

Bannerghatta Butterfly Park

Three Year Report Card



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India's first butterfly park, also the largest in the world, was opened to public in November, 2006 at Bangalore. Biotech News requested some of the people involved in the establishment of this unique facility, to re-visit the park and provide a feedback.

The Country's first Butterfly Park and one of the largest in the world, spread over 17 acres, was inaugurated and dedicated to the nation by Mr. Kapil Sibal, the then Minister for Science & Technology, GoI, on 25th November 2006 at Bannerghatta, Bangalore. The park was established with grants from National Bio-resource Development Board (NBDB), Department of Biotechnology, GoI through a tripartite project involving the University of Agricultural Sciences (USA), Bangalore, the Zoo Authority of Karnataka (ZAK), and the Ashoka Trust

for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE), Bangalore.

Our association with the butterfly park project for close to five years had metamorphosed us from hardnosed professional entomologists to butterfly enthusiasts. The bug of nostalgia bit us often and induced in us an inquisitive longing to visit the park just to see how the ambitious project of DBT, GoI had been received by the public. Our visit to the park was also provoked by what we were reading in the media and science magazines. The impression we got was

that the year 2009 was the not just the year of Astronomy but also butterflies. And we firmly believe the tricks a human mind plays in selective filtering of information had nothing to contribute to this impression! There was so much happening with these amazing creatures of nature that the world seemed to be star-crossed by them!

Interesting news that was making rounds on the internet concerned the closure of a major national highway across Taiwan (east to west). One lane of the road is apparently closed each ►►

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Butterfly Park Conservatory in early-2007(left) and mid-2009(right), the vegetation has established extremely well. A little pruning of vegetation to the eye level will improve the visibility of butterflies.

- ▶ year, in March, just to protect 11500 butterflies that cross a 600 m stretch of the highway every hour on their annual migration!

Immediately, thereafter we learnt about the annual 'Butterfly Exhibition' organized by the Natural History Museum, London, an event that is eagerly awaited by the British public. The 'Butterfly Jungle' opened this year from 1 May to 27 September, 2009, with butterflies flown in from South America.

It was almost as if the entire world was in thrall of butterflies. We were left wondering as to why is it that we in India seem to be completely obsessed with the mundane, with little time for nature's beauty? Or so we thought! As if to prove us all wrong came the news that the Karnataka Circle of India Post too was enamoured by butterflies and the Butterfly Park at Bangalore! On 23rd May 2009, the Chief Postmaster General, Karnataka Circle, did his bit for nature awareness

by releasing a pictorial cancellation seal for the Bannerghatta Post Office. The pictorial cancellation is the brain-child of Mr. M. P. Rajan, Chief Postmaster General, Karnataka Circle who also happens to be an entomologist by training! The postal department was assisted by butterfly enthusiasts and amateur radio club in designing the cancellation. The seal depicts the outline of the Malabar Banded Peacock, a butterfly endemic to the Western Ghats. Truly, this was postal ▶▶



The visitorship trends show that fewer children are visiting the park. More children need to be attracted and involved in the park through specific programmes for children.

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From the Visitor's Book

Excellent Park and very well maintained. We have seen Niagara Fall, Montreal Botanical Gardens, Busch Gardens in Florida. But this is one of the best.

-Prof. V. Kodur,
Michigan State University, USA, June
2006

'This was the nicest facility we have visited while in India'
Mark Spinti, Utah, July 2007

I am a butterfly lover and a plant lover. When I visited Butterfly Dome (Conservatory), I was amazed at the beautiful butterflies and the flora and fauna. But to my utter disappointment, I saw that there was no attendant to deter people from touching butterflies...and disturbing them. My suggestion to preserve this place by hiring one or two attendants, just to watch all the time. In China, Singapore special attendants are standing there all the time.

Unsigned, March 2009

Outstanding effort!...felt like was going through Discovery/Animal Planet!...In short, Great Experience... in no way should this whole project be put aside..

-Dr. Dileep Mennon, Ophthalmologist,
Kerala, December 2006

'Excellent-n-fabulous. Absolutely dream creations and what an opportunity to be here especially with the gentleman Mr. Mahadevappa, who really took time to explain all about the butterflies, the eggs....the pupa...Excellent, keep it up guys, you are doing a good job.'

-Ratul Oberoi, Mohali, Punjab, Sep
2007

'It is a very good park...Government taking initiatives to promote and conserve butterflies very well appreciated. Some suggestions to improve are...Guide system-introduce guides to explain...; Pamphlets and brochure-Please prepare pamphlets which have pictures and brief write-up...; Shopping complex-A shop...to buy souvenirs...'

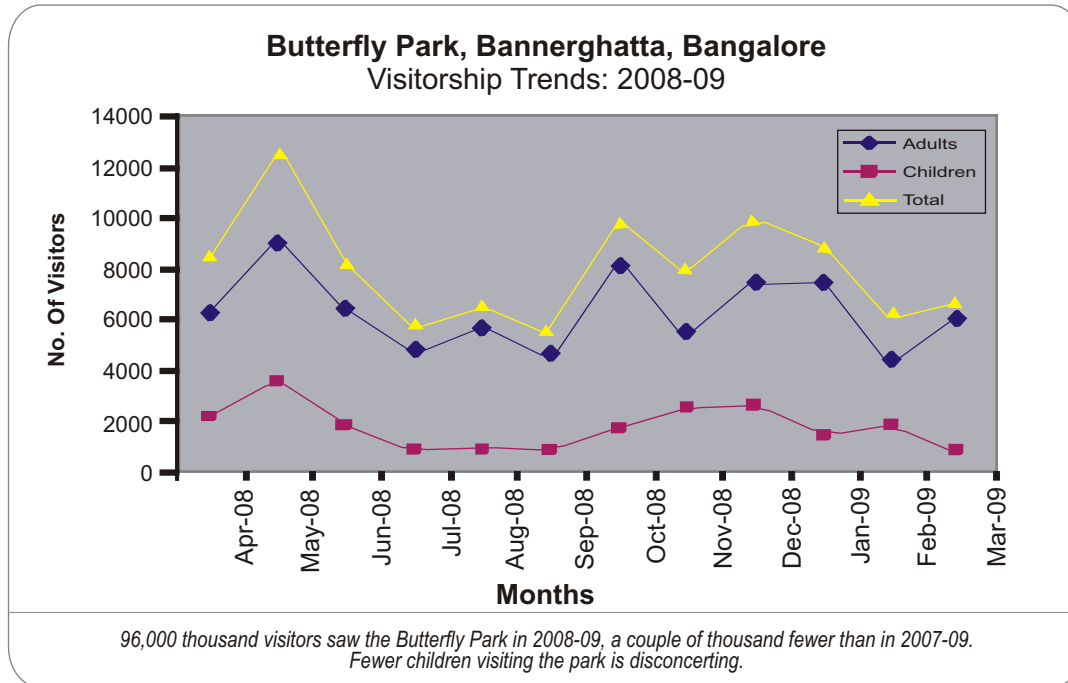
-T. Das Prakash, Tata Consultancy
Services, Bangalore

► department's recognition of the popularity of the new attraction at Bangalore - the Butterfly Park.

These were reasons enough for us to visit the Butterfly Park and re-live the memories of one of the most endearing projects we had worked on. But the real

motivation to visit the park came from the ever affable and persuasive Dr. S Natesh, Sr. Advisor, DBT and Editor-in-Chief of Biotech-News, who enquired about the status of the park. After all the park was the result of his vision as the head of NBDB.

So, off we went to Bannerghatta on 11th July 2009, a tiring two hours drive from UAS, GKVK, through some of the most chaotic streams of the famed Bangalore traffic. Reaching the Butterfly Park, following a courtesy call to the Conservator of Forests, was indeed ►►



► refreshing. The first impression as we walked around the park was a sense of disbelief! We had to pinch ourselves to realize that we had played a part in creation of this beautiful jewel in the crown of Bangalore. Or was it again a case of mind playing its tricks on us! We decided to click photographs as we went around a second time, taking care to mix with the crowds and eavesdropping on them!

We were happy to note the sense of amazement and awe amongst the visitors. It was embarrassing to hear them praising the park and the exhibits receiving bouquet in disguise was a wonderfully narcissistic experience and an ego trip like none!, though there was always the odd cynic who thought the price of Rs. 20 was too high. We then decided to pick out the very people who were full of praise for the park for their opinion -posing as officials of the park of course! We were in for a shock we

hadn't bargained for as there was a litany complaints from the very people whom we had heard passing appreciative comments and had to beat a hasty retreat.

After this sobering experience we went around the park a third time and realized that the visitors to the park had a point, after all. Without belaboring too much let it be summarized that the landscape inside the conservatory was overgrown and required immediate attention, a coat of paint and some waterproofing was necessary in some places, and the audio-visual centre was defunct and literally powerless. The idea of educational programs for school children and opportunity for amateur butterfly enthusiasts to work as volunteers at the park either pursuing their own research or assisting captive breeding work as outlined in the original project document needed to be put into action. The concept of the park as

visualized was not just as a place of entertainment but also of true education in nature awareness. The educational programmes for teachers and students, painting and kit-design competitions, Butterfly identification guides, flash-cards and butterfly rearing kits etc. developed by ATREE during the project period need to be revived and sustained.

Not satisfied with this assessment we decided to see what was in store for us in the visitors' book, and for the second time in the day we learnt our lessons, with all humility though. The writing on the wall was loud and clear 'the park is good but can do better.' The butterfly park receives little over one lakh footfalls each year, which translates to average monthly revenue of Rs. 20 lakhs, there is no reason why the park can't do better with just a little extra attention.

The comments in the book ranged from unabashed appreciation and praise ►►

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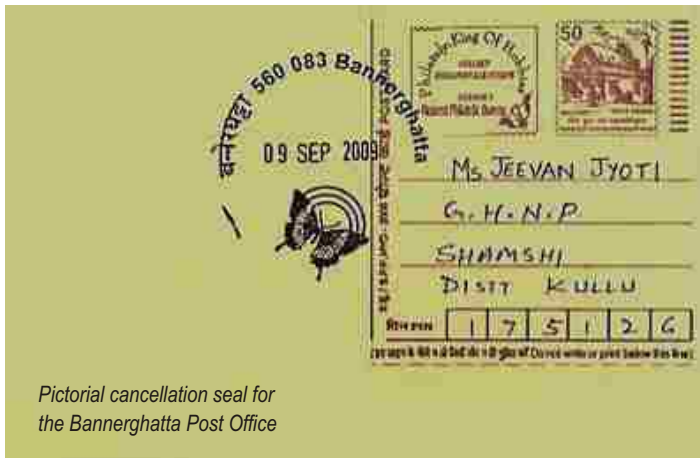
► to pragmatic suggestions for improvement. We had found the keys to future of the butterfly park. All the Zoo Authority of Karnataka, which runs the park now, has to do is to lend its attention to the visitors' suggestions and we would have the road-map to the best butterfly park in the world, and one that is operated in true participatory mode with visitors!

Mr. B. Raju, the Assistant Conservator of Forests and Deputy Director of the park was bubbling with enthusiasm and ideas for the park but sounded despairing when it came to funds and finding the skilled manpower to keep the captive breeding programme running. Dr. Srinivas Reddy and his team were doing an excellent job of breeding about 15-20 species of butterflies and he was soon leaving to take up a job at UAS, Bangalore. After making some feeble noises about finding a suitable replacement we left the park duly humbled but with a determination to share our impressions with DBT - in

the hope that it would throw a life-line at the park.

As we were returning by taxi, our attention was drawn to 11th June edition of a national daily lining the floor of the car. The headlines screamed, 'Government withdraws order banning movement of vehicles at night through Bandipur National Park.' The National Park had seen a spate of animal deaths by vehicles and the District Commissioner of Chamarajnagar had banned the movement of vehicles between 9.00 pm and 6.0 am through the national park,

only to be repealed by higher-ups. Our approach to conservation seems a far cry from the philosophy of Mr. Lee Thay-Ming, of the National Freeway Bureau, Taiwan, 'Human beings need to coexist with the other species, even if they are tiny butterflies.' We can only hope that the butterfly park would usher in the required sensitivity to nature amongst us in the years to come. ■



Pictorial cancellation seal for the Bannerghatta Post Office

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