Kiribati President Anote Tong told The Associated Press an unusual backup plan — moving the populace to Fiji, the leaders of Kiribati are considering. Fearing that Climate Change could wipe out their entire generation. For them, moving won’t be a matter of choice. Mr. Tong. “It wouldn’t be for me, personally, but would apply more to a younger generation. For them, moving won’t be a matter of choice. It’s basically going to be a matter of survival.” Kiribati, which straddles the Equator near the International Date Line, has a population of 103,000, though he hopes it will never be necessary for everyone to leave. “We would hope not to put everyone on one piece of land, but if it became absolutely necessary, yes, we could do it,” said Mr. Tong. “It wouldn’t be for me, personally, but would apply more to a younger generation. For them, moving won’t be a matter of choice. It’s basically going to be a matter of survival.”

FROM THE STATE DIRECTOR’S DESK

WWF-India Kerala State Office is proud to say that we have been very successful in completing the project titled ‘Development of Sustainable Livelihood Security Index for the Ramsar Site (Vembanad) of Kerala’ funded by the Department of Environment and Climate Change, Government of Kerala. As most of you must know, Kerala is blessed with 3 Ramsar Sites – Vembanad – Kol Wetland Complex, Sasthamkotta Freshwater Lake and the Ashtamudi Lake. All these three Ramsar wetlands provide the basic functions of wetlands, but they are very unique in their values and services. Ashtamudi Lake has much tourism potential attached to it and also a very large group of fishermen as the main stakeholder. Sasthamkotta Lake is a freshwater lake and it provides drinking water to almost the entire Kollam Corporation and its surroundings. When it comes to Vembanad – Kol Wetland Complex, the values and services and very diverse including very high tourism potential including Kumarakam, Alappuzha and Kochi, diverse flora and fauna, many stakeholders including surface water transport, lime shell miners, fishermen, farmers, clam collectors etc. In spite of all these functions, values and services, all the three Ramsar Sites in Kerala are under various threats, mostly anthropogenic. In the case of Sasthamkotta, the threats include over extraction of water, land use changes, pollution etc. While as in Ashtamudi it is again pollution from various sources like domestic, commercial, industrial etc. When we critically analyse the situation of Vembanad, we find that the wetland complex faces all possible kinds of man-made threats – reclamation, pollution, loss of biodiversity, over extraction of resources etc. A recent analysis of the physical extent of Vembanad has shown that the wetland complex has shrunk by 30-40% due to reclamation and other related activities. It was this frightening understanding that led us to undertake the study to find the intricate complex web of resources, dependent livelihoods and the direct and indirect stakeholders and their inter-relationships. The study was mainly restricted to the districts of Kottayam and Alappuzha and the major four livelihoods i.e., tourism including hotels, resorts and houseboats, agriculture, clam and lime shell collection and aquaculture was included in the present study. The study covered about more than 600 stakeholders in the 25 panchayats surrounding the wetland complex. Based on the field data collected, the three pillars of SLSI i.e. Ecological Security, Economic Efficiency and Social Equity of each livelihood was analysed on a panchayat level to formulate the strategies and action plan required for specific intervention in future to ensure that the Vembanad wetland ecosystem remains healthy thereby supporting livelihoods and dependent stakeholders on a sustainable basis. The initial literature review, the present study through field data collection and one-to-one interactions with the stakeholders helped us realize that most of the problems and threats faced by Vembanad are known to us and through years of discussions and deliberations, we have come out with many strategies and action plans also. But unfortunately, we have failed to implement most of these interventions on a permanent or temporary basis and see its outcome. Almost all recommendations for interventions remain on paper. What we need to realize is that, we have only one living planet. The Living Planet Report says that we are over extracting the resources from Planet Earth and putting its systems under severe pressure. But still we have not moved beyond the tipping point. Let us – government, R&D institutions, NGOs, local self governments, communities and individuals understand this, rise to the occasion and act as responsible citizens to protect and safeguard our natural systems and their wealth for our development and for the future generations to come.

Renjan Mathew Varghese, State Director

IMPORTANT NEWS ON ENVIRONMENT AND NATURE

GLOBAL

With sea-level rising, a nation plans en masse move

Fearing that Climate Change could wipe out their entire Pacific Archipelago, the leaders of Kiribati are considering an unusual backup plan — moving the populace to Fiji. Kiribati President Anote Tong told The Associated Press that his Cabinet endorsed a plan to buy nearly 6,000 acres on Fiji’s main island, Viti Levu. He said the fertile land could provide an insurance policy for Kiribati’s entire population of 103,000, though he hopes it will never be necessary for everyone to leave. “We would hope not to put everyone on one piece of land, but if it became absolutely necessary, yes, we could do it,” said Mr. Tong. “It wouldn’t be for me, personally, but would apply more to a younger generation. For them, moving won’t be a matter of choice. It’s basically going to be a matter of survival.”
Thousands of Olive Ridleys born, but not all are lucky in seaward march

At daybreak, thousands of Olive Ridley hatchlings emerged from sand pits on an islet located at the Rushikulya River mouth and one after another crawled into the Bay of Bengal, leaving the onlookers spellbound. However, with few volunteers and Forest Department employees at work, the tiny turtles struggled to get into the water and, when the sun became harsh, were left high and dry on the sand. As a result, hundreds of hatchlings were grabbed by crows and kites which had been hovering around. Locals and tourists were seen making desperate attempts to save as many hatchlings as they could.

Many other hatchlings were found dead on the islet and nearby beaches, having got entangled in rejected fishing nets. It has not been a very good year for Olive Ridleys this time round. Only around one lakh turtles laid eggs on the islet near Gokharkuda village and the beaches near Kantiagada village this year, compared to 2.51 lakh last year. Marine Zoologists have not been able to assess the nesting behaviour of sea turtles. In 2007, there was no mass nesting on the Rushikulya Rookery Coast, while the previous year it had occurred twice on this beach. The worst thing happened on Full Moon day when high tides washed away a vast portion of the sandbar destroying the nests along with eggs, according to Rabindranath Sahu, Secretary of the Rushikulya Sea Turtle Protection Committee. In recent years, the beaches near the Rushikulya River mouth have emerged as the main nesting ground for the endangered Olive Ridleys on the Odisha coast, the other major site being the Gahirmatha Sanctuary area close to the Bhitarkanika National Park. Sea turtles have stopped laying eggs at another location near the Devi river mouth. (Source: The Hindu, April 19, 2012)

Maharashtra defends Dolphinarium plan

Despite directives from the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) “not to entertain” the proposal for a Dolphin Park in Sindhudurg district, the Maharashtra Government is still strongly defending the Rs.510-crore project. The Ministry also quoted the Central Zoo Authority as saying, “The objective of the said water park does not conform to the objective of its operation, i.e., conservation of wildlife, as laid down under Rule 10 (1) of the Recognition of Zoo Rules, 2009.” It further said: “The operation of the Water Park for extracting performance out of the animals shall also be a violation of Rules 10 (11) (2) of Recognition of Zoo Rules, 2009.” In addition, the State government had proposed to undertake the project in the public-private partnership (PPP) model, which is meant for commercial purpose, and not permitted under Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, the MoEF noted.” Experts in Pune’s Science and Technology Park, a Central Government institute, have been asked to prepare a detailed project report to justify the State Government’s plan. Opposition to the project has been coming from animal activists and environmentalists alike. Last week, Ric O’Barry, Director of Earth Island Institute’s Dolphin Project, urged Chief Minister Prithviraj Chavan to “take immediate action to stop the Sindhudurg proposal before it proceeds.” Writing on behalf of the People for Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), he said “dolphins do not cope well in cramped, artificial environments” and “keeping them in captivity is morally and ethically indefensible.” However, Dr. Sarang Kulkarni, a Marine Biologist with the Science and Technology Park who is in-charge of preparing the DPR, rubbished the fears. “The opposition is based on half knowledge. There are lots of misunderstandings,” he told. The project had received an in-principle approval in October last year, based on the interim technical feasibility report prepared by the same institute. (Source: The Hindu, March 1, 2012)

Edamalakkudy ecosystem under threat

Exotic species, reckless harvesting of resources, and unsustainable methods of construction are threatening the fragile ecosystem and rich biodiversity in Edamalakkudy, the only tribal panchayat in Kerala, Idukki district. A week-long biodiversity assessment programme conducted by the Kerala State Biodiversity Board revealed that the community, spread over 28 settlements in Edamalakkudy, was facing a threat to its sustainable method of living from external factors. The programme found that medicinal plants were being recklessly harvested for making herbal drugs. Middlemen engaged by traders used the tribal people to collect medicinal plants. “With no system to monitor the trade, the loss of such plant wealth cannot be estimated. We found that endemic medicinal plant resources were being depleted at an alarming rate. Some species, like Coscinium fenestratum (maramanjal) have been all but wiped out from their natural habitat,” Dr. Laladhas, Member Secretary of KSBB said. “An immediate intervention is needed to control and conserve the available resources in the area.”

The team reported that exotic plants were posing a grave threat to the forest, home to some of the world’s rarest and most endangered species. Exotic weeds such as Mikenia micrantha, were choking native plant species. The survey flayed the introduction of modern housing methods using tin sheets and cement bricks to substitute the eco-friendly materials used by the tribal people. “In the traditional method of construction, the walls are made of vertical...
State yet to prepare wetland list

Kerala is yet to prepare an inventory of its wetlands even as the deadline for the task, mandated by the Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2010, ended nearly a year ago. The rules required the States and Union Territories to identify wetlands within their territories and submit a brief document providing basic information of them within one year of the rules’ notification. An account of the pre-existing rights and privileges, consistent or not consistent with the ecological health of the wetland, was also to be submitted to the Central Wetland Regulatory Authority. The rules were enacted so as “not to use wetlands beyond their carrying capacity.” According to Dr.E.J. James, Member of the Central Authority, Kerala has not submitted the list despite repeated reminders. “Though the Authority can bring any wetlands under the regime, it is waiting for the State Government to respond”. Kerala has three wetlands — Ashtamudi, Sasthamcotta and Vembanad-Kol — that have been designated as Ramsar sites. The rules prohibit “reclamation, setting up of new industries/their expansion, manufacture or storage or disposal of hazardous substances, solid waste dumping, discharge of untreated waste and effluents from various sources, constructions of permanent nature and any other activity which is likely to have an adverse effect on the wetlands” within notified wetlands. (Source: The Hindu, March 26, 2012)

Wonder almanac for streetlights

The Energy Management Centre (EMC), under the State Department of Power, has developed an Almanac-fed ON/OFF Control Automatic Streetlight Switching System (Astrolite) for streetlights and park lights. The switching system is tuned to sunset and sunrise timings, says G. Anil, Head, Small Hydro Power Division, EMC. “The manual switching off/on of streetlights may not coincide with the sunrise and sunset. An unnecessary 30-minute burning of 250 W sodium vapour lamp may result in energy waste to the tune of 45-50 units per year.” It is estimated that, on an average, each corporation spends more than Rs.1 crre and municipalities, around Rs. 2-3 lakh a month as energy bill for street lighting. “As per Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB) records, the total energy consumption for street lighting is approximately 250 million units a year. If we can save five per cent of this energy consumption it will be a great achievement for the country,” he says. Two units of this system had already been installed at Thalassery Municipality in Kannur for demonstration. The cost of the system is Rs.8,500 a unit. It has a programmable clock and calendar and a weather-proof enclosure. The EMC is keen on installing this Astrolite in Municipalities and Corporations in the State with the financial support of the civic body concerned. (Source: The Hindu, March 19, 2012)

EXPERT’S TALK

 Kerala’s wetlands: a responsibility to cherish

Kerala has three wetlands — Ashtamudi, Sasthamcotta and Vembanad-Kol — that have been designated as Ramsar sites. The rules required the States and Union Territories to identify wetlands within their territories and submit a brief document providing basic information of them within one year of the rules’ notification. An account of the pre-existing rights and privileges, consistent or not consistent with the ecological health of the wetland, was also to be submitted to the Central Wetland Regulatory Authority. The rules were enacted so as “not to use wetlands beyond their carrying capacity.”

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4 / Mruithika/ March - April 2012
Let's get acquainted with a feathered wonder, the Blue bearded Bee eater, a not so common bird of Kerala. This shy bird is found mainly in deciduous forests of India, mainly in the Himalayas, Western Ghats, Eastern Ghats and North Eastern India. Looking into its physical allure, one can find that, it has a larger yet slimmer body compared to other bee eaters, with pale green feathered dorsal part and a light brown ventral part; furthermore it has a black sickle shaped bill and a square ended tail lacking pin feathers that are typical features of small bee eaters. But the most distinguishing feature is the blue feather found at the middle of the throat and upper breast resembling a beard when it makes its call. Now, as the name indicates, they exclusively feed on bees and even their feeding style is also interesting. These birds take advantage over the defensive behavior exhibited by giant honey bees by provoking guard bees to defend their nest and when a mass exodus of guard bees occur, they just grab their meal.

Anu Radhakrishnan

CHILDREN’S CORNER

Heal the Earth – Make your school plastic free

Every year 22nd April is observed as Earth Day to ensure a better Earth for our sustained future. Come, let us do some small things and make a big change...

- Stop bringing unnecessary plastic items
- Don’t carelessly throw away plastic items
- Remove all plastic waste materials from the campus
- Establish proper waste bins
- Green friends can ensure proper waste disposal
- Share the need to reduce and reuse plastic
- Be responsible citizens
• Use ink pens/ change refills and reuse pens
• Use ecofriendly products
• Reduce e-mwaste

ACTIVITIES OF WWF-INDIA KERALA STATE OFFICE

Teachers Training Workshops

Two Teachers Training Workshops were conducted with the support of CPREEC, Chennai on Forest Conservation at Millath College of Teacher Education, Sooranad, Kollam on 8th and Mangalam College of Teacher Education, Ettumanoor, Kollayam on 9th March 2012. Both the workshops were attended by around 60-65 Teacher Trainees each. Technical sessions were on ‘Forest Conservation’ and ‘Forest Ecosystem Interpretation’. Activity sessions on the themes presented by the participants were the highlight of the workshop.

National Environment Awareness Campaign

As part of the National Environment Awareness Campaign (NEAC), WWF-India, Kerala State Office in association with Centre for Environment & Development with the support of MoEF conducted an awareness programme titled ‘Waste to Wealth’ followed by action components. The 150 Teacher Trainees of Mar Theophilus Training College, Nalanchira, Thiruvananthapuram attended the awareness programme in which all the participants were trained to make paper bags. Dr. George Chackacherry, Director, Suchitwa Mission inaugurated the workshop. The 1500 paper bags made by the participants were distributed to local shops on free of cost encouraging them to avoid plastic bags.

Wetland Trip through Vembanad Lake

A team of 16 nature enthusiasts had a half day cruise on the waters of Vembanad Lake, India's largest Ramsar Site on 10th March 2012. The team enjoyed bird watching, scenic beauty, daily life, culture and food associated with our wetlands and water bodies. Endangered Oriental Darter, Little Cormorants, Indian Shag, Stork billed Kingfisher etc were sighted.

EARTH HOUR

Public Campaigns

The public campaign as part of the Earth Hour is a regular programme of WWF-India Kerala State Office. The campaign at Statue Jn. in front of the Government Secretariat was held on 28th March from 4pm to 6.30 pm. Around 15 volunteers engaged in the campaign with stickers that ask people to save energy and to observe Earth Hour. Around 1500 stickers were distributed. Specially designed stickers were also put on autorickshaws. A team of volunteers did a shop to shop campaign with the posters of EH2012 and
put up the posters in front of most of the shops with their permission. The same were held at Saphalyam Complex at Palayam, Thiruvananthapuram on 29th March and at Sanghumughom Beach on 30th March 2012.

The Thiruvananthapuram Chapter of JCI in association with WWF-India organized a sticker and signature campaign at Tejaswini building of Thiruvananthapuram Technopark in which hundreds of IT professionals participated and announced their unity with EH 2012 by switching off lights in their homes and office.

The campaign on the morning of the Earth Hour day was held at the Museum - Zoo premises from 6.30 - 8.30 am targeting hundreds of people including higher level government officials, ministers, business men etc. who come there to have morning walk. It was quiet interactive with games and competitions. They were asked to find out 50 hidden leaf shaped EH tags placed under camouflage on either side of the walking track and each tag retrieved will win a CFL or a Key chain. Most of the tags were retrieved and it was a thrilling activity for the morning walkers to take part in the global campaign. Another competition was to answer any 10 energy related questions out of the given 15 and to win a CFL or Key chain.

With the objective of increasing maximum outreach, 1000 copies of Earth Hour posters with the message and photograph of Sri. Sachin Tendulkar, 2012 Earth Hour Ambassador was published and distributed to 300 residents associations through Federation of Residents Associations of Thiruvananthapuram (FRAT) during their Annual General body Meeting. Around 200 message boards of sunpack sheets asking public to observe the switch off from 8.30 to 9.30 pm on 31st March was placed within the City to give maximum publicity for the event.

Earth Hour 2012 at Thiruvananthapuram

Earth Hour in Thiruvananthapuram was organised at the usual venue, the Gandhi Park at East Fort, the heart of the City where thousands of people move by. Sri. Renjan Mathew Varghese introduced Earth Hour 2012 followed by a series of national integration songs by MBS Youth Choir for the next 60 minutes. Earth Hour documentaries were screened for another 30 minutes and then the stage was taken over by SAPTAM, a youth band. They engaged the public till 8.30 and the SWITCH OFF was observed from 8.30 to 9.30 pm. Sri. A.K. Sivakumar invited the guests to the venue for candle light vigil and asked the venue authorities to Switch Off. Sri. G. Vijayaraghavan, Planning Board Member, Dr. R.V. Varma, Chairman of State Biodiversity Board and Sri. Dhareshan Unnithan, Director of Energy Management Center were the guests of the day and they came together to light the EH logo and the public joined in the candle light vigil making the Gandhi Park Maidan sparkling with candle lights in the darkness of the SWITCH OFF. Later the guests addressed the public encouraging them to reduce the energy footprint and to make the State energy secure. Mementos for the guests were given by Sri. Renjan Mathew Varghese and the music band continued till 10 pm.

Earth Hour observation was also organised in Kovalam by the performance of a music band under the initiative of a prominent hotel. The event witnessed participation of both domestic as well as foreign tourists.

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