

# Educator Skills Training programme on Bears at Van Vihar National Park

R. Marimuthu\*

Alertis-Fund for Bear and Nature Conservation, Netherlands has funded Zoo Outreach Organisation to conduct two teacher training workshops for forest department personnel, teachers, NGO's and others. The theme includes bear conservation and the plight of dancing sloth bears, some of which are now comfortably housed in the Bear Rescue Centres of Van Vihar National Park, Madhya Pradesh and Bannerghatta National Park, Karnataka where the workshops will take place.

The first workshop was conducted at Van Vihar National Park, Bhopal from 28-29 July 2010 with 29 participants, most of them teachers. There were also a few NGO's as well as middle level forest officers representing almost all National Parks of Madhya Pradesh. The trainers were B.A. Daniel and R. Marimuthu, (this reporter) of Zoo Outreach Organisation. The training was inaugurated by the Mr. Jasbir Singh Chouhan, Director, Van Vihar National Park while Mr. A.K. Khare, Assistant Director welcomed the



*Pre-assessing trainees attitude towards bears*

participants and resource persons. After the inaugural, the training began with Assessment tools. To pre-test the participant's knowledge on bear

conservation and bear dancing problem in India, brain mapping and attitude assessments were carried out.



*Mr. Jasbir Singh Chouhan, Director, Van Vihar NP inaugurates the training*



*Guest lecture on Dancing Bears by Mr. S.S.Rajput, CCF*

\*Education Officer, Zoo Outreach Organisation, Coimbatore. Email : [marimuthu@zooreach.org](mailto:marimuthu@zooreach.org); website: [www.zooreach.org](http://www.zooreach.org); [www.zoosprint.org](http://www.zoosprint.org)



**A slide show presented by Mr. S.S. Rajput**

Mr. Surendra Singh Rajput, Chief Conservator of Forests (Territorial) and former Director of Van Vihar National Park, Bhopal spoke on "Conservation and Rehabilitation of Bears in Van Vihar Bear Rescue facility" with the collaboration of Wildlife S.O.S and Madhya Pradesh Forest Department and with the support of Ministry of Environment & Forests and Central Zoo Authority. In his talk he covered the objectives of the Centre, dancing bear problems in India, the various traumas and agony of the bears when Kalendars train them for dance performance, the rescue operations of bears from Kalendars and rehabilitation programme for Kalendars by Wildlife S.O.S.

Following their presentation, the trainers explained the taxonomy of bears including the four species found in India, e.g. Sloth Bear-*Melursus ursinus*; Asiatic Black Bear- *Ursus thibetanus*; Malayan Sun Bear- *Helarctos malayanus* and Brown bear-*Ursus arctos*. Their scientific name, other names, habitat, colouration, food, threats and special characteristics of each bear was explained in detail. But for sloth bear additional information such as why they are called as "sloth bear" (though

they are not lazy), lifespan, weight, height, pregnancy, litter size, maturity and its special behaviour such as carrying young ones on its back. There were 100,000 Sloth bears estimated in the year 1800. After 200 years, their numbers have reduced to about 11,000, a loss of 89 percent of sloth bears in 200 years time. To explain this, a map activity was done with past and present distribution range maps. This was also a group activity. The groups cut and



**Understanding Sloth Bear's past and present ranges - map activity**

past the jumbled past and present sloth bear range maps. At the end they compared the past range maps with present and understood the population and habitat decline of sloth bear in range countries.

To give people an idea about bear behaviour and adaptations, it was compared with humans. The body size and weight, speedy sloth activities were done. Their birth weight, adult male and female weight and height, tail, arm and canine teeth length, and walking speed were compared with humans.

If we want to protect bears it is important to know the historical events related to them. Participants were asked to pair up and make illustration for timeline cards whichever the year they got. After they did the drawing, each one was called up in chronological order and asked to explain their drawing. Then put their drawings in order to take an exhibition for the entire group to see. They did the





Illustrations from 1605-2050 with some predictions.

The participants were divided into three groups and conducted mini dramas. The groups were given readymade scripts on the following themes 1. The dancing bear trade-a happy ending 2. Bears lose their home due to felling of trees and 3. A boy saves bears. They were given ample of time for the preparation and rehearsal. All the three groups performed the miming drama in a creative and lively manner. Through these dramas the participants could understand the dancing bear trade, habitat loss and awareness of people to save bears.

People in different parts of the world and even in the same region or country have different perspectives on bears. To understand the important role bears play in human culture, participants were divided into groups and asked to examine how bears have been used as a symbol in their own culture, viz advertising, art, folklore/stories/ movies/songs, literature and mythology. We made it as a competition and each group came up with many examples. The group with more points was declared as a winner.

It is important to know different peoples' perspectives on bears in order to conserve them. By putting together their views and using them to educate other people about Sloth Bear Conservation. To demonstrate this activity the participants were divided into villagers, street playwrights, songwriters, advertising executives and politicians. Each group was given sufficient time to practice. Finally, they performed their roles and shared their views on conservation of bears.

After this training, the participants needed to practice by conducting education programme on what they have learnt out of this work. So they were taught about how to plan



**Bear behaviour: Compare human body weight, height, running, walking speed with bears & other bear behaviours**



**Tracing out bear's 500 year history through illustrations**



**Participant's bear history illustrations put up on display**





an education programme for short as well as long duration using the bear education packets and teaching guide. The bear education kits materials were tried by all participants that is, tying rakhi (wrist band), wearing masks, carrying placards and how to use the booklet. They were also informed about Zoo Outreach Organisation's various education activities and materials as well as education network-South Asian Network of International Zoo Educators.

Post brain mapping activity was conducted to demonstrate how their level of knowledge increased about bear conservation and dancing bears in India. By comparing pre and post brain mapping, it showed a great difference in the amount the knew earlier and the information they learned from the workshop. The participants were supplied a pledge card and asked to write two pledges that they would carry out in next two months.

In the valedictory, participants were asked to give their comments on the training. Mr. Jasbir Singh Chouhan, Director, Van Vihar National Park spoke on the closing session and distributed certificates and most importantly gave 50 Bear Education kits to each participants to immediately test their training by arranging a programme with the audience of their choice back in their work or home place.



*Mini dramas themed on a boy rescuing dancing bear from Kalandhar, bear habitat loss and dancing bear trade*





**Role-play: Different peoples perspectives on bear conservation\_ politicians left and advertising executives on the right**



**How to use the Bear education packet materials demonstration\_ participants trying masks, placard and rakhi**



**Each participants were supplied with 50 bear education packets in order to test their training immediately**



**Participants, trainers and coordinators**