

Cycas Conservation Centers in the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, Western Ghats, India.

Three monthly report – I
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The work on conservation of *Cycas circinalis* continues in the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve thanks to the support received from TCS in July 2008. With this grant we propose to focus on building awareness about Cycas through conservation centers. The idea has already taken off in the village of Velleri Combei. One of the abandoned houses in the village was restored and equipped with a better roof, a bamboo verandah, mats, and utensils. The 'Cycas' house at Velleri Combei was host to 11 visitors from the distant village of Bangalapadigai. The children of Bangalapadigai were taken to Velleri Combei by L.Rajendran (Nursery supervisor with Keystone Foundation, who also took part in restoring the Cycas House) and Subramani (a staff of Keystone). They spent the evening in discussions and familiarizing themselves with the people of the village. Early the next morning they were taken for a Cycas trail to the top of the mountain. The children were accompanied by elders from the village who spent time explaining the Cycas life history, use and destruction. The children were very happy with the visit and much reluctant to leave for home.



Manikam of Velleri Combei playing the flute for the children



L.Rajendran with the first visitors to the Cycas house

The Cycas work in Velleri Combei was also given a boost, through the cell phone that was provided to Manikam from the village. He was always keen on getting a phone to his village which is an hour's trek from the nearest phone. The last time Manikam saw some harvesters stealing the cycas stems he made the walk to call the Keystone office and today hopefully he doesn't have walk to make the call, and with all the awareness work that has happened in the area over the past years maybe the harvesters will never come back!

Information posters have been designed in house in the regional languages of Tamil and Malayalam to be displayed at the Cycas conservation centers. Work is progressing in the Cycas center at Appankaapu, Kerala.

The cycas seedlings have been increased to 5000 in the nurseries with seeds from the Nilambur area. 100 seedlings were out planted in the village lands of Velleri Combei village. Cycas seedlings were also distributed to local schools for planting in their school yards.

Communication has been initiated with NGO partners in other parts of the Eastern and Western Ghats of the Indian peninsula to locate Cycad populations and to document the use and knowledge of the species. Some leads have come from Andhra Pradesh and Orissa on the Eastern coast line.

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