosprint.org)

The last activity for the pre-lunch session was the session on the Food Web. Here again a brief talk was followed by the Food Web activity with a long cotton rope.

See a good illustration of 'finger challenge' exercise on our website (www.zoosprint.org)

It had been a long morning and everyone relished the simple packaged "Kerala Meals" for lunch.

Prey base/Tiger Behavior/Range Map (1 hr)

The post lunch session began with a brief about the various animals that forms the prey base of the tiger.

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This was followed by a short session on tiger behavior and characteristics.

The participants, by now had caught on to what this programme was all about and all of them took to the next activity with renewed gusto. Here we did the exercise on range maps, including habitat, past and current range. The real message of the loss of species, endangered status and habitat loss could be easily and firmly established here. Session was conducted by Mr. Raajkaran and Mr. Gangadharan.

Tiger Timeline (30 mins)

Participants were given individual topics from the timeline exercise of the Tiger Manual by Mr. Raajkaran... some inputs and local information about Trivandrum Zoo like, year of establishment and recent birth of Tiger cubs etc. were given as Timeline. Participants were at their creative best here and some very interesting interpretations of the timeline was created. Once the timeline exercise was completed, participants could appreciate the whole aspect of the need to conserve nature and in particular, the tiger.

Zoo – Function/Strategies/proper behavior (30 mins)

A detailed briefing followed the timeline exercise by Mr. Raajkaran, on the functions of modern zoos, various strategies to achieve their objectives and most importantly, proper behavior while in the zoo. We found that many were still of the mindset that zoos were a place for amusement only, and we are happy that we were able to change that line of thinking during the course of this half hour.

Visit to the zoo/exercise on observation (1 hr 30 mins)

The last session for the day was in the zoo. Participants were taken to selected locations like the primates enclosures, aviary and tiger exhibits. We were able to demonstrate the importance of proper behavior within zoos and the importance of conservation. Participants also did an exercise on observation techniques.

Day 2

Address by Mr. C. S. Yalakki (45 mins)

The session began with a lecture by Mr. C. S. Yalakki. During this very informative talk, Mr. Yalakki was able to enlighten the participants about the critical state of affair of our forests, the need to conserve nature, role of NGOs and individuals in conservation etc.

Games and puzzles for children - Ms. Avanti Mallapur (1 hr)

Ms. Avanti Mallapur, Wildlife biologist who was on a visit to the Trivandrum zoo for her studies was kind enough to share her knowledge and experience with the participants. She gave us a few games, puzzles and word jumbles that can be used among young children. These activities were designed to bring out the inquisitive nature of children and open up new areas of learning for them. Needless to say, the participants got into the act with renewed gusto and played their part as children to perfection. They unanimously agreed that these games and puzzles will be well received among their target audience.

Subspecies/population/countries/characteristics/habits (1 hr 30 mins)

Mr. Gangadharan and Mr. Raajkaran touched upon significant tiger specific information like the sub-species of tigers - both present and extinct, population, habitat distribution by forest type and countries. Also discussed were the various characteristics and habits of tiger behavior like camouflage, hunting, jumping etc.

The participants were treated to a delicious vegetable biriyani for lunch.

Tiger Tracking and Counting Techniques (45 mins)

Mr. Gangadharan touched upon the various methods by which tigers are tracked in the forest. Also he briefed on counting technique including camera traps and pugmark studies.

What can I do? (1 hr)

Primarily the participants who discussed how each one of them as individuals can make a difference in their community using the knowledge that they gained from this programme dominated this discussion. Ideas ranged from lectures during Residents' Association meetings to arranging field trips for children into local forest areas.

Feed-back/Evaluation/Concept Map (45 mins)

The last session of the day was dedicated to gaining more response from the participants on how this programme benefited them. Going back to the survey of the first day, the participants went over the questions of first day. Happy to report that we got a near 100% correct answers this time around. Participants were asked to do the concept map on tigers again and there was significant improvement in the knowledge level right away.

More Interaction (30 mins)

Most of the participants didn't seem to get enough... more animated discussion followed on how strange myths still existed in our society about the tiger. These include.

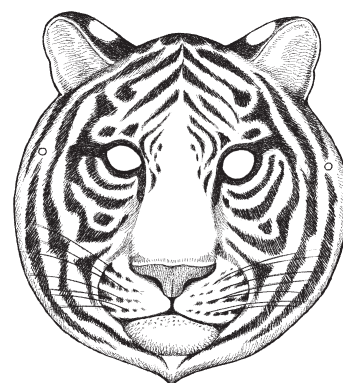
- i. Tigers in particular and cats in general are "poisonous".
- ii. Possession of tiger claw can ward off evil.
- iii. Tiger claw when suspended around ones neck can make him braver.
- iv. Tigers can become invisible at will.

Needless to say... we could put things in a more scientific perspective

Programme Officially declared Closed

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See good illustrations of these programmes on our website www.zoosprint.org