

Campaign to change children's mindset towards wildlife

The programme is free for tribal students, children from government schools

ROHAN PREMKUMAR
UDHAGAMANDALAM

The Forest Department has launched a campaign to change the mindsets of children from communities that have a high number of problematic interactions with animals in the region.

The eco-ambassador programme, at the Gene Pool Eco Development Committee, currently has more than 160 children enrolled in it, including children from adivasi communities, apart from school students from government and private schools.

G. Prasad, Forest Range Officer, Nadugani Range, said the programme was started after two local adivasi children had bought rice from their pocket money to feed to the captive elephants from the Theppakadu Elephant Camp that were being used to drive away wild elephants entering human habitations in the region. The



Students being taught about the different species of flora around Nadugani in Pandalur in the Gene Pool EDC. ■

Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Coimbatore Circle), at the time had sanctioned the programme, to include more students.

Currently, the programme is free for adivasi students and children from government schools. For private schools, a fee of ₹350 is charged per student, with ten free visits to the Gene Pool EDC in Nadugani.

Lunch and snacks are also provided by the Department to the visiting students, many of whom are learning about native ecology for the first time in their lives, said an official of the Department from Gudalur.

“The main objective is to work with children from local communities, many of whom have negative attitudes towards wildlife due to frequent problematic inte-

ractions caused by encroachments to wildlife habitats. We hope that through such visits, children will learn about the biodiversity in the area, and the importance of conservation. Ultimately, in the long-run, we hope that the children can bring the message of conservation to their own families, and alter behavior of local communities,” said Mr. Prasad.

Kommu Omkaram, District Forest Officer, Gudalur division, has also helped to support the programme. Recently, rare endangered tree ferns and orchids, which had become separated from their host trees due to heavy wind and rainfall, were rehabilitated at the Gene Pool EDC.

The forest department, has been working with indigenous communities to help in identifying these rare species of flora to ensure their protection.