

VOC Park Mini Zoo, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu

Zoo Outreach Organisation ZOO celebrated International Vulture Awareness Day on 1 September 2012 at VOC Park Mini Zoo, Coimbatore. Twenty-one students aged between 11-14 of Anupparplayam Corporation High School took part in the programme with their teacher Mr. T. Ambrose. Dr. Asokan, Director of the zoo welcomed them and briefed about the zoo. Following this an education awareness programme on vultures was conducted by R. Marimuthu, Education Officer, ZOO.

They were given detailed information about vanishing vultures and the need to protect them. He started with the meaning of biodiversity, each species unique role in ecosystem in which vultures are part of it. Vultures of the world-new and old world vultures were also explained. A total of 23 old world vultures are found in Africa, Asia and Europe and out of which 9 species are found in India. They are: 1. White backed vultures (*Gyps bengalensis*), 2. Slender billed vultures (*Gyps tenuirostris*), 3. Long billed vultures (*Gyps indicus*), 4. Egyptian vultures (*Neophron percnopterus*), 5. Red headed vultures (*Sarcogyps calvus*), 6. Indian Griffon vulture (*Gyps fulvus*), 7. Himalayan Griffon (*Gyps himalayensis*), 8. Cinereous Vultures (*Aegypius monachus*) and 9. Bearded or Lammergeier vultures (*Gypaetus barbatus*). Colour photographs of these species were shown to the students to understand differences in species.

Then general information such as their morphology, distribution and habitat, general behaviour, social behaviour, vocalizations, diet and feeding behaviour, reproduction, longevity, causes of mortality and its conservation status were told. Vultures in human culture explained by giving out few examples. The Egyptians considered the vulture to be an excellent mother. In the Hindu epic Ramayana, Jatayu and his brother Sampaati who had the form of vultures and helped Rama to find out Sita kidnapped by Ravana. In the Tibetan and Parsi practice of sky burial, vultures and other birds eat human corpses.

Then moved on to the ecological significance of vultures and they are



Municipal school students with nine species of Indian vulture posters



Going through the information on the vulture booklets



Exploring vulture flash cards to know about vulture kinds and the poem

the primary removers of carrion in India, scavenging on animals and thereby helping keep the environment clean. The three Indian vultures, White backed vulture, Slender billed vulture, Long billed Vulture are threatened. In the wild it has been declined drastically over the past decade. The decline of these species in India has been put at 97% by 2005. IUCN Redlist put these three species in Critically Endangered category and that is highest category of endangerment. Indian Wildlife Protection Act 1972 put this species Schedule I. Vulture decline in India was first documented in 1999. *Diclofenac*, the veterinary drug introduced in late 80's was the main cause of death. Non-Governmental Organisations and Government of India are striving hard to save these species by setting up vulture breeding and conservation centres in several parts of the country. In Nepal and Pakistan also vulture conservation activities are going on.

Subsequent to this, ZOO's vulture kits were distributed to all the students. First of all, VULTURE SHOCK booklet was used. The students were asked to go through page by page and few of them read loudly to other students hear. Then they took the Indian Vulture Venture ...Flash Cards. They explored all the nine species of



ZOO educator presents detailed information about Indian vulture species

vultures, read the information and the poem. They tied the rakhi each other and pledged to save vultures. They were asked to look at the sticker with International vulture Day logo on it. Next they carried the placard and shouting slogans related to conservation of vultures and move around the zoo grounds. The children told that they learned new informations on vultures, which they never know and they will be supportive for

conservation of this species. Zoo Director thanked the students and teacher and also Zoo Outreach Organisation for having the day at the zoo. He also thanked Conservation Breeding Specialist Group for sponsoring vulture education materials.

Submitted by R. Marimuthu, ZOO and Dr. N. Asokan, Director, VOC Park Mini Zoo.

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Students who participated in the event with their teacher and coordinator