

THE JUNGLE TELEGRAPH

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Email Newsletter from the Wildlife and Nature Protection Society



MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Nature Bites back?

The stunning crippling of the world by the Coronavirus, coupled with the rapidly escalating death toll, have nations grappling to comprehend how to deal with this situation. We are naturally all quite saddened by the many deaths, illnesses and other impacts on millions of people, and we pray for stability to rapidly return along with healing and health.

There has been a complete Reset of the world. Nations and people who viewed themselves as technologically and maybe even personally superior to most have suddenly realized just how fragile life is and how vulnerable we all are against the natural order of things on this planet. **One wonders how bleak the situation would look like once the unemployment and economic realities hit. Time will tell.**

Humanity must use this crisis to reflect on the destructive, unconscionable, greedy and selfish manner in which we have continued to destroy and exploit this planet and its natural resources, all in the name of progress. It is poignant that the very origins of this catastrophic situation arose from the illegal wildlife trade that conservationist and other sensible people had called on curtailing for decades. There are many other similar disasters evolving right in front of our eyes. Our emission assault on the ozone layers and Climate Change are examples of behaviour leading to the next catastrophe. The great question is if we/mankind/national leaders will have the courage to make the big decisions which will roll these back and provide an opportunity for the earth to heal, and for all beings to live in a better balance on this beautiful planet? **It is time for a post World War two Summit equivalent.**

Conservation topics were continually in the news. We had escalated media exposure on the World Wildlife Day, the fantastic stance taken by the young lady Wildlife official, and videos of the latest terrible onslaught launched to clear even more large tracts of jungle around Wilpattu with questionable approvals and approaches. We have recently seen images of a Crocodiles crossing our new expressway segment, and early reports indicate heightened conflict due to newly isolated elephant herds. Our highways mandatorily need way more underpasses and tunnels to give our wildlife a fair chance of movement and survival. We can still build one or two added elevated passes in those hotspots! The staggering numbers of Pangolin's being illegally killed are chilling reminders that we are at war with our fellow human beings. **Are you part of the battle or will you sit this one out again after we ride this virus crisis? It is only together that we can turn the tide.**

We are strengthening our HO team so we can increase our focus on Scientific Research and in Regional youth activities. But we are also keenly looking for more partners and donors since the above issues require a lot more resources. Dealing with COVID19 will require many cost reduction measures. At the same time, not investing in preventing the future issues will only ensure that we might deal with a new problem in the not too distant future. If a fraction of the global healthcare budgets went into better conservation measures, we would not need such high healthcare costs in the first place. Finding a better balance for the shorter and longer-term outcomes is vital. Please do continue to participate in our many activities while ensuring that you contribute towards conservation with the best possible means you have. For now, stay home, stay safe, and be glad that Mother Earth and Nature is being given a well-deserved break, even though not in the ideal manner. **Maybe the best of humanity will soon start to emerge?**

We must live in hope!

Sriyan de Silva Wijeyeratne

A ROARING SUCCESS STORY

The Ecological Restoration of a Rainforest (ROAR) using the technique of Relay Floristics by initially planting pioneer and early successional species ROAR has created a much-needed favourable shelter for the growth of the primary forest species thus improving the biodiversity of the area. The reappearance of wildlife such as sambur deer, mouse deer, wildboar, pangolin and porcupine and many species birds and butterflies is a clear sign of improved habitat. WNPS Diyakothakanda Ray De Costa Memorial Rainforest Initiative is implemented with guidance and advise of Professors Nimal & Savitri Gunatilleke and supported by Ajita De Costa.



MAJOR OVERHAUL AT THE OFFICE

In recent months the office has undergone renovations, with three new toilets built with a his and hers upstairs and one toilet downstairs which can be accessed via the gardens, the old toilet downstairs has been converted to a store room and a new small pantry added for staff and member use. All the Past Presidents photographs are now displayed prominently at the entrance to the head office, and a new conference table has been placed in the office for meetings use.

The upstairs has also been cleaned and brightened up and is now in regular use by the society for events such as the *Marine Chat* and *Cat Chat*.

The gardens have also been landscaped and several new plants added and the older ones pruned. To provide a healthy environment for the plants, unfortunately parking inside the gate is discouraged.

Termite treatments, window repairing, painting, and getting the library up and running is on the cards for the coming months.



WNPS HEAD OFFICE

ACTIVITIES OF THE MARINE SUBCOMMITTEE

The first field trip of the Marine Subcommittee was to the Chillaw Mangrove Museum. Participants were introduced to the different species of Mangroves, their habitats and its critical role not only in the marine ecosystems but the overall environment. Dr Malik Fernando engaged participants on the marine life in and around mangroves and coastal habitats, and the Mr. Jagath Gunawardena gave participants a detailed account of mangrove habitats during the walk around the mangroves in the museum precincts.

Two very engaging marine chats were held at the WNPS office in January and February. The first was on the identification of Sharks by Rex De Silva and the other on the Understanding of Corals by Dr Malik Fernando. Both these programs created much interest, the chats will be a regular feature in the WNPS Marine Sub Committee calendar.



WNPS MEMBERS ON A VISIT TO THE CHILLAW MANGROVE MUSEUM.



MARINE CHAT WITH REX DE SILVA ON IDENTIFICATION OF SHARKS.



VISITING A MANGROVE HABITAT



MARINE CHAT WITH DR MALIK FERNANDO ON UNDERSTANDING CORALS.

CELEBRATING WORLD WETLAND DAY 2020

Colombo is recognized as a 'Wetland City' by the Ramsar Convention because of the extensive wetland ecosystem that buffers the city, which acts as a vital barricade against flooding. To celebrate World Wetland Day 2020, the WNPS organized a 'Wetland Clean up at the Bellanwila-Aththidiya Sanctuary on the 2nd of February 2020.



VOLUNTEERS AT THE WETLAND CLEAN UP

YOUTH AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

The WNPS Youth Ambassadors conducted an awareness program at schools in Udawalawe on the importance of human Leopard coexistence, sharing information from their trip to Jawai in India with the children as a model example for harmony between humans and wildlife.

A thank you to Cinnamon Nature Trails who sponsored our youth ambassadors visit to Jawai, India in 2019.



AWARENESS RAISING LECTURE, UDAWALAWE

TRIALING MITIGATIVE MEASURES FOR HUMAN-ELEPHANT CONFLICT

The Human elephant conflict subcommittee in May 2019 set up a trial of a LED Light Repellent System (LRS) at the northern border of the Uda Walawe National Park – in the town of Pokunutenna to deter crop-raiding elephants from entering paddy fields. This was the first time a LRS had been tried as a linear system to protect elephants coming through to paddy fields. These fields belong to 18 farmer families with each family having about 2-3 square kilometres of paddy. The previous methodology of the LRS system was to surround the property of a farmer and their crops, to the extent of one square kilometer. This linear system proved to be a failure, for a few reasons, mostly human-related. As such, it was decided to abandon any future linear LRS systems and only work with villagers who wished their house and cultivation protected, as had worked before. With this in mind, the WNPS has decided that in 2020, it would set up three locations - in Galgamuwa, Ehatuwewa or Wilachchiya and Pokunutanne - further to test the long-term feasibility of the LRS system. It is important to note that the LRS is an experimental system and only after a few years of trial and error can a definitive decision be made to assess if the LRS is a potential HEC mitigation system.



VILLAGERS PUTTING TOGETHER THE LED LIGHT REPELLENT SYSTEM



THE TRIAL SITE AT POKUNUTANNE WITH THE LED LIGHT REPELLENT SYSTEM SET UP.

SOCIETY GOES FOR LITIGATION

This year, 2020, the Society has filed two new cases- one to protect Sri Lanka's natural resources and another calling for the implementation of a national policy for the conservation of elephants.

1. Sand mining case- SCFR 29/2020

This case was filed by the EFL and WNPS challenging the mining circular which was issued on 31.12.2019 by the Geological and Mines Bureau. The circular had amended the permits/license issuing procedure for sand, gravel and clay by removing safeguards and regulations stipulated in the mines and minerals Act 33 of 1992. The case was taken up for support on 25.02.2020. The AGs Department moved for further time, noting that they are yet to receive instructions from the GSMB. It was fixed for support on 22.05.2020.

2. The Society has also gone to court in 2020 with Julius Creasy serving as its legal recourse to force the Department of Wildlife Conservation to adopt the National Elephant Policy that was approved in Cabinet as a mitigative method of human-elephant conflict. The case was duly filed on the 26th of February.

CAT CHAT

The 3rd Cat Chat organized by the Wild Cat Sub-committee was held on the 18th of January 2020 at the WNPS head office. The discussion was moderated by Dr Sriyanie Miththapala, with wildcat cat biologists speaking on the relationship between tigers and indigenous communities in India, highlighting just how interwoven conservation and anthropology are. Fishing Cat's were also highlighted as a flagship species to further the protection of mangroves, wetlands and other such valuable ecosystems. The event was attended by members of the subcommittee, active Wild Cat researchers and invitees.



PARTICIPANTS AT THE WNPS CAT CHAT



REGIONAL LECTURE SERIES

Our Regional Lecture series for 2020 commenced with a Lecture on the 'Social life and survival strategies of Sri Lankan Leopards' by Rukshan Jayewardene at British Council Kandy on the 19th of January.



FIELD TRIPS

The WNPS Monthly Educational field tours have become a much sought after experience, due to the expert guidance on these tours provided by field scientists and naturalists. In January, the WNPS visited Mannar with Dr Sampath Seneviratne providing fascinating insight on the migrant bird's species that visit during the North-south migratory season.

In early February, a tour of Sinharajah rainforest was done with our resource person Rahula Perera sharing his expert knowledge and insights. In early March WNPS members were treated to a fantastic weekend of birding in Bundala, recording over 128 bird species with Kasun Dayananda sharing his time and knowledge to enrich the experience.



BIRDING IN MANNAR, JANUARY 2020



WITH MARTIN WIJESINGHE AT MARTINS LODGE, SINHARAJA, FEBRUARY 2020



BIRDING IN BUNDALA, MARCH 2020

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