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Vanakam!

We have had an amazing time in India, this July. This month we have seen the highest number of volunteers this year, reaching over 120 at some points!

We have welcomed volunteers of all ages, from all corners of the globe; also the volunteers on our Summer Specials program joined us. This mix of people in the same place, at the same time, led to a really enjoyable month.

What always amazes me when I see the volunteers arrive is how quickly language barriers, cultural differences and generation gaps disappear. What I have come to realise is that when a group of like-minded individuals come together for the common purpose, then boundaries dissolve and strong bonds are formed.

I tend to spend a lot of my time in the office, which is normally a pretty quiet place...until the volunteers come to visit that is!! Then the place comes alive, with people laughing and joking, telling me their stories of the day, getting ready for the afternoon activities and planning what great things to do on the weekend.

July has left me and the team buzzing! All that is left to say is 'Thanks!' to all the volunteers who have worked so hard over the month to make our projects so worthwhile.

'Till next month...keep fighting the good fight!

INGRID SPRAKE

Operations Director

PROJECTS ABROAD | INDIA

A Report on Model Farm's Activities
By Raisa Dawood | Conservation Program Manager

The weather was still dry in May but it was a very lovely month for the team.

It was summer vacation for the local children and the farm was full of smiles and laughter. Playing, working and learning at the same time, the children spent most of their time with us. We had plans to increase the children's interaction with nature along with our regular activities.



Organic Farming open day for Dayavu Home Boys

Dayavu Boys Home is a shelter for boys whose families could not afford even the simplest facilities for a school going kid. Mr. Joshua has adopted these boys whose families are living in and around his hometown in Dindigul and has set up a home with all the basic facilities in his own farmland. He is a professional agriculturist and has been growing different fruits like mango, guava, chickoo, Indian gooseberry along with Moringa plants. He has also tried his hand at grape cultivation. He also has been growing flowers that are being sent for making aromatic oils. Being so dependent on agriculture for the maintenance of his Boys' Home, he still uses only organic inputs. That sounded interesting to us and we invited some of his boys to the Model Farm for two days of skill training on organic agriculture.

The Model Farm volunteers trained them in vermi compost making; cattle fodder management techniques, thatched leaf making, papaya fruit value addition and other organic input production. Also the volunteers themselves cooked small grain cereal based food reinforcing their nutrient value. Educational sessions on native seeds, herbal plants and man-animal conflict were also provided. They worked with our team in fixing the roof of our nursery unit with the help of the thatched leaf strips they made during their stay with us. Their food and accommodation expenses were sponsored by Projects Abroad for the 2 days. Our next event with the Boys Home would be a skill training workshop in fruit processing for selective boys at the Tamil Nadu Agricultural university campus.

Educational workshops on Human Elephant co-existence (HECx)

Various practical aspects with regards to the elephants in India were taken into consideration by the volunteers and different methods were chosen to emphasize the concept of Human-Elephant co-existence.

A common scene that the volunteers noticed during their traveling in India was the ill-treatment of tamed temple elephants and those in the Zoo. The children were made to take the role of the elephants caged in a zoo and a self-realisation session was organized.

Procedures and methods involved in a rescue operation were explained to the kids through a play. The volunteers also insisted on the do's and don'ts when encountering wild elephants. These were done in various sessions. Also in June, we conducted an educational awareness program on the Asian elephant Conservation by inviting the fifth grade children of the local school to the farm and this time the volunteers enacted a silent drama on the disturbances caused to elephant corridors due to urbanization. At the end of each session education packets sponsored by the Zoo Outreach organization were provided to each kid. A total of around 58 children participated in the various sessions in the last 2 months.



The Turtle Project Update

Turtle hunting still continues in the village. We are in the process of working out education materials on the ecological impacts of turtle. We continued our efforts in catching the small and medium sized turtles from nearby village open wells. Very soon the temporary farm habitat would run out of space and we needed to fix this issue too. The turtles already caught were



numbered for identification and their weight and carapace size were noted down. We tried numbering with stickers but as they have the habit of climbing one over another, the stickers got peeled off. So in June we numbered them with paint. In May we caught 3, while by the end of June, it was 6 more new ones and they were all brought to the farm by the local volunteers of nearby village of Karattupatti. The ones from the nearby village looked different on their carapace patterns. We will be studying it.

SJDT Ophanage Kitchen garden work

The orphanage kitchen garden was once again cleared the unwanted plants and more vegetable seeds were planted. Among the crops we planted earlier, sesbania, sweet basil, Indian basil, Rankalli, red lentils and some beans were still growing and were fine while the joy weed population was almost dying. This time we used the concept of dry organic matter mulching and planting seeds on the top of the mulch bed as it can retain moisture for a long time. A bunch of joy weed cuttings were taken from the orphanage to the farm for propagation, so that they could be planted once again for the kids. Our next aim was to train the kids on vermi compost making. This would be done in the following months.

Plant distribution at the church festival

The Christian community in the neighboring village celebrated the successful completion of the first six months of the year as a thanks giving festival. The Model Farm team distributed around 250 native seedlings to the public that gathered for the festival along with compost packs. The plant species chosen were mostly ornamental and fruit bearing trees. We specially managed to get more cherry plants which attract birds as well.

A Strange New World

By Sophia El BOUKILI | France

The first words that come to mind to regarding India are vitality and wisdom. In this world, which is another world than the one that I have known back home in France, I feel as if I am losing all my senses and at the same time to find them all. People, colours, culture, mentality, food and taste, traffic, all of these things are different here. Even the colour of the sun seems to me more nuanced in the tropics with shades of pink and purple I've never seen in France!

My spirit is constantly alert. I was really scared when I climbed into an auto rickshaw for the first time. This mode of transport which is half way between a motorcycle and a taxi, looks so dangerous to me, but in Madurai and certainly in India, it's one of the most widely used forms of transport. After few minutes in the auto rickshaw I was



Attempting for a Conversation with a Local Bus driver



Shop with many varieties of Home-made chocolates for display

little more relaxed when I saw the confidence of the auto driver!

Perhaps it's because I was distracted by the street which called out to me with incredible views and smells. Very often it changes. Sometimes it was good and I imagined the mama in her kitchen who cooks some spicy dishes and other times it was too bad and smelt of tar and bitumen of the city under construction and in perpetual change.

It's so crazy to find two very different places, only separated by a few hours in a plane.

We often say that it's a small world, but I realize now that the world is big with so many things that remain for me to discover.

Our Volunteer Journalists in Action!!





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Random Pictures!!!

