



Rural Schools Environmental Awareness Program

A project conducted by the Sri Lanka Wildlife Conservation Society (SLWCS) and the Biodiversity and Elephant Conservation Trust (BECT). Both SLWCS and BECT are working in partnership to ensure the future survival of the dwindling biodiversity of Sri Lanka.



School children from a public school in the Anuradhapura District in the Northwestern Province participating in a lecture.

It is very important to educate our young children and make them aware of the environmental issues of Sri Lanka. Their support is crucial to the long term conservation of Sri Lanka's biodiversity.



Jayantha Jayewardene addressing a rapt audience.

Children who have participated in the program are keen to get further involved in conservation issues.

The Rural Schools Environmental Awareness Program was begun to help mitigate human-elephant conflict. Today human-elephant conflict is escalating in a number of districts in Sri Lanka. Both elephants and humans are killed annually as a result of these conflicts.

The Sri Lankan elephant is an ideal flagship species for all of the threatened habitats, plants and animals of Sri Lanka. Whatever protection and other conservation measures developed for its future survival will automatically

ensure the protection of thousands of species of other endangered plants and animals. This is why the Sri Lanka Wildlife Conservation Society has specifically focused on the Sri Lankan elephant to invest the Society's efforts to help conserve Sri Lanka's incredibly diverse habitats and their threatened fauna and flora.

The Rural Schools Environmental Awareness Program is held in schools in areas most affected by human-elephant conflict. The program is designed to give the children a better understanding of the elephant - its habits, physiology, biology, and most importantly it need to survive. They are also made aware of why elephants raid crops and the effective ways to minimize crop raiding. They are also shown why it is necessary to conserve the elephants for the future. The Program also tries show how the presence of wild elephants can be beneficial to those living in conflict areas - eco tourism, adventure tourism, etc.

With this program we are trying to get the children to look at the elephant in a different light. The lectures are illustrated with relevant slides and presented by expert volunteers and personell from the Department of Wildlife Conservation. At the end of every lecture is a discussion time during which the children are encouraged to ask questions and participate actively in the discussions. Refreshments of soda and snacks are also served at this time to all of the participants.

PROGRESS

The Rural Schools Environmental Awareness Program was started in 1999 in the Anuradhapura District where human-elephant conflict is most intense, and the program is being continued in all schools. Already over 1400 children from nearly 20 schools have benefitted from this program. The program has been so successful now requests are coming from organizations such as Farmer's Associations, Village Cooperative Societies, etc., to conduct these programs for their members. Due to lack of funds and logistics these requests have not been accomodate. It is unfortunate since these organizations too can contribute to help save our wildlife.

FUTURE PROGRAMS

The feedback from the program so far as been very positive. Yet, the scope of the Program itself is limited since it does not have the facilities to provide continuing support to the school children. The program also does not address many of the other environmental issues that are cause for concern today. We would like to expand the schools program to encompass other local and regional environmental issues as well as introduce the concept of the "Three R's" of conservation (Reduce, Recycle & Reuse). Other local and regional environmental concerns would be finding better biological alternatives to reduce high usage of pesticides and insecticides by farmers, access to clean water, garbage disposal and waste management, controlling soil erosion and tree planting, developing mixed home gardens, plant nurseries and managing micro ecosystems, economical use of solar energy, developing buffer-zones to reduce human-elephant conflict near national parks. By establishing grass root environmental organizations, we would like to introduce computers to the rural communities and most importantly teach village school children how to use the Internet and how to access information from the global information network. We believe by expanding the scope of the schools program to include at least several of these important issues, we can empower the children and the villagers to be better stewards of the Earth.

The program will be extended to the schools in the Polonnaruwa District in the North Central Province, and to the schools in the Hambantota District in the Southern Province where also human-elephant conflict is intense. Eventually we would like to see the program established island wide in all the Provinces.



The Vision of this program is to empower the children of today with the knowledge and awareness they will need to conserve, preserve and wisely manage the natural resources they will inherit tomorrow.

FEED BACK

All the children who have participated in the program has been very interested in the elephant and its conservation. These sessions have so far proved very useful in getting the children to understand the elephant better, its biology, habits, social life, etc. Most of the children have not seen an elephant in daylight. They know of it as a specter that comes in the night and destroys their cultivations, houses and sometimes kill people. Therefore when a picture of an elephant, in good light amongst the greenery and blue sky, is shown there is a complete change of attitude towards the elephant.

With regard to the needs of the children, they have indicated that they would like books in Sinhala & Tamil on the elephant. In addition they indicate that there is very little reading matter available about nature in the Sinhalese and Tamil languages. We hope, when funds are available, to translate books on nature, wildlife and other environment topics that are in English to Sinhala and Tamil and donate them to the school libraries.

The children are also keen to get further involved in conservation issues, and have requested the field team to help them achieve this. We hope to, as a follow up, to start Nature Clubs in these schools so that there would be a continuance to the work that we have started. The Nature clubs will be started at our sessions but there will have to be follow up visits to help them to get on their feet. We will have to give them a simple set of objectives goals, rules and regulations. This will benefit the children by assisting them to get to know wildlife, nature and the environment better and they can, in a small way, start conserving it and be responsible for it. The nature clubs will have to be formed into a network and their progress closely monitored by one person for at least two years. A visit once or twice a year will also be necessary. Computers and access to the Internet will certainly enhance their awareness and the development of the clubs.

COST

Presently the program depends on volunteers to conduct the lectures and presentations. Equipment such as the slide projector and screen are borrowed. Though financially this helps to keep the costs low, it slows down the pace of the program since the sessions have to be scheduled around the availability of the volunteers and equipment. If the funds are available we would like to have a full time paid staff with a vehicle and necessary equipment to conduct these programs on an ongoing basis.

HOW TO CONTRIBUTE:

To donate equipment such as: slide projectors, slide screens, TV Monitors, VCRs, mobile power generators, computers and accessories, vehicles please e-mail us.

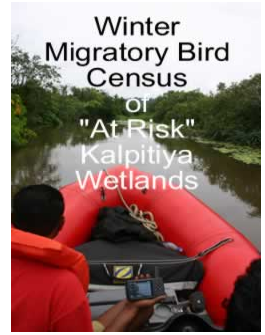
Updates to SLWCS website

[Video](#) and [Image](#) Banks

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- VOLUNTEERS NEEDED -[Winter Migratory Bird Census](#), [Elephant and Leopard Research and Teaching English](#)

- [Travel and Support Conservation](#)



VISION: To help protect and conserve the diminishing biodiversity of Sri Lanka and to make the local and international community aware of its endangered status.

MISSION: To enable communities to balance ecosystem protection and economic development by pioneering a model for sustainable conservation.

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