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An impressive nature walk by Stella Maris students at Semmozhi Poonga

PRINCE FREDERICK

mparting knowledge to a mixed group of participants, some twice your age and some others almost half your age, can put even seasoned teachers in a quandry. Add to that the peculiar situation of the instructor being a student of the subject themselves, the emerging picture does not instill confidence. Despite these factors being arrayed against them. Keertanaa K and Nikkitha Terasa held their own.

Recently, these third-year zoology students led a mixed group on a nature walk through the butterfly garden at Semmozhi Poonga on Dr Radhakrishnan Salai in Teynampet, as part of Urban Wilderness Walks, an internship programme offered by Madras Naturalists Society (MNS). The exercise skirted around providing descriptions of flora. It pivoted around teaching the participants how to record their impressions of what they had seen, heard, felt and experienced.

The duo had chosen nature journaling for their project, and a rangoon creeper and Hong Kong orchid tree would be the main objects of



During the walk at Semmozhi Poonga . PHOTO: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

study for the participants. Their choise was dictated by the fact that this tree and plant offered colourful flowers and invite a lot of impres-

"The Hong Kong orchid tree has bright rose colour flowers, and the rangoon creeper clusters of pink flowers. These two plants in general host a lot of insects like bees, wasps and moths and sometimes, we can see birds like mynahs on them, and these birds would eat the seeds, especially of the Rangoon creeper."

Participants were handed out activity sheets that they had prepared to "engage and guide them through the topic." Remarks Keertanaa: "The activity sheet had a few pointers on how to do nature journaling by explaining what encompasses the subject."

More importantly, it would draw the participants into a discussion of how the objects of nature impacted them.

"It had some questions. For example, it presented the participants with a few pic-

tures of flowers. There is a flower called lobster claw flower, bright red-orangish flower. We had a picture of that flower and we wanted the participants to tell us what it reminded them of. Besides, we asked them to look around the place and identify something that captured their attention in aspects of shape, colour, sound and interaction."This exercise was essentially attacking the usually unidimensional aspect of nature walks.

"Usually, when people go

on a nature walk, they usually only look at things. Only the eyes are involved. We wanted them to also listen, smell, touch and feel the texture. Indulging the senses was one of our core points," explains Keertanaa, adding that nature journalising can be abstract. scientifically-focussed or casual and meant for relaxation.

Besides the activity sheets, the participants also journaled in their own notebooks.

Going through their impressions, Keertanaa observes: "Some people start off with the big picture and then go into the small details. Some others might start off with a single detail and zoom out and focus on the larger part."

The two had chosen Semmozhi Poonga for the nature journaling walk as it is close to their college, and also almost marks a mid-way point between their respective homes, Keertanaa's in Adyar and Nikkitha's in Vadapalani.

INSIDE

Find your neighbours at these hunger spots in Chennai



The festive season is about food; and in one's enthusiasm, the preparation can easily overshoot the requirement. If that happens, here is what you could do with the excess plate

On a new stage



Due to the challenges posed by the pandemic, Mahalakshmi Ladies Drama Group has gone online P4

Creating saviours



As ALERT completes 15 years, the non-profit is looking at expanding beyond Chennai and working closely with academic institutions P5