

Annual Report 2010



Nilgiri Natural History Society





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INTRODUCTION

‘ Nilgiri Natural History Society endeavors to redefine life, nature and humanity through an ecologically sound and socially responsible value system. It aims to permeate manifestations of actions and thought processes across all walks of life.’

The Nilgiri Natural History Society was started in 2010 by a group of individuals who have been working in the region of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve for 15 years and more. These individuals are part of Keystone Foundation and have decided to launch the society to include people who believe that ecological societies are possible, where people and biodiversity coexist. The Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve is a region which is alive with these examples and the society seeks to understand and learn from them.



AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

a. To promote ecological awareness among people

b. To design and implement projects aimed at promoting an ecologically sound and socially responsible value system

c. To undertake research activities towards furthering the knowledge base on the natural history of the region

d. To exchange all information with other organisations, groups and individuals working in the same area or other areas in India and abroad

e. To network and exchange skills with other Non Governmental Organisations, Private limited companies, institutions, donor agencies, government institutions and the government

f. To conduct campaigns and programmes for spreading awareness on the ecology

g. To publish documents for generating awareness among the public on ecological issues, natural history etc.

h. To promote and support research by other individuals, institutions, groups on areas of interest to the society

i. To raise funds, accept donations, grants, subscriptions, gifts, benefactions, presents and other offerings in cash or kind or moveable or immovable property and to deal with the same for the purpose of the NNHS



ACTIVITIES

(April 2010-March 2011)

I. BEE MUSEUM

The activities of the Nilgiri Natural History Society is linked to the Bee Museum. The events that have happened over the past year is as listed below:

- Dr. Tarun Chabra speaks of his experiences with the Toda and their use of forest species.
- Toda and Kota community members showcased their music and dance for us at the Museum premises and interacted with the audiences.
- On May 13th 2010 the Bee Museum got a facelift with new exhibits featuring pictures, information and interactive games centered on the theme of conservation issues in the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve. These exhibits were produced for the Bee Museum by the Nature Conservation Foundation, Mysore as part of their Nature Discovery Center initiative.
- Mr.D. Srinivasan, from the Perks Photography Institute, Coimbatore presented a slide show on the NBR and techniques of filming and aesthetics of photography, in July.
- A meeting of the Conservation Education Network Meeting on “Communication Strategies” was held at the Bee Museum on 21st October. Experts from various organizations discussed and planned better capacity building strategies to expand the outreach and extension methods for environment education.
- Mr. Kalyan Varma made a presentation of Conservation Issues in the Western Ghats.



- Members Irula community from Sigur Plateau came up to the Bee Museum in September and presented a programme of their lively song and dance.

- There were a series of visits by school children.

- August had two. One by a group of 44 students accompanied by 3 staff members from the Kendriya Vidyalaya, Ooty and the second brought 28 students and 2 faculty members of the Aditi International School, Bangalore.

- School Children from schools in Garkiyoor, Mavanahalla and Vazhithottam also visited the Museum for an interactive session at the Nature Discovery segment.



- 80 students and 8 staff members from the Good Earth School, Chennai visited in September.

- October saw 30 students and 4 faculty members from the Cliff School, Ooty.

- November had 15 students from the Netherlands.

- 5 children from Hebron School came to the Museum in December as part of their module on rural entrepreneur development.



2. CONSERVATION VILLAGE AWARDS FOR THE NILGIRI BIOSPHERE RESERVE

Starting this year, Conservation Village Awards were constituted to be presented annually to an adivasi village within the region of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve. The award carries a prize of Rupees One Lakh. Villages were invited to submit an application detailing ecologically and culturally sound initiatives that they have undertaken in their village. These initiatives can be about the shelter, agriculture, forest use, water, drainage systems, waste management, energy consumption, mitigation measures to avoid conflict with wildlife, education and health that they have implemented anytime within the past five years and which are still in practice to date. The application needs to also propose an innovative action plan on how the award money will be invested.

The Conservation Village Awards 2010 presentations were held at Keystone in June 2010. People from Kotagiri, Coonoor, Sigur, Pillur, Hasanur, Punanjanur and Nilambur participated for the Hubba .

The panel of judges was- Rev.Mulley from Coonoor, Mr. Manoharan from Gudalur(Accord), Ms. Snehlata Nath, Director, Keystone Foundation for the Hubba Conservation Award.



Nilambur of Malappuram, Kerala was represented by villages like Nedungayam, Kumbalapara and Appankappu. Kotagiri of Nilgiri, Tamil Nadu was represented by villages like Garikaiyur, Neramukkai, Bikkapathy mund and Vellaricombai. Sigur of Nilgiri, Tamil Nadu villages like Anaikatty, Chokkanalli, Kurumbarpallam . Hasanur of Erode, Tamil Nadu was represented by, villages like Bejalatty and Ramranai. Coonoor of Nilgiri, Tamil Nadu was represented by Sengalpudur and Pudukadu.

Representatives of all villages gave a detailed account of their village. no of families, government schemes, self help group working mechanism, traditional agriculture, traditional leaderships, education, health systems, conserving forests, transferring traditional knowledge to the younger generation and NGO's activities in their village. The session went on for the entire day including discussion about what they are going to do if they get the award.





The Conservation Village Award 2010 was won by Chokkanalli village, Sigur Area and jury's special award was given to the Kumbalapara village in Nilambur Area.

Chokanalli village

Chokanalli village is situated in Kadanadu Panchayath, Sigur plateau Nilgiri district, Tamil Nadu and India. This village is surrounded by forests of the dry deciduous and scrub types. The Sigur River runs close by. There are above 40 household belonging to the Irula tribe living in this village. The people are involved in cattle grazing, agriculture and NTFP collection. They are also involved in many conservation related work like, planting forest trees around their village and temple with saplings raised in the forest nursery by Keystone Foundation, documenting the wildlife and birds, and conserving medicinal plants. The youth have been involved in monitoring their forests and they did this by walking a fixed route twice a month and monitoring the climate condition, flowering, fruiting, disturbances (fire and invasive plants) and wildlife movement.

In the presentation to the award committee, Chokanalli village elder Veeraiah, explained the efforts of the village in forest conservation. He mentioned the planting and community monitoring efforts. He also explained how the people were dependant on the forest.

5 other youth from the village came forward to explain the effort they were all making in preserving their knowledge about the forests. The youth spoke about the monthly visits to the forest that were organized by Veeraiah for the children in which he explains about the medicinal plants and other aspects of the forest. The village has two Mariyamman temples and during the month of March festivals are held there. After the festival, a lot of plastic waste and other garbage is left behind. The youth organize the children of the village and they clean up the festival grounds. Veeraiah also told the committee about the book that he has produced on the uncultivated edible plants of the Sigur plateau called "Irula soppu dagu" and he also mentioned the pictorial guide to the forest plants of the Sigur region. They explained about how they are planning to utilize the award money.

In 2002, an electric motor was given to the village for irrigation by the Forest Department. However, most of the farmers in the village being small scale farmers, they have been unable to pay the electricity bills leading to their power supply being disconnected. The village hoped to use part of the award money towards settling these bills and renew subsistence farming which in turn would lead to reduced pressure on the forest.



Similarly, in 2008, the Forest department had installed a solar powered electric fence around the village to prevent crop raiding within the village, by wildlife. Due to poor maintenance, the fence did not work for more than a year. As a second proposal, the village wanted to spend some money to repair the solar fence. A third proposal for the utilization of award money was to repair a kerosene powered motor given to the village by Quiet Corner, an NGO based in Mavanalla, to promote agriculture, in 2002.

Once the solar fence is functional, the two motors would easily provide enough water from the Sigur River for all agriculture practices in the village. project. If they could settle this pending bill from the award money, they will be able to do subsistence farming in the village and would lead to reduce the pressure on the forest.

Kumbalapara Village

Kumbalapara village in Pothukal Grama Panchayath of Malappuram district, Kerala is surrounded by semi- evergreen forest. There are 13 households belonging to the Kaatunaicka tribe living in this village. All the villagers are members of Vaniyampuzha Adivasi Vana Samarakshana Samiti(AVSS) associated with the Nilambur North Forest Division.

Through the AVSS, the village is involved in forest protection activities like preventing forest fire, raising medicinal plant nurseries and assisted natural regeneration of plants in forest etc. Most of the people are involved in NTFP collection and few of them have daily wage work in a nearby rubber Estate. Villagers do not have patta for their land holding and agriculture is on a nominal scale. The village depends on the adjoining forest for fuelwood to cook and also for the nighttime watch and ward against elephants.

Kumpalapra villagers, in their application mentioned, “We live an eco-friendly life. We are living in a place which is 3 kilometres inside the forest from the forest boundary.



There are thirteen Kaatunaicka families in this village. All of them are forest gatherers with- no ration card, no electricity, no public water supply (of course, there is a beautiful stream running near the village), not even a single well, even though we have concrete houses we are not staying in it, no livestock (couple of dogs), no gas connection. We have a peripatetic school and a teacher who is staying in the village”. They said- “we will not do any sort of planting inside our forest with the award money because if we protect our forest from fire plants will come up. We collect lots of fire wood (daily around 15 kilograms) to burn at night, to see elephants walking in between houses. We would like to reduce the collection of firewood from the forest by setting up a solar lighting system”. The jury’s special award was given to the Kumbalapara village on their presentation.

The award was used to install solar lighting for each of the 13 households. The lighting kit was bought from Barefoot Power, India. The lights are adequate to provide light to each of the households. This also contributes towards the reduction in use of firewood to keep wild animals away from their houses.



3. FILM ON THE NILGIRI BIOSPHERE RESERVE

A documentary on the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve (NBR) is in the pipeline and will cover the story of indigenous people's lives around the major rivers such as the Chaliar, Bhavani, Kabani, and Moyar. NBR is home to more than 20 indigenous communities, the film tells the stories of the Toda, Cholanaikkan, Kurumba, and Irula indigenous people

This film is being produced and directed by members of the NNHS. The film is aimed at students, naturalists, researchers, tourists – everybody who has something to do with the NBR. The film will be screened by September 2011.



4. NBR RESOURCE PACK – 'to nurture a lifelong love for nature'

An NBR resource material for conservation education is being designed for adults who work with children. This is being done with the understanding that:

1. Learning requires the active participation of the student
2. Children learn in a variety of ways and in different degrees
3. Learning is both an individual and a group process

The educator-led activities, provided in the NBR Resource Pack, encourages children to understand biodiversity and nature through the NBR. The resource pack is scheduled for publication by September 2011

5. CONSERVATION EDUCATION IN THE NBR

4 summer camps were organized in Conservation Centers located in the villages where Keystone Foundation works. Approximately 80 children took part and were from various indigenous communities of the NBR. Besides these camps regular interactions are held at tribal residential schools across the NBR. These weekly interactions have been an ongoing activity.





6. NATURE INTERPRETATION CENTRE AT LONGWOOD SHOLA, KOTAGIRI

A nature interpretation center at Longwood Shola was launched in June 2011. An abandoned building belonging to the Forest department was renovated for use as an interpretation center by members of the NNHS. The effort was supported by the DFO Nilgiris North division, Shri S. Ramasubramanian (IFS). Information on the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, description of Longwood Shola and its importance, flora and fauna of the reserve, wetlands and water sources within the reserve, conservation values, and conservation action have been highlighted using posters. In the future live displays and more interactive information will be in place. A nature trail will be made within the reserve to promote awareness activities at the interpretation centre.



7. HERITAGE WALK

A heritage walk was organized in Coonoor on 5 February 2011, with Rev. P.K. Mulley being the resource person. There were 45 participants mostly school students from St. Hilda's, Ooty, Stanes School, Coonoor and members of NNHS. The walk was through the Attadi Road up to Tenefrie, the highest peak in Coonoor. Tiger Hill, Brooklands, All Saint's Cemetery were the other places covered and the walk ended at the All Saint's Church. The first in a series of such planned walks, this one proved to be a big success.

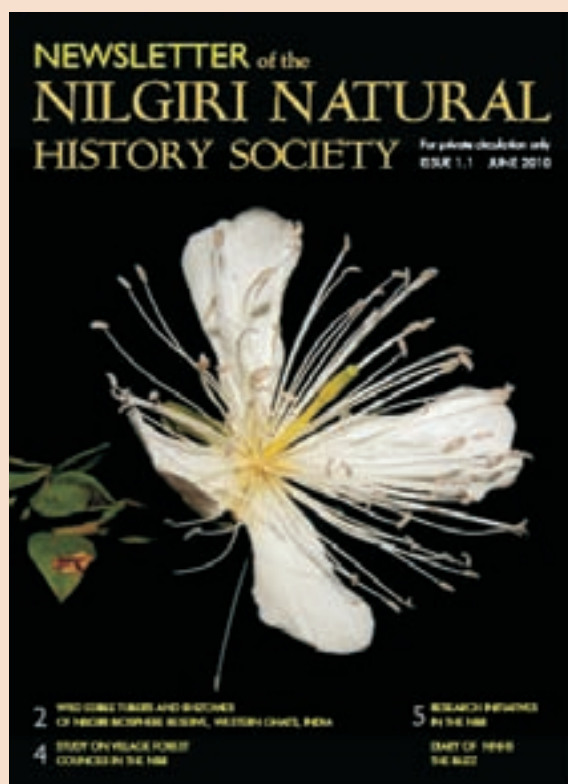


8. NEWSLETTER

The Society brings out two newsletters in a year. The newsletter expects to be a vibrant means of communication among the enthusiastic members of the NNHS, across their many walks of life. The newsletter has exclusive features from wallpapers that are produced by village conservation centres spread across the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve (NBR). Through these pages, we hope to share meanings and modes of conservation that are as much indicative of age old traditions as of future voices of change and dialogue in these communities. *Bidaru Satha* (sound of the bamboo) is the wall paper of the Velleri Combei conservation center in the Eastern Slopes of the Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu produced in Tamil. *Nisarga suddhi* (nature news) from Punanjanur, Chamrajnagar, Karnataka in Kannada and *Kattu poovu* (flower of the forest) from Appankappu, Nilambur, Kerala in Malayalam capture the pulse of the NBR.

There is a special focus on species, which intends to profile species which are endemic to the Western Ghats and present in the region of the NBR. Diary of NNHS is a report of the activities of the society for the past quarter and brings members and others on board with key events. The Buzz takes one through the events and happenings at the Bee Museum. Bringing special focus to the conservation and linked work that happens in the NBR is the Under the Lens section

The newsletter over the years we envision will read as a monograph on the NBR and we invite all our readers to be a part of it. We also invite members and people working on issues related to conservation and its linkages to contribute to this section. We wish to invite students who are working in the region of the NBR on various research questions to contribute to the section on Research Initiatives. The newsletter also features a column by Rev. P.K. Mulley, a cultural anthropologist of the region. A new section was added which profiles lesser known or amateur naturalists of the region. The electronic copy of the newsletter is available at nnhs.in



FINANCE

The audited copy of the financial transactions for the year 2010-11 is available as a separate annexure.



MEMBERSHIP DETAILS



Membership is invited under the following categories:

• **STUDENT MEMBERSHIP** – All those who are in the age group of 10-17 years, and identify with and are willing to contribute to the vision and objects of the society would be eligible for this. They would be eligible to attend the General Body Meetings and enjoy such privileges as may be notified by the Executive Committee from time to time. The student members would not have any voting right in the Society. The membership fee is Rs. 100 per year.

• **ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP** – All those above 17 years of age, who identify with and are willing to contribute to the vision and objectives of the society would be eligible for this. They would be eligible to attend the General Body Meetings and enjoy such privileges as may be notified by the Executive Committee from time to time. The associate members would not have any voting right in the Society. The membership fee is Rs. 100 per year.

• **INDIVIDUAL MEMBERSHIP** – Any individual who identifies with and is willing to contribute to the vision and objects of the society is eligible to apply for membership of the Society by submitting the duly filled in membership form of the Society along with the prevailing annual or life membership fee. The applicant may become a member of the Society upon approval by the Executive Committee. The decision of the Executive Committee shall be final. The annual membership fee for individuals is Rs. 250 per year and the Life membership fee is Rs 2,000.

• **INSTITUTIONAL MEMBERSHIP** - Any institution which identifies with and is willing to contribute to the vision and of the society is eligible to apply for membership of the Society by submitting

- the duly filled in membership form of the Society along with the prevailing annual or life membership fee. The applicant institution may become a member of the Society upon approval by the Executive Committee. The decision of the Executive Committee shall be final. The annual membership fee for institutions is Rs 2,000 per year and the Life membership fee is Rs 10,000.

ORGANISATIONAL INFORMATION

Nilgiri Natural History Society is registered under the Tamil Nadu Societies
Registration Act , 1975 (Tamil Nadu Act 27 of 1975)
Registration No. 54/2010

REGISTERED & MAILING ADDRESS

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