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Zoology Department of Stella Maris celebrates 60th anniversary

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Students of Zoology Department conducting a bird count. Photo: Anusha Sundar

Workshops, nature walks, intercollegiate competitions and guest lectures are part of the year-long celebrations. L. KANTHIMATHI reports

As part of its diamond jubilee celebrations, the Department of Zoology at Stella Maris College will invite its former faculty and students from across India and abroad to deliver lectures through video-conferencing. This programme would however continue beyond the diamond jubilee year.

Rita Jayraj, assistant professor and Head of the Department of Zoology, says, “The main objective of this initiative is to be up-to-date with the trends in the field. Two of our former staff members, who are from Australia and the United States, have agreed to be part of this programme.”

The celebrations would include a series of events that would be conducted through the year. There would be workshops on molecular biology, nature walks, involving spotting of butterflies and insects, intercollegiate competitions, guest lectures, release of a book on butterflies and also the release of a souvenir, which consists of a collection of photos and a brief description of birds, insects and spiders.

According to Kalpana Jayaraman, assistant professor, “Our students are never short of enthusiasm when it comes to trying out new things, which encourages us to organise a range of interesting programmes.”

The Department was founded in 1956 under the leadership of late Dr. Eileen Riordan.

In an email communication, Meera Paul, the second Head of the Department, says, “Over the years, the Department has witnessed a steady growth, continually adding new subjects that are allied to zoology. Another achievement of the Department lies in the area of animal welfare. With the support of the World Society for Protection of Animals, the Department has introduced papers on animal welfare. The Department also celebrates Compassion Week and has spearheaded several animal adoption drives in association with the Blue Cross of India. Our students have been involved in the activities of the Sea Turtle Conservation Network and the Crocodile Bank. They have also taken part in the Black Buck census conducted at the Guindy Park. Also, the Department has undertaken soil studies as part of the restoration project at Adyar Poonga.”

In 2005, the Department began to use computer simulations as an alternative to wet labs in the same year.

Another important milestone of the department was achieved in 2013 when the Department of Biotechnology, Ministry of Science and Technology, accorded Star status to the zoology department. According to the college authorities, SMC is one of the two colleges in Tamil Nadu which received the status in the first phase.

“On an average, close to 1,000 frogs and other fauna are dissected for academic purposes. To put an end to this practice, we adopted computer simulations,” says Rita Jayaraj. At the inauguration of the celebrations, the college principal, Sr. Jasintha Quadras, welcomed the chief guest, Additional Director General of Police Srilakshmi Prasad, who is an alumnae of the Department.

In her address, she said, “The Department has stood the test of time due to the teachers’ dedication and the keen interest they have been taking in spotting talent in students.”

She also advised the students to lead a life ruled by moral values.

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