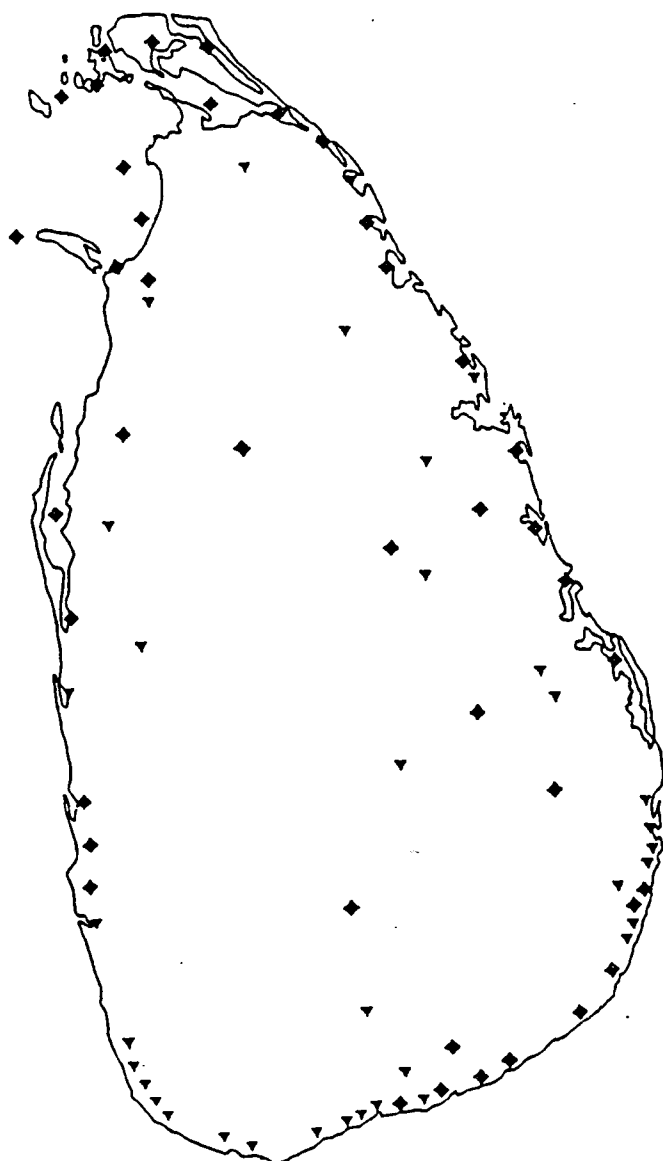


MISSION REPORT

ADVICE ON OPERATION AND
MANAGEMENT OF THE VISITOR CENTRE



504-456

JAN

WETLAND CONSERVATION PROJECT



Note to the front cover

- ◆ indicates the approximate location of a wetland of international importance as identified in the Directory of Asian Wetlands (Scott, 1989); total 41 sites.
- ▼ indicates the approximate location of a wetland of national importance as identified in a local list (Kotagama *et al.*, unpub.); total 35 sites.



ADVICE ON OPERATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE VISITOR CENTRE

Mission Report

By

Edo Jans

CEA Library



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From 31st January to 22nd February 1997

Wetland Conservation Project

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1 INTRODUCTION

In June 1996, Mr Edo Jans visited Muthurajawela to assist the Wetland Conservation Project (WCP) of the Central Environmental Authority (CEA) in setting up a visitor centre. Mr Jans is the Manager of the Nature Activity Centre in the National Park "De Weerribben", owned by the National Forestry Service (Staatsbosbeheer) of the Netherlands. In February 1997 Mr Jans was requested to come for a second time to inspect progress and to assist in improvement of the quality of the Centre and its products. Mr Jans was in Sri Lanka from 31 January to 22 February 1997; his Terms of Reference are shown in Annex A. Annex B provides practical remarks and proposals as to the functioning of the Visitor Centre.

Since the mission was of a very practical nature, the mission report is kept short. It summarizes the impressions and recommendations of Mr Jans for the Muthurajawela Visitor Centre. All reported issues were discussed with the manager and staff of the Centre, as well as with staff of the Wetland Conservation Project. In addition to this report, Mr Jans provided the Centre with a number of examples of explorative and educational materials, that can be copied.

2 REPORT ON ACTIVITIES

2.1 General

At the start of the present mission, the Visitor Centre Muthurajawela was open for six months. So far things are working fine. Some components can be improved or need more attention, but overall the first steps on a new road to the future are set well. In fact, the whole idea of a facility based upon the concept of a Nature Activity Centre is new for Sri Lanka, but the Muthurajawela Visitor Centre proved already that this concept works under Sri Lankan circumstances, so that it deserves a chance for further development. Thereby special attention should be given to management issues, to development and execution of tailor-made educative programmes for children and students, and to marketing..

During the three weeks mission period, Mr Jans focussed his attention to:

- advice to the manager on management matters (see section 2.2);
- continuation of training of the guides (see section 2.3);
- initial training of two new guides (see section 2.3);
- introduction of, and training the guides in, nature activity games for children (see section 2.3);
- discussions with and advice to staff of the Visitor Centre on team-building and on sharing responsibilities (see section 2.3);
- advice on construction, furnishing and organization of the new shop and ticket-counter (see section 2.4);
- advice on improvement of the permanent exhibition, and introduction of a first level of information (see section 2.5).

Furthermore, he provided the manager with a number of ideas for increased use of the facilities, in order to increase the income of the Visitor Centre.

The planned discussions with the Director of the Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWLC) on a potential visitor centre in Bundala did not take place, since DWLC did not work out its plans any further since June 1996.

2.2 Management

Much time was devoted to discussions with the manager about his work. The central theme in the discussions was "a manager should have the opportunity to function as a manager". Of course, this opportunity is strongly dependent on the quality of the other staff and especially on their readiness to take responsibilities.

Presently, the time involvement of the manager in actual management issues is far too low; he needs to spend too much time for routine matters and for decisions on details. He should assign more responsibilities to the other staff, on the base of clearly written and mutually discussed job descriptions; suggestions for this were provided. His staff needs to take more responsibilities, which requires some time. However, the manager cannot afford to take too long time

During the planned study tour for the manager to the Netherlands, this issue will receive much attention again. He will see how other managers of visitor centres use their time, how they have delegated what, and how they monitor activities and responsibilities of staff.

2.3 Guide training

Following the basic training provided to the guides in June 1996, this time a number of issues were trained in more detail. Very positive reactions were received regarding a special training in "telling of stories" and regarding repetition of the principles of guiding and guided tours. It was especially useful, since the guides could bring in their own experiences with local and foreign tourists and discuss on ways they solved problems.

Recently two new guides joined the team; the opportunity was used to provide them with a basic training, as was given to the other guides in 1996.

Special training was given in nature-related activities for children. Various plays were introduced and discussed, and the visit of 300 children in the age of 8-9 years on 20 February was used for try-outs. The try-outs showed clearly what worked well and what not. The overall conclusion was, however, that this kind of nature-related activity games appealed both to the children and the teachers. Furthermore, an introductory training took place on an educative programme for students in the age of about 12-18 years.

When there were no visitors, time was spent on constructive discussions with the guides on responsibilities and on team work. Presently, the guides are too dependent on the manager. It was explained to them how important it is for the manager, for the guides themselves, and for the complete product "Visitor Centre" to learn to take their own responsibilities for things that need to be done. To optimally use staff, the manager has to detect the specific qualities and specialities of all staff members and use them as much as possible in the division of tasks and responsibilities.

2.4 New shop and entrance

An important part of the Visitor Centre (of each visitor centre) is the entrance, now combined with a shop. For visitors it is important that they have the feeling that the shop and entrance are one entity.

A lay-out was prepared for the new shop, and part of the designed items was executed and supervised, including the ticket-counter, the sales-counter, and a number of displays. The basic design idea for the entrance was that visitors could see in one view what the centre has to offer. For the shop the basic idea was that products are all related to the Centre and its activities and ideology.

2.5 Exhibition

As requested in the Terms of Reference, special attention was given to the exhibition. The exhibition was considered too static, and the regular visitor's enquiry also rated the exposition relatively low.

Most of the present information in the exhibition consists of so-called "second level" information. This means that substantial detailed information is provided, with a lot of text. As a consequence, it is not really clear to a large number of the visitors what message the exhibition intends to disseminate. Advice focussed on bringing the information to a "first level" of information. To this end, a number of examples, including drawings, were left behind.

Furthermore advice was given on "how to make the exhibition more alive". It is considered very important that visitors can do something in an exhibition. By using their hands, eyes, etc. a message remains better in people's mind. To achieve optimum results, special attention should be given to the collected knowledge on the psychology of information acceptance. Relevant information on this subject is given to the manager. In summary, it is important to determine for each message to be given:

- what is the message?
- why do we want to give that message?
- for whom is the message meant?
- how can the message be expressed?

During the mission, a number of improvements of the permanent exposition were already started. A special corner was designed and constructed for children, to discover the little creatures ("the little ones") of Muthurajawela. This corner provides an example of how to provide "first level" information. Some other adaptations were also initiated (life histories, medicinal plants, discoveries of the day, etc.), all aiming at more first level information. Other ideas are left behind on paper.

3 COOPERATION

A discussion took place on further cooperation between the Visitor Centre Muthurajawela and the Netherlands State Forestry Department (Staatsbosbeheer), and some opportunities were identified, ranging from a complete twinning arrangement with e.g. the Weerribben, to mere exchange of information. Mr. Jans will continue this discussion within his organisation. In that context, also official cooperation of Staatsbosbeheer was sought for the study tour of the Manager of the Visitor Centre and the Project Director of the Wetland Conservation Project.

4 FINAL REMARKS

Serious consideration should be given to identification of an opportunity for specialist assistance to the Visitor Centre for a period of 1-2 years. The task of such assistance would be to help the Centre in:

- detailed description of management tasks, and assistance to the manager in their implementation;
- preparation of the manager for setting up (the management system of) other visitor centres in Sri Lanka;
- working out of new educational programmes for adults and various groups of children;
- preparation and execution of a practical marketing plan;
- preparation of a PR and information plan for a period of 5 years;
- preparation of a short-term maintenance plan (for one year period);

- preparation of a long-term maintenance plan (for five years);
- development of new activities to improve the income and the quality of the centre;
- participation in discussions and/or execution of other visitor centres or nature information centres.

If a specialist is found with adequate experience in management, marketing, and education, he or she can be expected to cover most or all of his or her own expenses. If this employment of a specialist would take place in the framework of a twinning arrangement (exchange of junior staff) the effect would even be more lasting, since the "counterpart" trainee will come back with relevant experience and take over again.

ANNEX A

TERMS OF REFERENCE

The specialist should:

- work out the recommendations he provided during his earlier visit, with emphasis on activities for children;
- assist in training of present and new guides;
- suggest and work out new activities that could be initiated by the Visitor Centre;
- assist in development of staff profiles and job descriptions for all staff of the Visitor Centre, in order to achieve cost-effective operation and maintenance;
- participate in discussions with DWLC on a visitor centre at Bundala;
- investigate opportunities for further cooperation with the Netherlands State Forestry Department in the near future (WCP) and on a longer term;
- summarize observations and recommendations in a short (English) mission report, to be delivered before departure from Sri Lanka.

ANNEX B

REMARKS AND PROPOSALS

B1 EXHIBITION

As far as the permanent exhibition is concerned, the following rules are of importance:

- keep working towards the first level of information. Study and or copy the ideas and examples provided;
- the children's corner table needs permanent availability of colour plates and colour pencils: without them the corner has no use;
- use the round stairs for a story on the history of the area, since also history goes step by step. The end of the story should explain the situation at this moment and should have a connection to the area model;
- in one place in the exhibition area a lot of ants are always seen. Use this for an information panel on ants. See the example given to the manager;
- create something to pull the visitors into the exhibition; a possibility was drawn up for the manager;
- make clear that there is a possibility upstairs to see video's. Most visitors are presently not aware of this;
- indicate more clearly where the toilets are;
- create a "route" through the exhibition, e.g. by painting footprints on the floor;
- maintain the aquarium in the exhibition on the small ones. Refresh the animals daily. Lower the water level and bring in some stones, since some animals need a place to come out of the water;
- cover the snail-house with a glass-plate;
- paint the discovery table one more time and finish with colourless lacquer for easier cleaning;
- make sure that there are always some prepared animals in the glass-trays on the tables. For visitors it is very frustrating if something is not complete or if it doesn't work;
- solve the problems with the toilets. Cleaning does not seem the greatest problem any more, but the smell is often terrible. Build a new toilet-unit outside, since there are not enough toilets when large groups are visiting.

B2 RESTAURANT

The restaurant needs substantial improvement; it is one of the weakest components of the centre. Improvements are especially required in the food quality, hospitality, and in general atmosphere:

- often it takes an unnecessary long time before food is served. Many of the items can be prepared in advance and kept ready in stock;
- the coffee and the french fries are absolutely of a terrible quality;
- give special attention to the clothes of the restaurant staff;
- the restaurant staff has no good view on the restaurant area. Make sure that there is always somebody in the restaurant to serve the visitors; presently visitors have to go too often to the kitchen to ask for service. For quiet times a bell ("ring for service please") could be considered;
- presently, the restaurant is often used as a sort of office for guides and manager. Meetings do not belong in a restaurant;
- put a little fence between the entrance of the exhibition and the restaurant. A lot of people go through the restaurant to the exhibition, which disturbs the people who are eating;
- improve the atmosphere of the restaurant. Other colours for the table covers and some plant trays will do a lot. Dare to bring more colour in the restaurant. Take better care of the plants around the restaurant; presently they are isolating the restaurant too much;

- give the restaurant a name, and display this clearly on the outside;
- place a signboard with "to-days' specials";
- the responsibility for the restaurant is in private hands. For the visitors, however, there is only one responsible person, and that is the manager of the centre. If the quality of the restaurant remains to be a problem, it is worthwhile to take the whole thing in own hands. This is not the best solution, but bad quality is worse.

B3 SHOP

The new shop is almost finished during writing of this report. It should be finished completely as soon as possible. The back of the first box-tower should be used to give primary information on the centre and its activities: make clear to the visitors what they can expect. A good and clear price list on the counter is important; make especially clear that the boat trip is not included in the entrance fee. Use the shop also to promote the boat trip.

B4 NATURE TRAIL

So far this is a good product. But it deserves more attention, since it is not very clear to visitors at this moment that a nature trail with a bird hide exists. Therefore:

- signpost the two walking routes;
- use the nature trail to give information on bird and plant life and on the landscape. It is an ideal place for this. Examples were given to the manager;
- the nature trail could be given a theme, such as "discover the art of nature". Along the trail there could be painting frames erected, providing a view of the landscape, a plant or a tree. People will like it, since the picture is constantly changing, and what one will see depends on ones position towards the frame;
- maintenance of the trail needs more attention.

B5 NATURE GAMES

The try-outs of the games worked out very well. A few things were made clear:

- do not take more than 100 children in total. Each guide should not have more than 15 children. Only in small groups he/she can give maximum attention to the children as well as the games;
- when a group of children is received, always a scenario has to be presented on what they are going to do, at what time and where, and which staff will be present. Make this scenario in a manner that you can easily deal with delays or other unexpected matters;
- make clear to the school staff that they remain responsible for the children;
- make sure that the school provides a minimum of one companion per group of 15 children;
- make sure that everything is ready before a group arrives. Have a last check.;
- always carry out an evaluation afterwards. Only in that way you can improve your programme.;
- make one or two guides responsible for the games; including execution as well as improvement and further development;
- all the other little things that guides have to remind during games were intensively discussed with them.

B6 MANAGMENT

A substantial amount of time was spent in talking to and discussion with the manager on management matters. This was done on the basis of the observation that the present management needs a lot of improvement. The manager has still to spend far too much time in solving little problems that could easily be addressed by his assistant or the guides. The manager should immediately delegate part of his responsibilities, especially to his assistant, but also to the guides. At this moment the guides are too much dependent on instructions from the manager, since they lack clear job descriptions. Although these will not solve the whole problem, they will certainly help to improve the management situation. But in addition the manager will have to prepare the assistant manager and the guides for their jobs. This aspect, and a number of other issues that are important for good managment were a subject of discussion with the manager, and they will be complemented by more discussions and demonstrations during his planned study tour to the Netherlands.

ANNEX C

NATURE ACTIVITY GAME FOR CHILDREN OF 12-16 YEARS

Children of this age are able to make connections. Through games, you can confront them with small environmental problems. Mostly they will find a solution. An example of such a game is:

"THE LIVING MUTHURAJAWELA GAME"

Situation

The best place to play this game is outside. You also need some room inside for your "shop". This is also the place for the game leader. He has to give out "instruction cards" and he has to pay for completed tasks. The game leader is always one of the guides.

Equipment

Table for the shop, pencils, paper, scissors, glue, game equipment for the game instructions, small maps with pictures of animals, plants and objects that are present in the area.

Preparation

Before you start the game the shop must be ready. On a table are the maps with the subjects and the price. Each instruction card is in an envelop.

Purpose of the game

The game has three goals:

- the participants use natural materials to make a model of the area. They can use grass, leaves, stones, sand, paper, etc. In this way they discover the different natural resources existing in Muthurajawela;
- with the money they earn by completing instructed tasks, they can buy animals, plants and objects to complete their model. The instructions are meant to develop better observation of the plant- and wildlife of Muthurajawela;
- after they have finished their model, they receive a card with "threats", such as "construction of a road through the sanctuary", "pollution of the water", etc. They have to find themselves how to deal with the threat. In this way they discover that nature might really be under great pressure.

The game

This game can be played with a maximum of 50 children, in 10 groups of 5 children each. The game takes time, since the children are expected to do various kinds of things. In practice it will take about 3-4 hours. The end of the game depends on the enthusiasm of the participants. The game leader can terminate the game at any moment he feels is best.

The game leader provides each group with a place where they can make their model. He gives some examples of materials that could be used. Do not use living materials. Also indicate clearly the expected maximum/minimum size of the model. When the model is ready the children can go to the game leader to receive instruction cards, so that they can earn money to buy animals, plants, etc.

Examples of instructions

- "Ask the game leader for the discovery box. Go to the nature trail and catch a minimum of 3 different aquatic animals. Find out what their name is. Show them to the game leader. For each identified animal you will receive 100 marshes".
- "Walk along the nature trail and discover and precisely describe the species of birds you encounter. Find their names. For each identified bird you will receive 100 marshes".
- (the same with - for example - butterflies).

- "The Muthurajawela marshes and Negombo lagoon are split in different zones. Find out which zones exist and what their functions are. For each zone you will receive 100 marshes"
- Think of a few more instructions.

Every time the children have "marshes" they can buy animals, plants etc., that they can put in their model. Make a series of different small cards with pictures of birds, mammals, plants etc. Give each card a value; for example:

- crocodile 600 marshes
- butterfly 40 marshes
- purple coot 100 marshes

The children will have to make their own choice of what they want to buy for their model. Make clear that they have to complete an ecosystem, and not only a set of birds or plants.

After this part of the game each group receives a card with a treat. For example:

- "The authorities decided that a new highway will go through the area, since they are of the opinion that foreign investors require good transport possibilities from Colombo to the airport".

One can think of a few other threats. Always make clear that a solution will not be to do nothing. Not building the road, for example, does not solve the transport problem. The children have to learn to think in alternatives. The group has now to make clear:

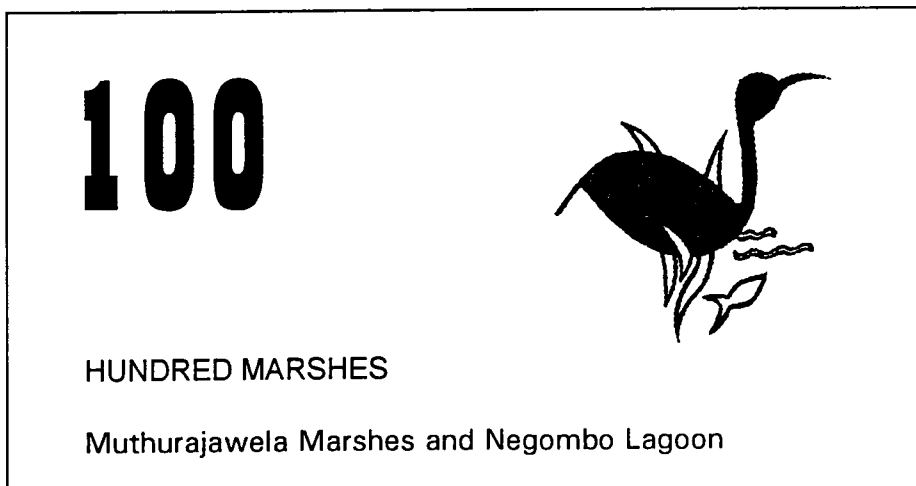
- what will be the consequences of the threat?
- how to deal with this problem?
- are there solutions?

Finally, each group gives a presentation on their work. Make the presentation not longer than 10 minutes.

Remark

This game needs special preparation and training, but it has elsewhere proven to be a perfect game for children of this age to discover the functions and values of nature. The results from the game can be summarized in a newsletter, that might be sent to school, with an invitation to come to the Visitor Centre to also play the game.

Example of "Marshes"



ANNEX D

GAMES FOR SCHOOLCHILDREN

Schedule:

group	9.00-10.00	10.00-10.30	10.30-11.30	11.30-12.30	12.30-13.30	13.30-14.30
1	game 1	refresm.	game 6	lunch	game 4	game 2
2	game 2	refresm	game 7	lunch	game 5	game 3
3	game 3	refresm	game 1	lunch	game 6	game 4

group	9.00-10.00	10.00-11.00	11.00-11.30	11.30-12.30	12.30-13.30	13.30-14.30
4	game 4	game 2	refresm	game 7	lunch	game 5
5	game 5	game 3	refresm	game 1	lunch	game 6
6	game 6	game 4	refresm	game 2	lunch	game 7
7	game 7	game 5	refresm	game 3	lunch	game 1

Games:

- 1 mirrorwalk
- 2 search for little creatures
- 3 colourful world
- 4 find a leaf and draw it
- 5 trees are necessary/spiderweb game
- 6 make an animal out of leaves
- 7 smell of nature

Explanation of the games:

- 1 Child walks under trees with a mirror in front of him/her, and discovers the world where some birds live. Start this game with an introduction on the importance of trees for birds. Let the children find out why the lives of many birds are connected with trees. After the game the children should explain to the game leader/guide how they experienced this game. What did they see? Would it be fun for people to live on trees? What would happen to the birds if there were no trees?.
- 2 A guide takes the children with him/her, and let them try to find various kinds of little animals. Use a magnifying-glass. Find out what colours they have, how many legs they have, whether they have eyes? etc, etc. What is the meaning of all those little creatures. The game leader can start this game with the story of the large crocodile:

"Many, many years ago there was this very big crocodile living in the marshes. He felt that he was the king of the marsh and he had no interest in, or respect for, any animal that was smaller than himself. The only animals that he was interested in were those he could eat. Suddenly, one day, he got this terrible itch on his back. Whatever he tried: he could not reach the itching spot, and the itching did not disappear. After a few days he had no other choice then to ask a little beetle to find out what was going on on his back. The beetle agreed to find this out, under the condition that the crocodile from then on would live in harmony with the other animals. The

crocodile said yes. The beetle inspected the back of the crocodile, and found all these very little creatures moving there around. The beetle started to eat these creatures, and therewith helped the crocodile to solve the itching problem. However, the crocodile did not respect the agreement he made with the beetle and continued to behave as he did before. The beetle then asked all his fellow beetles to join him on the back of the crocodile. In a short time there were so many beetles on the back of the crocodile that it caused him an itching problem, and... he could not reach them. He had no other way then to ask a little bird to find out what was going on on his back. The little bird agreed to do that, if the crocodile promised to live in harmony with the other animals from now on. The crocodile said yes. The little bird discovered lots of beetles on the back of the crocodile, and started to eat them, therewith also helping the crocodile. From that day onwards the crocodile realized that he could better live in harmony with some of the little ones. This would make his life a lot more pleasant.

- 3 A piece of paper with tape that sticks on both sides is given to the children; they have to collect as many different small things with different colours as possible. Start this game with a story about colours. If you have a quick look around, the world seems mostly green. If you have a good look, however, you will find all kinds of colours. After the game the game leader can talk with the children about the meaning of colour in nature. Why have some animals got camouflage colours and others very bright colours?.
- 4 Children are requested to search for a beautiful leaf. After they have found one they make a drawing of it. Start this game with a story of the importance of leaves. Leaves are little worlds in themselves. They give shade. Some ants use them for their nest (try to find an ants nest)
- 5 Let some children be a tree. All the other children stand near one of the tree-children. When the guide gives a signal the children have to change trees: they have to run to another one. While they are running they have to hold their breath. As soon as they reach another tree they are allowed to breath again: it is only allowed to breath close to trees. After a few times the guide "cuts down" a few trees. Then the children run again. The objective is that the distance between the trees becomes larger, so that the children have to hold their breath also longer. At the end of the game only two trees remain, with between them as large as possible a distance. The children run between the two trees for a few times. Then the guide cuts down another tree, and finally he cuts the last one. As soon as he cuts down the last one all the children have to hold their breath as long as possible. Then suddenly they feel the need to breathe again, but there are no trees left. This game makes clear why trees are necessary. Talk with the children about this after the game. Ask them if they know examples of tree cutting, maybe from their own surroundings. What can we do to stop cutting of trees? The guide has to make sure that he doesn't give the answers: the children have to do this. Let them create their own solution in their own world of thinking. Realize that they are just kids and not always aware of the worldwide problem of the disappearance of forests. When the children are interested, the guide can continue the game by inviting the children to find out what is also disappearing when there are less trees.
6. Children collect leaves. Alone or in small groups they create an animal with the leaves. This game has no special meaning; it just stimulates the creativity with natural materials. The game leader can add a story about recycling. Are there more things in nature that we can use?
7. Explain to the children that there are many things in nature that have a smell. Try to find examples. Try to find out what the meaning of smell is in nature. Why do some flowers have a nice smell and why do other things sometimes have a bad smell?. Give the children a small pot to collect things that have a smell. They create their own smelling pot. Let the children do this in small groups.