

# Conserving the M National Park



BY FAREEHA OVAIS

**T**HE Margallah Hills National Park (MHNP), spread over an area of about 15,800 hectares, is situated on the northern, eastern and western sides of Islamabad. It includes the Margalla Hills, Rawal Lake and Shakar Parian and was given the status of a national park in 1980, after the government recognized

the growing threat to its flora and fauna.

Despite being awarded the status of a national park, the MHNP continues to face a number of environmental problems, including illegal encroachments, stone quarries, forest fires, fuel wood cutting, poaching, misuse of natural resources and other problems, such as littering and water pollution arising from tourism.

Raising the environmental

awareness of visitors to the Park and, more importantly, the local communities is vital for protecting its bio-diversity. Various government and non-government environmental organizations have taken praiseworthy initiatives for this. These include The Environment Directorate of CDA, Federal Directorate of Education, World Wide Fund for Nature-Pakistan (WWF-P), Adventure Foundation Pakistan and Human Welfare and Nature Conservation Society. They are working on projects to conserve the different species of flora and fauna of the Park, as well as improve the life and livelihoods of the communities residing in it.

**A view of the Margalla Hills**

latter has donated four acres of land for this purpose," he informs.

The primary objective of the Centre is to increase the environmental awareness of the residents of the twin cities, especially students, visitors to the Zoo and MHNP, and others in government and non-government organizations. The Centre will include a library, information counter, a souvenir shop, and facilities for holding lectures, seminars, workshops, group discussions and some outdoor activities for students. Printed material such as flyers, leaflets, brochures and





**Students associated with the Nature Club involved in tree plantation**

The Director of WWF-P in Islamabad, Dr Ghulam Akbar, details the work currently being done by WWF-P, as well as some activities planned for the future. "The latest venture being undertaken by WWF-P is the establishment of a Margalla Conservation and Information Centre (MCIC), that is being constructed near the Marghazar Zoo in Islamabad. The Centre is a joint project of WWF-P with Capital Development Authority (CDA), and the

magazines on various environmental and conservation topics will be displayed and distributed in the Centre. Slide and documentary shows, lectures and such activities will be held on a regular basis. Special programmes will be arranged on request, such as quiz, essay and art competitions, debates, interactive games and guided visits of the National Park.

"Our maximum efforts are concentrated in sensitizing the future generation," says Dr Ghulam Akbar. "However, we realize that

# Margalla Hills

National Parks  
Down  
16602

Margalla Hills National Park faces a number of threats to its flora and fauna. These can best be tackled by sensitizing people to the environmental problems of the Park



**National Park**

visitors to the Park are important members of society and we hope that through our efforts they will acquire greater environmental awareness after a visit to the National Park," he adds.

Sensitizing the visitors, especially students, to topics like environment, conservation and biodiversity, will ultimately lead to

environmentally better informed citizens, who will participate in promoting the conservation and protection of the Park. If things proceed as planned, the MCIC will become the focal point for coordinating the green activities of all the public and private schools in Islamabad, especially in the National Park area.

In the second phase of the project, WWF-P plans to establish a formal training centre at the MCIC, where training sessions on environment-related topics will be held throughout the year. Training will be provided to students, local communities of the Park, WWF-P staff, employees of government and non-government organizations, multinationals etc. WWF-P has 17 offices spread all over Pakistan, and the MCIC will coordinate the conservation and information centres of all these offices.

"The foremost objective of the MCIC, however, is to serve as a focal point for the work being done to protect the Margalla Hills National Park. For this, the MCIC should become operational within the next few months," says Dr Akbar.

Under the Margalla Hills National Park Environmental Education Programme, nature clubs have been established in seven government schools within the Park. The students are getting involved in activities such as camping, nursery raising, tree plantations, anti-litter campaign and much more. With the collaboration of Adventure Foundation Pakistan, two camping sites have been selected and camping trips to these sites will be arranged in the next few months. In addition, nature walks as well as bird and animal watching expeditions will be organized to acquaint students with the flora and fauna of the Park, and highlight the importance of its natural resources and bio-diversity.

It is hoped that such activities, while providing recreational outings for students, will introduce

them to the principles of environmental conservation in an interactive and enjoyable way. To train the teachers of these schools, WWF-P has organized special lectures and teachers training workshops. In addition, a training manual in Urdu for the Urdu medium schools of MHNP has been prepared. Other resource materials including animal fact sheets, bird-watching cards, posters, flyers and brochures have been distributed among the teachers and students of these schools. The above activities are part of a school outreach programme of WWF-P that will soon be extended to the public and private schools of Islamabad and Rawalpindi, and eventually to the religious schools.

With assistance from CDA, signboards carrying different environmental messages and slogans will be placed at various tourist spots. These signboards will serve as an effective tool to motivate visitors to avoid littering the park area, take necessary steps to prevent forest fires, protect the animals and birds of the park, and other such environment-friendly activities.

WWF-P also plans to initiate a zoo education programme in the near future. This programme, coordinated by the MCIC, will provide information to visitors about the animals and birds of the Zoo. Through mutual consultations with the schools inside the capital, a timetable will be prepared through which students visiting the Zoo and National Park will be involved in various interactive activities.

Other organizations, too, are doing their bit for the improvement of Margalla Hills National Park. Unfortunately, some issues especially those of fuel wood cutting and forest fires still need our attention. Through dedication and sincere efforts on the part of everyone, one of the most beautiful national parks of Pakistan and be protected and conserved for the future generations. ■





**A view of the Margalla Hills National Park**

Park local protect- s govern- ment have es for The CDA, ation, ture- nature aman tiety. proj- differ- and well and mu- WF-P. alam work e by ome the ture by lish- alla and ntre con- the in is a F-P ent the

latter has donated four acres of land for this purpose," he informs.

The primary objective of the Centre is to increase the environmental awareness of the residents of the twin cities, especially students, visitors to the Zoo and MHNP, and others in government and non-government organizations. The Centre will include a library, information counter, a souvenir shop, and facilities for holding lectures, seminars, workshops, group discussions and some outdoor activities for students. Printed material such as flyers, leaflets, brochures and magazines on various environmental and conservation topics will be displayed and distributed in the Centre. Slide and documentary shows, lectures and such activities will be held on a regular basis. Special programmes will be arranged on request, such as quiz, essay and art competitions, debates, interactive games and guided visits of the National Park.

"Our maximum efforts are concentrated in sensitizing the future generation," says Dr Ghulam Akbar. "However, we realize that

visitors to the Park are important members of society and we hope that through our efforts they will acquire greater environmental awareness after a visit to the National Park," he adds.

Sensitizing the visitors, especially students, to topics like environment, conservation and biodiversity, will ultimately lead to

coordinating the green activities of all the public and private schools in Islamabad, especially in the National Park area.

In the second phase of the project, WWF-P plans to establish a formal training centre at the MCIC, where training sessions on environment-related topics will be held throughout the year. Training will be provided to students, local communities of the Park, WWF-P staff, employees of government and non-government organizations, multinationals etc. WWF-P has 17 offices spread all over Pakistan, and the MCIC will coordinate the conservation and information centres of all these offices.

"The foremost objective of the MCIC, however, is to serve as a focal point for the work being done to protect the Margalla Hills National Park. For this, the MCIC should become operational within the next few months," says Dr Akbar.

Under the Margalla Hills National Park Environmental Education Programme, nature clubs have been established in seven government schools within the Park. The students are getting involved in activities such as camping, nursery raising, tree plantations, anti-litter campaign and much more. With the collaboration of Adventure Foundation Pakistan, two camping sites have been selected and camping trips to these sites will be arranged in the next few months. In addition, nature walks as well as bird and animal watching expeditions will be organized to acquaint students with the flora and fauna of the Park, and highlight the importance of its natural resources and bio-diversity.

It is hoped that such activities, while providing recreational outings for students, will introduce

tures and teachers training workshops. In addition, a training manual in Urdu for the Urdu medium schools of MHNP has been prepared. Other resource materials including animal fact sheets, bird-watching cards, posters, flyers and brochures have been distributed among the teachers and students of these schools. The above activities are part of a school outreach programme of WWF-P that will soon be extended to the public and private schools of Islamabad and Rawalpindi, and eventually to the religious schools.

With assistance from CDA, signboards carrying different environmental messages and slogans will be placed at various tourist spots. These signboards will serve as an effective tool to motivate visitors to avoid littering the park area, take necessary steps to prevent forest fires, protect the animals and birds of the park, and other such environment-friendly activities.

WWF-P also plans to initiate a zoo education programme in the near future. This programme, coordinated by the MCIC, will provide information to visitors about the animals and birds of the Zoo. Through mutual consultations with the schools inside the capital, a timetable will be prepared through which students visiting the Zoo and National Park will be involved in various interactive activities.

Other organizations, too, are doing their bit for the improvement of Margalla Hills National Park. Unfortunately, some issues especially those of fuel wood cutting and forest fires still need our attention. Through dedication and sincere efforts on the part of everyone, one of the most beautiful national parks of Pakistan and be protected and conserved for the future generations. ■



Photos by the writer

**Learning to care for plants from a young age**