

Junglescapes News

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Ecological Intelligence

A lot has been written and talked about the other EI (Emotional Intelligence) but what we seem to need more urgently to save the planet is Ecological Intelligence (let us call this ECI for the sake of brevity). ECI is the ability to understand the inter-relationships between the different strands that form the complex fabric called our environment, and the impact our actions have on these. Wildlife species have a high level of in-built ECI - their understanding of seasonal weather changes and their ability to handle their food sources prudently are cases in point. Obviously ECI is core to their survival and hence a necessity.

Until a few centuries back, homo sapiens also required a high degree of ECI to survive as they lived largely in natural habitats. With urbanization and advance of science, ECI has receded fast

from the human toolkit. Our general indifference towards ecological issues like global warming is a fall out of ECI deficiency. Unfortunately, even tribals are fast losing their ECI now with their habitat changes and adoption of stereotype modern lifestyles. This does beg the question whether relocation of tribals from within forest areas has contributed to hastening this trend.

Re-building ECI amongst people, particularly those living near forest areas, is critical for sustainable conservation. Helping them re-connect with their environments will not only encourage responsible behaviours, but also instill pride in their heritage. Some simple steps may be effective. We can work with tribal schools in evolving effective courseware on ecology. Wildlife and nature films have to move beyond urban audiences, dubbed in local dialects. Take another case in point. Most tribal children have seldom been inside a sanctuary or national park, as they cannot afford the safaris. Their connotation of wildlife is generally negative, based on attacks on humans and crops. Taking tribal children on safaris inside core areas periodically will help them see wildlife in a different light.

Agencies like Centre for Environment Education (CEE) have been conducting awareness education for rural audiences and have created world class communication methodologies. They are keen to collaborate with NGOs in carrying these to tribals and villagers who live alongside our forests. Corporate sponsorship for such ECI awareness programs as part of their "Green" initiatives would help greatly in making this happen. This would put conservation initiatives in our country on a truly sustainable platform and is more vital now than ever before with the implementation of the Forest Rights Act.



Poetry Corner

The Oriole (Anonymous - JLRNTP member)

Yes, very ornamental, is the Golden Oriole;
Looks as if the sun is pouring out his soul;
Well, if I was asked,
I'd say his bandit-eyes are masked,
But he is a delight to see, on the whole! :)

ECOLOGY PRIMER – PART I - HABITATS

What is Ecology?

Ecology is the subject that deals with the relationship of living organisms to one another and to their physical surroundings. It is from the Greek word oecology, that means “the study of the home” (our home being our natural environment).

What is a habitat in the context of wildlife?

A habitat is a forest area that is populated by its own, unique combination of plants, mammals, birds, reptiles, etc. that live as a community, with intricate relationships between each other. A habitat has a set of unique physical factors that make it conducive for the community to reside there, like the climate, water, soil conditions, food availability, etc. Habitats are normally dominated by some species of plants and animals, and come to be known by this – like an elephant habitat or an evergreen forest (just as Bangalore is known as a habitat for IT professionals) – but a larger community resides within.

What is meant by inter and intra-habitat diversity?

Inter-habitat diversity is the difference between two habitats – when you cross from Mudumalai into Mukurthi NP you see the change in the vegetation from deciduous to semi-evergreen with differences in species (Nilgiri Tahr, Lion Tailed Macaque, etc that you don't see in Mudumalai). Intra-habitat diversity denotes variability within a predominant habitat – for instance within Bandipur you would find sub-habitats that are distinct like shola forests, hill ranges, riverine forests, grasslands, etc. Higher intra-habitat

diversity also means higher specie diversity, as a larger number of species can find niche areas conducive to their survival. Habitats in the Western ghats are blessed with high intra-habitat diversity that make them ecologically invaluable.

Why is habitat protection so critical for the survival of species?

Three main habitat threats are faced by species. First is habitat loss (self-explanatory). Secondly habitat changes - like changes in prey availability, or weather, soil, water conditions (e.g. the melting of arctic ice poses a major habitat challenge to polar bears). Third is loss of habitat choice as migratory routes get cut off. Not all species are able to adapt to habitat challenges. While leopards have adapted to different altitudes, vegetation and human interfaces, tigers have been far less adaptive (Sundarbans tigers may please pardon us!). In the past, species survived major habitat changes by traversing across large land masses. This is impossible with the scattered wildlife habitats of today. Conserving our remaining habitats and migratory corridors is the only solution to survival of most species.

An exciting exercise for you

The next time you visit a sanctuary, try and identify the intra-habitat diversity that lies beneath the predominant habitat. Observe the different types of life forms that survive in these intra-habitat niches. Discuss with your naturalist on these aspects.

In the next issues we will discuss “The Food Chain”, "Species". etc

BREAKING NEWS!!

A small social forestry project in Haryana has become the first in the world to qualify for carbon credits, which can be sold to carbon credit buyers in developed countries. The European Commission (EC) that has co-funded the Haryana Community Forestry Project said that this was the first small-scale afforestation project in the world to get certified by the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) of the UN. 370 hectares of sandy land belonging to 227 farmers in eight villages of Sirsa district in Haryana have been selected to get the carbon credits. As part of the project, 19 earthen water harvesting dams have been built to provide year-round irrigation and allowing a shift to more profitable off-season crops. This could mean a major fillip for the various Village Forest Committees and EDCs and provide a major thrust for sustainable afforestation. Junglescapes is already working with some VFCs around Gundlepet for water harvesting and will actively pursue the carbon credit aspects as well. K Anand, Junglescapes member, is leading this project and anyone keen to volunteer for this may contact us.

Book Review: "Tiger" by Stephen Mills (BBC Books)



If there is only one book you had time to read about the tiger, you could choose this one above all others. The reasons are simple. Very informative and entertaining to read, the author presents the complex facts of the tiger's life in a scientific yet simple style. Written in an easy conversational style, and printed in a coffee table format with large fonts and exciting pictures, the book is a real joy to read.

Mills starts the book with excellent momentum, talking about the tiger as a hunter. This is quite logical too since many facets of the tiger's behavior, covered in subsequent chapters, are dependent on its basic quest – food. He then takes us through the other aspects of the tiger's life – courtship, mating,

parenting, family life, social life, etc. The chapters on the tiger's family and social life are eye-opening, since we have been conditioned to think of tigers as unsociable and solitary animals. The author explains with real life examples of the family bonds that he has witnessed between tigers that share the same mother, even after they grow up and occupy their own territories. Mills draws upon scientific evidence from different sources extensively throughout the book. Equally, he reminds us often about the limitations of science in understanding the tiger's behavior, which is rather complex and highly individualistic as well. This is what lends a high degree of objectivity and humility to his book, as unlike many other authors Mills does not pose to be all-knowing nor does he try to offer answers to all questions.

Contrary to the view held by many conservationists that tourism harms endangered species, Mills argues that responsible tourism will indeed protect the tiger. He says tourists offer free patrolling and cites that tiger poaching is lower during the peak tourist season as compared to the lean seasons. Beautifully illustrated with over 100 stunning color plates, this is a definitive book on the Tiger. The book is published by BBC and is available at leading book stores at around Rs 750. Get a copy and rest assured that everyone in your family will become a Tiger fan !



Karthik's Blog

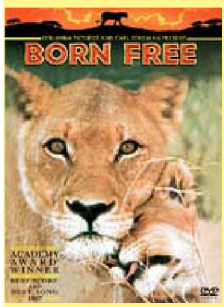
"Our Own Gerard Durrell"

People who love all the small lovely creatures that live in nature enjoy reading Gerard Durrell books. If you are a Durrell fan, you will also love reading the blogs of S Karthikeyan, the well-known naturalist of Bangalore. He has a lovely website called www.wildwanderer.com that carry his blogs.

Read about Tiger Beetles, Fiddler Crabs, Binturongs, flowering tress, rare Himalayan plants and a variety of amazing stuff. Karthik travels widely and his blogs carry the most interesting stories of his journeys. Apart from being a wonderful naturalist, Karthik is also an excellent photographer. His pictures make his blogs spring to life, like the one shown here of the chameleon.

www.wildwanderer.com is a website that no nature lover should miss. Spend a few hours a week on this site and see your knowledge grow, and your stress levels go down !

A CLASSIC REVISITED



Junglescapes is happy to revisit BORN FREE, a classic, and examine its relevance to contemporary conservation.

The 1950s and 1960s saw the making of a few mainstream feature films based on wildlife themes – some popular ones were Hatari and Drums of Destiny. But the one film that stood out in this genre and is considered a classic is “Born Free”. Shot in

1966 in Africa, the film is based on the famous book by Joy Adamson and revolves around the real-life story of the couple, Joy and George Adamson.

George Adamson is a game warden in Kenya and has to kill a lion that is harming humans, and its mate as well. He carries the lion’s three cubs back to his wife Joy. The smallest is named by her as Elsa. When the cubs reach adulthood, the two largest are sent to Rotterdam zoo. Now the Adamsons are faced with the dilemma of rehabilitating Elsa to the wild or sending her to a zoo. They choose the first option and the film is about the challenges of re-introducing Elsa to the life of a wild lion. They succeed finally and with a painful heart return Elsa to the wild. The film won a number of international awards. Its lead actors, Bill Travers and Virginia McKenna, became animal rights activists and started the Born Free foundation.

The film has contemporary relevance today as we try to re-introduce tigers in places like Sariska. Conservationists also feel that rehabilitating endangered species from captivity into the wild is one way to fight extinction.

VCDs of Born Free are available in all major book shops in India. Don’t miss it.

Tiger Park Data Bank initiative

An idea came up sometime back that naturalists and wildlife enthusiasts visiting our Project Tiger reserves could record their observations about these parks in a structured manner, thus creating a voluntary citizens’ forum for monitoring the health of these parks. The Data Bank initiative gives life to this idea. A simple and structured questionnaire has been created that can be filled up on-line and voluntarily by anyone keen to share information based on his or her visit to a tiger reserve.

While it is obvious that a few days’ visit to a park will not give detailed insights, we appreciate that people like naturalists and serious wildlife enthusiasts are in a better position to observe the indicators of health of a park as compared to other visitors. Hence it is expected that this data collection will be objective and useful in a variety of ways. For one, the information could help highlight potential concerns to officials in a positive and pro-active manner. The database may also be available for researchers and wildlife lovers who wish to access it. Once sufficient entries are available, trends could start becoming apparent. Integrity of the information would be maintained by ensuring that data submitted is not changed or edited in any way.

The link to the questionnaire is given below. In case you happen to visit a Project Tiger reserve please spare some time for the sake of our tigers and fill this form.

<https://spreadsheets.google.com/viewform?hl=en&formkey=cFdmM1ZseFZZXeWF6cTNBMkd6MTNITXc6MA>

Junglescapes
towards sustainable wildlife conservation

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