

Conserving our oceans and marine reserves

—By—
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Our wildlife has an intrinsic value and is beneficial to many countries. It has a great impact on ecology, education, science, economy and culture which is necessary for sustainable development.

World Wildlife Day is celebrated every year on March 3 as proclaimed by the United Nations in 2013. World Wildlife Day seeks to celebrate the world's plants and animals while raising awareness of issues that impact wildlife.

Wildlife refers to all undomesticated native plants and animals of a region. The day also serves to highlight issues such as, urbanization, poaching, pollution and destruction of wildlife habitat and the ways that humans can contribute towards conservation efforts.

This year's theme is, 'Life below water: for people and planet' which closely aligns with Goal No. 14 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG14). For the first time, this year, specific focus is on the conservation and sustainable use of marine wildlife. SDG14 aims at conserving and sustainably using the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

Lack of awareness is a major concern that has badly affected our wildlife, which the local Wildlife authorities are making an attempt to address. "We have organized an awareness program on the importance of marine and wildlife conservation for schoolchildren, on March 4, and have selected several locations districtwise, and the schools are informed in advance so that students can prepare for the different types of activities such as art, essay and presentation competitions," said the Director General, Department of Wildlife Conservation, Sooriya Bandara.

"This year, for the first time, World Wildlife Day focuses on the theme, 'Life below water.' Many events are planned in our department to commemorate the day. A public lecture will be held on Wildlife Conservation in Sri Lanka and current issues, at the Sri Lanka Foundation Institute, Colombo 7 on March 7, 2019 at 10 am. The speaker will be, Deputy Director, Research and Training, Department of Wildlife Conservation, Dr. Lakshman Peiris," he said.

"When it comes to marine life,

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Elephants, pangolins, rhinoceros, sharks and tigers are among the most critically poached and trafficked species in the world. According to the UN, the biggest threat to wildlife is habitat loss, as well as over-grazing, farming and development. Habitat loss accounts for 80% of the loss in biological diversity. At the current rates of extinction, nearly 20% of the world's species could be extinct within the next 30 years.

1 According to the statistics of Union for Conservation of Nature, there are 2,599 species, subspecies and a subpopulation of animals that are exposed to various threats.

2 Among them, there are 1,975 plants, fungi and other organisms that are also at risk.

3 World Wildlife Fund has stated in its report that there has been a decrease of 42% in the global wildlife population in the past 40 years.

4 According to the facts indicated by the United Nations, about 100 million sharks have been killed by humans, so far.

the trend in Sri Lanka is the viewing of whales and such charismatic species by tourists. It brings a lot of tourism revenue to the country. People should understand the value of conservation. Conservation and tourism management should go hand in hand. We should conserve wildlife for the future generation. Sri Lankans are fortunate, as we have more than 13 percent of land area for wildlife conservation. The conservation would help human beings as well as nature," said Bandara.

The ocean contains nearly 200,000 identified species, but the actual numbers may be in the millions. Over three billion people depend on marine and coastal biodiversity for their livelihoods. Marine wildlife has sustained human civilization and development for millennia, providing food and nourishment, material for handicraft and construction. It has also enriched our lives culturally, spiritually, and recreationally.

The capacity of life below water to provide these services is severely impacted, as our planet's oceans and the species that live within it are under assault from various threats. These include the threat of over exploitation, particularly, unsustainable fishing and other marine species extraction practices, and also, climate change, marine pollution and habitat destruction. These threats have a strong impact on the lives and livelihoods of those who depend on the marine ecosystem services, particularly, women and men in coastal communities.

The date chosen as the Wildlife Day coincides with the day the Con-

vention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) was signed. The CITES is a document that regulates the trade of wild animals and plants around the world.

The Secretariat of CITES and the Jackson Hole Wildlife Film Festival has teamed up to organize an international film festival. Winning films would help raise global awareness on the importance of life below water to our everyday lives, explore the critical challenges facing marine ecosystems and highlight inspiring solutions in meeting them.

Covering two-thirds of the planet and making up more than 99% of earth's livable habitat, our oceans remain the least understood ecosystems on Earth. In fact, we know more about the moon than we do about the deep sea. Nonetheless, life on our planet began in the ocean and we rely on a healthy ocean for our very survival.

Social media is an easy and fast way to spread information. Through the active role of social media this year as in past years, the people will get educated about life below water. One of the hashtags being used is #wildlife day. To be more specific, this year hashtag #WWD2019 is being used and posts are already rolling in. You can also take part. Plan events with themes as the centre of attention at a local, school, or community level and convey it on social media, and through proper methods get it marked on the WWF events map.

So mark your calendars and look forward to a successful and informative wildlife day.

