

Eco-tourism guide training programme at Thane Creek and Elephanta Island


FINAL REPORT



Bombay Natural History Society



Implemented by
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SUMMARY

The Gol-GIZ-CMPA Maharashtra Project, as part of the efforts to create awareness towards environment conservation and to showcase the rich natural heritage of marine and coastal areas in Maharashtra, launched pilot ecotourism activities for Thane Creek and Elephanta Island in 2016. For conducting ecotourism activities at both the sites, the main objective was to identify local youth from villages in Thane Creek and Elephanta Island and train them as ecotourism guides who could assist visitors on boat rides and nature walks. Bombay Natural History Society was assigned the task of training the local youth at Thane Creek and Elephanta as future ecotourism guides.

The training programme was conducted at Thane Creek and Elephanta Island from March 2016 to January 2017. The local fishermen community was trained to identify the flora and fauna of the area and was educated about the ethics of ecotourism.

INTRODUCTION

Indo-German Cooperation on Biodiversity

The Governments of India and Germany have fostered a partnership to enhance conservation of India's biodiversity in line with the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The partnership includes implementing projects in which protecting the environment takes center-stage in unison with the principle of sustainable development and enhancement of human well-being.

The CMPA Project

The CMPA project is a flagship project of the Indo-German technical cooperation supporting the CBD's Aichi targets. The project is funded by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (BMUB). It is implemented by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), Government of India, and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) on behalf of BMUB.

The overall objective of the project is, "The conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the pilot protected areas are improved, taking into consideration the economic circumstances of the local population."

The project aims at conservation and management of potential marine protected areas in Maharashtra. The three main components of the CMPA project are participatory process, human capacity development, and communication and awareness. The Project intervenes at two levels in India: At the national level and at the level of selected federal states. It focuses on:

I: Participatory management

Participatory management processes are implemented in the pilot protected areas.

II: Capacity development

A capacity strengthening system for supporting participatory management of coastal and marine protected areas is developed for selected states and at national level.

III: Information, education and communication

Relevant stakeholders have information on and are aware of the importance of conserving biodiversity in marine and coastal **areas**.

CMPA sites in Maharashtra

A series of national and state level stakeholder consultations involving government representatives, researchers and NGOs resulted in the identification of three CMPA sites in Maharashtra. These are Thane Creek, Velas to Dabhol Coastal Stretch and Ansure Creek.

1. **Thane Creek:** Thane Creek opens into Mumbai's harbour and extends over a distance of 26 km. Thane Creek supports a rich diversity of flora and fauna. It has been declared an Important Bird Area and a Wildlife Sanctuary.
2. **Velas to Dabhol coastal stretch:** This 60 km coastal stretch, is located in the Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra. Habitats in the region include sandy beaches, rocky shores; mangroves, estuaries, coastal plateaus and moist deciduous forests on hill sides. Beaches along this coast have become popular due to sea turtle nesting sites and the efforts of local communities to conserve turtle nests.
3. **Ansure Creek:** Ansure creek is located in the Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra. It is approximately 6.5 km long and 250-300 m wide. The creek harbors large mud flats and mangrove forests.

The Gol-GIZ-CMPA Maharashtra Project intends to improve the marine and coastal biodiversity of Maharashtra by promoting participatory approaches to the conservation and management of existing coastal and marine protected areas (CMPA), and supporting the creation of new protected areas in the future. By involving stakeholders at the local, state and national levels, it is expected to make a significant contribution to the conservation of areas rich in biodiversity, without compromising the resource use and livelihood options of the local population.

The overall objective of the Gol-GIZ-CMPA Maharashtra Project is to contribute to the improvement of the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the pilot protected areas, while taking into consideration the economic circumstances of the local population.

To achieve this objective, pilot ecotourism activities were initiated for Thane Creek and Elephanta Island. The **'Eco-tourism guide training programme at Thane Creek and Elephanta Island'** project was assigned to BNHS.

The purpose of the project was to identify local youth from villages in Thane Creek and Elephanta Island and train them as ecotourism guides to assist visitors on boat rides and nature walks. The training was planned to include the basic coastal ecology, cultural and natural heritage of the sites and locally found flora and fauna and their significance.

The project duration was from March 2016 to January 2017. This included pilot site visits, selection of participants for the programme, programme material designing and printing and implementation of the training programme.

TRAINING PROGRAMME AT THANE CREEK

Thane Creek

Thane creek is one of the largest creeks in Asia and is located partly on the coast of Mumbai metropolis. The east bank lies in Thane and Navi Mumbai districts, while the west bank is in Greater Mumbai district. The creek runs about 26 km north from Mumbai harbour before it joins the Ulhas River through a small channel. There are several sources of fresh water for the creek, of which the Ulhas River is the largest, followed by numerous drainage channels from various suburban areas of Mumbai, Navi Mumbai and Thane. The site is a mixture of saltpans as well as stretches of mangroves. The saltpan lands are potential areas for mangrove development, and can be easily reverted to their original status, that of mangroves. The site is a designated Important Bird Area (IBA). Considering the value of the adjoining areas in terms of bird habitat, the IBA can be extended to Uran on the eastern side and Sewree on the western side. The area also includes Elephanta Island, which is an international tourist destination.

Thane Creek is a very important wintering ground for waterbirds. It supports over 1,00,000 birds during winter (Kulkarni 2000). These include the Lesser Flamingo *Phoenicopterus minor*, Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber*, Asian Openbill *Anastomus oscitans*, White Stork *Ciconia ciconia*, Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*, Eastern Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*, Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* and Dunlin *Calidris alpina*. Smaller waders, especially Little Stint *Calidris minutus* and Temminck's Stint *C. temminckii* are sometimes seen in tens of thousands.

This site is selected as an IBA mainly because of a very large number of waterbirds found here (A4 criteria). Many species occur much above their 1% biogeographic population threshold determined by the Wetlands International (2002). Detailed studies on the bird life of this important site are urgently required.

Training Programme Activities

Sr No.	Activity	Indoor/Outdoor	Day
1.	Introduction: coastal ecosystem, mangroves and avifauna	Indoor	Day 1
2.	Mangroves and coastal ecosystem: Field work	Outdoor	Day 2
3.	Avifauna identification	Indoor & Outdoor	Day 3
4.	i. Avifauna identification field work ii. Communication with tourist and ecotourism ethics	Outdoor & Indoor	Day 4
5.	Revision, quiz, discussion & feedback	Indoor	Day 5

Brief of the training programme

The ecotourism guide training programme at Thane Creek was conducted at the Airoli Jetty Interpretation Centre from 28 March to 1 April, 2016. The total number of participants was 20. Every participant was provided with resource material, which included a bird guide (English and Marathi), mangrove species booklet (Marathi and English), a booklet giving information about the commonly found shells and a book regarding the birds of Maharashtra and their Marathi names.

Various indoor and outdoor activities were conducted during the training period. The BNHS staff gave presentations and talks to familiarize the participants to the general biodiversity of that area. Separate presentations were given regarding the avian diversity and the mangrove species found in and around the Thane Creek. Major focus was on helping the participants identify the species of birds seen during the boat ride. Other interesting facts

and information regarding each species was provided during the boat ride. Mocks and demonstration in the form of play were conducted for the locals, wherein the locals were trained to handle various types of tourists and their queries. On the last day, a quiz was conducted to check their knowledge about birds, gained during the training programme.

The energy levels of the participants were high and they voluntarily participated in the activities conducted. Their main expectation was to be able to identify the species and by the end of the programme, that had been fulfilled by taking them on boat rides and explaining to them about the birds spotted.

The programme was concluded by a certificate distribution ceremony and submission of feedback forms by the participants.

Observations:

- The participants were able to identify the common birds and mangrove species found in and around the creek.
- The confidence and enthusiasm levels showed an increase.



Discussion with the participants regarding the aims and objectives of ecotourism



BNHS staff explaining about the ethics of ecotourism



BNHS staff holding forth on Mangrove species' Identification and their uses.



The participants were provided with binoculars and field guides during the boat rides. They were taught how to identify various species of birds and provided interesting facts about the migratory species.



Distribution of certificates by Ms. Supriya Jhunjunwala, Adviser, Coastal and Marine Protected Areas, GIZ.



Distribution of certificates to the participants

TRAINING PROGRAMME AT ELEPHANTA ISLAND

Elephanta Island

Elephanta Island, also called Gharapuri Island, is one of the many islands on Mumbai Harbour, east of Mumbai, India. This island is a popular tourist destination because of the island's cave temples, the Elephanta Caves that have been carved out of rock.

The island is easily accessible by ferry from Mumbai, being about 10 kilometres (6.2 mi) from the southeast coast of the island city. The island has an area of 16 sq. km (6.2 sq mi). Apart from being famous for the caves, the island harbours good biodiversity. Bird species like Black-headed Gulls, Brown-headed Gulls, Greater Black-headed Gulls, Gull-billed Terns and other waders can be sighted during the ferry ride to the island. The deciduous forest on the island is home to many plants and bird species. The island is rich in mangroves and intertidal fauna but tourists are found neglecting the biodiversity component of the island. Hence training guides in ecotourism can help in developing ecotourism on the island. The practice would eventually lead the tourist to also appreciate and value the biodiversity of the island along with the ancient architecture.

Training Programme Activities

Sr No.	Activity	Indoor/Outdoor	Day
1.	Introduction: Coastal ecosystem, mangroves, terrestrial flora and fauna	Indoor	Day 1
2.	Mangroves and coastal ecosystem: Field work	Outdoor	Day 1
3.	Terrestrial flora and fauna	Outdoor	Day 1
4.	Avifauna identification	Indoor	Day 2
	Bat identification	Outdoor	
	Communication with tourists and ecotourism		

	ethics	Indoor	
5.	Revision, quiz, discussion & feedback	Indoor	Day 2

Brief of the training programme

The ecotourism guide training programme at Elephanta Island was conducted on 17 and 18 January 2017. The venue was Elephanta Island Forest Resthouse. The total number of participants was 20. Every participant was provided with resource material, which included a bird guide (English and Marathi), mangrove species booklet (Marathi and English), a booklet giving information about the commonly found shells and a book regarding the birds of Maharashtra and their Marathi names.

Various indoor and outdoor activities were conducted during the training period. The BNHS staff gave presentations and talks to familiarize the participants to the general biodiversity of that area. Separate presentations were given regarding the avian diversity and the mangrove species found around the island. Major focus was on helping the participants identify the species of trees and birds seen on the trail. Other interesting facts and information regarding each species was given during the outdoor trails. The energy levels of the participants were high and they voluntarily participated in the activities conducted. We had women participants during this training and they participated only in the indoor activities. Since Elephanta Island is a famous tourist hotspot, most of the locals were busy in their daily chores and we had to complete the training in two days. We had a small session on identifying bat species in the caves.

The programme was concluded by a certificate distribution ceremony and submission of feedback forms by the participants.



BNHS team at the Elephanta Island training programme



Participants were provided with the printed material at the training workshop



Participants learning bird identification during the nature trail



BNHS team explaining the participants about intertidal fauna and mangroves during the indoor sessions



Cave exploration for spotting and identifying bat species on the Elephanta Island



BNHS team with all the workshop participants at the training centre, Elephanta Island

The CMPA Project has been commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (BMUB), with funds provided under the International Climate Initiative (IKI). The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India (MoEFCC) has entered into a technical cooperation agreement with BMUB for implementing the CMPA project. BMUB has commissioned GIZ to implement the Project jointly with MoEFCC and the state forest departments in selected states of India.

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