

WILDLIFE CELEBRATIONS

The Missing Targets

Wildlife week is being celebrated from 2nd to 8th October. Every year WLW is celebrated by organizing lectures, quizzes, bird watching, competitions, film shows etc. Students are involved in a big way, to catch them young for wildlife conservation. This year the COVID 19 has restricted the WLW more to webinars and online activities. The covid has also affected the wildlife tourism in protected areas.

WLW is a weekly event celebrated annually in India. Although WLW is observed every year from 2nd October to 8th October, there are some places in India that start celebrating it from 1st October onward. The main reason behind celebrating this day is to accelerate awareness of conservation of wildlife among the people by the central and state governments, environmentalists, activists, teachers, etc. India has a large repository of organisms of various species, so the conservation and nurturing of these natural resources are extremely important for us. This weekly event is celebrated every year with a different theme to work from different aspects of the same issue. The theme of 2020 campaign is to promote the preservation of fauna – i.e. animal life. The theme of 2019 event was “Life Below Water: For people and planet”.

WLW, also known as **National Wildlife Week**, is a national event in India that has a place in almost all states and union territories. The credit for celebrating WLW goes to the National Board of Wildlife of federal government, which makes almost all preparations related to this program and also controls its operation and management. The first proposal to celebrate WLW was put in the year 1952. After considering this proposal, the first observation of WLW took place in 1954. Since then, this event is observed every year in full swing for the protection and development of wildlife in India.

Wildlife weeks / days are celebrated in almost all the countries of world during different months and days. **World Wildlife Day**, also the UN Wildlife Day, was celebrated on 3rd March 2020 under the theme "Sustaining all life on Earth", encompassing all wild animal and plant species as key components of the world's biodiversity. This aligns with UN Sustainable Development Goals 1, 12, 14 and 15, and their wide-ranging commitments on alleviating poverty, ensuring sustainable use of resources, and on conserving life both on land and below water to halt biodiversity loss. World Wildlife Day has now

become the most important global annual event dedicated to wildlife.

National Wildlife Week during April 6 - 10 is an annual celebration of the National Wildlife Federation, America's largest and most trusted conservation organization. The rich history of National Wildlife Week dates all the way back to its first celebration in 1938. As the longest-running education program, National Wildlife Week connects budding conservationists of all ages to the awesome wonders of wildlife.

The National Wildlife Day is observed on September 4 every year in US with an aim to increase awareness about wildlife species and ways to protect them. The day focuses on the preservation and conservation of endangered species around the world.

National Wildlife Week in Nepal is celebrated every first week of the Nepali New Year with the objective of generating awareness on the importance of wildlife conservation by involving school students, youths and local communities. The theme of 22nd national wildlife week in 2019 event was, "Youth in Conservation".

World Animal Day is an international day of action for animal rights and welfare celebrated annually on October 4, the feast day of Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals. World Animal Day mobilises people for action now for a better future for animals to raise the status of animals in order to improve welfare standards around the globe. It's celebrated in different ways in every country, irrespective of nationality, religion, faith or political ideology.

In all these wildlife celebrations initiatives, specially in India, two targets are largely missing, one is the flora (the plants), and the other one is the local community. Whereas the connotation 'wildlife' includes both flora and fauna, these celebrations focus on animals, and the holistic integrated approach to include plants and communities in the wildlife ecosystem is largely missing. Plants and animals are the two facets of same coin. The niche habitat – wildlife – community interface is missing the priority for the management intervention.

Wildlife traditionally refers to undomesticated animal species, but has come to include all organisms that grow or live wild in an area

without being introduced by humans. Wildlife can be found in all ecosystems. Webster Dictionary refers wildlife as living things and especially mammals, birds, and fishes that are neither human nor domesticated. According to Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972 - "wild life" includes any animal, bees, butterflies, crustacea, fish and moths; and aquatic or land vegetation which form part of any habitat.

The misplaced vision of wildlife for WLW is reflected from the 2020 WLW theme as preservation of fauna, and not flora. The most States, like Odisha, Tamil Nadu, have also acknowledged the central theme to preserve the fauna means the animal life of the India. The related websites also focus on animal to exclude plant in wildlife week celebration vision.

Whereas the WLW celebrations are mainly confined to urban areas, the cause of action of wildlife conservation emanate from remote wild areas having local communities as the key stakeholder. The WLW events of protected areas have very limited local community participation. Therefore, an innovative approach towards the management of wildlife needs to be considered for India where local communities are made central to conservation. A number of examples already exist in India and the world over to show that community-led conservation works well if structured right.

Local communities are an integral component of the wildlife ecosystem. Participation and involvement of the local communities play an important role in the wildlife conservation. Community-based wildlife conservation education (WCE) should be designed to create WCE activities and to meet the community interests and involvement in wildlife conservation projects. The need to have a common understanding about the WCE model is becoming more and more urgent when the principles of involvement and participation in the model are not broadly understood either by trained WCE experts or natural resource professionals. The exposure and participation of the urban stakeholders with actual wildlife situations and local communities can make these celebrations more relevant, and the communities more responsible. We need more doers than thinkers.

Are these initiatives anyway contributing to the wildlife conservation efforts, as mitigation measures for wildlife population decline or poaching? Global populations of mammals, birds,

amphibians, reptiles and fish have suffered an average two-thirds' decline in less than half a century. This has contributed to environmental degradation, leading to the emergence of zoonotic diseases such as COVID-19, according to WWF's Living Planet Report, 2020. The Living Planet Index shows that factors believed to increase the planet's vulnerability to pandemics -- including land-use change and the use and trade of wildlife -- were also some of the drivers behind the 68 per cent average decline in global vertebrate species population between 1970 and 2016.

Half of India's wildlife in danger of extinction. With wildlife disappearing at an "unprecedented" pace across the world, the Living Planet Report 2016 identifies India as an ecological black-spot where around half of the wildlife lives in the danger of being wiped out. Habitat destruction is the main cause for wildlife extinction in India. The rapid deterioration of the environment due to human interference is aiding the disappearance of wildlife from the biosphere. Habitat loss is due to deforestation for extended cultivation, construction of dams, mining operations and road laying. According to IUCN, habitat loss and degradation have affected about 89 percent of all threatened birds, 83 percent of mammals and 91 percent of all threatened plants globally.

These Wildlife conservation education initiatives need to focus on the age old democratic principle "**Of the Community, By the Community, For the Community**", because the local community are the integral component of the wildlife ecosystem, custodian of the local biodiversity resources, and only through the community driven management, the restoration and conservation of the wildlife (flora and fauna) will be possible on sustainable basis. The "**Community based Sustainable Wildlife Development**" should be the cynosure of all such initiatives.

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