



SAHYADRI VARTA

GIVING VOICE TO THE WESTERN GHATS

Celebrating 25 years of Save the Western Ghats March of 1987/88

In the year 1987, a group of enthusiastic people from all walks of life, came together united by the cause of conserving the Western Ghats of India. They marched for 100 days across the length of the mountain range with the aim of waking people up to the impending peril, the Western Ghats was facing. This march is still counted as one of the most important environmental movements of the country which brought the issues of the Western Ghats to the public vision.

This year Applied Environmental Research Foundation, Pune along with Save the Western Ghats group is celebrating the 25th year of this march. A 3 day conclave is being organized at Mahabaleshwar, Maharashtra to commemorate this momentous occasion and felicitate the marchers of 1987/88. Save the Western Ghats Group was revived in the year 2009 with a meeting in Goa. This was followed by the milestone meeting in Kotagiri where the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel was constituted. Last year, the annual meeting was conducted in Moodbidri, Karnataka where the involvement of the youth was invoked to carry these goals forward. This year too, the crux of the annual meeting is the vision of safeguarding and conserving the Western Ghats but is more significant as it also celebrates 25 years of one of the most significant environmental movements of India.

Through various sessions and events, this conclave aims to foster sustainable relationships between the various civil society organizations across the 6 states of Western Ghats. These collaborations are a way of rejuvenating civil society endeavors in the region so as to formulate better goalposts and implementation strategies for the future.



The conclave shall focus on the themes of improving stakeholder participation in the process of conservation, stabilizing the demand for natural resources and preserving the natural resources from further degradation, attaining the goals of sustainable development and protecting the rights of indigenous people.

In the 25 years since the march, old issues have aggravated and new issues have emerged. It is high time to come together and act collectively with the proper utilization of Science and cashing on the strength of the media. This conclave is a platform which shall foster such action leading to just environmental decision making for the Western Ghats.

The conclave will commence from 30th November to 2nd December 2012 at the MTDC Complex, Mahabaleshwar.

TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THE CONCLAVE CHECK OUR WEBSITE

www.savethewesternghats.org

Save Kaas: Save Heritage

Seminar on community awareness for sustainable development

The Ranwata Nature and Environment Society, Satara in association with Terre Policy Centre and Association of Hospital Owners, organized a conference on the 1st April 2012 at Satara. This conference was meant for brainstorming on creating community awareness for Sustainable Development in the Kaas Plateau, lying 30 kms to the west of Satara.

Kaas Plateau is a charming stretch of typical lateritic cap having a unique eco-system and a high degree of endemism. It holds a number of ephemerals, orchids, bulbous plants, herbs, insectivorous plants and endangered species. The plateau is in full bloom in the monsoon attracting tourists as well as researchers and is clearly one of the most sensitive bio-diversity hotspots in the Western Ghats. But, this plateau is facing peril due to habitat destruction as a result of increased human presence and changing climatic conditions. Air/Water pollution, jungle burning, hunting, poaching, wind mill encroachments are rampant in this area. The agenda of this conference was to address these issues and channelize all conservation and developmental efforts so that a concrete plan of action could be drawn up.

Representatives of UNESCO- India, AERF, Biome, members of local communities, scientists, researchers, entrepreneurs dealing with recycling and waste recovery, eco-tour, hotel and transport operators as well as representatives of public departments and civil society groups attended this meeting. There were a number of sessions dealing with assessing the opportunities and threats to biodiversity and heritage in Kaas, threat to livelihoods, strategies for moving forward with concrete action and awareness and capacity building.

At the end of the conference, a resolution was passed, to ask the government to form a body, to deliberate on ways to conserve this natural heritage, promote tourism in a controlled fashion and safeguard the livelihoods of the people.

It was also decided that regular research and monitoring is to be done to assess baseline ecology and biodiversity. The legal status of the area will be defined after taking into account the ecology and livelihood issues of the local people. A long term management plan is to be drawn up, following guidelines given by the MoEF, GoI / WII Dehra Dun. Environmentally sustainable livelihood practices of local communities of the area are integral to landscape conservation and special measures are to be taken to continue the same. All efforts should be done to make sure that residents of the concerned villages should be the main beneficiaries of conservation and management actions, including tourism.

*Adv. Seemantani Noolkar
Ranwata, Satara*



Kaas Lake



Flowers in full bloom in Kaas Plateau

Saving our rivers

Walking along the Godavari in Nasik

On the occasion of World Environment Day (5th June), Nasik Nature Forum decided to organize a River walk along the banks of river Godavari. Nasik is nestled near the northern tip of Western Ghats. The river Godavari plays a vital role in shaping the environment as well as the cultural space of Nasik. The river starts its journey from Trimbakeshwar about 30km from Nasik eventually crossing 1400 km before meeting Bay of Bengal. Along the way the river passes through many habitats, is responsible for shaping some of the land forms as well as enticing thousands of farmers and country to settle on its banks.

But the current situation of Godavari, which winds through a course of 14km through Nasik city is indeed troubling. It is difficult to find water as long stretches of river have been occupied by water hyacinth. Water quality appears problematic because of addition of industrial as well as domestic untreated used water.

During the walk along the banks, we observed many pollutants like plastic, thermacol, glass etc. People throw household waste, immerse idols as well as wash utensils and clothes in the river. Cattle, automobiles are washed in the river water. There were some outlets from drainage system pouring the waste into the river water.

All these observations were reported and later discussed by the group. Many floral and faunal species were found across the river banks and it was also observed that the vegetation was more diverse near clear water. Since water level was below average level due to summer, the river bed was observed carefully for the unique land patterns, stones, crevices etc.



River walk along the Godavari



Participants finding discarded waste in the river

The purpose of the walk was to take people out in open environment and let them see from themselves the ecology, geology and culture around them. 'Eyes won't see what mind does not know'. Now hopefully the people have in mind the picture of a beautiful unpolluted river rather than that of a polluted drain.

This event was a pre-Conclave awareness generating drive. It shall be conducted again, once during the monsoons and once after it.

Ketan Patwardhan

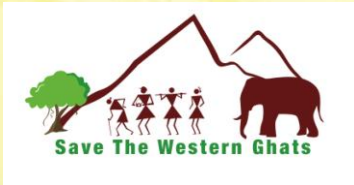
Kiran Rahalkar

Nasik Nature Conservation Trust

Civil Society to react to WGEEP report

Controversial report finally made public

The Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel has stirred a hornet's nest by declaring the entire Western Ghats (142 Talukas) as ecologically sensitive zones. This has brought in strongly worded reactions and dissent notes to the MoEF, from both Maharashtra and Kerala and this report has been deemed by them, to be an impediment to development in the area. After a long hiatus in making the report public, owing to its controversial recommendations and dissenting opinions from the states covered by the Western Ghats, the WGEEP report has finally been released. But, it still comes with a disclaimer that indicates that the recommendations made by the panel are not binding and the ministry is not duty bound to accept those recommendations. Nevertheless, the contents of the report have been presented to the people, where they could make a judgment for themselves. A period of 45 days has been given, by which civil society organizations working in the field of conservation of the Western Ghats are to send in their comments, suggestions and criticisms of the report. There are also plans to translate the report into Marathi, Kannada, Tamil and Malayalam for the benefit of people across the Western Ghats. Sahyadri Varta would take this opportunity to appeal to all individuals and organizations to send in their comments and criticisms to the panel and the ministry, so as to help in transforming the contents of this report into concrete policy and action.



Applied Environmental Research Foundation
C-10, NatyaChitra Co-op Housing Society
Bhusari Colony, Kothrud
Pune- 411038, Maharashtra, India

www.aerfindia.org

Email Id- info@aerfindia.org

EDITOR: Mr. Jayant Sarnaik

EDITORIAL TEAM: Mr. Alhad Godbole

Ms. Pratyasha Rath

Ms. Supriya Kulkarni

You can send in your suggestions and opinions about this edition of Sahyadri Varta and also send in articles for the next editions. For any such concerns or queries, contact:

Pratyasha Rath

pratyasharath@aerfindia.org