

A small Big Bang!

A Rocha, (meaning 'The Rock' in Portuguese) is a global conservation organisation founded by Rev. Peter & Miranda Harris in 1983. A Rocha was begun as a field study centre and bird observatory in southern Portugal, and is now a network of similar projects in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, North and South America. A Rocha is a member of the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and it's work has been welcomed by the United Nations, WWF, BirdLife International, also by governments and inter-governmental agencies like the European Commission.

A Rocha's objective is to conserve natural resources and bio-diversity with the assistance of local communities. This brings together people from cross-cultural backgrounds with a shared commitment to the environment and conservation studies.

The India chapter of A Rocha started early this year with a founding conference at the Ecumenical Christian Centre, Bangalore, held between the 13th and 15th of February 2003.

The Hon. Justice M. F. Saldanha, High Court of Karnataka, inaugurated the Conference. A Rocha UK Director Dave Bookless and International Trustee Prof. Sir Ghillean Prance and Lady Anne Prance represented A Rocha International. Other eminent personalities who spoke at the conference were Prof. R. Sukumar, Asian elephant conservation expert, Indian Institute of Science; Dr. Ramachandra Guha, historian and writer, Mr. Vivek Menon, Director, Wildlife Trust of India, Mr. S. K Chakrabarti IFS, the then Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (Wildlife), Govt. of Karnataka; and Dr. Ranjit Daniels, biodiversity expert. A post conference field trip to Bannerghatta National Park was organised to expose the delegates to various management techniques adopted for conservation both in the wild and captivity.

A Rocha India is based in Bangalore, south India, with a group of volunteers led by Convener Mr. Vijay D. Anand, and is rapidly moving forward- dreaming, planning and executing ideas one after another. It has been involved in various programs in and around Bangalore, including a rally to reduce the use of plastic, the promotion of water conservation through the publication of a pamphlet, and a trip to Bannerghatta National Park with the students of Arpana, a school for the mentally challenged. Mr. Anand has been addressing various groups, including Church meetings. The invitations to speaking engagements are increasing, and are being used as opportunities to increase support for A Rocha India.



One of the long-term plans of A Rocha is to work with the development and conservation of the Kalrayan Hills in the Eastern Ghats of Southern India. The two people taking a lead in this are Convener Vijay D. Anand and Alagappa Moses, lecturer on Environmental Science at Bishop Heber College, Trichy. *Read on for more on that!*



the kalrayan hills

A Rocha India is considering the Kalrayan Hills in the state of Tamil Nadu as a potential field study centre. Our Convener Vijay Anand and a few other supporters have, for the last three years, been searching for a location that would serve as an appropriate site for starting the work of A Rocha in India. They have been drawn to the Kalrayan Hills, a major hill range of the Eastern Ghats situated to the northeast of Salem District, Tamil Nadu, southern India.



The reasons behind choosing the Kalrayan Hills as the project site for A Rocha India are:

- Severe environmental, social and economic problems in the area caused by forest loss. This has resulted in loss of rainfall, declining water quality and availability for irrigation (especially in the dry season) and soil erosion.
- The likely importance of the area for biodiversity, though it is poorly known and the urgent need for surveys.
- The urgent need to address the problems of shortsighted, inappropriate management of the forests and other ecosystems in order to improve the living standards of the native people.
- A strong interest among local communities in finding new ways to address environmental degradation and alleviate poverty.
- The presence of churches in the area that have shown an interest in working with A Rocha towards restoration of the hills.
- The general absence of other projects and initiatives in the area seeking integrated solutions to environmental and development problems.

The precise nature of work and the exact localities in the Kalrayan Hills that A Rocha India should initially focus on is being worked out. A Rocha India is trying to gain the support of local political, government, community and religious leaders for the work in the Kalrayan Hills.

As soon as it is feasible and the necessary resources become available, we hope to establish a field study centre at an appropriate location in the Kalrayan Hills. This will act as a centre for bringing people together to collectively work towards resolving the problems of the area. *//will also be a whale of fun! -ed//*



from the editor.....

Welcome to A Rocha India! This is the first issue of a newsletter we hope to produce regularly. We are an organisation that works in the field of environmental conservation, firmly in the context of community. We have a presence in 13 countries in Europe, Africa, North America and now India. The work in India is yet to fully take off, but we are in the process of laying the foundations.

While scientific knowledge is the vehicle of any study that centres on ecology and the environment, it is interesting that belief systems are often the fuel. There has been a revival of interest in traditional belief systems, especially in those that value and protect the planet and promote the preservation of the environment. We stand at this point, where belief systems meet scientific enquiry. A Rocha was started by Christians, and takes the stand that protection and preservation of the environment is an act of worship. This is not some sort of delicate balancing trick - properly defined, faith and scientific enquiry complement each other. So while our motivation comes from the faith we hold, it finds expression in the practical work of environmental conservation!

There are many things in A Rocha India that are still quite fluid, and it will take time before things can settle. We are constantly on the look out for people who can contribute to our efforts, and any help offered will be sincerely appreciated. Send us your comments and suggestions, visit us. We should soon have our web page on the website of A Rocha International, www.arocha.org **Keep in touch!**

~Baruk SJ



Why do elephants have red eyes? Don't know? So they can hide in Cherry trees, of course. Have you seen an elephant in a cherry tree? No? See the camouflage works!



Projects done!

Co-operation

Karnataka (and the rest of India) has faced a severe drought this year, leading to crisis levels both in urban and rural communities. A Rocha India prepared pamphlet promoting water conservation hand in hand with the Church of South India, Karnataka Central Diocese, commemorating World Environment Day. We distributed 5000 copies in Bangalore. This was in sync with 2003 being declared the United Nations year of Fresh Water.

Conservation

Volunteers of A Rocha India conducted a survey of plants, birds and butterflies in Rampura and Kalkere tanks in the suburbs of Bangalore city, and a preliminary report was published recently. This study is expected to encourage a detailed study to decide on a management plan of the conservation of these tanks. Beulah Wood, of South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies, brought these tanks to our notice. We have a more detailed report on this work in this issue.

Community

A Rocha India helped organise an 'Environmental Awareness Program' for around 1000 school children through various competitions like painting and quizzes on behalf of the Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation to coincide with the World Environment day in June 2003. We are constantly on the lookout for creative and innovative ways to spread environmental awareness, and any suggestions are welcome!

Volunteers of A Rocha India organised a one-day field trip on the 3rd of October for a group of mentally challenged children from the Arpana School, Bangalore, to Bannerghatta National Park, to participate in the wildlife week celebrations. Active participation in the community has always been a significant part of A Rocha, and we constantly look for opportunities where we can meaningfully contribute our time and skills in teaching others about nature conservation

Christian

Convener Vijay Anand addressed members of two church congregations in Bangalore on the topic 'Environmental crisis - A challenge to Christians' on the 8th of June, the CSI Environment Sunday.



Rampura and Kalkere tanks



Urban wetlands, natural and man-made, have long been the lifeline of most cities in India. Apart from playing host to various flora and fauna, they facilitated a sufficient supply of water for domestic use, and are closely connected with the life and traditions of the people. Rise in population and industries have, however, resulted in the depletion of these areas, both due to encroachment and pollution.

Karnataka has about 44,000 man-made wetlands constructed over centuries, and about 328 are threatened today. Rampura and Kalkere tanks are situated towards the northeast of Bangalore. The observations of Dr. Beulah Wood, South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies, Bangalore, were used as the base for our study, and proved the primary motivation for this survey. Volunteers and resource persons from A Rocha India conducted a study on the area in April 2003.

The survey revealed 15 species of plants, 75 species of birds and 19 species of butterflies. Dr. Beulah Wood has recorded a total 107 species of birds encountered over a 3-year period, and the current survey encountered about 70% of those during an 8-hour period! Terrestrial species dominate, at 65%; waders were at 11% and water birds at 23%. Rampura tank is worth considering for monitoring birds; there was much less diversity in Kalkere Tank. Water quality in both tanks is poor, and proper treatment could be suggested.



Droughts affecting the country have been getting more and more severe. It has taken a long time for planning agencies to realise that traditional means of conserving and harvesting water have served the needs of the people for centuries, and can with minor adjustments, continue to do so. Happily rainwater harvesting is gaining popularity both in urban as well as rural areas. One hopes that it will not be too long before communities wake up to the fact that our wetlands, urban or rural, are in dire need of preservation. Human communities have never been, and can never be, separate from the planet!



Characteristics

Christian: Underlying all we do is our biblical faith in the living God, who made the world, loves it and entrusts it to the care of human society.

Conservation: We carry out research for the conservation and restoration of the natural world and run environmental education programs for people of all ages.

Community: Through our commitment to God, each other and the wider creation, we aim to develop good relationships both within the A Rocha family and in our local communities.

Cross-cultural: We draw on the insights and skills of people from diverse cultures, both locally and around the world.

Campaigning: We work in partnership with a wide variety of organisations and individuals who share our concerns for a sustainable world.

A Rocha is currently active in 13 countries - Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Ghana, India, Kenya, Lebanon, Netherlands, Portugal, U.K. and U.S.A.



Our publications.



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