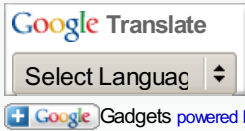


Translate this Article

**What did you spot? Elephant or dung?**

Bangaloreans jump at opportunity to see animals in natural habitat while conducting a headcount

By Sridhar Vivan

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Their mission: to get the animal headcount. The larger aim is to get the government to declare Melagiris (the forests near Bangalore that fall in neighbouring Tamil Nadu) a sanctuary, which will ensure protection to the animal population.

Participants includes techies, students, housewives and wildlife enthusiasts. They were brought together by Bangalore-based Kenneth Anderson Nature Society, which conducted the survey along with the Tamil Nadu forest department, on March 19-20.

After a formal meeting at the Mathigiri forest office, the volunteers were divided into groups that were named Hosur, Anchetti, Denkanikottai, Jowalagiri, Royakottai, Urigam and Krishnagiri. These are the names of the forests in the periphery of Bangalore, which collectively are known as Melagiris.

On day one, which was Saturday, the volunteers were to walk in the forests along with forest guards and report direct sightings of animals, said Sriram Kumar, a techie working for Tektronix. In the afternoon session, they were told to sit near a water hole frequented by animals. On Sunday morning, they were told to report the pugmarks of carnivores. In the afternoon, they were told to record sightings of animal scat (excrement).

One of the participants was Kiran Gopinath, CEO, Ozone Media. He said, "I have been a wildlife enthusiast for over 10 years. The thrill and joy of spending time in a forest is unparalleled. It is sheer joy to walk in the forests, breathe fresh air and spot wildlife. It is important to conserve our wildlife and forests for many reasons. One is to ensure that the resources of our planet last longer. Surveys and studies about our flora and fauna help us the state of our natural wealth and allow overnments/society to make necessary improvements in managing our forests."

so, what did you see?

After two days in the forests, while some volunteers spotted herds of elephants, others had to console themselves with the animal's scat. A few volunteers were lucky enough to spot a leopard's pugmark, deer, chitals or other animals. To the organisers, every trace of the animals counted.

C S Swaminathan, general manager with Wipro Technologies, said, "Participating in the survey was a great opportunity for me to see first-hand how animals are doing in protected forest areas. I spent two days looking for evidence of animal activity and was thrilled to report the presence of elephants, leopard, spotted deer, wild dogs and some other mammals. It was good to meet, interact and work alongside dedicated, conservation-minded volunteers, many of whom had travelled long distances to participate in this endeavour. I hope such surveys lead to better conservation strategies for wildlife and help reduce man-animal conflict."

Geetanjali Dhar, a home-maker, said, "I am into wildlife tourism. I was part of the tiger census last year. When I heard about the mammal survey, I wanted to participate. I managed to spot deer, mongoose and wild boar. Among the birds, I saw the changeable hawk eagle, flower peckers and sun birds."

After the two-day experience, these Bangaloreans vowed to make their surroundings a safe habitat for animals.

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Kiran Gopinath, CEO, Ozone Media