



# CALL OF THE WILD



SSTCN

October 1992

Vol 1

## EDITORIAL

## TURTLE TALES !!

Hi! "The Call of the Wild" is brought to you over the grapevine (for the first time and hopefully not the last). To take a little pot-shot at the target. We aim to corner a bit of your attention by asking you to do some figuring out! If the unspoken question is - what are two such varied environmental bodies as the SSTCN (Students Sea Turtle Conservation Network) and the SS (Scrub Society), doing in association, the SS would probably venture a hint that it all boils down to heavy and multitudinous MCC connections (which does form a common denominator). But we'll leave the hints where they are and cry off this opening session with just a little something to think about, "does co-operation ever need a raison d'etre?"

## ALL FOR A STREAK OF GREEN !!

The forum of environmental activity on the Madras Christian College campus owes its origins to a clandestine group of eco-activists, called the Green Freaks. In the summer of 1989, an international water management fair, sponsored by the Rotary Club and headed by Dr. M.S. Swaminathan (World Food Prize winner and current President of WFP - India), was to be held over a period of three weeks, with the MCC farm as its venue. What was not known however, was that over a weekend, two bulldozers would come into the campus and reduce 11 acres of prime scrub jungle to oblivion. Overnight, the Greenfreaks were born. Six individuals embarked upon a poster campaign that eventually galvanized the student community and later the entire college into action, caused no end of embarrassment to the beleaguered administration, and brought progress on the water management fair to a grinding halt. The Greenfreaks, despite the nobility of their nocturnal forays, had necessarily to remain anonymous (by and large they still are). The very secrecy which shrouds the Greenfreaks makes the movement exclusive to very few. But the seed which they had planted germinated into the growing realisation that an environmental body was a must on a campus which boasts of 365 acres of unique dry evergreen forest. The Scrub Society is so named because of the colloquial usage of the term "Scrub" for the native vegetation of the area. The Society conceptualized the working together of all members of the college - staff, students, alumni, and other campus residents - on equal footing, to preserve what is our common legacy. With this ideal in mind, the society came into its own formally by the month of April 1991.

The Scrub Society has for its governing aims, a commitment to the total preservation of species which are locally endangered or rare; the conservation of the campus as a whole; and the creation of environmental awareness which hopefully will be the common property of every person associated with the campus in time.

Towards achieving these ends, checklists of the various species of plants and animals available on campus are already being undertaken. The Society invites you to join its ranks and to help launch a membership drive that will enable it to meet those aims it aspires towards. Enquiries may be directed to the President (Manish Chandhi), Secretary (Amardeep Devadason), or Treasurer (Winston Henry).\*

SEA TURTLE EXPLOITATION  
Conservation of sea turtles has been necessitated by various human associated activities over the past few decades. The populations of the various species have been affected by direct factors such as the consumption of adult turtle meat and the poaching of eggs, the latter being especially on the rise with many Indian fishermen turning opportunistic collectors. Besides there are other gains to be had, the Hawksbill, for instance, being hunted for its shell. Other indirect problems on the Madras coast and on other coasts include habitat destruction and pollution. Sand mining, urbanisation and the spread of fishing villages result in a depletion of nesting area. The dogs and crows which immigrate as a consequence of human settlement prey upon the eggs and the hatchlings. Beach lighting, another consequence of urbanisation disorients both the adult and the hatchling.

India has 5 species of sea turtles - the Leatherback, Green, Loggerhead, Hawksbill and Olive Ridley - of which only the Olive Ridley nests on the East Coast. On the Madras coast, sea turtle conservation began in 1973. The Students Sea Turtle Conservation Network (SSTCN) has been conducting the sea turtle programme on the Madras coast since 1988.

### The SSTCN

The sea turtle program involves the setting up of a hatchery to incubate the eggs of the Olive Ridley, the turtle that nests on the Madras coast between December and March. Over the past 4 years, the SSTCN has collected about 60,000 eggs and released about 40,000 hatchlings. The eggs are incubated in natural conditions which simulate the natural nest conditions very closely and the hatchlings are released immediately after they hatch. One important objective of the SSTCN has been education and awareness. This, it has tried to achieve by audio visual presentations in schools and colleges and by conducting camps and workshops for students. A wide cross section of the public has joined members of the SSTCN on their egg collection walks on the beach at night and many have visited the hatchery to participate in the release of hatchlings. A good rapport has also been struck with the fisherfolk of nearby fishing communities and this is instrumental in any long term conservation plans for the sea turtle.

The SSTCN has also been involved in other programmes primarily in the area of environmental education. These include a volunteer program at the Vandalur Zoo and Marine Camps, an educational workshop for school students at the Theosophical Society. \*\*

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