

## World Wetlands Day 2012, Report



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### **Wetlands**

Wetlands are the link between water and land. They are defined as areas of marsh, fen, peatland or water (permanent or temporary), with water that is static or flowing. They can be natural or manmade. The soil must remain water logged or submerged for whole or part of the year. The wetland biota depends upon and is adapted to this waterlogging or submergence during atleast part of their life cycle.

Wetlands have the dual capacity of being ‘water providers’ and ‘water users’. Being critical components of the water cycle that delivers the fresh water, the wetlands need some quantities of water to keep their functions in perfect order.

India has a varied terrain and climate that supports a rich diversity of inland and coastal wetland habitats which are unique ecosystems. Wetlands in India (excluding rivers), account for 18.4% of the country’s geographic area.

These ecologically sensitive areas are getting depleted fast, causing a threat to the environment. **Conservation programmes for them is the need of the hour.**

### **World Wetlands Day**

The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Convention) was adopted on **2nd February in 1971**. Each year since 1997, February 2nd is celebrated as the World Wetlands Day.

### **The Corbett Foundation**

The Corbett Foundation (TCF) is a registered public charitable trust set up by Mr. Dilip D. Khatau on April 22, 1994. TCF began with an initial mandate of supporting the conservation of the area in Kumaon and Garhwal famous as the “Corbett Country”. In 1999, TCF established a division called Kutch Ecological Research Centre (KERC) in Kutch, Gujarat for watershed management, human health awareness, medical & veterinary services, wildlife conservation programs and eco-tourism programs. TCF operates in Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve since 2009 and in Kanha Tiger reserve since 2010 and would soon be expanding its operation to Kaziranga Tiger Reserve in the year 2012.

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On the auspice of the World Wetlands Day celebrated throughout the world, every year, The Corbett Foundation with its divisions in Bandhavgarh, Corbett, Kanha and Kutch, carried out school programmes in various parts of the country.

In Kanha, a series of presentations were made in three schools, Govt. Middle School Katangi on 23<sup>rd</sup> Jan 2012, Govt. High School Samnapur on 27<sup>th</sup> Jan 2012, and Govt. Higher Secondary School Nikkum on 28<sup>th</sup> Jan 2012 in the state of Madhya Pradesh, India. The schools chosen for the presentations are located close to the famous Kanha Tiger Reserve. The purpose for conducting these sessions was to deliver students the idea of what Wetlands are and stress of their importance, especially their impact on human life. The topic of Wetlands was introduced to the students from classes 6<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup>.



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The school programme was based on a PowerPoint presentation designed in local language (Hindi). The presentation highlighted the importance of and threats to wetlands. The ppt included pictorial depictions of Wetland values.

The presentations in schools were concluded inform of an outdoor activity scheduled on 2<sup>nd</sup> Feb 2012, the World Wetlands Day at the Bandhatola Dam, a man-made reservoir in village of Samnapur, Dist-Balaghat, M.P. India. The programme was successfully delivered to a strong crowd of over 115 students and 5 teachers from three different schools.



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The site for the World Wetlands Day activity was chosen taking into consideration the impact of human life on the wetland. The man-made dam so selected had high human disturbance, where people used the water for daily chores and also the land was partly dried up and cultivated, thereby harboring very little bird life. During the school presentations students were taught about the threats to wetlands and the site (Bandhatola dam) exposed those threats thereby enabling students to understand the human activities that hamper the wetlands. This indirectly made the students to think of ways where they can reduce the impact in their little ways.



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On the World Wetlands Day, at first the students were reviewed about the presentation made in their schools and asked to correlate the taught lesson with the actual experience. Quickly the water cycle was reviewed and the students were asked to think what would happen if the cycle was broken, also how the habitat and wildlife interact and which human causes create imbalance in that interaction.



Before letting students off to explore, they were instructed to be good role models and show respect for the habitat and its inhabitants; by handling any animal with care, leaving plants undamaged, not disturbing birds or other creatures. The students were explained that as they would not like others to damage their home, they in-turn should avoid damaging the home of wild plants and animals. They were asked to stay together as a group thereby indirectly inculcating the feeling of responsibility and companionship. Strict ground rules were laid to abate students from dirtying the place and disturbing the decorum.

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The students were then divided into groups and encouraged to observe and assess the different aspects of wetlands.



By applying the Touch and Feel strategy students were allowed to explore the wetland and note everything they see. They were asked to observe birds and try to note down the characteristics such as colour, or any particular behavior such as feeding, cleaning, etc, helping them to focus their attention.

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The students were asked to explore the shorelines for invertebrates and note where the creature was seen and think of the role it might be playing in the habitat. The students were earlier taught that the invertebrates are an essential link in wetland food-chains as they are source of food for fish, frogs and birds. They were encouraged to discuss food-chains and webs.

The students were also asked to sketch any animal signs such as tracks or trails, they might see which would help to identify the type of animal or bird. They were asked to observe plants and how they are adapted to life in the water.



The objective behind this activity was to encourage the students to think beyond the water and land concept and see the interconnectedness of different life forms with each-other and with their habitat. This activity intended to enhance the observational skills of students leading to increased interest and developing a sense of responsibility towards their environment while making the visit more rewarding.

The programme went on for three exciting hours. The students were asked to discuss and reflect on their experience after returning to their classrooms.

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The World Wetland Day outdoor activity programme was concluded by a group photo and students pledging in one voice “Nam Bhumi Bachao, Jeevan Bachao” (Save Wetlands Save Life).

