

**REPORT ON ATONG FESTIVAL CUM WILDLIFE CONSERVATION
EDUCATION & AWARENESS PROGRAMME.
DATE: 17TH DECEMBER 2008.
VENUE: KARUKOL SCHOOL PLAYGROUND.**



Supported By –



The Rufford Small Grant Foundation

Background

The Atong festival is celebrated every year during the winter season in the areas of Baghmara, Siju and Rongara under the South Garo Hills district of Meghalaya. The festival is celebrated as one day programme and the celebration is mainly to preserve the 'Atong' language which is spoken in south-eastern most region of South Garo Hills district. There was cultural dance, indigenous games and rock concert in the festival.



Education Programme at the Festival

We planned to take the opportunity of such festivals where a large number of people would be gathering (as a platform) and we would have a larger audience and wider coverage of our conservation message. We decided to put up a stall where we would display posters of wild animals, would have a colouring activity, discussion and anti-hunting skit to enhance conservation education awareness among the locals. The activities undertaken in the Atong Festival are briefly discussed below –

a. Conservation Education display stall –

The posters were made of pictures of different wild species of birds and animals found in the region containing basic information about them and some emotional expressions to save them. The posters were made big enough and put up in the walls of our stall in a manner so that everyone passing by can see and read them. This will help the audience to gather some knowledge about animals, its habitat, threats etc in a simple manner.

Spectators of the festival of every age gathered in huge numbers near our stall to see the posters. They were very interested to see something like that. Everybody whether adults or children whoever read the posters gave different comments about each of the wildlife species put up.

Some said; 'we people are always cruel to them and we never realized their feelings!' Someone expressed that nowadays such wildlife (Rose Ringed Parakeet, Oriental Pied Hornbill and Slow Loris) are not seen anymore in our area. Someone replied that the particular species (Asiatic brush-tailed porcupine) is very rare and he has seen it for the first time. Most of the visitors agreed that the population of all these animals and birds have been declining because of various reasons – not availability of food, habitat loss and poaching.



b. Colouring of Wild animals and Birds pictures –

The colouring activity was on bats and primates; the colouring sheets were extracted from the colouring booklets of Zoo Outreach Organization (Z.O.O), materials and the crayons were also provided. The colouring activity was open to all. Many children even young boys and girls participated in the activity and asked us which species is the one s/he was colouring. In order to encourage them

we ourselves also participated in the activity and explained them the types, food preferences, characteristics and role played in the environment by each of the species (bats & primates). Some of the participants had coloured the picture according to what they have seen but some would colour fancily with their creativity. Most of the children had brought their coloured sheets to show us and we appreciated their efforts and gifted them toffees.



After the activity was completed everyone whoever participated were asked to exhibit their colouring sheets for display to others, some parents asked for permission to take home the coloured sheet of their choice.

c. Conservation awareness (Anti-Hunting) Skit -



The skit was performed in between the main programme schedule of the festival which is one of the methods that we have chosen to deliver the conservation message and awareness on 'anti-pet' and 'anti-hunting' to the mass gatherings. The skit was on poaching / hunting of wild animals in the landscape and was performed by the young boys from Bolsalgre -Baghmara. It was a 15 minutes skit in local language designed as per time allotted by the organizing committee of the festival.

It was a well performed skit and was appreciated by

everyone. Some of them have given comments saying such good work would have come earlier then we could have conserved many forests and wildlife in our region.



d. Handout distribution & Postering -

Handouts were developed focusing only on 'anti-pet' and 'anti-hunting' distributed to everyone around whoever has come to the festival. Some people responded saying that they would stop such activities and will advise others not to undertake such activities which are threat towards wildlife.

Poster campaign where focused only on specific issue of 'anti-pet' and 'anti-hunting' and were pasted all over the places in Baghmara, Karukol, Rewak, Siju, Rongara, etc to create awareness.

Experiences and Feelings

All of our activities in the festival are effective and enjoyed by the audience. Especially the colouring and the Skit were greatly appreciated. The colouring activity is something new to village children and helped us to sensitize them towards wildlife and also to give them some basic knowledge of the animals and birds on the other hand the skit had made adults to think positively and to appreciate nature and wildlife around them.

Hopefully, our programme had touched the hearts of everyone whoever had participated in the festival on that day. This would be the starting point for some people who had positive mind set and feel sympathetic towards wildlife.



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