

Role of Butterfly garden in ecotourism

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Abstract:

Shahapur forest department, Hariyali an NGO, NSS cadets of B. N. Bandodkar College of Science, Thane, came together to develop an open type of butterfly garden at Vafa. A plot measuring 250 square meters was selected for the garden. This garden is a part of the project of Shahapur forest department in developing a site for ecotourism.

Key words: Ecotourism, butterfly, food plants ,nectar plants.

Introduction:

The western ghats is one of the hotspots for biodiversity. The District Thane lies in the northern region of the western ghats and exhibits some diversity of the same. The Shahapur forest division of this district is rich in biodiversity.

Nowadays the conservationists have understood that merely prohibiting people from entering or damaging the forests is not helping in saving the landscape or the plants and animals in the forest.

The outlook of the conservation strategy is now changed. The knowledge that fulfilling the requirements of the residents in and around the forests will only help in conserving the forests has been assimilated by the decision makers. Increased awareness of the importance of offering alternate sources of income for the residents without cutting the forest has been attained by the expert conservationists. This has lead to policy changes in the forest department. A new approach is to utilize the richness of forest to make the people aware of the biodiversity and provide the locals with in situ employment.

In foreign countries such as Singapore, Malaysia , UK, USA , Japan etc. a number of special enclosed butterfly gardens are erected. Similar butterfly gardens we also get in India in places like Bangalore, Nasik etc. However here is a unique garden planned which will be of an open type and the design is such that will attract a large number of butterflies and tourists. According to Shetler(1990), the reason behind developing a butterfly garden is to make

public aware of the importance of the need to save butterflies and other animals and plants by saving their natural habitats.

The Forest department at Shahapur took the initiative to establish a ecotourism spot of which the butterfly garden is an important part. Shahapur forest, Hariyali a NGO, NSS cadets of B N Bandodkar College of Science, Thane, came together to develop this open type of butterfly garden at Vafa. A plot measuring 250 square meters was selected for the garden.

The basic needs to establish a permanent stable butterfly colony :

- 1) A good and continuous source of nectar providing plants for adults (Brewer Jo,1990).
- 2) Number of host plants to lay eggs and as a food source for caterpillars. The phenology of these plants that is the number of days they are covered with young leaves helps the butterflies to remain sedentary than dispersing in search of available food plants.
- 3) Humidity which is required for the fecundity of adult butterflies as well as indirectly helps the plants remain green and flowering.
- 4) The site should get sufficient sun light for the cold blooded butterflies to bask in the sun to attain the proper body temperature.
- 5) The site should also provide shelter from sunlight in the hot hours of the day to avoid desiccation and protection from wind, heavy rain and as a roosting place.

Shahapur site for the butterfly garden:

The site at Vafa fulfills all these criteria as it is a forest land the diversity of plants is great as well as the river Bhatsa, which is flowing adjacent to the forest takes care of the humidity and irrigation of the garden. The forest type is semi deciduous but planting additional local evergreen host and nectar plants and taking good care of them will transform the butterfly garden patch into evergreen garden.

First a garden plan was developed taking into consideration the East and west direction and the nature of plants whether herbaceous, shrubs or trees. With the help of the checklist of plants of Shahapur forest host plants and nectar plants were selected from local availability. The process of acquiring and planting the plants is in progress.

Role of Shahpur Forest department:

This garden is a part of the project of Shahapur forest department in developing a site for ecotourism. They will acquire the necessary plants and maintain the garden. All the logistics of developing the garden is the responsibility of the forest department. The local tribal people will be trained for conducting the trails. The money generated will be given to them thus

generating a source of income at their door and will also increase their awareness of the importance of the habitat and the floral and faunal diversity thereby reducing the pressure on the forest for wood and other requirements.

Role of Hariyali, a NGO:

The NGO Hariyali as it's name suggests strives to conserve the greenery of the surrounding and undertakes all the tasks that will help in enhancing the beauty and conserving the nature. The Hariyali NGO is working in the field of conservation for last eleven years.

The NGO Hariyali with the help of their experts will train the locals in identifying various plants and also make them aware of their importance in the forest and the ethno botany with their medicinal importance. The knowledge about identification of butterflies, their life histories and their preferred host plants and nectar plants will also be given to them. This will make the tribal people confident in handling the trails and their further observations in the field will give the in depth knowledge about the intricacies of floral and faunal relationships to the ecotourists and forest department.

Role of NSS cadets of B.N.Bandodkar College Of Science, Thane:

NSS is a unit of every college working for a social cause. B. N. Bandodkar College. The NSS unit is one among many working for conservation of environment with the NGO Hariyali for last many years.

In the last week of December 2009 the NSS cadets of this college started the actual field work of making the butterfly garden. They have made the walkways and mud puddling site according to the garden plan. The available plants were also planted in the assigned locations. The cadets will be visiting the site every Sunday and holidays to complete the gardening.

Role of The Butterfly Garden in Ecotourism:

This will be the first among few gardens getting developed in the nearby areas.

The garden will be the densely populated colony of many species of butterflies. Along with these butterflies the floral garden will also flourish. The layout and the plan of the special garden will be a wonderful site. These colourful butterflies will create an idyllic site which will attract many ecotourists. The information imparted by the tribals on the trails will make them aware of the roll of butterflies in the food chain and the importance of saving this natural heritage of our country. The continuous flow of tourists will provide the local people jobs as guides as well as encourage them to start tourism oriented enterprises to supplement their income.

The students of various schools and colleges visiting this garden will gain first hand knowledge about the life of the butterflies. This will work as the guide for them to establish butterfly safe heavens around their homes. This will also augment their observation skills.

Conclusion:

The western ghats of Maharashtra has 208 species of butterflies (Gaonkar,Harish,1996). Some of them which were earlier recorded in Thane district are no more to be seen. The number of species noted recently in adjacent area is around 110 to 140. Such butterfly gardens evenly spread around Maharashtra will help in establishing new colonies of the butterflies which are presently not seen in these areas.

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