



WWF

NEWS  
LETTER

KERALA

2011

January - February 2011

# Mruthika

Newsletter of WWF - India, Kerala State Office

## FROM THE STATE DIRECTOR'S DESK

The series of one day programmes as part of the Teachers Training Workshops being organized in Kerala with the support of CPREEC, Chennai is successfully going on. The last two months witnessed four programmes covering Thiruvananthapuram, Kottayam and Palakkad. Human – wildlife conflict is a serious issue which has been on the increase in the recent past mainly attributed to encroachment, deterioration of forest ecosystem due to grazing, imbalance in prey – predator relationship etc. This was one of the most seriously discussed and debated issue in the fourth Southern States Forest Minister's Meeting convened in Thiruvananthapuram. The draft report of WWF's study on Human Elephant Conflict in Anayirangal and surrounding areas in Munnar was invited to aid in the discussions. The workshop on tools for achieving environmental democracy organized by River Research Centre at Mangalavanam saw many active environmentalists and conservation organizations discussing and debating on the present environmental issues and how existing laws and legislations can be used to curd unsustainable development projects. The experience sharing by Ritwick Dutta and Sreedhar was a real good learning

process for all. One of the Network Initiatives of WWF-India is on conservation of marine turtles, mainly the Olive Riddleys. It has been decided to conduct a comprehensive survey along the Indian Coast to develop a clear understanding of the status of marine turtles, issues in conservation and the attitude and perceptions of the various stakeholders involved. The Kerala component of this survey has got off to a start with Mr. Murukan joining in as Project Officer. He has started his survey from north Kerala and is following a common data collection format. He says that it has been a rather thrilling experience with meeting the coastal people, interacting with them and understanding the socio-economic-environmental issues. We expect that the survey will come out with a clear cut action plan for protection of the marine turtles along Kerala Coast and also the wealth of other information gathered as part of the project will help us to address the various other issues along the coast and its people. Hope the reading of this newsletter will be a great learning experience for you also.

**Renjan Mathew Varghese,**  
State Director

## IMPORTANT NEWS ON ENVIRONMENT AND NATURE

### GLOBAL

#### CO2 fear over mass tree deaths in Amazon

Billions of trees died in the record drought that struck the Amazon basin in 2010, raising fears the vast forest is on the verge of a tipping point, where it will stop absorbing greenhouse gas emissions and instead increase them. The dense forests of the Amazon soak up more than a quarter of the world's atmospheric carbon, making it a critically important buffer against global warming. But if the Amazon switches from a carbon sink to a carbon source, that prompts further droughts

and mass tree deaths, such a feedback loop could cause runaway climate change, with disastrous consequences. "We can't just wait and see because there is no going back," said tropical forest expert Dr. Simon Lewis. "We won't know we have passed the point where the Amazon turns from a sink to a source until afterwards, when it will be too late." Dr. Alex Bowen, from the London School of Economics Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change, said huge emissions of carbon from the Amazon would make it even harder to keep global greenhouse gases at a low enough level to avoid dangerous climate change. "It therefore makes it even more important for there to be strong and urgent reductions in man-made emissions". The revelation of mass tree deaths in the Amazon is a major blow to

efforts to reduce the destruction of the world's forests, one of the biggest sources of global carbon emissions. The recent use of satellite imagery by Brazilian law enforcement teams has drastically cut deforestation rates and replanting in Asia had slowed the net loss. The 2010 Amazonian drought resulted in several state-of-emergency being declared and the lowest ever level of the major tributary, the Rio Negro. Lewis examined satellite-derived rainfall measurements and found that the 2010 drought was even worse than the very severe 2005 drought, affecting an area 60 per cent wider with a harsh dry season. "The Amazon is such a big area that even a small shift there can have a global impact," said Lewis. He also expects the drought to have an impact on the animals that live in the region, one of the most biodiverse places on Earth. (Source: *Guardian Newspapers Limited, 2011*)

### **Ivory shipment seized**

Thai authorities have seized a large shipment of ivory (69 elephant tusks and four other pieces of ivory) being smuggled from Mozambique, Africa, at Thailand's main Suvarnabhumi Airport on January 5. According to the Director General of the Thai Customs Department, airport officials seized the containers labeled as "personal use property", after a tip-off from the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) network. The consignment, that weighed 435 kg, was packed in two containers en route for Laos' capital Vientiane. The ivory is worth 10 million baht (\$3,31,000). Trade in elephant ivory is restricted/ prohibited under the CITES and Thailand's Wildlife Preservation and Protection Act B.E. 2535 (1992). In 2010, Thai airport officials intercepted close to 4.5 tonnes of African elephant ivory. Wildlife experts say Thailand is a commonly-used global transit point for the illegal trafficking of animal parts and is also a hub for ivory carving. (Source: *The Hindu, 7 January, 2011*)

## **NATIONAL**

### **'Fast start finance for climate change has not even passed double digit'**

With the so-called "fast start finance" for climate change completely missing over a year after it was promised at Copenhagen, major emerging economies have accused rich countries of trying to pass off existing funding to the wrong recipients as part of their pledges. Environment Ministers of the BASIC bloc - Brazil, Argentina, South Africa, India and China - who held discussions warned

that this flow of money was the key to the future of climate change negotiations. At the U.N. Climate Change Summit at Copenhagen in December 2009, rich nations pledged to give \$30 billion in "fast start finance" between 2010 and 2012 to help the poorest countries and those most affected by climate change. It was supposed to have been new and additional money meant specifically for small island states, African nations and the least developed countries. However, more than 14 months after the promises were made they are yet to be kept. "I would be surprised if the total disbursement so far goes beyond two digits," said Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh, in a scathing indictment of developed countries. Instead, he says, rich nations are attempting to sneak in their existing aid to large developing economies as part of the "fast start finance" package. "The U.S. has listed an amount of \$26 million to India as part of their fast start finance pledges," said Mr. Ramesh. This failure to deliver on fast start finance was "the single biggest disappointment after the grand bargain at Copenhagen", he added. (Source: *The Hindu, 28 February, 2011*)

### **Nature Forever Society to launch Project SOS to save the sparrow**

As the countdown to the World Sparrow Day (WSD) on March 20 - a celebration of the much-cherished but fast-disappearing sparrow - begins, the Nature Forever Society (NFS) has decided to launch Project SOS: Save Our Sparrows by distributing 52,000 bird feeders to interested citizens, institutions and organisations across the country. Describing it as a unique functional conservation programme involving common people, India's well-known Sparrow Man Mohammed E. Dilawar of the NFS says the feeders, to be distributed free-of-cost in association with Burhani Foundation (India), could be installed in homes, open yards, balconies and even office premises. Feeders have proved to be the best medium of saving the diminutive bird, whose dwindling population, especially in cities, has become a cause of worry. Another interesting feature of the WSD this year is to look beyond house sparrows and expand the celebrations to 26 species of sparrows found across the world. In one of the firsts, NFS has acquired exclusive photographs and information on as many as 22 of the 26 species, which are now available on its dedicated interactive website: [www.worldsparrowday.org](http://www.worldsparrowday.org). (Source: *The Hindu, 05 February, 2011*)

### **Swaminathan: document indigenous climate-resilient farming knowledge**

Agriculture Scientist Dr. M.S.Swaminathan called for

documenting indigenous farming knowledge which coped with monsoon vagaries. In earlier days when there was no irrigation, farmers were prepared for floods and droughts. The climate-resilient farming was a way of life in those days, and people went in for mixed cropping. He said a publication could be brought out on procedures adopted by farmers and how effective they were in coping with climate swings. Addressing a Symposium on Climate Change at the 98<sup>th</sup> Indian Science Congress at Kattankulathur, he pointed out that 127 agro-climatic zones had been identified in the country based on the cropping and weather factors. He urged that climate risk management research and training centers be set up in each zone. Through the centres, alternative cropping strategies and methods of checking potential adverse conditions should be developed. (Source: *The Hindu*, 6 January, 2011)

## STATE

### Slow death awaits Sasthamcotta Lake

The over-exploited Sasthamcotta Lake is heading for a major crisis with a new drinking water scheme to be launched from it shortly. The Chavara-Panmana Water Supply Scheme from the lake will be commissioned on January 12, ignoring the warnings of an Expert Committee which looked into its partial drying up during the last summer. A recent hydrological study carried out by the Centre for Water Resources Development and Management (CWRDM), Kozhikode, had cautioned against any additional exploitation of water from the lake. It had also recommended detailed studies before burdening it any further. Incidentally, Sasthamcotta is one of the 25 Ramsar sites of international significance in the country. The signatories of the Ramsar Convention, including India, are expected to maintain the ecological character of their wetlands of international importance and plan its sustainable use. It is estimated that already 37.5 MLD water is drawn from the lake for meeting the drinking water needs of over seven-lakh people of Kollam district and adjoining areas. The new project will draw an additional 12 Million Litres per Day (MLD) from it. During the last monsoon, there was a shortage of 13 per cent rain and the water exploitation from this rain-fed lake was not regulated accordingly. The exploited volume remained unchanged during both the summer and the monsoon months resulting in the drying up of vast stretches of the water body, the report said. Ideally, the outflow from a water body should be limited to 60 per cent of its inflow. In this case, it had crossed

70 per cent and any added pressure would eventually kill the lake. There is also the risk of deterioration of water quality and the water supply pipes going dry in Kollam, cautioned experts. (Source: *The Hindu*, 3 January, 2011)

### Bat fish, Razor fish, Frog crab rediscovered

Three unique marine organisms, Deep Sea Smoky Bat fish, Grooved Razor fish and Frog crab, have been re-recorded from Indian waters after a gap of over a century. Cruises on board ocean research vessel 'Sagar Sampada' in the Bay of Bengal yielded the species. The specimens were collected off the Andhra Pradesh coast during the cruises held between August and September 2009. It took over a year for the identification and validation of the species, scientists of the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute said. Bat fish was first described in 1894 after it was spotted in the Bay of Bengal. The recent collection of the species came off Tamarapatnam at a depth of 100 metres and after 116 years of its identification, said scientists E.Vivekanandan and R. Jeyabaskaran. Razor fish, also known as Shrimpfish and Pipette feeders, was first reported in India from the Gulf of Mannar by renowned fisheries expert Francis Day in 1878. The rediscovery was from the area off Singarayakonda from a depth of 30 metres. The Frog crab was first found in 1933 based on a single specimen collected from the Andaman Sea in 1898. The recent find of four specimens were from an area off Tamarapatnam at a depth of 100 meters. The rediscovery came after a gap of 120 years. (Source: *The Hindu*, 5 January, 2011)

### Survey finds 200 bird species in Wayanad

The Malabar Ornithological Survey 2010-11, the first ever comprehensive study on avifauna in north Kerala, has proved that the Wayanad part of the Western Ghats is a critical habitat for endemic as well as endangered birds. The team sighted 200 species, including 14 of the 16 endemic species and two critically endangered species, during the two-month survey in Wayanad district. The team told that the Vellarimala-Chembra regions were of high conservation value because of its unique biodiversity. "We found an excellent population of Black-chinned laughing thrush, an endemic and endangered bird species, whose presence is mostly confined to the Vellarimala and Brahmagiri mountains of Wayanad region," they said. Other endemic birds reported from the region include the Black-and-Orange Flycatcher, Rufous-bellied Shortwing, Nilgiri Flycatcher, Wayanad laughing thrush, Small Sunbird, Malabar grey Hornbill and White-bellied

blue Flycatcher. The team sighted some rare species, including the Scaly Thrush, Oriental dwarf Kingfisher, Black-capped Kingfisher, Olive-backed Tree Pipit, Speckled Piculet, Nilgiri Wood Pigeon, Mountain Hawk-Eagle and Jerdon's Baza. The team also found Brown-rock Pipit on the Chembra mountain, the first record of the species from north of the Palghat Gap. (Source: *The Hindu*, 28, January, 2011)

## SPECIES OF THE ISSUE

### Long billed Vulture



The Long billed Vulture or otherwise known as Indian Vulture (*Gyps indicus*) is distributed mainly on crags in the hills of Sind in Pakistan, central and peninsular India. The species breeds mainly on cliffs, but is known to use trees to nest in Rajasthan. Like other vultures it is a scavenger, feeding mostly on carcasses of dead animals which it finds by soaring over savannah and around human habitation. They often move in flocks. It has a bald head, very broad wings and short tail feathers. It weighs between 5.5 and 6.3 kg and measures 80-100 cm in length and 205 to 229 cm across the wings. It is distinguished from other species by its less buff body and wing coverts. They have suffered a 97%–99% population decrease in Pakistan and India. The cause of this has been identified as poisoning caused by the veterinary drug Diclofenac, which is a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug and when given to working animals it can reduce joint pain and so keep them working longer. The drug usually enters the vultures when they feed on the flesh of dead cattle which were given Diclofenac in the last days of life. Diclofenac causes kidney failure in vultures. Captive-breeding programmes for several species of Indian vulture have been started. The vultures are long lived

and slow in breeding, so the programmes are expected to take decades. Vultures reach breeding age at about 5 years. It is hoped that captive-bred birds will be released to the wild when the environment is clear of Diclofenac.

## ACTIVITIES OF WWF-INDIA KERALA STATE OFFICE

### Class on EIA at IMG

Renjan Mathew Varghese, State Director took class at Institute of Management in Government (IMG), Govt. of Kerala on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for Government Officers on 4th January and for Panchayat Secretaries on 24th January.

### Teachers Training Workshops

As part of the series of Teachers Training Workshops conducted with the support of CPREEC, Chennai, four workshops were organized in January and five workshops were organized in February across the State including:



- Mar Theophilus College of Teacher Education, Trivandrum on 6<sup>th</sup> January
- Aravinda Vidya Mandir, Pallikkathode, Kottayam on 13<sup>th</sup> January





- NSS Training College, Pandalam on 21<sup>st</sup> January
- SN Training College, Varkala, Thiruvananthapuram on 27<sup>th</sup> January
- JP Memorial B Ed College, Kattappana, Idukki District on 10<sup>th</sup> February
- Millath College of Teacher Education, Suranad, Kollam on 11<sup>th</sup> February
- Govt. Girls HSS, Thodupuzha on 14<sup>th</sup> February
- School of Pedagogical Sciences, Kannur University on 17<sup>th</sup> February
- Apsara Public School, Kasaragod on 22<sup>nd</sup> February
- NSS Training College, Ottappalam on 24<sup>th</sup> February

### **Seminar on Free Trade Agreement**

The State Director attended the one day seminar organized by Kerala Swathanthra Matsya Thozhilali Federation (KSMTF) on 'Free Trade Agreement and its Implications' at Hotel Chaithram on 17<sup>th</sup> Jan, 2011.

### **Submission of Draft Report on Anayirangal HE Conflict**

South Western Ghats Landscape Programme has studied in detail the issue of 'Human Elephant Conflict' mainly in Anayirangal near Munnar. The Draft Project Report has been submitted to the CCF (Biodiversity Cell) for discussion in the upcoming Southern State Forest Minister's Meeting.

### **Talk on Forest Canopy organized by ATREE**

The State Director attended the lecture organized by ATREE at the Conference Hall, Kerala Forests and Wildlife Department Headquarters on Forest Canopy on 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2011. The keynote address on 'Tree Canopies and their Human Connections - inspiring new stakeholders in forest conservation' was done by Dr. Margaret Lowman, Director, Nature Research Center, North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences and Professor, North Carolina State University.

### **Workshop on 'Tools for achieving Environmental Democracy'**



The State Director attended the one day discussion workshop organized on 'Tools for achieving Environmental Democracy' by River Research Centre at Mangalavanam, Ernakulam on 22<sup>nd</sup> Jan, 2011. The sessions were led by Shri Sreedhar and Adv. Ritwick Dutta from Delhi.

### **Marine Turtle Survey along Indian Coast - Kerala component**



WWF-India is presently carrying out a comprehensive survey and assessment of the status of Marine Turtle along the entire Indian Coast. As part of the project, the survey and field assessment along Kerala Coast is progressing well. The work is being carried out by Mr. Murukan Pareparambil, Field Officer.



## World Wetlands Day 2011

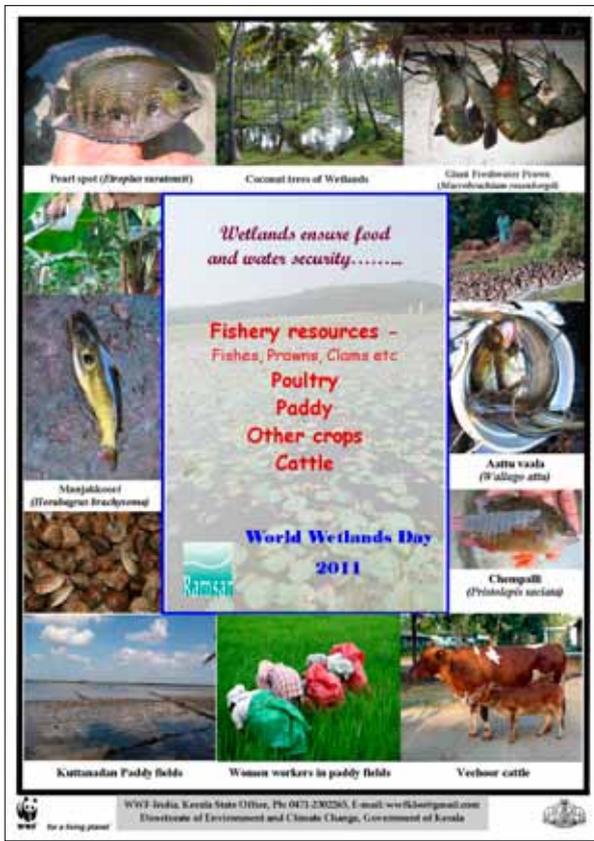


Kerala State Office observed World Wetlands Day 2011 at City HSS, Kannur from 31<sup>st</sup> January to 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2011 with a series of events. On 31<sup>st</sup> January 60 students from 4 schools were taken for a wetland field trip to Mundery Kadavu of Kattampally wetlands, one of the most important wetland of the district where thousands of waterfowl including migratory birds anchors. The students were accompanied by Mr. Sivakumar and other school teachers. Even though the site was not new



for the students, they had a rather different experience of observing the wetland by understanding the values, services and functions that these ecosystem provides to us and this made it very clear to them on why we should conserve and protect our wetlands and its resources. On 1<sup>st</sup> February painting, poster design and quiz competitions were conducted for school children. On 2<sup>nd</sup> February, a single day awareness programme on 'Wetland Conservation' was held and it was inaugurated by Smt.M.C.Sreeja, Municipal Chairperson of Kannur. Shri. Roy P. Thomas, Divisional Forest Officer, (Kannur), Kerala Forests and Wildlife Department was also present in the inaugural function and he released the poster set on wetlands. Two technical sessions were also led by experts. Kerala State Office prepared a CD ROM on World Wetlands Day 2011 and dispatched the same to all active nature clubs affiliated to WWF-India requesting them to conduct local level programmes.





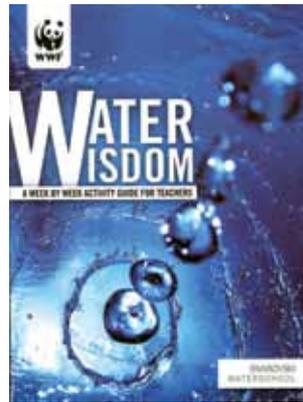
### Students Wetland Congress organized by ATREE



The State Director was the Chief Guest and Judge for Competitions in the very relevant Students Wetlands Congress organized by ATREE in Alappuzha on 21<sup>st</sup> February, 2011. About 150 students from various schools who are part of the Jalapadam programme of ATREE attended the programme. About 9 teams presented their studies.

### Publication - Water Wisdom

WWF-India in association with Swarovski Water School has bought out a publication titled ‘Water Wisdom - A week by week activity guide for Teachers’.



A State like Kerala, even though receives 3000 mm of rainfall annually, is reeling under the problem of severe water shortage. So it is very much necessary that we educate and make the younger generation more aware on the increasing need for water conservation.

### Financial support to Vava Suresh

Suresh or as he is popularly called ‘Vava Suresh’ is a man of conservation - not through words, but by action. He translates his passion for conservation by rescuing snakes mainly in cities where these dangerous and poisonous reptiles find their way out of their natural habitats and take refuge in home gardens and inside houses. Earlier when city dwellers used to site such



unfriendly guests, a mob would gather and they would somehow kill the snake. But now immediately the call goes out to Vava and he goes into the rescue operation. In a recent rescue operation, he was accidentally bitten by a cobra and he had to be admitted in the hospital for many days and ultimately he had to sacrifice part of his middle finger of the left hand. The State Director visited Mr. Suresh in the hospital and on approval by Mr. Ravi Singh, Secretary General & CEO offered financial support for meeting the immediate medical expenses.

### EDITORIAL BOARD

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Kerala is blessed with enchanting natural beauty.  
It is nourished by 44 rivers and a chain of backwaters.

It is confronted with environmental problems due to pollution  
on account of urbanization and industrialization.

The health consequences of exposure to dirty  
environment are considerable.

The people of Kerala are highly conscious of  
the need to protect the environment.

Kerala State Pollution Control Board is committed  
to control environmental pollution.

It administers various environmental statutes for the  
prevention and control of pollution.

**Join us in maintaining and restoring the  
wholesomeness of the environment.**



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