



Education Outreach about Sloth Bear at Chhota Udepur, Gujarat, India

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Nature education doesn't support one point of view or activity over another. Instead, it teaches people to think critically about different sides of an issue and helps them improve their decision-making and problem-solving skills (Llopiz-Guerra et al., 2024). Wildlife and Conservation Biology (WCB) Research Foundation has started a project titled “Aatmavat Sarvabhuteshu” (a Sanskrit phrase from Bhagvad Gita meaning “one should feel the happiness and distress of others as his own”). The main goal of this project is to share scientific knowledge with local communities and promote culturally sensitive, science-based education for school children and adults through outreach programs focused on sloth bear (*Melursus ursinus*) conservation (Desai et al., 2022). The program was conducted in villages of Chhota Udepur district, central Gujarat, as the area supports a good number of sloth bears, forms a key corridor between two major wildlife sanctuaries, and provides an ideal setting to understand how local perceptions of sloth bears influence human-wildlife coexistence (Malik et al., 2023; Chaudhary et al., 2025; Desai et al., 2025; Patel et al., 2025).

This program was conducted on January 21, 2025, with a group of 24 students aged between 10 to 15 years with one camp instructor participating in a nature adventure camp at the “*Makhaniyo*” mountain which holds cultural importance in the tribal communities. The students were educated about the importance of wildlife and introduced them to flagship species of the region such as Indian leopard (*Panthera pardus fusca*) and the sloth bear, which is the only bear species found in Gujarat and marks the westernmost edge of its range (Mesaria et al., 2021; Mesaria et al., 2023). Students were given information about sloth bear’s physical characteristics, ecology, lifecycle, diet, parental care, indirect signs of sloth bears, waste management, causes of human-sloth bear conflict. They were also informed about Do’s and Don’ts to avoid conflicts with the wild animals in the area. Furthermore, we also distributed scientific educational material such as pocket booklets and comic leaflets about sloth bear, which are prepared by the WCB Research Foundation. Additionally, to make the learning experience more interactive, a documentary and an animation film on sloth bears were screened. We hope that such species-specific conservation education may encourage community participation in protecting sloth bears and their habitats and develop the positive attitude for sloth bear.



Figure. 1 Team explaining about sloth bear and mitigating human-sloth bear conflicts



Figure. 2 Distribution of education booklet, comic leaflet and screening of documentary film on sloth bear

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