



# Wetland Festival - 2008

Latha Bhaskar and Priyadarsanan Photographs: Deepak

February 2  
World Wetlands Day  
Healthy Wetlands,  
Healthy People

World Wetlands Day is observed on February 2<sup>nd</sup> every year to commemorate the signing of the U.N. Convention on Wetlands, known as Ramsar Convention. This is an occasion to join together to acknowledge the benefits that we receive from wetlands, and to help raise the awareness about the importance of wetland ecosystems in sustaining the life on the earth. The theme suggested for this year's wetland day was **"Healthy Wetlands, Healthy People"** that will also be the theme for Ramsar's 10th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

ATREE has celebrated this year's wetlands day as 'Wetland Festival-2008' in Alappuzha, Kerala in collaboration with Kerala State Landuse

Board and World Wide Fund for Nature-India (Kerala State Office). The program was targeted for students and other stakeholders of the wetlands of Kerala. It provided an opportunity for the students of Wetland Study Centers (WSC), partners of *Jaladarpanam* (Participatory water quality monitoring program) and other stakeholders to express their views, thoughts and creativity and highlight their concerns in wetland conservation. This occasion provided a platform for Government agencies, NGO's and other interested groups to come closer and work together for wetland conservation.

This celebration, which was first of its kind in India, was well accepted by the participants. Around 600 participants attended the festival held at St. Josephs GHS, Alappuzha on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February 2008. The participants included students, teachers, media, general public, members of self help groups and local NGO's.

The program started in the morning with an inaugural ceremony. Dr. Latha Bhaskar (ATREE-CERC) briefed about the aim of this Festival and welcomed the gathering. Mr. P.P Chitharanjan, the Chairman of Alappuzha Municipality inaugurated the program. He appreciated ATREE for organizing such an event and assured the support of Alappuzha municipality in such efforts. Fr. Thomas Peelianickal, (Director of Kuttanad Vikasana Samithy) gave the wetlands day message. Mr. R. Sanal Kumar, (Deputy Director, Kerala State Land Use Board) delivered the keynote address. A wetland poster series was released during the function by noted fisheries scientist Dr. K. G. Padmakumar, (RARC, Kumarakom) handing over to Sr. Sophyamma Thomas, Head Mistress of St. Joseph's school. Felicitations were given by Mr. Renjan Mathew Varghese, State Director, WWF – India, Kerala State Office and Sr. Sophyamma Thomas, Head Mistress, St. Joseph's GHS. The inaugural ceremony came to a close at 11 a.m. with the vote of thanks by Mr. D. Deepak.

Inauguration of Wetland Festival - 2008



Symposiums

A mini symposium on wetland conservation was organized as part of the Wetlands Festival. Dr. K. G. Padmakumar gave the keynote address on **"Wetland biodiversity"** session. The next session was on **"People and wetlands"** and the leading Environmentalist and *Vanamithra* award winner Mr. K.V. Dayal gave the keynote address.

Puppet Show on Wetland Conservation



A puppet show with wetland conservation as the theme was an attraction of the Wetland Festival. Conceived, created and performed by members of Wetland study Center, Govt. TTI Alappuzha, the story centered on the environmental deterioration of the Vembanad socio-ecological system. The 15 minutes show was successful in highlighting the deterioration of the lake and affected livelihoods. Puppet show as a strong and interesting media inspire us to organize further workshops on puppet making/show for the students to propagate conservation message. The puppet show concluded stating that there are chances of hope as long as we have dedicated organizations like ATREE.



## Activity filled wetland festival

Several activities were organized for students and stakeholder groups who participated in the wetlands festival, which included, competitions for the students, exhibitions “ask the expert desks”, and water quality monitoring demonstration kits. *Kudumbashree* Self Help Groups displayed wetland products like fish pickles, various types of rice and rice products, jam/squash, etc. which were also sold at the venue. The activities for the students included quiz competition, frog call contest, painting, poster competitions, water games etc.

The afternoon session started with a “wetland conservation pledge” prepared by the students of NSS High School, Kavalam. All participants pledged to safeguard and conserve the wetlands, to the level best possible, through out their life. Two student poets recited their creations on Vembanad, was too touchy. A magic show with the theme ‘Water and Wetland’ by the Magician Manu Mancompu was another attraction of the festival. Children enjoyed this very well applauding every item. The first issue of the CERC

newsletter titled Vembanad was released in this venue by Ms. Anitha Sharma, handing over a copy to naturalist Mr. Manu.

The concluding session was chaired by Mrs. Mariamma Kurien popularly known as the “*Kandal Amma*” who loves and protects the mangroves in her area. She shared her concerns about nature conservation issues with the audience and distributed prizes to the winners of various competitions. Dr. Priyadarsan Dharma Rajan, and Dr. Sidhartha Krishnan, (ATREE, Bangalore) were also present at the venue interacting with the participants, inspiring the conduct of the program throughout. Mr. Jojo.T.D extended vote of thanks.

## Wetlands: a gourmet's delight

A wetland feast was arranged at the venue of Wetland Festival by the *Kudumbashree* SHG teams, with the support of ATREE—CERC. The food stall had mouth watering delicacies from the wetlands such as duck roast, *karimeen* (fish) molee, fried prawns and clam meet fry along with palappam, tapioca and rice. The stall clearly gave an impression on the variety of food products wetlands provide. There was good demand for the low subsidized food arranged and the stock went out soon.

## Festival Scenes



Posters by students



Magic Show on ‘Water and Wetlands’



Winners of a competition



Products of Self Help Groups

## The Mangrove Mother — nurturing mangroves for 45 years

Tears were rolling down her cheeks, when *Kandal Amma* spoke about the once pristine Vembanad, to hundreds of children assembled during the Wetland Festival organized by ATREE.

Mrs. Mariamma Kurian, popularly known as ‘*Kandal Amma*’ (The Mangrove Mother) with due respect for her efforts to popularize kandal or mangroves, have been planting and nurturing mangroves in her land bordering Vembanad for the past 45 years. To those who had been to her house, gets a feeling that she had cared mangroves more than her 11 children. In the past, she used to collect seeds from the dense mangrove patches

near Kumarakom. Now one has to visit her land to see the remaining patches of mangroves in this region. She was inspired by her poor father who had started planting mangroves, instead of putting stone walls like others do, to save their small piece of land and house from being eroded.

It is perhaps the Indian Ocean tsunami that implanted the importance of mangroves in the mind of people and policy makers. By her own words “there was a huge rush of researchers, Government officials, media, and school children to see and learn the importance of mangroves from her.

Otherwise an ordinary house wife, she collects and distribute seeds during the fruit bearing periods. She has been recognized and awarded by various forums for her role in popularizing mangroves. The most memorable occasion was when Kallen Pokkudan, whose name synonymous with mangrove conservation in India called on her.



- Deepak