

Crusader of Conservation : Bhoja Shetty

'Environment' is the watchword nowadays (rather catch word). Talking about biodiversity and its conservation has become fashionable in the higher class of the society, to gain instant popularity (and associated monetary benefits !). But the real issue of spreading awareness about the consequences of ecological disasters and remedial measures at the grass roots level is a task shunned by most people, leaving only a handful of committed individuals to shoulder this onerous responsibility. One such person is Mr.K.A.Bhoja Shetty, State Director of W.W.F-India, Karnataka branch.

Mr.K.A.Bhoja Shetty, born and brought up in the serene, verdant surroundings of Dakshina Kannada district of

Karnataka, naturally had a first hand experience of nature. After his early schooling, he proceeded to Madras and obtained a honours degree from Presidency College, Madras. He joined as Assistant Conservator of Forests in the Madras forest department (now Tamil Nadu). After two years of training at the Forest Research Institute, Dehradun, he started his illustrious career in real earnest. He was associated in the preparation of working plans for Bellary, Coimbatore and other divisions. Later he held the post of District Forest Officer of Coimbatore. Soon he was made the Deputy Conservator of Forests for Coorg division. Here he built up a good rapport with local planters and minimised poaching and illegal smuggling



of Sandalwood. And, during his tenure in Kodagu, the Nagarahole Sanctuary was set up. Nagarahole is one of the best managed sanctuaries famous for its rich wildlife and forests.

Later, when the States were reorganised, Mr. Bhoja Shetty reverted back to the Tamil Nadu forest department. He was the Principal of the Forest Training college for sometime and later went to U.K and obtained a post graduate diploma from Oxford. His simplicity, sincerity and efficiency made him an ideal choice for the coveted post of Chief Conservator of Forests for Tamil Nadu. During the ten years of his office as the Chief Conservator, he struck a delicate balance between conservation and development. He was the mainstay behind setting up of Anaimalai Wildlife Sanctuary (now Indira Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary) and other pristine reserves.

Also, he took personal interest in setting up of the Madras Snake Park at Guindy. Mr. Romulus Whitaker, then Director of the Snake Park gratefully acknowledged Mr. Bhoja Shetty's help in getting the land allotted for the snake park. With many such feathers in his career, Mr. Bhoja Shetty retired from the forest department after nearly four decades of dedicated and distinguished service.

He, then returned to his home state of Karnataka and settled in Bangalore. But the penchant for wildlife conservation and spreading its awareness and first hand experience in the forest drew him into World Wide Fund for Nature-India as its State Organiser in Karnataka. Now, he is the State Director. He has played an active role in making WWF, a force to reckon with the environmental circles.

He has built up a dedicated team and a solid foundation for WWF in Karnataka.

His personal interest in organising monthly programmes like film shows, birdwatching and other annual programmes like the nature camps, quiz, exhibitions, workshops etc., and help in spreading of environmental awareness have started yielding good dividends. There are nearly 30 nature clubs throughout Karnataka with a membership of nearly 1000, mainly children.

Besides, he is also associated with National Environmental Awareness Campaign, Biodiversity of Western Ghats, etc. He has been a great source of inspiration and guidance to the Conservation Corp Volunteers.

Even though he is 70, he carries on with the eagerness and zeal which make young people wonder in disbelief. He personally leads the nature trails, and explains different aspects of nature (incidentally, he is a very good field botanist) in simple terms to both young and old. recently he has received many awards and honours in recognition of his yeomen service to environmental education. With such exemplary accomplishments and achievements to his credit, he never boasts of them, but continues his work unobtrusively. His simplicity, humility, gentlemanly behaviour and indepth knowledge of the subject have made him highly respectable among the wildlife circles in Karnataka. Punctuality is his another forte.

But Mr. Bhoja Shetty appears to be disillusioned by the wanton destruction of forests in the name of development and short sighted policies of the planners. He is anguished by the indifference and callous

attitude of both the government and the public. "It's time the government and the people sit up and take note of the impending catastrophe", he feels. Will the government and people heed to these words of wisdom ? Well, that depends on people like Mr. Bhoja Shetty, who translate words into action and practice what they preach, rather than people who wash their hands off by just talking about conservation in seminars and conferences at five star hotels and later forget about it.

His association with the Merlin Nature Club:

Mr. Bhoja Shetty has been a constant source of inspiration and encouragement to the members of the club from its

inception. He has extended help in almost all our activities and programmes. He was the one who initiated us to sell WWF education products to raise funds for the club. He has donated many books and periodicals to the club library, besides allowing us to use some of the rare books in his personal collection for reference. He has helped us to learn more about flora and nature as a whole. We are indebted to Mr. Bhoja Shetty for all the help. Also, we at Merlin Nature Club, feel privileged to be associated with Mr. Bhoja Shetty and the activities of WWF and look forward to his continued support and help. We salute to Mr. Bhoja Shetty for his passionate commitment and dedicated service for the cause of conservation.

-T.S.Srinivasa
