

2019

Once again the academic collaboration between the University of Cologne (UoC) and the Bharati Vidyapeeth Institute of Environmental Education and Research (BVIEER) in Pune, Maharashtra created the opportunity for an educational field work project in India. Thanks to the hard and passionate work of Prof. Dr. Shamita Kumar and Prof. Dr. Kirk W. Junker nine students of the UoC and about 50 students of BVIEER were given the chance to participate in a challenging field research, including a field trip to the Bandhavgarh National Park in Madhya Pradesh, India.

Coming from different faculties like the Faculty for Biochemistry, Biology, the Faculty of Law and from the International Masters of Environmental Science Program (IMES), the students of the UoC took this journey in late February 2019 to broaden their knowledge on park management and wildlife law.

Starting with the pre-field work, nine groups were created, consisting of one student from the UoC and five students of BVIEER, working on individual research questions which they were allowed to set up on their own according to their interest. The final research topics were for example the human tiger conflict, importance of the forest to local people, biodiversity as a subject in schools and employment opportunities resulting from ecotourism. During the pre-field work stage the students were also introduced to the concept and objectives of a national park and were prepared for birdwatching by an interesting lecture held by bird expert Mr. Kiran Purandare.

Following the pre-field work the students took the trip to the Bandhavgarh National Park. After an 18 hour drive with the train everyone arrived at the Resort and were warmly welcomed.

The main and most exciting part were the jeep safaris. In two morning and two afternoon safaris the participants were given the extraordinary opportunity to face and enjoy the overwhelming biodiversity, both flora and fauna, of the national park. Focusing not only on the sighting of one of the great Bengal Tigers, sightings of Sambar, Gaur, Asian Jackal, Spotted Deer and the Sloth Bear were also made. Equally amazing were the sightings during birdwatching which included observing birds like the Serpent Eagle, Black Vulture, Green Bee-Eater, Indian Roller and the Grey Hornbill, to name only a few. Apart from the safaris the students were given the opportunity to visit local villages and schools and were able to do interviews, questionnaires and surveys with the local people for their individual research questions. Visits to an Eco-development village and to the Interpretation Center gave valuable insights into economic and cultural aspects of life in and around the National Park. The evenings were not only filled with discussions among the groups and lectures on the history of the National Park held by the field director, but also with nice dinners, activities like star gazing and cultural communication between the students.

After arriving back in Pune the students evaluated their research results and prepared presentations which they presented in front of all groups and the professors.

The trip was concluded with the chance to participate in the Ashok Kumar Memorial – Wildlife Law and Enforcement Conference on March 11th – 12th, 2019, held in Pune.

During the whole trip the students of UoC had not only the opportunity to broaden their academic knowledge, but also to experience the rich and unique culture of India. Between research work and free time valuable friendships developed between the students.

On the behalf of the students of the University of Cologne I want to thank Prof. Dr. Kumar, Prof. Bharucha and Prof. Dr. Kirk W. Junker who have made this possible. Not only in times of globalization, but especially on environmental topics, international friendships and collaborations are crucial. Throughout this trip we not only got the opportunity to experience the Indian approach of managing certain environmental issues but we were also able to form friendships. These will surely develop into academic relations in the future and will therefore benefit the environmental collaborations and also the next generation to come.

By Emma Shensher



(Picture taken by Joshua Hermens)



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