

DEPARTMENT
OF
ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE

B.Sc. THIRD AND FIFTH SEMESTER
FIELD TRIP
TO
MAWPHLANG SACRED GROVE
ON THE
21st SEPTEMBER 2019



On the **21st September, 2019** under the guidance of the faculty, **the B.Sc. (Env. Sc. Honours) 3rd and 5th Semester students of Department of Environmental Science, Shillong College** embarked on a field trip to **Mawphlang Sacred Grove, Mawphlang**, East Khasi Hills Meghalaya. The one day trip was carried out in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the B.Sc. degree in Environmental Science. The purpose of the trip was to give students a field based studies on areas promoting biodiversity conservation. Sacred groves are regarded as one of the traditional ways for conserving biodiversity on a degraded landscape.

On reaching the sacred grove the team prepared for the trek through the forest under the guidance of a local guide, Mr. Wanshai Wahlang.

Before entering the forest, the students were briefed about the importance of sacred grove in biodiversity conservation. The local guide gave a short introduction and history of the sacred grove. The total area of the site is approximately 80 ha. The site is regarded as a sacred grove by local communities. The grove is believed to be the dwelling place of a local forest spirit/deity known as the *Basa* and has served as a site of for the performance of rituals and for the coronation of Chieftains/Kings of the *Hima* in the past. Due to local belief in the sacredness of the site, the extraction of any materials or items from the forest is strictly prohibited. Local communities believe that the violation of this tenet can lead to negative impact upon the life and health of the violator. The forest is believed to be 800 years old and is considered to be an example of an undisturbed climax forest. Tourism is allowed in the forest, accompanied by local guides who ensure not only the safety of visitors, but also that they do not in any way damage the forest.

The students were explained about the trees and plants inside the forest. Large deciduous trees along with few species of pteridophytes and gymnosperms are also observed. Trees like *Rhododendron arboreum*, *Quercus fenestrata*, *Viburnum dilatatum*, *Myrica esculenta*, *Myrica nagi*, and the critically endangered species *Ilex khasiana* were shown to students. The forest shows a largely closed canopy with reduced light penetration, a notable understory and comparatively sparse forest floor growth due to reduced light penetration. Despite being characterized as dominated by growth of deciduous, the grove does demonstrate growth of *Pinus kesiya*.

The students were also told that the forest is also home to approximately 70 species of birds, most of which are of the order Passeriformes. Species cited during the field visit are as follows: the Grey Sibia (*Heterophasia gracilis*), Whiskered Yuhina (*Yuhina flavicollis*),

Golden Throated Barbet (*Megalaima franklinii*), *Phylloscopus* sp. leaf warblers, Large Niltava (*Niltava grandis*) and Green tailed sunbird (*Aethopyganepalensis*).

Monoliths and stone tables which are indicative of the native animistic religion were observed throughout the grove. According to the guide however, rituals have not been performed in the grove in over 60 years and coronation ceremonies for chieftains/kings are no longer carried out within the grove.

The trip that was undertaken was of great benefit to the students. They had the opportunity to observe the importance of traditional practices that contribute to bio resource and bio diversity conservation. They also learnt about the importance of sacred grooves as a mean of in situ conservation as well as the ecosystem services they provide in terms of water conservation, soil conservation, carbon sink, etc. Mr. Wahlang also imparted valuable knowledge about plants of ethnomedicinal importance along with the uses of numerous other plants. Apart from the environmental related topics, the trip also highlighted the economic value of the Mawphlang Sacred Grove as a means of generating revenue and employment to the people of Mawphlang village. This trip has help in increasing the knowledge of the students about the significance, importance and value of Sacred Grooves

