

Connecting Technology and Conservation

...*Kaustubh Bannintaya* [kaustubh.bannitaya@gmail.com]

As I was lazily lying on the couch, I received a call from my school inviting me to an educational trip with Mr. Bhaskar, an international explorer and Author. I thought that it would be better than sleeping on the couch all day long. It was an extraordinary experience. We set out early in the morning on the 20th of April to one of the environmental hotspots, the Western Ghats. Our plan was to cover Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary, Aane Choukooor, a small Mahout Camp where many tamed elephants live, and the Coffee Estates of Coorg.

Day 1: Friday, 20th of April, 2012.

In the Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary, we went on a boat ride in the backwaters of river Kaveri. There were many species of birds as well as a lot of crocodiles. The rower explained the life cycles of many bird species. We watched many birds including the great egret, little egret, cattle egret, white egret, open billed storks, painted stork and pelicans. We were thrilled to look at the numerous birds living together in harmony.

In the evening, we set out to Aane Choukooor where the elephants for the Royal Mysore Dussera event are trained. We met many mahouts and saw many elephants including Abhimanyu and Balaram. We spoke to the mahouts and learnt about the life of elephants as well as the life in the forest with the elephants. Not only did we play with the children, but we also played with the elephants and their calves. I was also allowed to mount the elephant Gopalkrishna bare-back and ride through a small distance in the forest. But, not all of us were as lucky as I was.

On the whole, the first day was very enjoyable and educative with elephants and birds.

Day 2: Saturday, 21st of April, 2012.

In the morning, we went to Kaveri Nisargadhama, where we enjoyed a small elephant ride and curiously watched the deer playing with each other in the deer park. There was greenery all around and our eyes were filled with the reflections of colourful flowers. It was more of a tourist spot than an environmental spot.

In the evening, we were taken to the coffee estates of Gonikoppal. Though it is called a coffee estate, it is not only coffee that grows here. This was a different ecosystem mainly constituting of plants of different kinds and jackfruit trees. There were a few birds, but worms grew in plenty. We had a look at the kokum, pepper, chilly and many wild flowering plants and many jackfruit trees, and of course, coffee. An interesting fact about coffee grown in Coorg is that it is grown under the shade of huge trees. We also saw the big machines that are used in making coffee powder.

At around 8.15 in the evening, we participated in the teleconference program of the

24-hour grand opening of the Nature Research Centre in the Museum Of Natural Sciences, North Carolina. Two of my friends, Aashish Jaisimha and Disha Dharesh spoke about the Western Ghats, the elephants and mahout community during the teleconference.

After spending time with birds, elephants, mahouts, deer and plants and trees, I realize that I have only just learnt about a very small fractional part of nature. I have understood the enormity of nature and how we are dependent on it. It was also engaging to see how technology can play a major role in the broader sharing of conservation scenario.