

## **Project Update: January 2009**

### **Film Screenings - An effective tool for Conservation Education.**

Samrakshan is an organisation mandated to promote participatory and sustainable biodiversity conservation in a socially just manner. Samrakshan's Mizoram field base is located in Saiha district at the southern most tip of the state and acknowledged by experts to harbour some of the best remaining rainforests in north eastern India. The focus of our efforts, at this juncture, is entirely on conservation education and awareness. Activities are undertaken in a structured fashion with school going children and their teachers (of classes 5, 6 and 7) and members of institutions like the youth associations and village council members (institutions that espouse social sanction and exert influence in village level decision making). As a part of this programme we have put to use various tools towards facilitating interactions on wildlife conservation issues; these range from seeking space in existing newsletters (brought out by other institutions), screening films, organizing discussion sessions with youth associations and village council members to organizing painting and sketching events for school going children.

During the recent months we have screened two films by Sekhar Dattatri. 'Nagarahole – Tales from an Indian jungle' as a part of our discussions on wildlife occurring in Saiha (for select species would occur in both these forests and film would lay the platform for discussion on these species) and 'Point Calimere – Little kingdom by the coast' towards our talk on Palak Lake (a lake in Saiha). Nagarahole and Point Calimere are two Protected Areas (PAs) situated in Karnataka and Tamilnadu states in southern India.

Selection of the films to be screened depends on the subject then being discussed with the participants. Prior to screening a film for the participants two to five screenings, depending on the need, are held at our field base. During these the film is discussed threadbare. A list of the species (primarily mammals and birds) depicted in the film is then prepared. This list is bifurcated into species occurring in the region and others. For the species occurring in the region corresponding local names are collated. These could be in Mizo, Mara or Lai; three languages that people in Saiha use. Elementary information on these species is looked up in the field guides and other books. The relevant pages in the field guides are book marked and shared with participants in course of the screening. During the screening's participants are prompted to share the local names of select species and are also shown the relevant pages in the field guides. These films usually have a commentary in English or Hindi with English subtitles and their duration ranges from 30 to 60 minutes. At times, however, we cut down on the length of the film by screening only the portion that is relevant to the subject under discussion. Also, at select points within the screenings we pause to allow deliberations; these pauses could be at our or participant's initiative.

Screenings for members of village councils and youth associations are many times organized on television sets at a members' residence. This is possible since the screening venue akin to the time is fixed by the participants. However, at most of the schools at each of the locations of Saiha, Phura and Tuipang where our programme operates we organize these screenings on our

laptop computers. Laptops are of great utility in these schools that are bereft of electricity connection. Since the strength of a class varies from ten to twenty-five the screen size is congenial to the activity; volume however is a concern on select occasions. During screenings at Donbosco School, at the district headquarter, that also possesses electricity connection we have put to use a projector and in tandem with the participants have experienced the thrill on seeing the impact. Basic details on screenings organized by us between February and June 2008 are tabulated below.

Films Screened	Institutions		Schools		Total	
	Screenings	Participants	Screenings	Participants	Screenings	Participants
Point Calimere - Little Kingdom by the coast.	6	62	9	506	15	568
Nagarahole – Tales from an Indian jungle.	3	30	7	430	10	460
Total	9	92	16	936	25	1028

The average size in a screening at Donbosco School is 110 (significantly higher than other schools) and a result the average participant size for schools is higher.

During these screenings’ participants have asked if Palak Lake (wetland like Point Calimere and recognized as Important Bird Area (IBA)) would have the water fowl, in large numbers, as depicted in the film on Point Calimere. When we discussed the concept of Wildlife Sanctuary in context of Point Calimere the participants have asked us of asked of the Wildlife Sanctuaries in Mizoram. On seeing Spotted dove (*Streptopelia chinensis*) and Wild pigs (*Sus scrofa*) an expression of familiarity dawned on their faces and they told us of the species occurring in the region. Primates with their swinging and scratching generated maximum vocal response followed by the dung beetle at work. Asian elephants (*Elephas maximus*) bathing and trumpeting too were followed by lot of chattering amongst the participants. They told us that Saiha, where we work, literally means “ivory” in Mizo language!

The hesitation, we had in the initial stages, on the success of films as a tool disappeared when we observed the body language of the participants during the screenings. Wide eyed and open-mouthed students and institution members who did not get up to smoke even after the film was over brought forth the fact that films are loved by participants. At Donbosco School while the students requested us to show another film the next time, we visit them; one of their teachers came up after the screening and requested for a copy of the film that he could screen the film for his children! We realized that despite the commentary in the films being in a language that many participants are not comfortable with film screenings make the participants don’t feel “subjected to”.

Screening of these films that focus on wildlife conservation has been of great utility to stimulate the sensitivities of the participants on these issues. This is coterminous to the educative value

these films bring. Two reactions we recall with fondness. They bring out the connect these films, despite depicting places far away from the region, made with the participants. During the Point Calimere film a boy, sitting in the corner of the first row, was taking aim at the waterfowl on the screen with an imaginary catapult in his hand! During the Nagarahole film a girl covered her face with her notebook when the Wild dogs (*Cuon alpinus*) bit into the then alive Spotted deer (*Axis axis*).

#### Acknowledgements.

Samrakshan thanks all programme participants for giving an opportunity to screen these films and also Sekhar Dattatri for sharing his films.