57 species of plants and animals in India are critically endangered – which means their population is less than 250 in the wild. Yes, they’re almost gone! The tiger’s numbers are dwindling and the Indian rhino could be facing extinction. Does this make a difference to us? Would it matter if we never saw a vulture or flying squirrel ever again?

What about plants and trees? Will having forests around make any difference to us living in the city?

With many species of animals and plants teetering on the brink of extinction, biodiversity loss and the consequences of that are real threats. Each species performs a specific function in nature. If you lose one, you could lose all of them.

The biodiversity convention is a neat little way to continually remind us that we, human beings, are not the only living things on this earth. It is one of the few conventions with near unanimous approval, with as many as 193 countries as its signatories. Conservation of biodiversity needs action through policy. And that’s what this convention promises.

It goes to show that saving particular species from extinction is for the good of all species in general. We need diversity and right now, diversity needs us.

Gobar Gyan

Biodiversity is more than numbers of birds, animals and plants in the wild. It is also the complex interrelationship of these animals and plants that keeps nature, and hence us, in good working condition. Article 2 of the Convention on Biological Diversity defines biodiversity as “the variability among living organisms from all sources...”

Take for example, the case of bees. If there are no bees in this world what do you think would happen? No bees wouldn’t necessarily only mean no honey. No bees would mean no one to pollinate the plants, which would mean plant species dependent on bees would die out. This would mean all living organisms dependant on those plants – animals, microorganisms and even human beings – would die out. It’s the genetic make up, the genes of the bee, which enable it to perform many functions in nature - produce honey, pollinate flowers. The variability of genes means the structural differences in genes of different species, for example, the structural differences of the genes of bees make them different from birds or trees or any other living organism. This variability is biodiversity.

Since more and more animals and plant species were being threatened, the UN Environment Programme convened the Ad Hoc Working Group on Biological Diversity in November 1988. This Working Group designed the Convention on Biological Diversity which was adopted at the Rio Summit in June 1992. After the Convention came in to force in December of 1993, the first Conference of Parties (COP) to the Convention was held in the Bahamas in 1994.

Since that time, urgent threats to biodiversity have been addressed, discussed and decided upon at each successive COP.

In 2012, India plays host to COP 11. Over 2000 delegates from more than 150 countries will gather at HICC-HITEX Complex in Hyderabad to discuss the threats to and future of biodiversity conservation.

For more, see Biodiversity: Of Birds and Bees, Gobar Times, September 2011.
According to the Convention, Parties are supposed to meet every year. Well... let's just say, they try to stick to this rule. Sometimes, COP misses a year like in 1998, 2001 and 2005. Or they have to call a special second meeting in a year to discuss something extraordinary (and hence, the ExCOP in 2000).

The parties are constantly reviewing plans of action while trying to integrate conservation and sustainable development of biodiversity into state policy. Newer challenges and changing threats mean they have to keep abreast with these and be on a lookout for solutions. Of late, the focus has been on the use of genetic material – safety concerns, benefit sharing and liability.

Activity 1: Tie it to a timeline
Ask your computer teacher for help and explore the website of UN Convention on Biological Diversity – www.cbd.int
Using the website of the Convention as a point of reference, fill up the blanks of this timeline –

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COP</th>
<th>Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD;</th>
<th>Decisions:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COP 1: First Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD; Nassau, Bahamas</td>
<td>28 November - 9 December, 1994</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>COP 2: Second Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD; Cartagena, Colombia &amp; Montreal, Canada</td>
<td>6 - 17 November, 1995</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>COP 3: Third Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD; Buenos Aires, Argentina</td>
<td>15 - 26 May, 2000</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>COP 4: Fourth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD; Cartagena, Colombia</td>
<td>7 - 19 April, 2002</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>COP 5: Fifth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD; Nairobi, Kenya</td>
<td>9 - 20 February, 2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>COP 6: Sixth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia</td>
<td>20 - 31 March, 2006</td>
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<tr>
<td>COP 7: Seventh Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia</td>
<td>22 - 23 February, 1999 &amp; 24 - 28 January, 2000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COP 8: Eighth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD; Curitiba, Brazil</td>
<td>6 - 17 November, 1995</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>COP 9: Ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD; Bonn, Germany</td>
<td>18 - 29 October, 2010</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Activity 2: Convention Czars
Now that you have a fair idea of how COPs work and what their outcomes are like, why don’t you try your hand at one.

Imagine that there's going to be an India specific conference of parties on biodiversity. Representatives from different parts of the country – north, south, east, west – shall meet to discuss biodiversity threats in their areas and what they are doing to conserve biodiversity.
Let’s do some role playing. Choose four teams, one each for north, south, east and west. Each team should choose one representative who will do all the talking.

Think like a national representative, there are many facts before you; but there are also many expectations from you.

Large parts of the Western Ghats have been cleared for logging, reservoirs, roads and for use in agriculture for coffee, rubber, palm oil.

The endangered Asiatic Lion found in the Gir forests of Gujarat is facing threats to its habitat.

Pygmy hog is found only in Manas National Park in Assam.

Coral reef around Andaman Islands and Lakshadweep are threatened by rise in sea temperatures.

Using these facts as an example, find out more biodiversity related news that affects your team’s area. Discuss these threats with your team and think of conservation strategy to save the species.

If want to save the sparrow in your neighbourhood, how would you do it?

Elevate a Secretariat to act as the judge and monitor. He/she will make sure everyone gets their turn to speak and all questions are answered properly.

Now, come up and talk about biodiversity threats in your area and what you are doing to stop this.

Finally, decide on outcomes and decisions like the ones in Activity 1.

Activity 3: Highlights from Hyderabad

Our environment minister, Jayanthi Natarajan, speaking ahead of the COP 11 in Hyderabad over October 8 to 19, 2012 said that biodiversity conservation will become a deciding factor while awarding environmental clearances.

Do you think Ms Minister has good point? Do you think it will help in biodiversity conservation? Why or why not?

Now, imagine you’re writing for a leading newspaper or magazine in your area, spin a story or a couple of stories on related themes of biodiversity, UN conventions and COP 11.

You can even make a class newspaper or magazine around COP 11 in Hyderabad.

Consider these facts –

- Hyderabad to host the sixth Meeting of Parties to Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety from 1 to 5 October, 2012 and eleventh Conference of Parties (COP) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) from 8 to 19 October, 2012.
- Organised by the Ministry of Environment & Forests, Government of India.
- At the HICC-HITEX Complex in Hyderabad, India.
- India will host the High Level Segment (HLS) of CoP-11 to CBD from 16 to 19 October, 2012.
- HLS is where ministers meet and discuss very important and urgent matters.
- The Minister of Environment of India, as the host of the meeting, has identified four key issues for discussion -
  - Implementation of the Strategic Plan on Biodiversity 2011-2020
  - Biodiversity for Livelihoods and Poverty Reduction
  - Coastal and Marine Biodiversity
  - Implementation of Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and Benefit Sharing.

What do you feel like writing about? Once you decide that, ask these basic questions –
What is my story about? Where did it happen? When did it happen? Why did it happen? How did the story unfold?

How much background information about CBD would you give?

What information would you give to make your reader feel like he/she was right there at COP 11 in Hyderabad? What are we missing by not being there?

What are the important thinking points/outcomes you want to highlight so that you engage with your readers and get them to think about biodiversity?

What would you add to the above facts to make your story up to date?

What is your conclusion?

Now put together the answers of the above questions and you have yourself a story!

Give it an interesting headline and you’re ready to be published.

Your deadline for this magazine is October 24. What is on October 24?

Don’t forget to send your story across to GT, we may have some use for it. What’s more this activity can count as an Eco Club activity too!

If you found the activity sheet interesting, E-mail us at eeu@cseindia.org or write to: Activity Sheet, Centre for Science and Environment 41 Tughlakabad Institutional Area New Delhi-110062 or Call 29955124 Extension 219