

GOOD EARTH

Children take a decision to clean up a wetland

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Kids decided they had to do something. They did not want garbage dumped in the wetland.



CLEAN UP: Kids in the forefront.

"Aunty, do the turtles die when they eat plastic?"

"Uncle, I have a pair of woollen gloves which I got from Manali, will they do?"

"Should we clear all the reeds also?"

"What if there are snakes, I'm afraid to go near the edge!"

Questions came thick and fast amidst the flurry of activity that morning. It was May 29, 2005: 25 kids from the Aundh neighbourhood of Pune had gathered to clean up a wetland that lay between two housing societies. They had seen garbage being dumped there, and were determined to get rid of it. The environmental group Kalpavriksh had helped organise them.

In anticipation

Excitement and activity built up for days before the clean up. Boards were painted, with drawings of turtles and egrets and a stern warning against dumping garbage, in English and Marathi. The children formed a club, and called themselves "The Flapshells" after the turtles that resided in the wetland. Kalpavriksh members talked to them about the importance of wetlands, the wildlife they contained, their role in absorbing pollution and recharging groundwater. The Flapshells learnt that the turtles they were named after, were considered threatened and were protected by the Wildlife Protection Act. The kids distributed leaflets and posters about the clean up all over the colony. Some volunteered to be "Wetland Wardens", to regularly patrol the area.

On May 29, about 40 people gathered. Instructions were given about what kind of things to pick up (plastics, metal, carton, thermocol), and what could be left (food matter, cloth, rotting thin paper. One of the Flapshells was rather worried that his photo of picking up a thrown piece of underwear should not appear in the newspaper! An expert from Wetlands International came and told the adults present, that the reed grasses in the wetland should not be removed, as they were part of the ecosystem.

Finally, after 60 sacks of garbage, the cleaners called it a day. A Pune Municipal Corporation truck came to take away the sacks. The next day, two newspapers carried the news with pictures, further spurring the Flapshells to keep an eye on the wetland.

Long live the Aundh Pune wetland!

What can I do?

There must be a patch of nature, where ever you live. Are people throwing garbage into it? Or in other ways damaging it?

Can you gather the people of your colony, and try to stop this damage, clean up the area and help to protect it?

Form a club or organisation, name yourself and take up regular activities and write to us to tell us what you are doing.

In collaboration with Kalpavriksh Environmental Action Group