

Annual Report

2011-12



Nilgiri Natural History Society



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INTRODUCTION

The 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



MEMBERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

The Society has the following categories of membership:

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.

The NNHS has 105 members as of 31st March 2012, including three institutional members, 64 individual life members, 22 individual annual members, two associate members and 14 student members. The Society has a 10 member Executive Committee. The members of the Executive Committee are,

Sumin George Thomas (President)

Senthil Prasad (Secretary)

Balachander T (Treasurer)

Anita Varghese

Archana Sivaramakrishnan

Easwaran H R

Robert Alexander Leo

Samraj T

Saneesh C S

Selvi N

The byelaws and registration documents of the Society are available online at nnhs.in/http://nnhs.in/category/resources.



ACTIVITIES

Village Conservation Awards

Village conservation awards were instituted this year to be presented annually to an adivasi village within the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve. The villages were invited to submit applications detailing ecologically and culturally sound initiatives that they have undertaken in their village. There were mixed responses from the communities and there were 34 villages who expressed their interest in the award.

The villages were asked to present their activities to a jury comprising Rev. Philip K. Mulley, Anthropologist, Mr. Mathew John, Keystone Foundation and Ms. Anju Sharma, Trustee Keystone Foundation. The award was given to Vellerikombai village in Kotagiri for their



efforts in conservation activities in their village land. They decided to use the award money to Repair the water pipe line to the village from nearby forested land (Koovakkarai) so that they could continue agricultural activities, repair one of their traditional temple, and repair and maintain their Village Conservation Center. A special jury award was given to Punanjanur village in Chamarajnager district of Karnataka and the award money was used to repair a water supply system and to support the future study of school opt out students. Attempts have been taken to increase the level of participation and also assess how communities have understood this concept.

Bee Museum

Inaugurated in October 2006 by the then Secretary, Minister of Tribal Affairs, Ms. Meena Gupta, the museum, first of its kind with a focus on honey bees of India, tells of the ecology of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve and the livelihoods of the honey gatherers. The museum has a steady flow of visitors and activity modules for children.

The Bee Museum at Ooty started off as an initiative of Keystone Foundation. The Society has since then taken over the running of the Bee Museum and it is now the hub of the Society's activities.

Visits by Students

The year saw visits to the Bee Museum of students from Chennai NCS School, Chennai, Hebbron School, Ooty, Nilgiri Adivasi Welfare Association (NAWA), Kotagiri, Woodside School, Ooty, Mavanalla Government Tribal Residential (GTR) Middle School, St. Theresa's High School, Ooty, CSI Hobart Middle School, Ooty, Crescent Play School, Ooty, CSI CMM Higher Secondary School, Ooty, Kozikarai CSI GTR School, Mumbai, M.D. Patel College, Hyderabad Environmental Science College, Hyderabad, Emerald Heights College, Ooty, Ooty Government Arts College, Bangalore Yoga College, Sri Natraj Camp, Andhra Pradesh, Attapadi Village, Aravenu, Banagudi Solai, Karikaiyoor and Bangalapadigai.



Children's Day Celebration

Children's day was celebrated by the NNHS at the Bee Museum. The gathering of 50 students, ages ranging from 10 to 15 years, was possible due to their shared belief that people and biodiversity can co-exist. Many possible avenues stemming from this idea were explored throughout the day. Children from Stanes Anglo-Indian, Riverside Public School and Rishi Valley School attended the programme. Chief Guest, Pranjali Bandhu, a writer and NNHS member from Ooty, spoke of her experiences with the natural world as a child and encouraged the children to continue observing and engaging with the vast natural and cultural heritage of the Nilgiris.

The children were given a tour of the Bee Museum which was followed by the screening of a number of short films and listening to bird calls. This was followed by a quiz on the same. Kota dancers and musicians then performed for the children who were in awe of their skilful movements. Soon, the dancers were joined by the children, and together they danced a traditional Kota dance. The programme concluded with the handing out of certificates and prizes to all the students, and a few group photographs.



Talk on Waste Management

A talk on Waste Management centred on the work being carried out by the Blue Warriors, with 500 households in villages around Kotagiri, was organized by the NNHS. The Blue Warriors are a group of children who monitor and maintain source segregation of waste within four villages. This project was initiated by Arun Bellie,

a local from Kotagiri who strongly believes that source segregation is the answer to our problems with waste. The Divisional Forest Officer, North Division, Mr. S Ramasubramanian as well as the President and Vice-president of Hubbathalai Panchayat were in attendance. Individuals from Blue Mountains School, Monarch College, Inner Wheel, YWCA, Nilgiri Wildlife Association, NNHS members as well as other locals from Ooty were present. In all, 40 persons from a variety of age groups attended this talk. Various ideas on means of implementation were discussed as well and a follow-up on the same is in progress.

Crafts Bazaar

A Traditional Crafts Bazaar was organized at the end of December. Kurumba, Irula, and Toda artisans presented their traditional knowledge and skills via handicraft stalls.

Talk on Fragmentation, pollination web, plant and bee diversity in relation to pollination

The Bee Museum talk in February 2012 was by Dr. Amots Dafni, Professor, Department of Evolutionary Biology and a world renowned pollination ecologist.

The talk was titled "Fragmentation, Pollination Web, Plant and Bee Diversity in Relation to Pollination – A case study of *Iris Artropurpurea* in Israel'. The audience included students from different schools and the Arts College, Ooty apart from other NNHS members. Dr. Dafni highlighted the importance of pollination among plant communities and what it means to the world. He



He talked about the adaptation of species and in certain cases their extinction from the world. He highlighted the case study of the *Iris Artropurpurea* species, which was followed by a lively question and answer session.

Talk on Nilgirica Upstream

A talk and discussion on a comprehensive design for holistic regeneration of the Nilgiris was organised at the Bee Museum. A small group of interested individuals attended and participated in the discussion. A presentation by Godwin Vasanth kick started the event and provided structure to the forum's discussion. [Nilgirica Upstream](#) is a holistic systems design for the regeneration of the region around the ancient mountains of Nilgiris in Southern India. Nilgirica is the proposed Bioregion name for the area around the Nilgiri massif. The design addresses ecological, social and developmental problems at its root and connects the scenario around the massif to global processes, pressures and developments. The design is based on intrinsic elements and underlying natural systems of the Nilgiris, and is focused on their holistic regeneration.

Workshop on Cooking with weeds

The year came to an end with an intriguing workshop on cooking with local and wild edible plants, conducted by Cata and Blanca of [Ayurfusion](#). After briefing the participants on their journey with food, the cooking began. Participants helped prepare a localised variation of lasagna containing multiple types of keeray that was then baked in a



home-made oven. Additionally, two salads assembled primarily from locally found flowers, ragi bread and a scrumptious yam fruit cake were prepared and devoured by participants. Those that attended considered it to be a wonderful learning experience, both with regards the benefits of cooking with local and wild edible plants as well as developing a healthier lifestyle.

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 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 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.

Eco Quest, Mysore

Eco Quest, a nature discovery center, an initiative of Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF, Mysore) was launched by the well known herpetologist Romulus Whitaker in April 2011. This nature discovery center aims to provide a forum for

citizens of Mysore to converse and connect with one another on nature, wildlife and conservation. The center has a hall with creative activities for young visitors, and provides facilities for educational activities relating to wildlife and conservation. Beside this is the Green Shop, an



outlet of the Last Forest Enterprises, which markets fair trade and organic produce.

Conservation Education in the NBR

Four summer camps were organized in Conservation Centers located in the villages where Keystone Foundation works. Around 80 children from various indigenous communities of the NBR participated in them. Besides these camps, regular interactions were held at tribal residential schools across the NBR. These weekly interactions have been an ongoing activity.

First Annual General Body Meeting

The first AGM was conducted on the 15th of August 2011. This meeting was attended by 17 members who came together to discuss and review the previous year's Annual report and Audit report, as well as plan future activities and projects to be undertaken by the NNHS. Additionally, a core group was formed to meet on a monthly basis to assess and plan for NNHS activities.

Longwood Shola and Kodanad Genepool trail

Our trail began with an introduction to Longwood Shola through the recently launched Nature Interpretation Centre and by our resource person for the day, T Samraj, an Executive Member of the NNHS. After spending some time at the Centre for better understanding the Shola patch we were soon to explore, we began our trail. Longwood Shola presented us with wonderful and



immense plant and bird diversity. From here we moved on to the Kodanad Genepool, where a variety of plants endemic to the Nilgiris and Western Ghats

were spotted. Keeping the group size small allowed for interesting discussions and interactions. Both the locations visited helped those who attended the trail gain insights into the purposes they serve and the wonders of nature to be found so close to the town of Kotagiri.

Film screenings at schools in Coonoor and Kotagiri

NNHS organised screenings of Honey Hunters of the Blue Mountains (a film by Keystone Foundation) at Brindawan, Stanes Anglo-Indian and Riverside Public Schools. These screenings were followed by questions from students regarding the collection of wild honey and the indigenous communities involved in this activity. The purpose of this interaction was to initiate dialogue and invite students to participate in activities organised by the NNHS.

Talk on Human-Wildlife Conflict, Coonoor

As an integral part of our celebration of people and wildlife, a talk and discussion on incidents and issues of Human-Wildlife Conflict in and around Coonoor was held at Coonoor Club..

The turnout of around 45 persons primarily consisted of owners and managers from nearby estates along with members of the Coonoor Club and other interested individuals. They included YMCA, Tranquilitea, Citizen Seithigal, Coonoor Merchants Association, Nonsuch Tea Estate, Craigmore Plantations, Belmont Tea & Produce Co., Wood Cote Estate, Sutton Estate, and Kattery Estate.

We began with a brief introduction on the NNHS



followed by a presentation by Snehlata Nath of Keystone Foundation, also an Honourary Executive Member of the NNHS. A. Paulraj, Forest Range Officer, Coonoor spoke of human-wildlife conflict issues within his division and answered questions posed by those present. The dialogue that followed was engaging and filled with a variety of perspectives and solutions for mitigation.

It was additionally suggested that other such forums be organised, including more stakeholders. The NNHS therefore undertook similar discussions in Ooty and Kotagiri.

GTR school poster competition

A poster competition was held at the Government Tribal Residential (GTR) Schools at Sigur and Pillur. The children were asked to draw and write about their ideas on 'Environment and Waste' and possible ways of solid waste management. The posters were reviewed by staff at Keystone Foundation and prizes distributed in both schools.

Sigur trail

The Sigur Plateau is at the centre of the Nilgiri Hills and Eastern Ghats and is a crucial area of wildlife habitats as it links the two regions. Around 700m above sea level, the dry-deciduous forest that covers the plateau provided a different variety of flora and fauna to be appreciated.

After gathering at the Keystone Resource Centre at Vazhaithottam, the group of 15 participants proceeded to Anaikatti from where the trail into the forest began. The Sigur Plateau offered breath



taking views of the unique floral diversity as well as the Moyar Falls. The place was excellent for trekking and with resource person, Senthil Prasad, we were able to enjoy the beautiful adjoining forest areas, hilly terrain and the enchanting wildlife. In spite of the oppressive heat, we were rewarded with sightings of numerous elephants, spotted deer, common langur, peacock and sambar. Bird lovers also found the place interesting due to the amount of birds we were able to spot, especially the critically endangered Indian White Backed Vulture.

HWC talk, Kotagiri

A public talk and discussion on issues and incidents of Human-wildlife conflict was organised at Mudhaiya Hall, Ramesh Vihar Hotel, Kotagiri. 30 persons from The Kotagiri Wildlife Association, Kotagiri Drivers Association, Kotagiri Market Association, a group of farmers from Nedugula and other interested individuals attended and participated in the discussion.



Presentations made by T Samraj and Robert Leo of Keystone Foundation kick started the event and provided structure to the forum's discussion. Both direct and indirect causes of human-wildlife conflict were concentrated on, as were perceptions of conflict.

Representatives from the Forest Department were present as well and addressed various questions and complaints of those gathered.

This discussion is part of a series of similar discussions organised by NNHS on human-wildlife conflict, with various different stakeholders.

Solid waste management talk, Coonoor

As part of a series of talks on Solid Waste Management by Arun Bellie and the Blue Mountain Warriors, an open discussion was held at St Sebastian Church Hall, Coonoor in December. Individuals from Coonoor and surrounding villages participated in the event which involved telling of personal experiences by the Blue Mountain Warriors, children from schools within the Nilgiris.

Wetland Biodiversity survey

As part of a Keystone project on wetlands and their conservation, NNHS members participated in a series of biodiversity surveys at Taranad mund and Bison swamp on to monitor biodiversity in the dry season.

Bikkapathy Mund Trail

The trail was set on a sunny day and there were enthusiastic participants from all corners, including a large group from Europe. The trail began at the Toda mund. The participants got an opportunity to interacted with the Todas and got to look at their traditional houses, their buffalo pens,



their traditional embroidery shawls and got an insight of their symbiosis with nature. Further on the trail they had a bird's eye view of the Sigur plateau with the running grasslands and sholas. They were interested to hear about the community bee reserve and took a peek at a couple of bee cavities in the trees nearby. They took stock of the birdlife including the sighting of a black eagle. They also saw some fauna like the Gaur and Malabar Giant Squirrel. Some were interested in the

vegetation looking at the strobilanthus spp and few medicinal plants like gaultheria etc.

Talk on Cultural Linkages amongst the tribal communities in the Nilgiris

The talk was held at the Bee Museum during the month of January 2012 and cultural anthropologist Rev Philip Mulley briefed about certain historic perspectives and why and how these linkages work. There were more than twenty participants including school children.

Wetland Day celebration

The wetland day was celebrated at Happy Valley, Mission compound at Kotagiri on February 25th 2012. Around 50 school children from Hill Fort and CSI schools participated by planting new saplings at the wetland. The Town Panchayat President Mr. Vappu presided



over the function and others present were the Councillors Saravanan and Kannan along with officials from the Forest Department officials and the TWAD board. Some teachers from these schools also spoke of the importance of the wetlands and the wetland species. The local residents of the Happy Valley also participated in the awareness campaign.

Cairn Hill trail

Situated 2200m above sea level, the entrance road to Cairn Hill is flanked by dense cypress trees. A hotspot for birds such as the Nilgiri Laughing thrush, Nilgiri Blue Robin, White-bellied Shortwing, Black-and-Rufous Flycatcher, Rusty-tailed and Nilgiri Flycatchers, Cairn Hill is situated about 3 km from Ooty on the road to Avalanche. Guided by Mr Bhoopathy from Kotagiri, participants met at the

Bee Museum where they were briefed about the history of Cairn hill and its teeming bird life. This was followed by a 3 hour walk through the deciduous forest, which is a perfect place for birders.

FINANCES

The Audited Financial Statements for the year 2011-12 are available as a separate annexure. They are also uploaded onto the Society's website at nshs.in. The auditors for the Society are Srivatsan & Gita, Coimbatore.

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