

Trip to the hottest hotspot of the Western Ghats

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On a pleasant morning, we left our school campus at around 6. We were on our journey to the famous bird sanctuary – **The Ranganthittu Bird Sanctuary** located in the district of Mandya. It was a four hour drive from Bangalore. We reached the place and were thrilled as we went on a boat ride. Our lead member **Bhaskar Krishnamurthy**, one of the three only explorers of India was with us in our boat providing us with every minutest detail concerning the birds, the flora and the fauna of the region. We came across over fifteen species of birds including Open billed Storks, spoon billed stork, Black Cormorants and many more. I was most fascinated seeing the marsh crocodiles lazing on the rocks. Some were even passing by our boats right next to us. It was an amazing experience amidst the lush green bamboo trees and the colourful birds. The melodious voice of these birds is still lingering in my ears.

We departed from the sanctuary to have our breakfast. From there, we headed towards **Coorg International School**. The school was situated in a wonderful environment amidst the forests. It was a calm place and the best place for a science lover. We freshened up and got ready to head towards **Anechowkuru**. As the name suggests, it is 'The Land of Elephants'. A *forest without an elephant is like a flower without fragrance*. They add on to the beauty of nature. These mammoth elephants were being hunted and poached for their magnificent tusks. Thus they had entered the list of endangered species. We had been to the '**Mahut Community**'. They are the Indigenous communities who have dedicated themselves in the protection of elephants. Kudos to this community who have taken initiatives to prevent this from happening. This community consists of people of all ages tending the elephant. The Mahut children are brought up in this environment. The first thing they see when they wake up is the majestic trunk of the elephants cuddling them lovingly. They bathe with them, eat with them, play with them and sleep with them. In other words elephants are their brothers, sisters and also their best friends. They have developed so strong a bond between them that they have become a single soul in two bodies. Their feelings for the elephants are unexplainable. They live a carefree and a harmonious life. The concept of Universal brotherhood must be imbibed from them. I played with the children and was ecstatic to see them smile. It was great spending time with them. We finally bid adieu to them and returned to the school.

We reached the school after our enthusiastic journey. We were asked to assemble in the dining hall for a cup of tea/coffee. No sooner did I have a cup of hot coffee than I was asked to go to a classroom for a seminar. An interactive session on birds and the environment of Coorg was conducted by **Dr. SV Narasimhan**, a multifaceted personality who shows varied interests including bird watching. He is an excellent artist and mimics all bird sounds. After the wonderful and informative class we went to the dining hall to have our dinner. After a tiring day, with good memories we retired to bed.

The sounds of chirping birds woke us up the next day. It was a bright morning. We were asked to get ready and reach the dining hall sharp half past seven. We had our breakfast and proceeded towards our bus. We were to go to **Kaveri nisargadhama**. The area was lush foliage of thick bamboo groves surrounded by the river Kaveri. The bamboos had dried up. We saw a herd of deer and had a nice time on the elephant ride. We were allowed to explore the area for 30 minutes. We had a great time wandering about in the area. We returned back to the school and had our lunch.

They had arranged another seminar by a **Professor Kushalappa** of the University. It was about the elephants. It was an excellent seminar. We discussed about the water problems prevailing in the cities and how the cities differed from the villages. We were then taken to the

coffee plantations. We were astonished to hear that Coorg produced 30% of India's coffee. We were completely unaware of the fact. It was a huge plantation and we were explained about the nature of the crops and the climatic conditions in which they prevail. We were then taken to the place where coffee beans were processed and its procedures were explained.

We returned back to the school and had very little time to get ready for the **Grand Conference.** After getting ready we checked out of the room for dinner and sat in the auditorium for the Conference to begin. We were amazed to see how through one computer we could connect to a several countries. We learnt how the advancement of technology has provided us with an opportunity and an exposure to natural sciences. We were extremely excited to share our experiences. When the server was connected to India our heartbeat increased tremendously. I was called upon by Bhaskar Sir to share my experience. I was totally unprepared for this. Though I could not do my best, I am proud that I got an opportunity to share my experience live on skype where millions of people were watching us. We finally bid adieu to the school and were on our journey back to Bangalore.

As a whole it was an informative, enjoyable and a memorable trip. I would like to place on record my sincere thanks to **DK Bhaskar Sir** for having organized this wonderful trip and **Coorg International school** for extending their hospitality. I would be failing in my duty if I do not acknowledge my sincere thanks to **Prasad Sir** and **Asha Ma'am** for providing me an opportunity to be a part of this program.