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A trip to the wetlands gets 40 schoolchildren thinking about the environment and saving nature's children

# 'Why don't our adults preserve the mangroves'

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A group of school students from Kannamwar Nagar and Tagore Nagar visited the mangrove wetland at Vikhroli recently, came away enlightened about the delicate ecosystem. Prior to the visit information was sparse, but after their four-hour trip through the lush wetlands, they were pledging to do whatever they could to save the mangroves.

"I never thought that trees - that play such a pivotal roles in the ecosystem - were being ignored and destroyed for years, to facilitate development," said Nasir Aslam Pasha, a seventh standard student at the BMC school in Tagore Nagar.

According to Nasir, the trip has changed him "to core". Nasir was among 40 students from standard two to seven, who went on the trip organised by Nav Nirmitti, a city-based NGO.

The students were mesmerised the moment the trail began. None could conceal their curiosity and started firing questions at Hemant Karkhanis, the education officer of the Godrej Mangrove, who patiently answered all questions thrown at him.

The students were amazed when they found out that, apart from protecting the coasts from natural disasters like floods and tsunamis, the mangrove provides one of the essential ingredients of toothpaste and has many medicinal values too.

"This is one of the most memorable days of



■ Children enjoying a workshop on mangroves at Godrej, Vikhroli -Mukesh Trivedi/DNA

my life. This is a place one should visit often," said Jaylaxmi Ramkrishnan Dasari, a seventh standard student at the BMC school.

The mangrove wetland park at Vikhroli, spread over a sprawling 1750 acres, is home to around 206 species of birds, many species of reptiles, around 70 species of butterfly and mammals like wild boar and jackals, apart from 14 species of mangrove.

The trip began with a visit to the aquarium, which houses species of marine fish and ended with a panoramic view of the entire wetland, seen from a 15-meter watch tower.

The information given by Karkhanis and Dr Maya Mahajan, executive officer of Soonabai Pirojsha Godrej Marine Ecology Centre, had the students rivetted, so much so, that even the scorching heat did not deter them. All the stu-

dents burst into applause when a brown-breasted kingfisher flew past the group and when they encountered beautiful butterflies on the trail.

"If mangroves are so important to our existence, why don't the adults do something about preserving them?" asked Shital, a second standard student.