FROM THE STATE DIRECTOR’S DESK

In Kerala, over the last many years, WWF has been taking a lot of initiatives for the protection of our feathered friends i.e. birds. In these two months also we have been able to take up some initiatives in this direction. We were approached by the Kerala State Biodiversity Board to look into addressing the Feral Pigeon Menace at PRS Hospital in the City and we have been able to give good guidance to the hospital authorities to ensure that the birds are not harmed and on the other hand it does not become a menace. We observed World Sparrow Day and Big Bird Day also with some very relevant initiatives. We have always been open to suggestions from others and also willing to network believing that together we can achieve more. In this regard, a project brainstorming session was arranged at ATREE CERC, Alappuzha to identify possible and relevant new projects and programmes and how it can be jointly worked out complementing each other's strength and weakness. A similar discussion on Conservation of Ithikkara River and partnering with HELP Foundation was also carried out. On the two major ongoing projects – with regard to Project on Position Paper on Climate Change in Kerala, a volunteer from UK is helping us to compile the vast amount of information that has been collected from primary and secondary sources and structure it into a draft position paper and for the Project on Laterite Mining and its Environmental Impacts in Kerala, field work is progressing. Since the field work and data collection is very difficult, a request has been placed to the funding agency for an extension of the project period for a further six months. With regard to our ongoing work in the Western Ghats Nilgiris Landscape Programme, we do regularly, we had interactions with the senior officers of the Kerala Forests and Wildlife Department to update them on the status of our work and request for extension of permission to carry it forward. As in previous years, this year also, in the end of the month of March we observed Earth Hour in Kerala with very relevant programmes in Thiruvananthapuram and Kochi. The venue in Thiruvananthapuram was Shanghumugham Beach and the event attracted the majority of the domestic tourists visiting the beach in the evening hours during the weekend. We were also able to conduct three Teachers Training Workshops in Pandalam, Kottarakara and Thiruvananthapuram. In the month of April we have been able to partner with other agencies in their programmes and contribute effectively to the shared mission of nature conservation and environment protection. WWF team participated in the Kanana Sangamam organized by the Kerala Forests and Wildlife Department at Kanakakunnu, especially in the National Seminar organized on the theme of Conservation for Livelihoods. We also participated in the Stakeholder Workshop convened by Energy Management Centre and the Global Alliance for Clean Cooking Solutions as part of initiating the Segmentation Survey in Kerala for Clean Cooking Solutions. As in previous years, Earth Day 2015 was observed by distributing a set of two CFLs to the economically backward families of Pambukala Harijan Colony near Poovar in Thiruvananthapuram as part of ‘Going Beyond the Hour as part of Earth Hour’. We have also been busy with our other regular programmes like Sunday Bird Walk, preparations for Wild Wisdom 2015, sending our reports on wildlife trade and mortality to TRAFFIC India etc. With regard to our many upcoming programmes, we have submitted proposals for National Technology Day 2015 with KSCSTE, World Migratory Bird Day 2015 with Kerala State Biodiversity Board and World Environment Day 2015 with Dept. of Environment and Climate Change, Govt. of Kerala for funding. Hope the proposals are considered and the funding comes through and we will be able to do more on our mission.

Renjan Mathew Varghese,
State Director

IMPORTANT NEWS ON ENVIRONMENT AND NATURE

GLOBAL

Pollution control: China sends mixed signals

China has sent mixed signals about its approach to tackle pollution — by announcing zero-tolerance to violators of a stringent environmental law, but the same time seemingly curbing public debate on the subject by pulling out from mainstream video sharing sites a hard-hitting documentary on emissions that had gone viral on the internet. “We are going to punish, with an iron hand, any violators who destroy ecology or environment, with no exceptions,” said China’s President, Xi Jinping, while reviewing the work report of the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) — the official body that exercises administrative and planning control over the Chinese economy. (Source: The Hindu, March 7, 2015)
Google Maps goes ‘trekking’ in Amazon

For its next technological trick, Google will show you what it’s like to zip through trees in the Amazon jungle. The images released on Monday are the latest addition to the diverse collection of photos supplementing Google’s widely used digital maps. The maps’ “Street View” option mostly provides panoramic views of cities and neighbourhoods photographed by car-mounted cameras, but Google has found creative ways to depict exotic locations where there are no roads. (Source: The Hindu, March 3 22, 2015)

India has 988 species on IUCN ‘Red List’

India has added 15 more species to the ‘Red List’ of threatened species published by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in 2014, but the country has climbed down a spot to the seventh position. By the year-end, India had 988 threatened species on the list, which lists Critically Endangered, Endangered and Vulnerable species. In 2013, the number was 973. With 659 species in 2008, the increase over seven years is 50 per cent, in part due to better research identifying more threatened species and deforestation. (Source: The Hindu, April 21, 2015)

STATE

Impact study to decide feral cattle’s fate in Sanctuary

A two-day survey revealed a large presence of feral cattle in Idukki Wildlife Sanctuary. If found posing a threat to the wild animals in the Sanctuary, they could be culled, Sanctuary authorities said. Feral cattle are domesticated animals — cow and bison — that were sent for grazing in the forest long back. Over the years, they made the sanctuary their habitat. Though they are wild in nature, feral cattle are not protected under the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972. The feral cattle were mostly trapped inside the Sanctuary after the Idukki dam was constructed. The Sanctuary hosts the largest number of feral cattle in Kerala now — over 250 cattle as per the survey. The number of wild animals such as Sambar Deer and Mouse Deer, the main competitors for food, was found less. However, the presence of large number of calves showed that the population of feral cattle was on an upward growth. Idukki Wildlife Warden PR. Suresh said an impact study would be conducted soon, after when a decision on culling would be taken. He said the habitat pattern of wild animals too needed to be analysed. (Source: The Hindu, 6th March, 2015)

Safety net for sacred groves

The Kerala Forest Research Institute has initiated a networking project to arrest the depletion of sacred groves in the State and protect local biodiversity hotspots. A two-day workshop held at the Institute recently highlighted the need for an incentive-based system to preserve the complex ecosystems that are home to rare flora and fauna including endangered species. Participants from several districts expressed concern over the diverse threats faced by the sacred groves that had stood the test of time for centuries. The workshop culminated in the creation of a sacred grove network involving nature lovers, conservation groups and researchers. The Scientists of KFRI said the network would act as a platform to share information on the threats faced by the groves and formulate strategies for conservation. (Source: The Hindu, 31st March, 2015)

New spider takes Telangana’s name

Telangana now has a spider named after it — Telangana Crab Spider (Thomisus telanganensis). Two wildlife and taxonomy researchers from the Zoology Department of Osmania University chanced upon a female of the species while they were on an expedition at Nagnur in Karimnagar district. The results of the discovery by Research Scholar G.B. Pravalikha and Assistant Professor Chelma Srinivasulu have been published in the recent issue of the Journal of Threatened Taxa, an International Journal of Conservation and Taxonomy. The spiders of the Thomisidae family structurally resemble crabs and are hence called “Crab Spiders”. The Telangana variety has a tendency to walk sideways like crabs. They are also known as “Flower Spiders” as they lie in wait for prey on flowering plants, the researchers said. (Source: The Hindu, April 9, 2015)

Three new havens for Tigers

In a move that comes soon after the Tiger Census in January showed an overall rise in numbers of the big cat, the Centre is set to form three new Tiger Reserves. In-principle approval has been accorded by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) for creation of reserves in Ratapani in Madhya Pradesh, Sunabeda in Odisha and Guru Ghasidas in Chhattisgarh, Union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar informed the Lok Sabha on Tuesday. Odisha is among the States where the Tiger population has dwindled. The NTCA also accorded final approval to a proposal to declare Kudremukh National Park in Karnataka and Rajaji National Park in Uttarakhand as Tiger Reserves. Punishments for violation of Tiger Reserve rules and hunting or altering the boundaries of Tiger Reserves have been enhanced. As per the Ministry’s country-level assessment, India hosted an estimated 2226 tigers in 2014. (Source: The Hindu, April 22, 2015)
Urban wildlife is one of the most unattended fauna in terms of conservation. With an objective to familiarize these animals, this column introduces some of the major urban wildlife of our State.

Common Palm Civet

Common Palm Civet is one of the most common urban wildlife in our State. They are found in forests, villages and even in cities. In villages and cities, they prefer vacant houses and roof of old tiled buildings. They find the gap between the tile and the ceiling very comfortable to spend the day time, simply to sleep and then they become active for feeding in the night. This nocturnal omnivorous animal feeds on all types of fruits, vegetables, small animals and birds. Thus they perform their ecological role as a seed distributor, pollinator and pest controller.

ChilDREN’S CORNER

Match the following States with their Flowers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Flower</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Karnataka</td>
<td>Siroi Lilly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Kerala</td>
<td>Foxtail Orchid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jharkhand</td>
<td>Jarul</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Answers: Karnataka - Lotus, Kerala - Kanikkonna, Jharkhand - Palash, Manipur - Siroi Lilly, Meghalaya - Lady Slipper Orchid, Nagaland - Rhododendron, Orissa - Ashoka, Maharashtra - Palash, Assam - Foxtail Orchid, Andhra Pradesh - Water Lilly

EXPERT TALK

Invasive Alien Species

Urban wildlife is one of the most unattended fauna in terms of conservation. With an objective to familiarize these animals, this column introduces some of the major urban wildlife of our State.

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4 / Mruthika/ March-April 2015

(Threatened species of the family Cichlidae and their distribution in the Indian Ocean)

Mozambique

The Mozambique Province of the Southern Region of the Indian Ocean, with its diverse and unique marine ecosystem, supports a rich biodiversity. One of the significant species found in this region is the Mozambique tilapia (Oreochromis mossambicus), which is known for its adaptability and resilience in various habitats.

Mozambique tilapia, also known as the Mozambique tilapia, is a species of cichlid fish native to the Mozambique Channel and the Indian Ocean. It is one of the most important species in the region, with a significant role in the local economy and food security.

The Mozambique Channel is a wide body of water connecting the Mozambique Channel and the Arabian Sea, with a length of about 700 km. The channel is a rich source of nutrients and supports a diverse marine life, including the Mozambique tilapia.

The Mozambique tilapia is known for its ability to adapt to various aquatic environments, making it a valuable species for aquaculture and fisheries. It is also an important source of protein for local communities.

The Mozambique Channel is a diverse and complex ecosystem, with a rich biodiversity. The Mozambique tilapia, along with other species, plays a crucial role in maintaining this balance and supporting local economies.

The Mozambique Province is home to a variety of species, including the Mozambique tilapia, which is a significant species in the region. Its presence and adaptability make it an essential component of the local marine ecosystem. The Mozambique Channel, with its diverse species, is a vital part of the global marine environment, and the Mozambique tilapia is a key element in maintaining this balance.

The Mozambique tilapia, Mozambique Channel, and the Indian Ocean are interconnected systems, with the Mozambique tilapia playing a crucial role in the local economy and food security. The Mozambique Channel is a vital source of nutrients and supports a diverse marine life, including the Mozambique tilapia, which is an essential species in the region.
Introduction of Aquatic Species in Indian Waters, New Delhi

National Committee on Aquatic Sciences, National Biodiversity Authority, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India, with the support of the Government of the Union of the Emirates and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the United Arab Emirates, and the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) and the European Inland Fisheries Advisory Commission (EIFAC), have jointly organized the first conference on the introduction of aquatic species in Indian waters, held in New Delhi from 10 to 12 August 2015.

The conference was attended by more than 150 participants from India, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, the United States, the European Union, and other countries, representing governments, scientific institutions, and non-governmental organizations.

MEMBER’S DESK

Mruthika/ March-April 2015 / 5
Addressing the Feral Pigeon Menace at PRS Hospital

Feral Pigeons are turning out to be a big menace in PRS Hospital, Killipalam, Thiruvananthapuram posing threat to the hygiene of the institution and thereby compromising the health of the people visiting the facility. This was intimated to Dr. Oommen V. Oommen, Chairman, Kerala State Biodiversity Board by the PRS Hospital authorities. He referred this to WWF. Mr. A.K. Sivakumar, Senior Education Officer who is also a keen birder visited the facility, interacted with the authorities, photographed the issue in details. In office, the same was discussed and publications and reading materials on similar issue was referred and a note with the possible solutions to address the issue was submitted to the Chairman, KSBB and PRS Hospital authorities. The PRS Hospital authorities, desiring not to harm the birds, have requested us to look into the possibility of putting up bird house, bird baths and feeders little away from the hospital so that the population of feral pigeons can be restricted to that location. Senior Education Officer and State Director visited the hospital and discussed in detail with the General Manger on the practical ways of detracting the feral pigeons using nets, spikes, wires, grease and stuffed toys of predator animals.

Ongoing project on Position Paper on Climate Change in Kerala

The data collection and compilation is over. Now it needs to be structured into the draft position paper. Mr. Roshanlal from UK has joined us for 3 months as Volunteer and he has been assigned the work to structure the position paper. The work is progressing very well in discussion with the State Director. Once this is completed, the Expert Group Consultation Workshop will be organized where each expert will be given an opportunity to present his sectoral paper and then it will be open for discussion to the participants of the workshop. The draft position paper will also be presented and then circulated among the participants for final comments. We hope to submit the final position paper to Dept. of Environment and Climate Change, GoK by end of April.

Discussion on Conservation of Ithikkara River and partnering with HELP Foundation

Under the SGP of WWF-India earlier given to HELP Foundation, a network of schools and LSGIs has been mobilized to form the River Watch Group. Now that the project funding is over, we need to ensure that we take this forward and sustain the network on long term. A discussion was organized in the office on 10th March 2015 with the State Director, Senior Education Officer, Prof. Peter Pradeep, Director, HELP Foundation and Mr. Rejith P.G., Environment Programme Manager, Dept. of Environment and Climate Change, GoK. After much discussion and debate, it was decided that, rather than touching upon the sensational issues now, we would identify areas where we can positively intervene and establish a rapport and then extend to other sectors. In the days ahead, Prof. Peter Pradeep will take this forward and do the necessary to coordinate this involving others also.

Ongoing project on Laterite Mining and its Environmental Impacts in Kerala

After the field survey and data collection have been completed for Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam and Ernakulam and the data analysed and draft report prepared, the State Director met Mr. Yalakki, IFS, Director, Dept. of Environment and Climate Change, GoK on 17th March 2015 with the draft report and explained the present status of the project. Convinced of the difficulties in data collection, extensive field work and so on, the Director has agreed to give extension for the project for another 6 months till September end. The field work in the other four districts will be completed in April – May months, the data compiled, analysed and the project is expected to be completed by September end.

Meeting of WGNL Team with PCCF (PFM) & PCCF & Chief Wildlife Warden

With regard to our ongoing initiatives in the Western Ghats Nilgiris Landscape Programme, the sanction to conduct the field work is getting over. With the objective of updating the Forest Dept. top officials of the progress of our work and for requesting extension of permission, a meeting was convened whereby the WGNL team of Ms. Vishaish Uppal, Mr. Tiju Thomas, Mr. Boominathan along with the State Director met Mr. S.C. Joshi, IFS, PCCF (PFM) and Mr. G. Harikumar, IFS, PCCF & CWLW and discussed the status of our ongoing work, progress made as of now, issues and submitted the official letter to give extension for permission to work in the field.

Teachers Training Workshops
Three Teachers Training Workshops were conducted in the month of March at NSS Training College, Pandalam, BMM II College of Teacher Education, Kottarakkara and YMCA Hall, Thiruvananthapuram. The former two workshops were for Teacher Trainees in which around 150 students participated and the latter was exclusively for 25 Higher Secondary School Teachers organised jointly with Zoology Association, Thiruvananthapuram. All the three were on the theme of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) with technical sessions and highly interactive activity sessions.

World Sparrow Day 2015

World Sparrow Day was observed with a Sparrow Survey in Thiruvananthapuram City and Sparrow Day Campaign held within the Museum & Zoo Compound. The Sparrow Survey was carried out with the help of active volunteers from University College and All Saints College. The survey found a steady increase of sparrow population in Thiruvananthapuram City of around 61% than last year. The leading dailies gave good coverage for the report. On 20th, the volunteer team under the leadership of State Director and Senior Education Officer conducted a Sticker Campaign within the Museum and Zoo Compound from 6.30 to 8.30 am where a number of people from different walks of life come for jogging in the morning hours. The campaign was along with an interactive game to place 3 eggs on nests with eyes bound with thick black scarfs.

‘Big Bird Day’ - Birding Session at Kallar Forests, Thiruvananthapuram

The Big Bird Day 2015 was proposed to be conducted on 8th March 2015 at Kallar Forests falling under Thiruvananthapuram Division of Kerala Forests & Wildlife Department. Unfortunately due to the demise of Hon. Speaker of Kerala Legislative Assembly it was postponed to 21st March. 23 birders along with field staff of Kerala Forests & Wildlife Department participated in the birding with sighting of 91 species of birds including many migratory.

Earth Hour 2015

Kerala State Office observed Earth Hour 2015 with variety of events and campaigns with the support of Department of
Environment & Climate Change, GoK, Energy Management Centre, Kerala State Electricity Board and Indus Cycling Embassy. Commencing with the Press Meet on 26th, public campaigns were conducted at Statue Jn on 26th evening, Saphalyam Complex on 27th evening, Museum Campus on 28th morning and Sanghumugham Beach on 28th evening. The campaigns were conducted with interactive games and giving CFLs as gifts. A cyclathon was conducted on 28th morning at Maanaveeyam Road. During the main event of EH, an On-the-Spot Painting Competition for students, Musical Evening, Sand Sculpture, Switch Off and Candle Light Vigil were conducted. Sri. Biju Prabhakar IAS, District Collector was the Chief Guest. Around 500 people joined the event at Shanghumugham Beach making the Earth Hour a grant success.

National Seminar on Conservation for Livelihoods
The Kerala Forests and Wildlife Department conducted the mega event titled Kanana Sangamam in the Kanakakunnu Palace compound. Mr. Renjan Mathew Varghese, State Director, Mr. Tiju Thomas, Programme Officer, WGNL Programme and Mr. Visanth, Project Officer, KLSO attended the seminar as part of the event and presented our work related to Community Forest Rights in Vazhachal area and also actively participated in the discussions and deliberations and also attended the two days consecutive brainstorming and discussions on Community Forest Rights and Participatory Forest Management.

Cycle Rally by ICE & IMA titled ‘Silent Wheels’

Indus Cycling Embassy (ICE) in association with Indian Medical Association (IMA) initiated a Cycle Rally titled ‘Silent Wheels’ from Thiruvananthapuram to Kasargod in 12 days time span. The State Director was invited to the Flag Off function and the State Director also joined in the campaign and showed our solidarity by cycling on the first day of the event.

Earth Day 2015

Kerala State Office observed Earth Day 2015 by distributing a set of two CFLs to 130 families of Pambukala Harijan Colony near Poovar in Thiruvananthapuram. The programme was in association with AMAS Neyyattinkara and was inaugurated by Smt. L. Shanthi Prameela, Asst. Education Officer, Neyyattinkara and a poet in the presence of Sri. Anil V. Salam, Member, Block Panchayat and Sri. Renjan Mathew Varghese, State Director.

Sunday Bird Walk

A team of 17 birders led by Sri. A.K.Sivakumar, Senior Education Officer went for the Sunday Bird Walk on 26th April at Chathancode within Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary. Fifty-two species of birds were observed including the endemic Malabar Trogon, Crimson backed Sunbird, Malabar whistling Thrush, Malabar grey Hornbill, Nilgiri Flowerpecker and White bellied blue Flycatcher.