FROM THE STATE DIRECTOR’S DESK

Earth Hour has become the world’s biggest people’s green campaign wherein on the last Saturday of March, you Switch Off all non-essential lights for one hour and cast your vote against global warming and climate change. In Kerala, the association with Energy Management Centre and KSEB over the years has brought us to a platform wherein they give us 5000 CFLs every year to be distributed freely to the households belonging to the backward section of the society. There is already a heated debate going on whether we should promote more CFLs since they contain harmful mercury and as more and more of this waste is generated and we do not have an exclusive collection, storage and disposal system for such electronic waste, it can cause much harm to the environment and living systems. Yes, we should discourage more and more use of such items. But as of now, for the State of Kerala, energy conservation is high priority since we can meet our increasing energy needs only through energy conservation and making the shift to renewable energy. In Kerala, we are heavily dependent on hydro-electric power and that too has its limitations since we cannot go in for many more major dams since they have a very big negative impact on the environment. We do not have the prospect of going the thermal or nuclear energy route since we do not have the fuel to run thermal power plants and neither do we have vast tracts of uninhabited land along the coast to safely setup a nuclear power plant. So the saying ‘Energy Saved is Energy Produced’ is very true for every Keralite. Since we are in the tropical belt and sunlight is available in plenty all through the year, making the switch to renewable, mainly solar, is also a great option available with us. As part of the extension of Earth Hour 2014, we have been organizing various events in different locations to distribute the CFLs freely to the financially backward. We have not just been distributing the CFLs, but using the platform to sensitise the community on the impending need for energy conservation especially in our State. In the last two months, we were successful in distributing CFLs to 120 households in Mayyanad Grama Panchayat as a joint venture with HELP Foundation, in the eight tribal colonies of Vazhachal Forest Division with the Western Ghats Landscape Programme of WWF-India, 150 households in the Aaramada Grama Panchayat with AMAS Neyyattinkara. The ongoing project on ‘Preparation of Position Paper on Climate Change in Kerala’ is nearing completion with the last round of institutional visits, data collection and interaction with experts going ahead in full steam. In the EE front, three Teachers Training Workshops were organized - in Konni and Thrissur in July and Muvattupuzha in August and all the three workshops witnessed the participation of around 126 school teachers in total. In connection with birding, WWF being part of the Green Partnership Programme of Kerala Forests & Wildlife Department, an effort to document the avifauna outside the forests in the State, we attended the State-level meeting organized in July at College of Forestry, Thrissur with review of the Common Bird Monitoring Programme, Pelagic Birding, Kerala Bird Race 2014 as key agenda points. Out staff and volunteers actively participated in the Heronry Count organized under the Green Partnership Programme in Pathanamthitta District in August. A three day Wildlife Orientation Camp was conducted in August at Parambikkulam Tiger Reserve which had the active participation of twenty nature enthusiasts. Another major event was the City level of Wild Wisdom Quiz 2014 held on 23rd August at Vedamanickyam Hall, LMS Compound. 8 schools participated at the Junior level and 17 schools in the middle level. Mas. Aaron Dev Jose and Kum. Pooja Bijoy of Le Cole Chempaka became the winners of the middle level and we are proud of them as they will go to New Delhi to compete with the other City level winners from other states for the title of Wild Wisdom National Winners 2014.

Renjan Mathew Varghese,
State Director

IMPORTANT NEWS ON ENVIRONMENT AND NATURE

GLOBAL

Atlantic is storing excess heat, says Scientists

The key to the slowdown in global warming in recent years lies in the depths of the Atlantic and Southern oceans where excess heat is being stored, not the Pacific as has previously been suggested, according to new research. But the finding suggests that a naturally occurring ocean cycle burying the heat will flip in around 15 years’ time, causing global temperature rises to accelerate again. The slowdown in average surface temperature rises over the last 15 years after decades of rapid warming has been seized on by climate change sceptics and has puzzled Scientists, who have hypothesised that everything from volcanic eruptions and sulphur from Chinese power stations to heat being trapped deep in the oceans could be the cause. (Source: The Hindu, Aug 23, 2014)
Biodiversity loss pushing Earth towards sixth mass extinction

Scientists now warn that the persistent loss and decline of biodiversity is leading humanity to early days of the Planet’s sixth mass biological extinction event. Since 1500, more than 320 terrestrial vertebrates have become extinct. Populations of the remaining species show a 25 per cent average decline in abundance. The situation is similarly dire for invertebrate animal life. “While previous extinctions have been driven by natural planetary transformations or catastrophic asteroid strikes, the current die-off can be associated with human activity, leading to an era of Anthropocene defaunation”, said lead researcher Rodolfo Dirzo, a Professor of Biology at Stanford University. (Source: The Hindu, July 26, 2014)

SC puts on hold 140 projects cleared by Wildlife Board

The fate of about 140 projects cleared by the newly-constituted Standing Committee of the National Board for Wildlife (NBW) is uncertain with the Supreme Court finding that the panel’s constitution “is not in consonance” with the Wildlife Act, 1972. On August 12, a fresh Committee under Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar had cleared most of the 140 projects pending review. The Green Bench directed that none of the orders passed by the new committee would be given effect until the next date of hearing in the Supreme Court after two weeks. “We are of the view that the same was not issued in consonance with Section 5A of the Wildlife Act,” the Bench observed in the order. The suspension of the Committee’s clearance of the projects is based on a petition filed by Pune resident Chandra Bhal Singh challenging a July 22, 2014 notification issued by the Environment Ministry changing the constitution of the new Standing Committee. (Source: The Hindu, Aug 26, 2014)

India logged 248 new species in 2013

The Zoological Survey of India has discovered 248 new animal species in different parts of the country in 2013. Of them, 162 are insects, 19 are arachnids, 36 are fish, 5 are amphibians and 2 are reptiles. “These rarest-of-rare species are found in small habitats and most of them are endangered,” K. Venkataraman, Director of Zoological Survey of India (ZSI), told. Emphasising that such discoveries depend on both chance and expertise, he said the Western Ghats and Eastern Himalayas continued to be “hot-spots for these discoveries.” Of the 1.4 million animal species that had been found across the world till December 2013, India, with over 96,000 finds, was home to 7 per cent, he said. (Source: The Hindu, July 13, 2014)

STATE

Garbage choking marine life: study

An assessment carried out by the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI), Kochi, across 150 beaches in Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh has brought to shore disturbing results of marine pollution. Beaches in Maharashtra topped the list with an average of 6.7kgs litter per 10sq.m. In Karnataka beaches, litter weighing 3g to 856g were found in one sq.m. The Kerala average was found to be in the range of 4g to 22g. Plastic bottles, pouches and bottles formed major components of the refuse. Tamil Nadu painted a relatively clean picture as the State average was in the range of 1 to 2.94g per sq.m. and pieces of fishing nets dominated the rubbish there. While liquor bottles outweighed all other pollutants, polythene carry bags, milk covers, styrene dining plates and polyurethane foam used as insulators in refrigerators and freezers were found strewn across the sandy stretches. (Source: The Hindu, July 3, 2014)

Hybrid Tilapia - A threat to endemic species

The fast-growing Genetically Improved Farmed Tilapia (GIFT), which is being promoted in a big way in Kerala as part of a Marine Products Export Development Authority's (MPEDA) project for food security and export promotion, may pose a threat to endemic species, especially Pearlspot (Karimeen). The license is given to farmers to cage-breed Tilapia, a native of Africa, with strict conditions and only male sex developed through hormone-laced feed, given during their initial growth through cage aquaculture, are supplied for pond fish farming. (The male fish has high growth rate and it prevents the possible spread of hybrid varieties in waterbodies). This, however, is not a safeguard considering the possibility of overflowing ponds, warn experts. (Source: The Hindu, Aug 24, 2014)

Focus on values of Njavara rice

A festival promoting Njavara rice was held at Chittur, Palakkad on 17th July 2014 to coincide with the United Nations Organisation (UNO)'s observance of 2014 as the International Year of Family Farming. The Palakkad-based Njavara Foundation organised the event to promote the rice variety with high medicinal and nutritional value. “It is used traditionally in Kerala to treat rheumatic patients. Njavara rice is in high demand during the Malayalam month of Karkidakam for Ayurvedic rejuvenation treatments. In spite of this, Njavara has only few promoters. It is in this backdrop that we decided to propagate the family farming concept across the region with special focus on Njavara,” Njavara Foundation Chairman P. Narayanan Unni said. (Source: The Hindu, July 15, 2014)
Money grown on herbs at Marayur

Murugan, a tribal of Kammalankudy in Marayur Sandal Division, is a happy lot now. He was selected as the ‘best farmer’ in the forest division for producing the highest quantity of ‘Kattupadavalam’ (a wild variety of *Trichosanthes cucumerina*) last year which fetched him Rs 3 lakh. He is not all alone in the cultivation of ‘Kattupadavalam’ in the tribal forest areas. The people of Karpoorakudy, Periyakudy, Nellipettykudy, Kuthukallukudy, Vengaparakudy and Kavakudy settlements are all engaged in the farming of Kattupadavalam, which makes them ‘rich’ through it’s sale to the ayurvedic medicine manufacturers which procure it completely including the roots. Murugan said he got Rs. 240 for a kilogram and the produce was taken entirely by the ayurvedic firms making it a new trend of cultivation in the ‘kudies’ (settlements). The important aspect is that wild elephants do not reach the kudies as the bitter taste keeps them at bay, he said. The harvesting season of the matured herb with seed is from January to April. According to M.G.Vinodkumar, Range Officer of the Marayur Range, the variety is a speciality of Marayur and what the Department did was only provide guidance to the tribal people to farm it. It has very good demand among the ayurvedic medicine manufacturers and truck loads of it were being exported under the auspices of the Vana Samrakshana Samithies, run and manned by the tribal people. From time immemorial, the tribal people had grown the herb and supplied it to the middlemen at a paltry sum or for a small quantity of tobacco or betel leaves. It was in 2011, the direct procurement of ‘Kattupadavalam’ started by the main two firms - Kottakkal Arya Vaidya Sala and Oushadhi. As of now 37 tonnes of the herb was sold by the tribal people.
This year we expect a harvest of 50 tonnes and there was already agreement signed for that quantity with the firms including the Coimbatore Arya Vaidya Sala,” said Mr Vinodkumar. A major change is that the tribal people had earlier cultivated only a minor quantity and they collected the herb mostly from the forest. Now there is zero collection from the forest and the entire quantity is cultivated by themselves. It made them self dependent and the high price makes them good farmers of the herb. The variety is a specialty of Marayur region and is said to have high medicinal value, he said. Now the non-tribal people in the region too has started cultivation of the herb for the high price it fetched. That too could be procured by the VSS, he said.

Source: The Hindu, Jiji.K.Raman
Energy Conservation Seminar and free CFL distribution in Mayyanad

A Seminar on Energy Conservation was organized jointly by WWF-India, EMC, HELP Foundation and Mayyanad Grama Panchayat at the Mayyanad Grama Panchayat Auditorium on 5th July 2014. Around 120 people, mainly women, attended. Sri. Subash, Energy Technologist, EMC led the technical session. Many guests including the State Director attended and spoke on the occasion. The State Director visited the mangrove afforestation site of HELP Foundation.
As part of “Going beyond the Hour” in Earth Hour 2014, seven hundred CFLs were freely distributed among the households in the 8 tribal colonies of Vazhachal Forest Division on 29th and 30th July 2014. The programme was organised in association with KSEB, EMC and Western Ghats Landscape Programme of WWF-India. The functions were jointly managed by the team from the State Office and the Landscape. It was a good time of interaction and mutual learning from each other.

**Teachers Training Workshops**

The second Teachers Training Workshop supported by CPREEC, Chennai was held at Ecotourism Centre, Konni under the Kerala Forests & Wildlife Department on 11th July 2014 on the theme of ‘Western Ghats’. It was attended by 42 teachers from schools of Pathanamthitta district. Sri. T.Pradeepkumar IFS (DFO Konni) and Sri. Mathew P.S. (Dy. Dir. of Edn.) were the chief guests. Mr.S.Radhakrishnan, Dy. Director (Wildlife Edn.) and Sivakumar, Sr. Education Officer led the sessions.

The third Teachers Training Workshop was held at KM Bhavan's Vidya Mandir, Pottore, Thrissur on 22nd July 2014. The workshop was attended by 36 teachers from different schools of Thrissur district. Sri. Abdul Bashir, Rtd. Divisional Manager, Kerala Forest Development Corporation and Senior Education Officer led the sessions.

The forth workshop was held at Nirmala College, Muvattupuzha in Ernakulam district on 6th August 2014 in association with NGC and was attended by 48 teachers from different schools of the district and the college. The workshop was inaugurated by Rev. Dr. Vincent Nedungattu, Principal of the college. Dr. Gigi K. Joseph, NGC Coordinator & Associate Professor of the college and Senior Education Officer led the sessions.
Green Partnership Programme – State level Meeting

Sivakumar, Senior Education Officer and Mr. C. Harikumar attended the meeting on 12th July 2014 at College of Forestry, Thrissur of the Green Partnership Programme, a combined effort initiated by Kerala Forests & Wildlife Department to document the avifauna outside the forests in the State. The review on Common Bird Monitoring Programme, Pelagic Birding, Kerala Bird Race 2014 were the key agenda of the meeting.

Session on Wildlife Conservation

A two hour session on Wildlife Conservation was led by the Senior Education Officer at Arya Central School, Pattom, Thiruvananthapuram on 24th July 2014. Around 60 students attended the session. It was a totally interactive programme with PowerPoint presentation.

Articles on WWF in Kerala Tourism Magazine

Kerala Tourism Magazine has invited an article on the work that WWF is doing in the State. In this regard, an article in two parts – ‘WWF efforts to save ecosystems and species, for a living planet, for today and tomorrow’ explaining our projects and ‘WWF molding the younger generation of today to be better green citizens of tomorrow’ detailing our environment education, awareness and outreach programmes were prepared and submitted.

Friday Forum - August 2014

The first Friday Forum of this academic year was held at Museum Auditorium, Thiruvananthapuram on 8th August 2014 on the theme “Walking & Bicycling, – Save the Environment & Stay Healthy”. Dr. Sankar Ram, Medical Officer from Directorate of Sports & Youth Affairs led the session. The session was arranged in association with the Indus Cycling Embassy, Thiruvananthapuram. Around 130 students from 5 different schools attended the Friday Forum.

Heronry Count in Pathanamthitta District

Mr. A.K. Sivakumar, Mr. C. Harikumar, Ms. Neha Waikar, Ms. Sayujya Anand and Mr. Jaichand Johnson along with Kerala Forests & Wildlife Department officials conducted a single day Heronry Count in the district on 10th August 2014 under the Green Partnership Programme. The team visited 6 heronries at Kilivayal, Kulanada, Adoor, Pandalam, Mepral, Eramallikkara and Venpala and collected data on bird species, number of nests and trees.
Wildlife Orientation Camp at Parambikkulam Tiger Reserve

A three day Wildlife Orientation Camp was conducted on 15th, 16th and 17th August 2014 at Parambikkulam Tiger Reserve. Twenty nature enthusiasts were accompanied by Senior Education Officer and a volunteer. The camp was highly interesting with rich wildlife sighting like Leopard, Gaur, Sambar Deer, Spotted Deer, Nilgiri Langur, Stripe necked Mongoose, Monitor Lizard, Wild Boar, Peacocks and so on. A very good birding also was held during the camp.

Orientation Session at TKMM College, Nangyarkulangara

Senior Education Officer led a session for the Nature Club Members of TKMM College, Nangyarkulangara to orient them about nature club and its activities. 58 students of the college attended the session.

Wild Wisdom Quiz

The City level Quiz of Wild Wisdom 2014 organised jointly with CBSE, Discovery Kids and Mentos, with the support of Union Ministry of Environment & Forests was held on 23rd August 2014 at Vedamanaickam Hall, LMS Compound, Thiruvananthapuram. 8 schools were represented in the Junior level and 17 schools in the Middle level. Master. Aron Dev Jose and Kum. Pooja Bijoy of Le Cole Chempaka, Thiruvananthapuram became the winners of Middle level. Mas. Ganesh Chandran and Sarang of Saraswathy Vidyalaya, Vattiyoor came up with second prize and Kum. Hrudaya R. Krishna and Devabala S. of Christ Nagar Central School with third prize. The Junior level quiz for classes 3 to 5 was won by Mas. Viswakalyan Reddy and Aditya Kishor of Loyola School. Mas. Mathew Behian Cherian and Hrudayesh R. Krishnan came up with second prize and Kum. Aditya M. Nair and Namita Gopan of Saraswathi Vidyalaya with third prize. Mr. Athul Chandra of Quiz Works, New Delhi mastered the quiz and Mr. Renjan Mathew Varghese and Mr. A.K. Sivakumar of WWF-India coordinated the event. The winners will compete with the other winners from 28 cities across the country on 1st October 2014 at New Delhi.

Ongoing project on Preparation of Position Paper on Climate Change in Kerala

As part of our ongoing project on Climate Change in Kerala, the State Director visited the Regional Agricultural Research Station, Kumarakom on 8th July 2014 and had detailed interaction with the Associate Professor and Agro Meteorologist to understand their mandate and work in relation to CC. Thorough follow-up was carried out over both phone and mail with Dr E.J. Joseph, Head, Water Management Division, CWRDM for his sectoral paper in this project. The State Director met Dr. Jayachandran, KUFOS and got the proceedings of the seminar on CC organized at Alappuzha.

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