

VOL 1 ISSUE 3

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October - November 2014

# ECOTRAIL

FOCUS ON ENVIRONMENT

## Remembering the Birdman, Dr. Salim Ali

This issue of Ecotrail gives me immense pleasure as it is being brought out on 12th November, the birth anniversary of one of the foremost ornithologists India gave the world - the late Dr. Salim Ali.

I had the privilege of interacting with this humble man at his home, on the field and




Left to Right: Mr. Oswald Thayil, Dr. Salim Ali, Mr. Ranjan Biswas - Editor of Ecotrail.

in his office at the BNHS where he interviewed me for my Ph.D. project on Leopards, along with another "mammal" great the late Dr. J.C. Daniel. I was then a young Education Officer with the WWF-India, World Wildlife Fund as it was known then. The interview went on for one hour where both these gentlemen grilled me. Then the great Dr. Salim Ali came over to my side, bent down and whispered into my ear "You will do a good job teaching and making the young aware about the green issues. Leopards can wait to be

studied". Little did I realise that destiny will one day lead me to follow his wisdom.

The next time I met Dr. Salim Ali was to bring him to Asia's first nature education centre in Dharavi, Mumbai, to plant the first sapling in the park. It was early morning and right through the journey from his house in Bandra to the nature park we stopped all along, doing bird watching - he, me and the driver. At well past 80 years he was just like a child every time he spotted a bird. He would then go on to tell me its biogeographic distribution in India. A journey of less than 7 km on an empty road took us more than 1 hour and 30 minutes. It was a struggle to explain to my trustee and boss Mr. S.P. Godrej who was the then Sheriff of Mumbai, and my distinguished committee members, that it was not me who was responsible for keeping them waiting!

Conceived and conceptualized by WWF-India in collaboration with the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service and implemented by the then State Government body of Maharashtra the Bombay Metropolitan Development Authority, the Nature Park today is a green paradise. The picture you see alongside this article is Dr. Salim Ali coming to plant the first sapling of the Ficus variety-Banyan, at the Nature Park. This little sapling that was planted on the Ganesh Chaturthi day in August 1985 by Dr. Salim Ali is today a grand old tree.

Indeed a great man! Diminutive in size but probably one of the most towering conservationist of the 20th century, whose legacy continues even till today. 



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## Winter Cheer

Dear Readers

As the winter sets in and the festive season begins, I am excited to once again connect with you.

This issue is special as we cover the great ornithologist Dr. Salim Ali, honored by the nation with a Padma Vibhushan and by the world with a number of accolades, but to me, he will always remain one of the greatest Teachers. Even greater was his humble and unassuming nature.

We also have a small note on the just released International Climate Change Report which makes some very serious points forcing a change in our lifestyle urgently, or else face the consequence.

Safety in camping, treks, wild life safaris is in our DNA and in the past two decades Trailblazers has been accident incident free and committed to sharing knowledge. A brief article covers some of the safety codes in the outdoors with more coming up in our next issues.

Trailblazers celebrated Teachers Day in Agra, conducted history camps and CAS programs for cleaning up even before the Government initiated the Swachh Bharat campaign! Read on there is lots more.

Ranjan Biswas  
Editor

# On the Brink...

*Pterocarpus santalinus* is a medicinal plant endemic to the Eastern Ghats of South India. Red Sanders, Red Sandalwood, Algum and Saunderwood are many of its common names. It is also called as Rakta Chandan in Hindi.

Red Sanders is a light demanding moderately sized tree, growing up to 8m with a trunk 50-150cm in diameter. The leaves are alternate, trifoliate with three leaflets. The flowers are produced in short racemes. The fruit is a pod 6-9cms long having 1-2 seeds. This tree is often seen in dry deciduous forests.



*Pterocarpus santalinus* L. f.  
Image courtesy Missouri Botanical Garden. <http://www.botanicus.org/>.

The wood of Red Sandalwood tree is traditionally used as a sacred wood in Hindu culture. It is also used in treatment of various diseases like fever, vomiting, hyperdipsia, wounds etc. The heartwood and fruits have a great medicinal value and are used in treatment of various skin diseases.

Due to its slow growth and rarity, it is one of the most prized woods. In India sandalwood is one main and lucrative market for smugglers, as a high price is paid for this wood in China. *Pterocarpus santalinus* is listed as endangered species by IUCN, because of overexploitation for its timber in South India.

## THE OUTDOOR LEARNING CURVE



### Marvel in Marble

*Best trip of my childhood, I loved it. -Tanaya, North Point School*

Students and teachers of North Point School enjoyed the visit to the world famous Taj Mahal, the sight of which left them mesmerized. Fatehpur Sikri enhanced their knowledge and acquainted them with the rich heritage of India. The visit to Agra Fort was also truly rewarding. At each of these places visited, students had fun-filled group activities. In the city of forts and palaces, the visit to shoe factory was a singular experience for the students. At the factory they followed the process of shoe making from Cut to Box.

The trip included a visit to the holy cities of Mathura and Vrindavan where the streets are lined with many temples, both old and new. It was obvious that every square foot of the place was wrapped in timeless devotion to Lord Krishna.

To ensure that the students relaxed after busy days of visits to monuments and factories, every evening a series of fun activities were planned for them. Winners of activities were given prizes. The students had loads of fun and enjoyed every bit of the Trailblazers trip.

### Southern Sojourn

All set for Trailblazers French Connection camp, the enthusiastic junior students of Sreenidhi International School met up with Trailblazers team to visit Puducherry and Chennai. The camp aimed at bringing out a greater understanding of history, culture, and the rich heritage of the state of Tamil Nadu and Union Territory of Puducherry.

As part of the trip students visited Dakshinchitra, an open air museum where they got to experience the rich heritage of South India. They visited traditional

houses and marveled at the art, crafts and architecture of all four southern states of India. The evening was spent at the Marina beach.

The next day on route to Puducherry, a visit to the Madras Crocodile Bank Trust and Mahabalipuram was scheduled. At the Crocodile Bank, students interacted with conservationists and saw endangered species of crocodiles, snakes and turtles. At Mahabalipuram, students visited the shore temples. They were awe struck with this UNESCO heritage site.

We had to limit our Puducherry visit to Aurobindo Ashram, Museum, Promenade, the church and temple at the French city due to the arrest of Tamil Nadu CM Ms. Jayalalitha which caused some unrest. However this did not seem to affect the fun students had at the camp. Trailblazers had in their basket many fun games and activities planned for the energetic students even at the airport whilst waiting for their flight back home! What a memorable trip!





## Know Before You Go - Be Safe

As indicated in the previous issue of Ecotrail we are committed to bring about awareness on the critical issue of Safety in the outdoors. As much as the fact that the outdoors is a laboratory for enquiry and learning so also the outdoors poses immense challenges and possibilities which can make the entire experience a deterrent. The first article in the series on safety is "Clarity in its objective" for an outdoor experience.

Is the trip really required, can the elements of learning be covered in a classroom etc. If the objective is just an annual trip of the school then post identifying the location of the visit it is important to ascertain the possible threats to you and the students. Threats will be dependent on the location. If it is city based trip, there could be threats like losing children in the crowd, getting lost, missing a child if the head count law is not impressed upon, city traffic accidents, hotel location and more. Is it in a crowded locality, is the locality safe, is the hotel checked out for fire safety, kitchen and restaurant surveyed for cleanliness, fire safety equipments are well located, fire safety instruction with mock drill done, does the hotel have a doctor on call and is the first aid kit readily available.

If the trip is in a wild life sanctuary or if is a simple trek, are the children geared up for the same? Most wild areas are full of surprises. It is not just the Tiger or Lion but small mammals, reptiles, you need to be careful of. Follow all the laws of the forest. If you are on a trek are you equipped with torches, ropes, emergency ration, and most important, your gear? You may climb a hill in the summer but the nights can be very cold and you have to take the wind chill factor into account. Do you have a local guide to show you the way? Does the organization you have chosen to partner, have trekking or expedition experience, do they have an SOP for trekking in the area and has the forest and government officials been informed of your trek? These are just some of the aspects you need to look for before setting out.

Trailblazers has been diligently following the Safety Code and implementing them for over 20 years now. We stand out today as one of the safest institutions in the country. Events can happen to the best, but it is in your interest that you do the necessary homework always and every time.




## Oh Kolkata!

The true city of joy has been ignored by many for long and I can't blame anyone for that. I just returned from the city and its surrounding and was amazed at the immense learning and fun one can have. Its sights, sounds and smells. The city itself has so much history carved within.

The Story of British rule in India and freedom finally 200 years later, has left its mark on this city like none other. The Victoria Memorial may be a must-do visit, but the innards of the city are even more worth the visit and best of all it is very safe, be it the Rabindranath Tagore residence, the Jorasanko or Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's home or the visit to Job Charnock's Chowringhee. The Kolkata Book Fair is the largest book fair in Asia and a major event in the city, a must for teachers and students

alike. Every lane, every meandering road has history written all across. Just pause and feel. It's amazing. The food courts offer delectable jhal muri and puchka, cutlets or moghlai porotha.

Take a short trip not very far from the city to the famous Battle of Plassey site or to magnificent Murshidabad which still bears the memories of the nawabs with the Hazaarduari Palace, the Nizamat Fort, gardens and retains small industries like silk weaving and exquisite embroidery in gold and silver. Alas schools have just missed the point in large parts of India and surely history teachers will rue that they had not visited places which they taught for decades. Undoubtedly the city of joy is also the city of history and an alluring past. -Editor 

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## SPECIAL CAMPS

# History Camp

Chirec School went on a historical journey to the famed cities of Agra and Fatehpur Sikri via the capital city New Delhi. Here they visited the Lotus temple and the UNESCO World Heritage sites of Qutub Minar and Humayun's tomb. The soaring conical tower of Qutub Minar is an exquisite example of Indo-Islamic Afghan architecture. Humayun's tomb was the first garden-tomb on the Indian subcontinent. It inspired several major architectural innovations, culminating in the construction of the Taj Mahal.

The grandeur of the Taj Mahal in Agra was a sight to behold...one of the seven wonders of the world! Students and teachers alike were amazed by the beauty of this monument dedicated to eternal love.

In Agra the students also visited a marble factory and enjoyed learning and shopping. Next was the Water filtration plant visit and the shoe factory visit which were very informative.

The magnificent Agra Fort and Fatehpur Sikri enthralled the students further.



## Stepwell discovered

A 5,000-year-old stepwell has been found in one of the largest Harappan cities, Dholavira, in Kutch, which is three times bigger than the Great Bath at Mohenjo Daro.



# CAS Camp



Mumbai is the financial, commercial and entertainment capital of India. Sreenidhi International School visited Mumbai for their CAS programme where students and a teacher participated enthusiastically. We took them to one of the most prominent landmarks in Mumbai, the Sanjay Gandhi National Park where the ACF Mr. Santosh Saste gave an inspiring talk to the students.

During our stay of two days at SGNP, the students helped renovate the Open air auditorium by cleaning and painting it. Students then enjoyed the thrilling night trail at SGNP where they spotted herd of deer crossing their path. They later visited an ideal village to learn self-sustainable development and explored their creativity with a Warli painting workshop which they enjoyed immensely. The students went for a trek to the historic Karnala Fort and explored the heritage around. They watched with fascination the panoramic view from atop the fort. This was followed by visit to Bio Gas plant. The trip ended with savouring delicious traditional Maharashtrian food and with some amazing shopping!



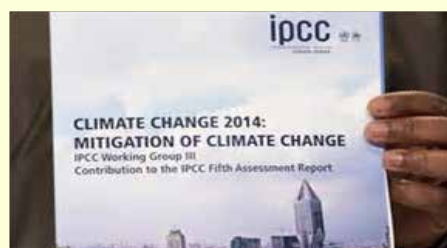
## Teacher's Day in Agra

Trailblazers celebrated Teachers' Day at the "Marvel in Marble" Camp with the teachers and students of North Point School. Trailblazers honored teachers and Principal Madam on this occasion with heartfelt thanks. We organized a cake cutting ceremony, offered teachers flowers as a token of appreciation. The students performed and entertained everyone. The teachers were overwhelmed with the surprise celebration. This was followed by an emotional speech by the Principal, Mrs. Sudha Menon.



## Report released

Nobel Peace prize winner and Chairman of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Dr. R. Pachauri released the critical Report on Climate change in Copenhagen on 30th October. "All we need is the will to change, which we trust will be motivated by knowledge and an understanding of the science of climate change" he said.



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