

Snake Bite Mitigation and First Responder Awareness And Workshop Center for Wilderness medicine, KMC, Manipal Goenkar NGO 8th June 2022

Snakebite is a preventable and treatable disease that claims more than 60000 lives annually across the globe, of which, India has among the highest death tolls. It is primarily a disease in rural India, influenced by many factors, including human and ecological.

A group of doctors, rescuers, researchers, and conservationists, recognizing these factors, decided to use a one-health approach to tackle this problem. Requiring a multi-pronged approach, mitigation is a very important aspect, recognizing this; an awareness program was organized on the 8th of June, 2022 in Cotigao Government High school, in association with the village panchayat and Goenkar NGO with support from the Goa forest Department in the beautiful wildlife sanctuary, Cotigao, nestled in Goa's Western Ghats. Later, another similar program was organized at Chandor with the Ganv Bhavancho Ekvott, Chandor club, Guirdolim club, and Chandor Seamen Association.



Govt high school Cotigao-inside the wildlife sanctuary

The program was conducted by conservationists, researchers, and rescuers Aaron Fernandes, Alex Carpenter and Benhail Antao, along with Dr Freston Marc Sirur and Dr Vrinda Lath, from the Centre for Wilderness Medicine, Kasturba Medical College, Manipal. The program aimed at providing a holistic image of snakes and snakebites, while educating the public, not only in prevention but also in first aid in case of a snake bite.



The team with the dignitaries opening the session

The sessions were opened with a video introducing the big four, Russell's Viper, Saw-scaled Viper, Indian Cobra, and Common Krait, the snakes responsible for the highest number of deaths in the country along with a few methods to avoid conflict situations with these snakes.

Mr. Alex Carpenter spoke about the value of forests, highlighting the fact that in a forest, with a balanced food web, the density of venomous snakes is much lower, when compared to an agricultural or an urban setting where human activity supports a higher density of rodents, thereby supporting their predators, the venomous snakes. He also stressed the fact that a snake would never bite unless provoked in any manner.



Alex Carpenter addressing the audience of children

This was followed by Mr. Benhail Antao, who taught the people about some of the common snakes and how to identify them, including the venomous and non-venomous snakes, while also busting myths and explaining the value of these species in the ecosystem.



Benhail sharing his knowledge with the students

Mr. Aaron Fernandes then spoke about some good and bad practices during an encounter with a snake, stressing the importance to call for help, avoiding unskilled handling, risky behavior, and delaying treatment by going to faith healers and herbal remedies. He also taught them to recognize good rescue practices.



Aaron Fernandes interacting with the children about human wildlife conflict and response

The audience was quite interactive, clarifying doubts about myths and beliefs associated with snakes, first aid in case of a snake bite, and crowd management.

The concluding session included a few measures to be taken in case of a bite, with the doctors stressing on the need to recognize the situation, record evidence without any undue risks, reassure the victim, call for help and take the victim to a healthcare facility at the earliest. They also taught the people a few basic manoeuvres to stabilize a victim during transport.



Engaging the children with CPR response behaviour



The audience varied greatly between the two sessions with the morning comprising mainly of students and villagers, who showed great enthusiasm and curiosity while the evening session comprised of adults who were quite interactive and expressed the desire to improve their knowledge and contribute towards improving the system and preventing deaths due to snake bite.





Dr.Freston and Dr.Vrinda interacting with the Chandor audience on first response



Aaron Fernandes talking human wildlife conflict mitigation



Benhail addressing the audience in Chandor on the identification of regionally important snakes

The sessions were concluded with the hope that the audience would return not with fear but with respect and knowledge to prevent snake bite and save a life if faced with such a situation.

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