

Zoo Outreach Organization and VOC Park Mini Zoo commemorates World Wetlands Day

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The Convention on Wetlands or "Ramsar Convention" is an intergovernmental treaty that expresses commitments of its member countries to maintain the ecological character of their Wetlands of international importance, and to plan for wise use, or sustainability of all wetlands in their territories. One hundred and Sixty Eight countries are members of the convention. As on 29 January 2014, 2177 wetlands of international importance were identified as Ramsar sites, covering an area of 208,518,409 ha. India has 26 Ramsar sites and the total area is 689,131 ha. Tamil Nadu has only one Ramsar site and that is Point Calimere Wildlife & Bird Sanctuary, occupying an area of 38,500 ha. and was designated 18 Aug 2002.

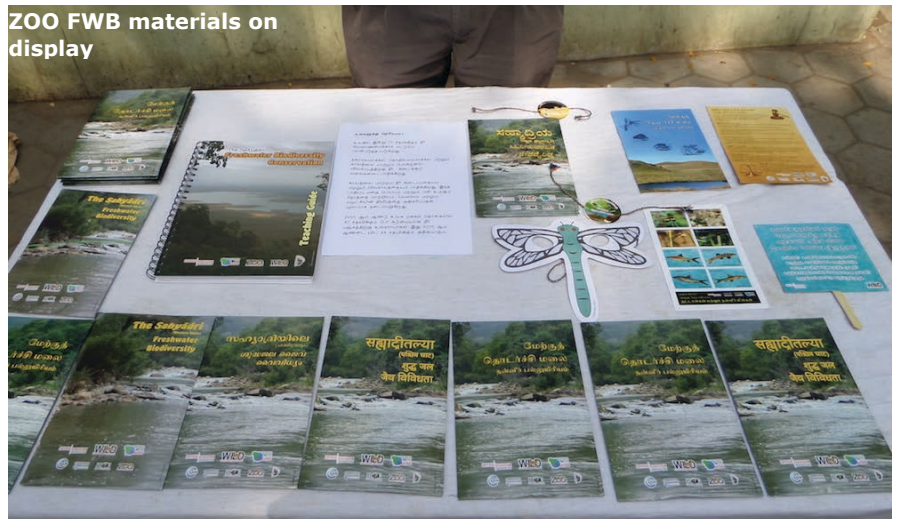
World Wetlands Day is celebrated on every 2 February to mark the adoption of the Convention on Wetlands in the Iranian city of Ramsar on the shores of the Caspian Sea. This year's theme is *Wetlands & Agriculture: Partners for Growth*. This year is the UN International Year of Family Farming, appropriate because wetlands are so often linked with agriculture, placing a focus on the need for wetlands and agricultural sectors to work together for best outcomes. Wetlands have nurtured the development of many cultures around the world. Drainage and reclamation of wetlands for agriculture has become ever more widespread and effective.

Each year since 1997, the Ramsar Secretariat has asked government agencies, ngo's, co's and citizens can help raise public awareness about the importance and value of wetlands.

In response to the Ramsar request an awareness programmes for zoo visitors was held at VOC Park mini zoo to help people understand the value and importance of wetlands and wise usage of water in agriculture. About 500 zoo visitors were sensitized about the service



Children in a family with FWB masks



ZOO FWB materials on display



Zoo visitors sensitized about importance of saving and using wetlands

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Zoo visitors clarifying Western Ghats specialties

of wetlands to agriculture and how the water can be utilized very wisely in sustainable way and the importance to conserve them since other animals and plants share the wetlands for their survival. They also learned that wrongful use of water for agriculture is leaving rivers, lakes and underground water sources dry. In helping zoo visitors understand availability of freshwater on earth and how it will be utilized, the following details were given:

- Out of all the water available on earth salt water makes up about 97%.
- Only 3% is freshwater in which most of them frozen in glaciers, ice snow and ground water.
- Only 0.01% of it as surface water in lakes, swamps, ponds and rivers.
- Worldwide, the agricultural sector uses maximum amount of water that is 70% and followed by industry (23%), the remaining (8%) used by humans, animals for drinking and other purposes.
- Most of the water used for agriculture (15-35%) is unsustainable.

On hearing these statistics the zoo visitors were shocked, since they had an assumption that more freshwater resources are available on earth. Further they were told about countries like the United States of America, China, India, Pakistan, Australia and Spain have reached their renewable water resource limits. The major reasons of wastage and unsustainable water use are leaky irrigation systems, inefficient field application methods and cultivation of crops, which demands more water. They were told that unsustainable water use harms the environment by changing the water table as well as depleting ground water supplies. Superfluous irrigation increases soil salinity and pollution of rivers, lakes and ponds causing damage to freshwater ecosystems

and other plant and animal species. So they were requested to embrace the sustainable usage of water.

In addition to giving details about wetlands and agriculture, they also learned about freshwater biodiversity of Western Ghats. Zoo Outreach Organization's education materials on Western Ghats Freshwater Biodiversity were displayed in different languages, e.g., English, Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil and Hindi. Visitors learned about the Western Ghats features, threats, and ecological importance; also that it holds 25% of India's total biodiversity that is equal of 2% of global biodiversity.

These Western Ghats mountain ranges are the lifeline of freshwater resources of 10 states of India, the origin of 70 west-flowing rivers and 46 east flowing rivers. Likewise more and more species depend on the 1,60,000 sq kms mountain range for their survival, including the freshwater species such as amphibians, fish, odonates, mollusca, aquatic plants, etc. The visitors have been asked to think of Coimbatore and other areas, which is directly benefitted, without Western Ghats and what would happen in the future. Realising its importance not only it providing us freshwater, fresh air and other services, also it is a home to various other flora and fauna. Participants were urged to save the Western Ghats from man-made threats for their own survival as well as all other species that depend on it.

R. Marimuthu, Senior Education Officer, ZOO conducted the programme and Dr. K. Asokan, Director of the zoo was the coordinator as well as sponsor.

