



Rupa Rahul Bajaj Centre for Environment and Art

under the aegis of

The Agri Horticultural Society of Western India

Annual Report 2023-24



Prepared by: RRBCEA Team



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From the Desk



Empress Botanical Garden has a historical charm as soldiers' garden and botanical garden in British era. Additionally, this serene wooded place has always attracted nature and art enthusiasts across the city and outside. Visitors come here from near and far to breathe fresh air, to relax, to experience the soothing greenery created by tall majestic trees, to capture nature's serene beauty through photography, sketching, painting, sculpting, to admire birds and butterflies and to visit the garden as a recreational space. This green space has so much to offer to anyone who enters the premises. However, in consideration to the need to provide community platform and initiative to bring these nature and art loving citizens together and explore the natural treasures of garden for public awareness and education programs, Rupa Rahul Bajaj Centre for Environment and Art (RRBCEA) was launched in 2018 in the Empress Botanical Garden premises to fill this void and to offer visitors of the botanical garden an immersive and enriching experience.

I am happy to share that RRBCEA has been able to bring many quality programs to engage local community for nurturing their passion about nature and art. The team is striving to make nature and art a part of everyone's daily life.

"What is the good of your stars and trees, your sunrise and the wind, if they do not enter into our daily lives?" –E.M. Forster

This year RRBCEA completed 5 years of its journey and it's a joy to see commendable growth of the centre in terms of working team, number and diversity of programs, number of visitors and active participants. The unique programs designed and executed by our team bring alive the natural beauty of the botanical garden to the visitors and program participants. Through our efforts we are helping people appreciate the profound beauty and wisdom nature has to offer. RRBCEA is striving to build a community inspired by nature and interested in making a change at individual and community level for a greener future. I hope more and more residents become part of this effort so that together we can make a difference.

"Nature is not a place to visit, it is home." –Gary Snyder

Mrs. Deepa Bajaj
Chair Person Sub-Committee
RRBCEA

A note from the Centre Head



This year Rupa Rahul Bajaj Centre for Environment and Art (RRBCEA) completed its 5 years journey with lots of pride and enthusiasm. Through our regular activities targeted at different age groups from 5 to 80 years, indoor and outdoor themed exhibits, facilities such as library and amphitheatre, we have created a vibrant place that offers even casual visitors many opportunities to explore their connection with nature and art. With 80 programs conducted throughout the year we have reached out to 3000+ active participants this year. We make special efforts and take pride in designing programs that are inclusive, participatory as well as fun for all with long lasting impression. It has been an enriching experience for RRBCEA team to design and conduct customised programs in-house as well as off-site which involved specially-abled individuals, students from low-income families, senior citizens and citizens from all walks of life.

Through our diverse art programs, we have created a platform for new performing artists, folk artists, upcoming art and crafts persons. Nature walks, workshops on bird watching, sapling exchange programs, nature exploration programs with school children, adopt-a-tree program with citizens designed and successfully conducted by our team have created a community of nature enthusiasts across Pune city and outside. Our team takes great care that our programs convey reliable, science-based information to our participants and visitors. Therefore, research activities like plant, bird and insect diversity documentation, plant phenology monitoring throughout the year, small research projects based on biodiversity and natural resources of Empress Botanical Garden form the solid basis of many of our nature related programs. We are happy to announce our first publication - “Birds of Empress Botanical Garden”- a booklet for bird enthusiasts.

Our collaborations with art and environment related organisations such as Baithak Foundation, Poornam Ecovision Foundation, research organisations such as Season Watch India enable us to take our work forward with great synergy.

I take this opportunity to thank our main funding agency Janakidevi Bajaj Gram Vikas Sanstha (JBGVS), Bajaj Auto Limited (CSR), our mentors, collaborators, facilitators and enthusiastic volunteers who share our vision and support us to bring our plans into reality. Their immense contribution in terms of money, ideas, expertise, skills and time have enabled us to build a network of like-minded people who can together make an impact. We will continue to march forward with our goal of bringing together more and more citizens from various backgrounds, inclinations and creating interest in nature as well as art in its diverse forms through our programs. Looking forward to an exciting year of growth, public engagement and visibility on national and international platforms!



Dr. Dhanashree Paranjpe
RRBCEA Head

Meet Our Subcommittee members



DEEPA BAJAJ

Chair Person Sub-Committee RRBCEA

An Engineer by qualification, a nature enthusiast with passion for both environment and art with a heart of gold for animals. She has founded the NGO Canine Control and Care in 2015 with the sole objective of animal birth control to control the population of stray dogs and cats in a humane way. She has been the driving force and guide behind the activities at RRBCEA as the chairperson.



ADV. LOLITA KEWALRAMANI

Subcommittee member

She is a postgraduate in Economics from Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics and Law from Pune University. Has worked in the field of environment law and specializing in conveyancing. She provides consultation to corporates and is a trustee and sub-committee member on trusts relating to environment, animal protection and education of underprivileged girls and other social activities.



DHANASHREE BHISEY

Subcommittee member

She is an animal enthusiast. She has been working with Dr. J.A. Shaikh (one of Pune's senior vets) for over 20 years. She was also curator of the wild animal rescue and orphanage at Katraj for a few years. She had set up the first-ever ABC program for Pune, with the Blue Cross Society of Pune in 1995. She is also a subcommittee member and mentor overseeing activities at RRBCEA.

Meet Our Subcommittee members

MEGHA BUDRUK

Subcommittee member



She is the Associate Dean of Faculty Affairs at the Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions and an Associate Professor of Parks and Recreation Management at Arizona State University in the USA. She specializes in natural resource social science and focuses on incorporating stakeholder perspectives in natural resource management. Her research areas include human-nature relationships, visitor experience, impact management, and community development in parks, protected areas, and cultural monuments.

DR. DHANASHREE PARANJPE

Center Head



She has a PhD in animal behaviour and ecology. She is passionate about science outreach and environmental education. She spearheads the dynamic team of RRBCEA to conceptualize, plan and execute various programs related to nature and art as well as research at the center.

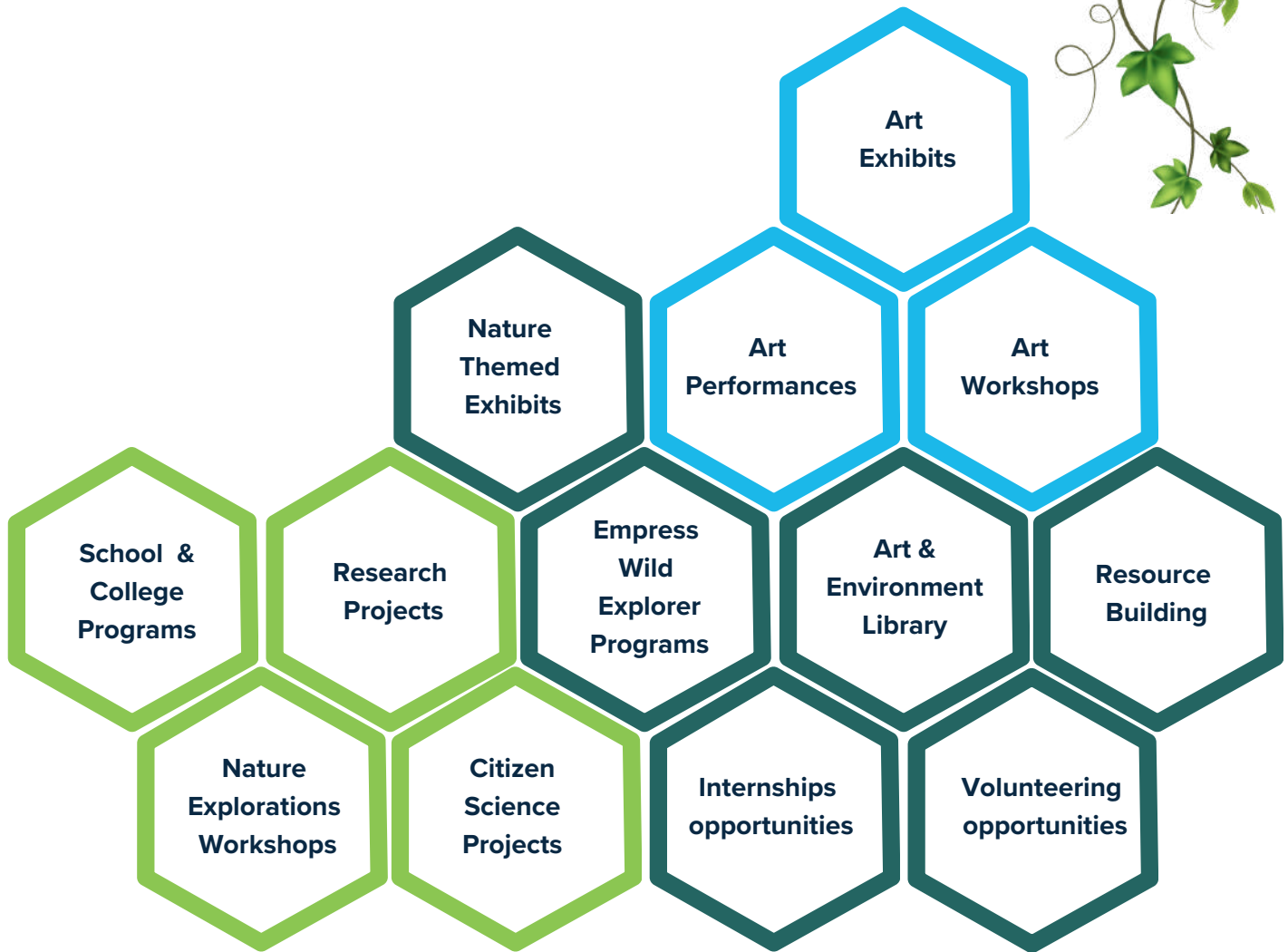
Introduction

Rupa Rahul Bajaj Centre for Environment & Art (RRBCEA) established under the aegis of The Agri Horticultural Society of Western India is an inclusive platform for citizens to connect with nature and art. The Centre is dedicated to imparting environmental awareness and education through artistic expression. Through a rich tapestry of initiatives, including immersive nature walks, enlightening art and environment workshops, and engaging sessions on climate change and sustainability, RRBCEA promotes environmental stewardship and creative expression. Since its establishment in 2018, the center has welcomed over 4,200 enthusiastic participants to more than 200 programs. We strive to expand outreach efforts to different focus groups such as Schools, Colleges, citizens and like minded organizations to advance our mission.

Through partnerships with local community and organizations, the center seeks to amplify its impact locally as well as globally. RRBCEA aims to inspire individuals of all ages and backgrounds to appreciate wisdom nature has to offer and take actions at individual level to become Eco-conscious citizens for a sustainable future.



Focus Areas



Our Impact

3180 +
Citizens
Visited

14
Art Promoting
Programs

15
Fusion
Programs

41
Environmental
Awareness and
Educational
Programs

3201
Participants

1
Booklet
Released

30+
Volunteers
Participation

1
Citizen
Science
Activity

3
Research
Activities

40+
Citizens
Participation

3
Educational
Nature
Themed
Exhibits

Content

Art Programs

Environment Programs

Art & Environment Fusion Programs

Research

Resources

- Library
- Nature Themed Exhibit
- Outdoor Exhibits
- Landscaping
- Booklets
- Games



Art Programs

RRRBCEA serves as a platform that fosters both performing and non-performing art forms, providing opportunities to aspiring artists. The Kalamanch Artfest was orchestrated to showcase the works of various artists, workshops, exhibition cum sale. Two days of artfest came alive with creativity and enthusiasm.

From October through February, we partnered with the Baithak Foundation to stage five performing art shows. Additionally, RRBCEA hosted three art programs organized by different organizations. Diwali was celebrated with lantern-making workshop, which was well-received. Overall, it was a productive year for art programs, with a total of one thousand participants attending these events.

14 Art Programs ; 1000+ Participants



8
Art
Performances



4
Hosted
Programs



1
Art Fest
(Kala Manch)



1
Art
workshop

Programs organized by RRBCEA



Lantern Making Workshop



Kala Manch Art Fest



Programs in Collaboration with Baithak Foundation



Bandhej



Sham-ae-Avadh



Pune Kabir Festival



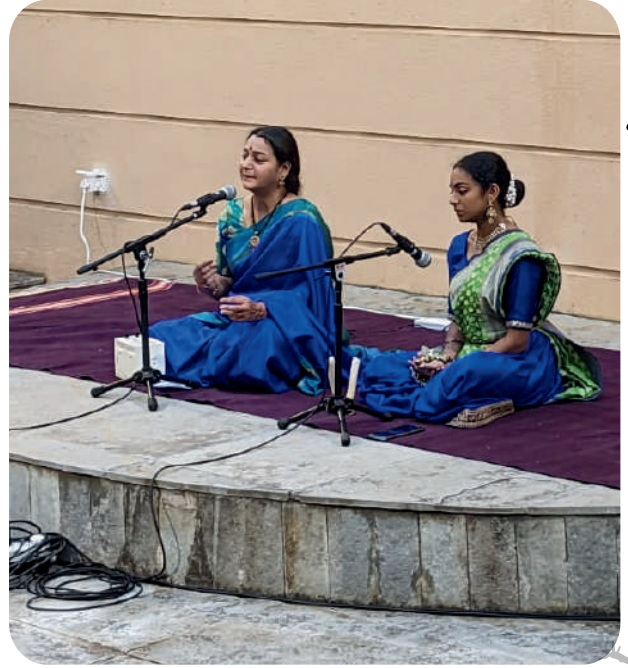
Marma Bandhatli Thev



Anantaraag



Programs in Collaboration with other organizations



Yuvati & Nidra Performance with Moving Mudras



Me & My Trash Program with Poornam ecovision and Kalasadhak Foundation



Environmental Programs

RRBCEA is dedicated to promoting awareness about the environment and nature through various Activities. One of the most effective ways to connect with nature is guided nature walks, with a particular focus on the Empress Botanical Garden. We organized Tree walks, Bird Walks, Butterfly walk and an insect walk led by experts. Our audience has been consistently appreciative of our efforts in educating them about the rich urban biodiversity that the garden offers. We conducted certificate workshops on the Basics and Advanced courses in birdwatching. Furthermore, we celebrated the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) festival for a period of four days with unwavering zeal and conducted bird walks on all four days of the event.

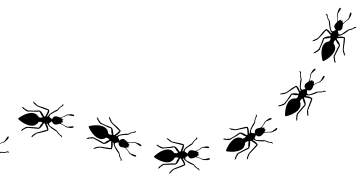
This year, we collaborated with SeasonWatch for our first Plant Identification Workshop, which was well received. It gave participants basics identification skills and knowhow of most common plant families. We partnered with other NGOs to host environmental programs, meetings, and workshops such as C20 chaupal, Bee Buddy session, and Punaravartan. We curated nature walks and workshops for various institutes and colleges. Our efforts have engaged over 1100 people, inspiring them about nature.

41 Environment related Programs; 1100+ Participants





Nature Walk inside Empress Botanical Garden



Environmental programs curated for Institutes and Colleges



The session on Biocultural Heritage by Dr. Aparna Watve



“
It was a great session. Loved the part regarding values associated with co-existence with nature. Thats going to help our society.
”
- Neha Agarwal

Story telling session by Vaishali Kulkarni



“
I really loved the plants around and their qualities. I loved the way we discovered them. I loved the session & stories. I loved the music which they like specially the Mehendi plant.
”
- Sara Bijani



Plant identification Workshop



Basics of Birdwatching workshop





Art & Environment Fusion Programs

Nature inspires art, it stimulates creativity and imagination. Nature and Art are complimentary to each other and they capture the interest of diverse set of people. Therefore some of our programs combine elements of both Nature and Art.

Empress Wild Explorer Program (EWEP) is a three-hour session for school age children. It explores niche topics with indoor and outdoor activities. This year, we conducted EWEP sessions focused on insects, soil, water, and biodiversity. Each module had a outdoor experience session followed by indoor theme based art/craft/hands-on activity/games.

Additionally, we collaborated with Ghorpadi Village High School for year-long activities (EWEP) on the school premises. The sessions were especially designed to engage students from 5th to 9th standard and to give them exposure to various topics related to environment.

To encourage children to write about nature and to develop their creative writing skills “Nature Wordsmith” a workshop on creative writing was conducted. Selected writeups from workshop participants were featured on our website.

15 fusion Programs ; 470+ Participants



**10
EWEP Session**

**210
Participants**



**4
EWEP for Ghorpadi
Village High School**

**250+
Students
Participated**



**1
Workshop**

**11
Participants**

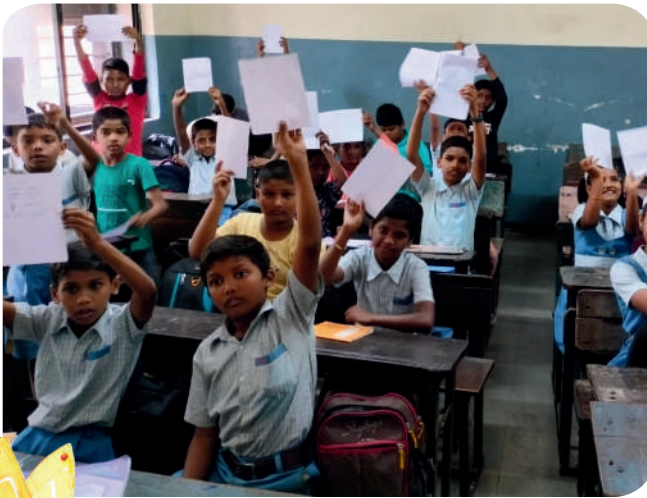
EWEP Open sessions



EWEP with other Schools visited Empress Botanical Garden



EWEP with Ghorpadi Village High Schools





Research

Empress Botanical Garden serves as an invaluable educational resource and living laboratory for conducting scientific research. RRBCEA envisions that research conducted and systematic data collected can form the basis of our educational and outreach programs throughout the year. Research activities allow us to build many educational resources which can be distributed to general public or educators. RRBCEA runs small research projects and citizen science program through public participation.

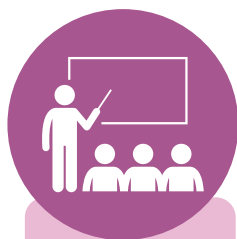
Insect Survey

Since October 2023, RRBCEA has been conducting an insect survey of Empress Botanical Garden with the help of three volunteers and the team of Mitra Kida BioSolutions Pvt. Ltd. The survey is still ongoing.



Adopt a Tree (Citizen Science Program)

Empress Botanical Garden is home to a variety of trees from different parts of the world. It's essential to collect data on the seasonal changes, including their flowering and fruiting patterns. In collaboration with the Season Watch organization, RRBCEA has started a citizen science project in 2022. This year, RRBCEA conducted two training sessions for volunteers. With their contribution, we were able to collect phenological data such as flowering, fruiting, new-mature, and dying leaves of 21 species of trees and 34 individual trees from the garden. This program gives an opportunity for citizens to actively participate in scientific data collection while having a soothing and calming experience to spend time with their adopted tree(s).



2
Training
sessions



34
Individual
Trees



47
volunteers
Engaged



Spending Time with Nature and Trees is my favourite kind of past time, & this is fulfilled by RRBCEA via Adopt a Tree program.

Its fun to watch seasonal changes in a tree and noting down these observations in a sheet. It is a great initiative which connects like minded people, Tree lovers, and many people with diverse backgrounds. Its kind of soothing experience in vicinity of these dendrophiles.

Looking Forward to many More Tree walk

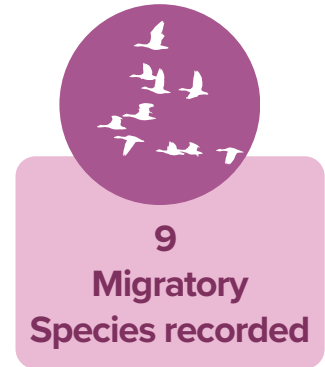
*-Vynaktesh Raskatla
Adopt a Tree Volunteer*



Adopt a Tree Program Training

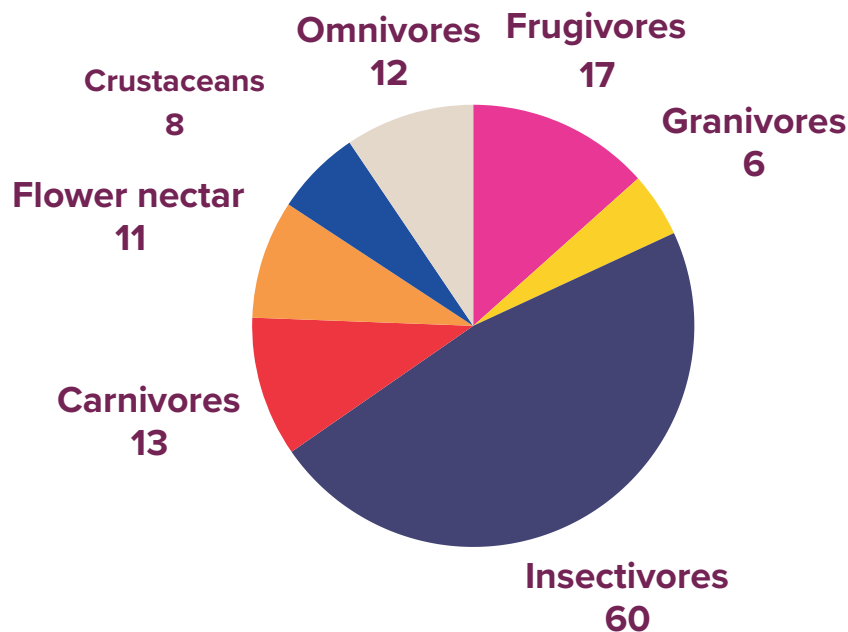
Bird Survey

RRBCEA conducted a year-long survey to document bird species found in Empress Botanical Garden. The survey spanning November 2022 to September 2023 revealed that Empress Garden is a major hotspot for sighting many resident and migratory birds.



“Volunteering with the RRBCEA's Bird Survey program was an absolute joy. I gained invaluable knowledge about avian diversity at the Empress Garden and gained real fieldwork experience. The team at the Center is truly passionate and dedicated to their cause, fostering a welcoming environment where volunteers like myself can learn and grow”

*-Shreyas Pattanshetty
Bird Survey & Insect Survey Volunteer*



Feeding guilds



Resource Building

The Resources are an impressive repository of diverse range of materials that can aid in the process of learning. Our team has developed a variety of resources such as booklet, a collection of different plant species, educational games, exhibit materials, and landscaping features that aid our programs.

We have developed these resources for

- In house Educational & Outreach Programs
- Educators
- Citizens
- Students and Researchers





Library

The library boasts collection of books on nature and art, available in both English and Marathi languages. From encyclopedias and environmental story & activity books to field guides on plants and animals, the library caters to the needs and interests of all. Additionally, there is a dedicated section on gardening and a children's section that houses a diverse range of interesting books suitable for all ages above 3 years



614

Books available in the library



Nature Themed Exhibits

RRBCEA undertook the ambitious goal of creating high-quality resources for environmental education. This year, the organization developed three nature-themed exhibits, namely "The Unexplored World of Insects," "Trees of Empress Botanical Garden," and "Winged Wonders: Exploring the World of Birds." There were interactive games, informative panels, activities, posters, and literature related to the theme for all age groups at the exhibit. Additionally, RRBCEA organized workshops based on insects, plants, and birds.

The exhibits received approximately 2900+ visitors throughout the year. The visitors appreciated the exhibits for their hands-on, activity-based learning experiences. The exhibits demonstrated the RRBCEA's commitment to promoting environmental awareness and sustainability. Research and development for the indoor exhibits at RRBCEA was done entirely in-house. Our team developed all the interpretation material, games, and hands-on activities that are displayed in the exhibit. Some of the artwork that we displayed is commissioned with due credits. The themed exhibits have undoubtedly contributed to the community's understanding of the importance of nature around them through five senses.

3 Nature themed Exhibits and over 2900+ visitors through out the year



**Insect exhibit
913 visitors**



**Tree exhibit
1021 visitors**



**Bird exhibit
880+ visitors**

Insect Exhibit

This theme included exhibits such as posters on complete and incomplete metamorphosis, panels on the importance of insects, their behavior of mimicry, a guess the insect game, observation stations, butterfly wingspan measurement, and a vertical section of a termite mount.



Feedback from Exhibit visitors

“Interesting interactive activities clubbed with unique information. Beautiful insights on the world of insects. Often misunderstood and disgusted, this exhibition changed my perspective for these tiny creatures”- Ms. Anchal

Amazing information about small creatures like insects . Thanks a lot. - Ms. Pandharinath Mhaske

Tree Exhibit

A collection of Folk stories, collections, games, hands-on activities, and patterns in trees such as the plant exhibit. The plant exhibit touched upon all the important aspects of plants, from the arrangement of leaves to their cultural importance. The visitors especially enjoyed the concept of Astro trees (Rashi van) and finding the State trees of India



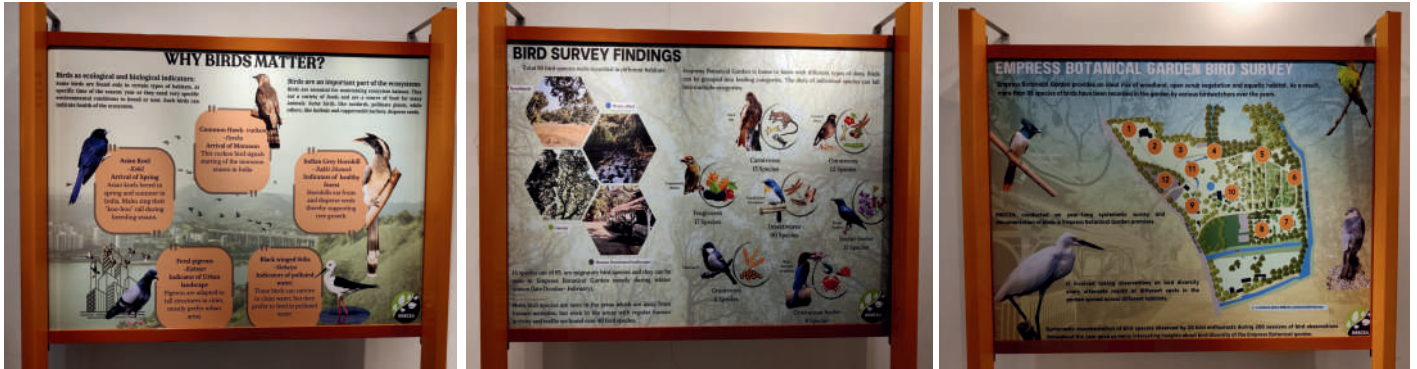
Feedback from Exhibit visitors

Fantastic initiative, keep up the good work you doing to raise the awareness level among the masses about environment, animals, birds. The collection of book in library is also very interesting- Vikram Singh

New experience. Felt refreshing , informative and knowledgeable. Gained lot of information- Rujuta Rode

Bird Exhibit

This year's theme for the bird exhibit was 'Winged Wonders: Exploring the world of Birds'. The exhibit displayed birds in Indian Literature, beautiful Bird models of 5 birds found in the Empress Botanical Garden, in-house developed games and a feather collection, a philately of bird stamps. The panels explained why birds matter and our year-long bird survey data.



Feedback from Exhibit visitors

A great initiative and eye opening opportunity to connect with our surroundings and creatures co existing with us. - Glades D'monte

Very informative and exciting. Preserved beautifully. Focused on local birds makes it more relevant for visitors of all ages. - Dhanavant Hardikar



Outdoor Exhibits

Informative and interactive boards about bird height comparison and bird species in different habitats were installed in the garden premises along with a map of Empress Botanical Garden. These outdoor exhibits engage hundreds of visitors that enjoy the greenery in the garden.





Landscaping

Special landscape elements were developed which will help in educational programs run by the center. These landscape features include

- Pond ecosystem
- Medicinal Plant patch
- Butterfly Garden Patch
- Collection of succulents
- Collection of plant species from Pune and the Western Ghats region that are vulnerable or threatened (IUCN status)



20+
Medicinal
Plants
Species



20+
Succulent
Plant
species



14
Native
Species
from Pune
region



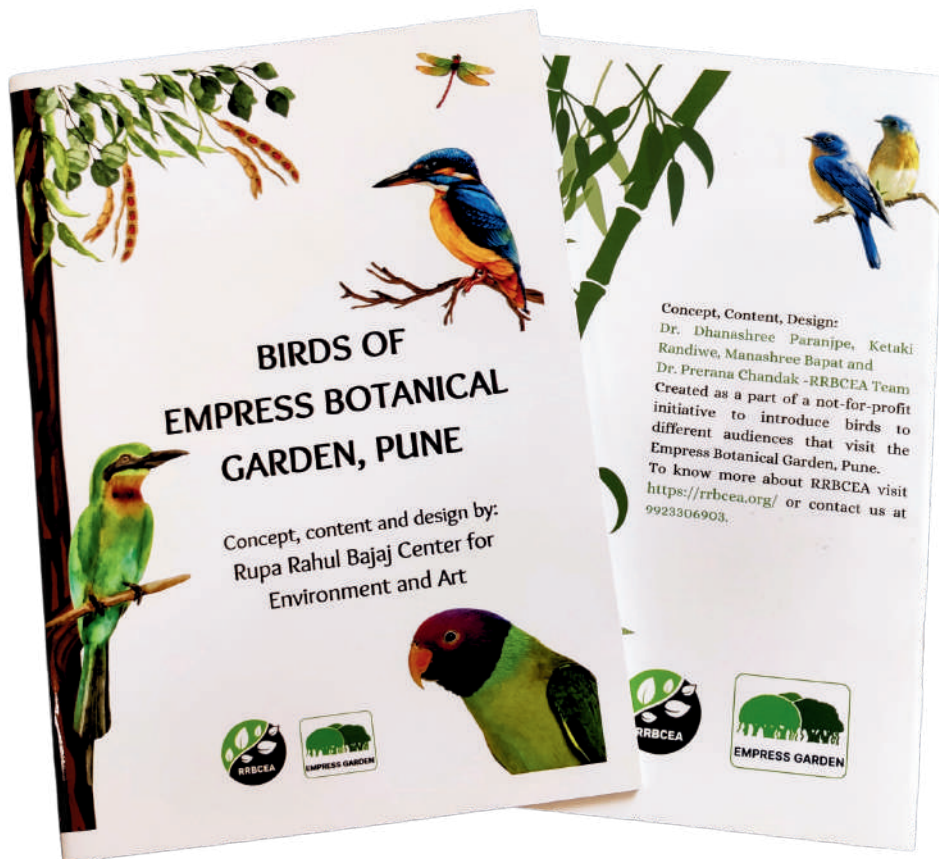
Medicinal
Plant Patch



Succulent
Plant Patch



Butterfly
Plant Patch



Booklet

A booklet based on the survey was published in March 2024. This publication will serve as a valuable resource for both novice and experienced birdwatchers, providing detailed guidance on how to identify and locate various bird species according to their habitat within Empress botanical Garden.



The booklet was released by Hon. Deepa Bajaj, Mr. Pingle Sir & Mrs. Anupama Barve

Games

We have created multiple educational games centered around four distinct themes: Birds, Plants, Insects, and Ecology. These games serve as valuable tools for kids' workshops such as EWEP, alongside various other activities and themed exhibits.



State Trees of India



Guess the Insects

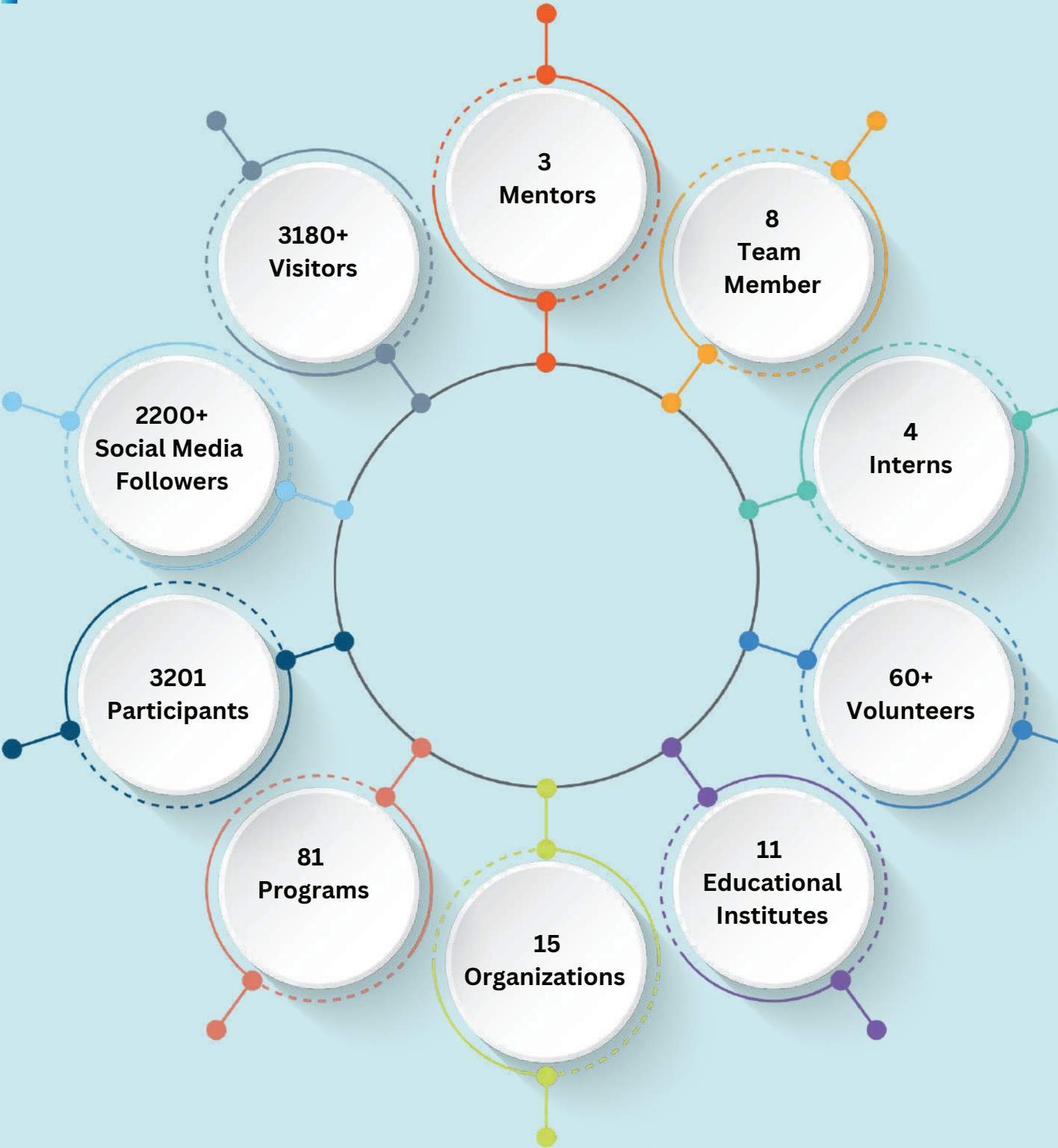


Visitors playing Feet functions game



Kids enjoying Habitat game from EWEP (Offsite)

Our Stakeholders

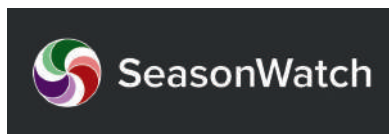


Partners & Collaborators

Our CSR Partners



Our Collaborators



BAITHAK



Organizations we worked with



Our Team



Dr. Dhanashree Paranjpe
RRBCEA Head



Vedanti Mahimkar
Program Coordinator



Manashree Bapat
PR & Communication Coordinator



Dr. Prerana Chandak
Nature Education Coordinator



Ketaki Godbole
Art Coordinator



Shirish Suryavanshi
Accounts & Admin



Vasant Chavhan
Care taker and Gardener



Vijay
Care taker and Gardener



Suresh Saste
Care taker and Gardener



Susmit Wadke
Intern: *Sita Ashok* Monitoring



Shreyas Pattanshetty
Intern: Insect Survey



Aishwarya Hirwale
Intern: Insect Survey



Shradha Pawar
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