

Prakriti Darshan: Chhattisgarh's unique initiative to nurture young conservationists

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Shishir Roy Chowdhury | Raipur | January 17, 2025 4:42 pm



Photo: SNS

The Chhattisgarh Forest Department has launched a groundbreaking initiative – ‘Prakriti Darshan’ – to instill environmental consciousness among the youth. Since its inception in February 2024, this educational program has engaged over 19,000 students from nearly 300 schools and colleges, offering them a firsthand understanding of nature, biodiversity, and conservation.

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Nandanvan Zoo and Safari is not just a tourist destination but a cornerstone of Chhattisgarh's conservation efforts. The facility boasts a 125-acre zoo, a 5-acre Rescue and Rehabilitation Center, and safaris where visitors can observe animals up close in naturalistic enclosures. From tigers and lions to sloth bears and herbivores, the experience provides a unique glimpse into the ecological roles of these species.

The Butterfly Garden, exhibits featuring otters, crocodiles, and snakes, and sections on medicinal plants highlight the intricate connections between human health, biodiversity, and conservation.

Chhattisgarh faces frequent human-wildlife conflicts, with wild elephants, tigers, leopards, and bears straying into human settlements. Recognizing this challenge, 'Prakriti Darshan' emphasizes the importance of peaceful coexistence and proactive conservation strategies. By nurturing respect for nature, the program aims to reduce these conflicts and promote biodiversity preservation.

Developed in collaboration with Azim Premji University, Bengaluru, 'Prakriti Darshan' incorporates pre-visit tasks and post-visit reflections to deepen students' understanding. The three-hour guided tour begins with safaris featuring herbivores, sloth bears, tigers, and lions, followed by a comprehensive exploration of the zoo.

"This initiative ensures that students don't just visit but learn to appreciate the ecological importance of wildlife and forests," said Sudhir Kumar Agrawal, PCCF (Wildlife). To further enhance its impact, the Forest Department has formally urged District Education Officers across the state to encourage maximum student participation.

A standout feature of the program is its 15-day internship in Environmental and Nature Education, designed for students specializing in forestry, zoology, botany, and biotechnology. Offering a stipend and certification, this initiative has attracted participants from neighboring states like Madhya Pradesh, Telangana, and Odisha.

Chanchal Chandrakar, a final-year biology student and intern, remarked, "This program has given me invaluable insights into wildlife conservation. I'm eager to share this knowledge with my peers to create greater awareness."

Students who have participated in 'Prakriti Darshan' describe it as life-changing. "I now understand how crucial forests and wildlife are for our survival," said Gayatri Sahu from a government school in Khairagarh. Aditi Paul, another participant, added, "The program has taught us the importance of ecological balance and the urgent need for conservation."

Director-cum-DFO Jungle Safari, Ganveer Dhammasheel, outlined ambitious plans for the initiative's expansion. "We aim to involve more schools, colleges, and over 7,000 eco-clubs across the state. Enhanced internship modules are also in the pipeline, ensuring students gain a deeper understanding of conservation."

By fostering a sense of environmental responsibility, 'Prakriti Darshan' is shaping a generation that values biodiversity and strives for sustainable living. The program's ripple effect is expected to influence not just participants but their communities, creating a lasting legacy of conservation.

PCCF and HoFF V Sreenivasa Rao aptly stated, "Under the guidance of CM Vishnu Deo Sai and directions of Forest Minister Kedar Kashyap, the Forest Department is committed to making our youth the torchbearers of environmental conservation." With its far-reaching impact, 'Prakriti Darshan' stands as a testament to Chhattisgarh's commitment to preserving nature for generations to come.

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Source: <https://www.thestatesman.com/india/prakriti-darshan-chhattisgarhs-unique-initiative-to-nurture-young-conservationists-1503387615.html>