

# **A Report on the Annual Jatre at Dabaguli 2012**

**Urigam Range, Hosur Forest Division**



## **Kenneth Anderson Nature Society**

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## 1. Dabaguli

### 1.1 Location

Dabaguli is a little known stretch of riverine forest along Cauvery, deep in the forests of the Urigam Range of Hosur Forest Division in Tamil Nadu. An Anti-Poaching Camp of Tamil Nadu Forest Department and a small shack housing a fisherman family are the only human presence for most part of the year.



*Cauvery at Dabaguli*

Dabaguli can only be accessed by mud and gravel roads. One of these is via Belpatti and Kestur and the other one is via Balagadapallum and Urigam.

### 1.2 Ecological Importance

The ecological significance of the forests which include Dabaguli is huge. This unique riparian zone is particularly important for many endemic and endangered species, many of which were checklisted during the Bio-Diversity survey conducted by Kenneth Anderson Nature Society jointly with ANCF. Several of the species were also camera trapped in the region during the year 2011.

The rare and endemic Grizzled Giant Squirrel (*Ratufa macroura*) re-discovered in this region in 2009-10 is restricted to a very few localities in southern India(1) and Srilanka. Disturbances to its habitat leads to severe stress to the Grizzled Giant Squirrel.



*Grizzled Giant Squirrel (photo by Sanjeev Kumar S R)*

The Cauvery river bed here is one of the last regions remaining in India where the highly endangered Smooth-coated Otter (*Lutra perspicillata*) breed and feed in secure environments. Over-fishing and disturbances has been the known factors for their dwindling population.



*Smooth-coated Otters (photo by Soumyajit Nandy)*

The density of the Four-Horned Antelope (*Tetracerus quadricornis*) is higher here than many other sites in India, where these species occur.



*Four Horned Antelope (photo Karthik )*

Also, these forests form a vital link in the elephant corridors of South India, connecting the Bannerghatta National Park and the River Cauvery. They form the Nilgiri Eastern Ghats Elephant corridor.



*Elephants on the banks of Cauvery in Uganiyam*

The other schedule species found here include predators such as Leopard, Dhole, Sloth Bear, Marsh Crocodile, Jackal and prey species such as Chital, Gaur, Sambar Deer, Barking Deer, Elephant, etc. The area is also home to the last few remaining Common Langurs in the Hosur Forest Division.





*Leopard camera trapped in Urigam(KANS)*



*Sambar in Urigam (Karthik)*



*Crocodile in Urigam (Dr. sudhakar)*

### 1.3 The Temple





### *Dabguli main temple*

There is a small temple dedicated to Basavanna in Dabaguli. A trickle of devotees visit the temple around the year mainly from the surrounding villages in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. People of the nearby villages revere Dabaguli a lot. Prior to harvest or when they buy a new calf, they come to Dabaguli and pray. The broken idols are apparently brought to Dabaguli to be submerged in the Cauvery. Once a year, around the time of Shivaratri, a Jatre or fair is organised here and a swarm of 10-15 thousand people descend on this peaceful place for two days.

## **2. The Jatre**

### **2.1 Initial Years**

The Jatre was initiated in 2007 by people from surrounding villages with the active support of religious heads. They formed a committee with representation from various villages like Kotiyur, Hunsanahalli, Manjugondahalli, Belpatti etc. and all villagers contribute money, their produce and ration for the success of the Jatre.

The huge pile of garbage and plastic plates left behind all around the temple, and garbage floating in the Cauvery in the aftermath of the Jatre, came to the notice of Kenneth Anderson Nature Society (KANS) in 2010.

### **2.2 Last year (2011) Plastic clean-up drive**



*Plastic clean-up drive 2011*



In 2011 as many as 15,000 people participated in the event. All means of transport from motor bikes to buses were used to get to Dabaguli from the nearby villages.

Food for all the people was arranged by the Jatre Committee for 2 days prepared on the banks on the river itself. There were many food stalls and tea-shops set up by the local people. People stayed overnight at Dabaguli and left only on the next day by noon.

### **KANS initiative in 2011:**

#### **Preventing the Use of Plastic Plates**

KANS convinced the committee to use bio-degradable Areca leaf plates as against the plastic lined plates used the previous years. When the committee pleaded lack of funds, KANS offered to bear 50% of the cost and even sourced a supplier for 30,000 areca leaf plates.

#### **Safe Disposal of Waste**

On KANS instruction, the committee prepared huge pits, 4-5 that are around 4 feet deep, to collect and dispose the used plates and other garbage. Straw baskets were provided to all the stalls to collect plastic waste and to prevent litter from the stalls.

#### **Conservation Video**

KANS screened the Kannada version of the movie "Nagarhole: Tales from an Indian Jungle" by Shekhar Dattatri, bringing home the message of conservation to the audience.

#### **Final Cleaning up of the Area**

The following morning KANS collected all the plates, glasses, liquor bottles, cigarette packets, gutka packets and other waste which was scattered all over the forest and disposed them in the prepared pits. Considering the volume of garbage, we were unable to do any segregation and hence burnt all the plates and plastic waste gathered at the pits. The organising committee also lend their help at this point to collect the waste and dispose it in the pits.

## **2.3 This year 2012, Preventing plastic pollution and Alcohol consumption at the source**

A few things that were observed by KANS during the Jatre of 2011 were:

1. The Dabguli jatre serves mostly as a social gathering. People come to jatre to enjoy and to meet relatives, marriages etc.,
2. The major problem and attraction seems to be alcohol consumption
3. The major chunk of pollution are the food plates and the vendors selling plastic bags/cups
4. Trees being felled for fire-wood
5. People camping all along the Cauvery

Based on the above the following tasks were taken up:





### **Prior announcement in all the villages and hand-bill distribution**



*Hand-bills*

Handbills written in Tamil and Kannada were circulated in all the villages (around 40 villages were covered) surrounding Dabguli with Fd logo by KANS volunteers and FD staff. Announcements were also made via the public announcement system warning people that plastic must not be used within the forests; Alcohol and such items will be confiscated at the check-post; Felling of trees is prohibited and Entry from the checkpost after 6pm will be restricted due to elephant movement.

### **Notice by the FD to the Jatre committee**

A notice was sent by the DFO of the Hosur Forest Department warning the committee of the above points.

### **Check-post : regulation of plastic and Alcohol**



*Plastic and alcohol monitoring at the Kestur checkpost*



The volunteers and FD staff were divided into 3 teams, 2 teams at one checkpoint each and the third at the temple area.



*Confiscated Alcohol*



*Confiscated Plastic items*

KANS together with the FD confiscated all alcohol and plastic items at the checkpoints. The teams stayed until 10pm in the night and a total of 240 liquor items were confiscated and several Kgs of plastic items in the form of bags, coverings, cups were confiscated. The Vendors were compensated by providing paper bags replacing plastic bags and paper cups replacing plastic cups.

The people were generally supportive of the initiative to disallow plastic usage within the forests. However the vendors who were to set up shops and people who turned up with liquor provided some resistance parting with the items.

### Plastic control at the temple



*Banner being put up near the pit*

The team stationed at the temple area put up several banners discouraging people on the plastic usage and indicating the general direction of the dugout pit to dispose the area leaf food plates.



*Distribution of baskets for waste collection*



Several waste baskets were provided to the shop keepers to dump the paper and biodegradable waste generated.



*Exchange of plastic items with paper cups and bags*

Volunteers who toured the entire area took away any plastic cups/bags from the vendors and replaced them with equal quantity of paper cups and bags sourced by KANS. However the waste generated by packaged material in form of chips etc., could not be controlled.



*FD patrolling the temple area*

Local police and Forest Department staff further made a note of the vendors selling items in plastic despite the prior announcement and gave a stern warning. They also patrolled regularly keeping a lookout for illegal activities and alcohol consumption.

By night fall the crowd had swelled to unmanageable proportions and plastic cups and bags were seen strewn around.



### Post festival clean-up



*Volunteers cleaning up the temple area*



*Cauvery banks and temple area after the festival*

The following evening of the 2nd day the last of the crowd had left and the shops were packed. All the banners were stolen and the lone pit overflowed with the leaf plates. The amount of waste in the form of plates, discarded food, paper and plastic waste was phenomenal. The volunteers who started early by afternoon could only finish 1/5th of the debris.



With lack of transport to take away the plastic waste and clear the remaining place, the committee was again reminded to clear the place by themselves. However a week has passed since the event and the place remains uncleaned.

## 2.3 Environmental Issues

Such a big gathering of people inside the forest poses many threats to the fragile ecosystem of Dabaguli.

Large number of plastic coated plates, cups and covers are used for food and these are littered carelessly in the forest. These are not just an eyesore but, the profuse littering will cause disturbance to the natural growth of the forests and its inhabitants, and pollute the river water.

Fire-wood for cooking is collected in large scale from the surrounding forests. Although KANS observed that mostly dry wood was being collected, about 7-8 tractor loads of these being removed from forest will have its own impact on these forests.



*Firewood collected for cooking*

A large number of loud speakers are used throughout the night in very high volumes. This will cause significant disturbance to wildlife in the area.



*Loudspeakers at the venue*

New buildings were being constructed at the venue. JCBs were used to clear off vegetation to set up various stalls.

There were lot of people who were drinking and smoking in the forest, even after the swamiji's repeated appeals. Irresponsible actions like these could result in forest fires.

### **3 Immediate task–action plan**

- Make the checkpoints at Balagadapallam and Kestur functional and restrict entry after 6pm.
- Restrict entry of buses and HGV
- Declare Dabguli as a plastic free zone
- Disallow public from staying overnight at Dabguli and Uganiyam, without permission.

### **4 Observations and future action points**

KANS is seriously concerned about the impact on the forests by this Jatre. The following observations were made by KANS during the fair.

1. Every year, the road from Kestur to Dabaguli was recently cleared and levelled. Steady traffic on this road caused larger disturbances and unsettled the loose soil especially from large vehicles like buses and trucks. Steps must be taken to stop all large vehicles at the checkpost.



2. There are proposals to tar the roads, which if carried out will invite more traffic to the area. As per the committee the number of people participating in the fair has gone up in the last 4-5 years from few hundreds to thousands solely due to motorable roads. Any attempts to tar the road must be stopped.
3. Electricity lines were drawn to provide electricity. This has led to boosting the level of festivities to a even higher degree.
4. Speakers placed all around the temple area kept a steady flow of loud music and commentaries (The sound carried until the Uganiyam APC). In the face of steady electricity supply to Dabguli it can be predicted that number of people visiting the place will increase throughout the year
5. The river bank was cleared of all grass and scrub plants using JCB in order to make place for the cooking area. Regular clearing has to led to the clearing of any regeneration. Such activities must be disallowed and the prosecuted under Tamilnadu forest Law
6. Overnight campers seen during the festival severely distresses the fauna of this area. Overnight camping in areas outside the public land must not be allowed
7. Firewood is collected from areas that are home to the Grizzled Giant Squirrel and Four Horned Antelope. Firewood collection even of dead wood , home to innumerable birds and insects must be disallowed
8. At least 15-20 small shops were seen along the way up to the temple. This further increased the amount of plastic litter in the form of ice cream and tea cups. The shop owners must take upon themselves to clear the waste generated during the fair
9. There were about five Swamyjis (from various Mutts) on the stage. From their talks it transpired that they wanted this Jatire to be held every year and with more pomp and festivities.
10. Foundation stone to renovate the existing temple and a marriage hall were laid. Already 2 temples and a guest house are constructed outside the public land in the forest land.
11. An appeal was made by them to the public at large to focus their energy (by means of donation) to organize a Cattle Fair at Dabaguli, which can easily bring in devastating infections to the wild fauna.
12. The committee did not take permission or intimate the forest department on the dates of the festival. Any such organised festival must follow official permission.
13. Bio degradable waste generated was huge and left to rot
14. Several new statues of deities have come up on the banks.
15. New temple outside the public land





References:

1. N. Baskaran, K. Senthilkumar & M. Saravanan 2011 - A new site record of the Grizzled Giant Squirrel *Ratufa macroura* (Pennant, 1769) in the Hosur forest division, Eastern Ghats, India and its conservation significance