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These techies go wild during weekends

Meet these corporate volunteers who spend their free time in forests for the cause of protecting wildlife

By Niranjan Kaggere**Posted On Wednesday, January 14, 2009**

Weekends are, naturally, the treasured days for the city techies and corporate associates. After a hectic week, many of them throng the swanky malls, pubs, discos and multiplexes these two days to unwind. But far from the din and bustle of the city, a group of volunteers, a majority of them are corporate professionals, spends its weekends protecting wildlife.

Weekend 'classes'

Every weekend, they travel all the way to Bandipur and Nagarhole to educate the road-users and drivers on the rules they should follow in the forest areas. They ask people to drive slowly to prevent road accidents that involve animals.

And they paint the roads to alert vehicle users about the passing of animals during the night and day. All this is part of an initiative taken by the city-based Kenneth Anderson Nature Society (KANS) and its massive field conservation programme.

Active volunteering

According to Laxmeesha Acharya, president of the society, the conservation programme started during the 54th Wildlife Week celebrations in late October 2008. "Since then, the programme is gaining momentum with the active participation of interested people who volunteer themselves for a cause despite their busy schedule. One team dedicates its weekends for a month and every month, the teams of volunteers keep changing. The fourth such monthly activity since the inception of the programme will be held on Jan 25 and 26," he said.

Explaining the importance of such an initiative, Laxmeesha says, "In Karnataka, many forest areas have either the state highway or national highway passing through them. The density of traffic is very high and vehicles go at a very high speed. This puts wildlife in great danger. Though the roads cannot be blocked completely, useful alternatives can mitigate the risk. Hence, we started educating people on the importance of following traffic rules inside the forest areas. We have been guided by people who have gained expertise in wildlife conservation."

Multilingual presentations

The volunteers have designed their presentations in Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil and English. "We distribute these pamphlets to vehicle users who pass through the Bandipur National Park. A few drivers take the materials and leave, while many of them stop and listen to our presentations which take just a few minutes. Sometimes, we explain to them the dangers involved in speed driving through detailed presentations comprising pictures," explained a volunteer.

"Not just the drivers, but also travellers in buses are also educated about the issue. We work all through the day educating the vehicle users. On a normal day, around 1,000 vehicles pass through Bandipur. The traffic surges during festivals and weekends," says Laxmeesha.

Besides this, the team also ventures out to Rajiv Gandhi (Nagarhole) National Park and

takes up road maintenance work. "Volunteers work on aligning the speed breakers and improve their visibility by painting them. Moving further with the programme, we plan to take up the same activity in the Melagiri region of Krishnagiri district in Tamil Nadu which is an important elephant corridor," says another member.

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