

RCE Greater Dhaka Celebrates Monsoon Rain Festival in the Bhawal Forest ‘To Save the Vanishing Sal Forests’

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The Bhawal Sal Forest is one of the vanishing deciduous forests of the Madhupur Tracts of Bangladesh. Due to urban-industrial expansion of Dhaka Megacity, the glorious Sal forest has been squeezing and losing its huge biodiversity and the natural habitat. Although Sal Forest is considered as the Lung of Dhaka but unplanned expansion of the city has already destroyed hundreds of associated plants and animal species. Once, this forest was a heaven for monkeys, deer, porcupine, cats, elephants, snakes, peacocks, wild hens, pigeons and doves etc. but they are now very rare; only a few are in captives in the zoos. With the change, many exotic trees viz. *Eucalyptus* spp., *Acacia auriculiformis*, *A. mangium*, *Swietenia macrophylla* have replaced the indigenous ones like *Phyllanthus emblica*, *Terminalia* spp., *Careya arborea*, *Litsea polyantha*, *Tamarindus indica*, *Artocarpus heterophyllus*, *A. lakoocha*, *Garcinia* spp., and *Randia* spp. etc.



Fig.1 Glorious Bhawal Sal Forest with Watershed



Fig. 2 Sal Forest watershed



Figs. 3 and 4 Construction of building destroying Bhawal Sal Forest



Fig. 5 Growing Acacia sp replacing Sal

Since the Bhawal forest is dominated with deciduous Sal (*Shorea robusta* Roth) trees, in the wet monsoon (Ashar and Sraban), they grow luxuriantly with its associate flora and fauna. In the rains, it charms with beautiful landscapes with moss covered roots of the blooming Sal trees and termite mounds. The dancing watersheds wave with water lilies; cranes, water fowls and ducks swim with joy. In a rainy day, the festival was organized by the students of Environmental Sciences of the RCE Greater Dhaka Youth Activists to enjoy the old day's tradition for purifying them bathing in the rain, treasure

hunting games in the forest finding the exotic and indigenous saplings kept in several hidden sites, tradition mud games, football, crawling and gliding, swimming and boating in the watershed.



Figs. 6 & 7 Students of Environmental Sciences of the RCE Greater Dhaka Youth Activists gathered in Bhawal Forest to celebrate Rain Festival and to learn the behavior of deciduous forest plants



Figs. 8 & 9 Undergrowth with Wild Turmeric, Radia, Convolvulus, Arums and many creepers and climbers, made the Sal forest beautiful and charming



Fig. 10 Sal roots and moss association Fig. 11 Moss-covered clay-mound Fig. 12. Termite mound



Figs. 10 & 11 Boating and swimming in the watershed and playing football in the rain

During the whole-day program on 28th July 2013, the young environmentalists studied the Sal forest habitats and habit of the plants; multipurpose uses including timber, house-posts, pilings, wood fuel and also the usage of green leaves for serving food and dry leaves as snacks and sweets serving trays/pots etc. The coppicing behavior of Sal trees for thousands of years is a unique character and does not need to be planted if not destroyed by the human being. Thus students are being motivated and promised to aware the people and the policymakers to save the Sal forests and the red-fine clay soil habitat of Bhawal and Madhupur Tracts from urban-industrial encroachment of Dhaka megacity.