

Project Update: February 2010

There is an ongoing environmental education programme in Bhimashankar area in two of the *Ashram shalas* at Terungun and Tokawade villages, which are located on the fringe of the sanctuary.

During Mahashivratri, hundreds of thousands of pilgrims and tourists visit the place and the area gets completely littered with plastic (mainly carry-bags of offerings which are taken into the temple) strewn all over. The children of Class 8 of both the schools who have been exposed to the education programme for almost 2 years now decided to appeal to the authorities to not allow this to happen to their area. They have written letters to the District Collector and other concerned authorities of the area - Tehsildar, Tribal Dept, Forest officials etc. The letters state that the children are the residents of Bhimashankar and they want it clean and unpolluted. The plastic that gets thrown around is polluting their forest, and choking their river. It is a big threat to wildlife as sambhar, shekrus and other animals are seen foraging around it and there have been cases of cattle dying by swallowing it. There has to be a law from banning entry of carry-bags in the sanctuary, and its strict implementation must happen. There must be a fine / punishment imposed on anyone found breaking the law.

There are couple of suggestions made:

- i) That the shopkeepers and vendors must not be allowed to give carry-bags at the venue.
- ii) That there have to be entry check-points where visitors' carry-bags should be confiscated before entering the sanctuary.

While sending these letters to the Collector, the children have also sent samples of paper bags that they made during the workshop session. The children now await a positive response from the authorities and hope that action will be taken soon to put an end to the ever-growing plastic menace there.