

# Certified Eco Volunteers

## Govt of Karnataka - Forest Department and Eco Tourism Development Board

In 2013, the Govt of Karnataka - Forest Department and Eco Tourism Development Board together started a pioneering effort in the field of wildlife and forest conservation by enlisting civilians into its fold as volunteers force, tapping into the pool of willing nature/wildlife enthusiasts and forge a long-term partnerships by providing a structured training & also rare privilege to experience the department's wildlife conservation efforts. The week-long Volunteers Training Programme (VTP) aims to impart knowledge on the basics of wildlife and forest conservation with discussions and presentations by naturalists, herpetologists, biologists, birding specialists, honorary wildlife wardens and forest officials followed by forest trails & overnight stay at anti-poaching camps. Further details can be obtained @ <http://www.karnatakacotourism.com>

Several batches of VTP were conducted in various landscapes of Karnataka - Bandipur, Bhadra, Dandeli, Kudremukh, & Nagarhole. The cost of the training was fully paid by the volunteers. Till date about **550+ volunteers** in all attended the programme & got trained, they are called **Certified Eco-volunteers** post completion of the training, and further this Eco volunteers force is to be utilized by the Govt of Karnataka - Forest Department and Eco Tourism Development Board for their planned wildlife conservation initiatives.

Among the trained volunteers force, the volunteers who genuinely wanted to contribute for the wildlife & forest conservation, self-initiated the below forest & wildlife conservation initiatives instead of waiting for the department to plan the activities for the volunteers, with co-operation/support from few Govt of Karnataka - Forest Department officers (CCF/ CF/ DCF/ ACF/ RFO)

**“Crowd Management”** - huge traffic inflow during the long weekend holidays & religious festivals at NP/TR/WLS (Location: Bandipur TR, Kali TR, Nagarhole TR & BRT TR) Purpose: Implement the convoy system for 500+ Vehicles, Conservation awareness for 1000+ public

**“Conservation Awareness Campaign”** - for safari visitors (Location: Bandipur TR & Nagarhole TR) Purpose: Explain do's & don'ts to 1000+ visitors. **“Conservation Awareness Campaign”** - for safari visitors (Location: Bandipur TR & Nagarhole TR) Purpose: Explain do's & don'ts to 1000+ visitors.

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**“Forest Fires”** - assistance to forest frontline staff in preparations of fire-line (Location: Bandipur TR & Nagarhole TR) Purpose: Provide assistance to prepare fire-lines for 500+ hectare forest area.

**“My Pledge”** - a campaign for forests & wildlife conservation (Location: Belagavi Forest Division) Purpose: Conservation awareness for 2000+ Children/Students (17 Colleges & 5 Schools).

**“Chinnara Vana Darshan”** - nurturing wildlife & nature conservation stewardship among school children (Location: Bhimgad WLS) Purpose: Conservation education & awareness for 1000+ Children (30+ Schools)

**“Free Health checkup Camp for Forest frontline staff & family”** (Location: Belagavi Forest Division) Purpose: Provide a socio emotional incentive for 375+ frontline staff & their families.

**“Design & Installation of Wildlife Warning Sign Boards to reduce wildlife road kills”** - Attempt to Influence Driver Behavior (Location: Belagavi Forest Division) Purpose: 100+ sign boards installation on SH cutting through the PA's.

**“Wildlife Crime Prevention & Detection Workshop”** - focusing on frontline forest staff (Location: Belagavi Forest Division) Purpose: Boost the confidence of foresters & frontline staff in booking the wildlife crime cases & increase the conviction rate.

**“Nature & Wildlife Conservation Awareness Campaign”** – Science Express Climate Action Special Train (Location: Bengaluru) Purpose: Conservation awareness for 2000+ Children

**“Conservation Talk”**– topic ‘Human-Wildlife Interactions’ (Location: Belagavi Forest Division) Purpose: Educate the foresters on wildlife behavior and ecology, interactions preventing techniques & bring awareness among villagers living on the fringe of protected areas (PAs).

**‘Rewards & Recognitions – THANK YOU cards’** – exclusively for frontline forest staff (Location: Belagavi Forest Division) Purpose: Boosting frontline forest staff morale.

The above forest & wildlife conservation initiatives have resulted into a wide range of **IMPACTS** as listed below:

- Public awareness programmers have created a positive impact on working together culture within department & public, thus enabling the public to join hands with the department for forest & wildlife conservation initiatives.
- Workshops & training for forest department staff (especially in territorial forest divisions) have enabled them to gain good knowledge on wildlife crime, human-wildlife interactions, thus empowering them to make effective decisions with confidence.
- Execution of social-emotional initiatives (free health check-up camp, spot rewards/recognitions) for the forest frontline staff has been effective in boosting their morale.
- Assisting the forest department in implementing the mitigation measures to conserve wildlife (monitoring of the road traffic night ban within forests, design & installation of wildlife warning signage boards) has helped to improve their efficiency.

The core objective of training this Eco volunteers force by the department was to strengthen and institutionalize all wildlife/ nature enthusiasts coming from different walks of life with unique professional skill sets, under a common umbrella of forest & wildlife conservation

Eco volunteers are working in Conservation Reserves/ Community Reserves/ Wildlife Sanctuary/ Tiger Reserves/ National Parks/ Zoos across Karnataka for the past few years & are successful to sustain the Eco Volunteers engagement (applied 3S - Save, Steward and Seed engagement model) for the initiatives planned by the respective department circle/division/range.

Volunteers Training Programme (VTP) is notified through an official Govt. Order. by Govt of Karnataka - Forest Department and Eco Tourism Development Board.

It's because of co-operation/support from few energetic & enthusiastic Forest Officers and Honorary Wildlife Wardens, the Eco volunteers are continuously engaged with the respective department circle/division/range to contribute for the forests & wildlife conservation initiatives.

