



REPORT

2026



COMMEMORATION OF



Crocodile Conservation
Project (1975-2025)



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Project (1975-2025)**



SNHC India with registered name Society of Nature Healers, Conservators and Local Tourism Development is a Non-Profit Organization (NGO) founded in Year 2019 in capital city of MP i.e. Bhopal with a vision of healing (restoring) Mother Nature in natural and effective ways and conserving its beauty, the beautiful species of birds, animals, stunning and wide varieties of plants including conservation and promotion of Heritage & Culture which is handed over to us from our ancestors.

Through our publication i.e. SNHC Journal – A Quarterly English magazine of central India on sensitising people for Nature, we are reaching Educational institutions at National Level, all forest divisions of India, libraries of different Govt. departments, NGO's and people in nature conservation etc. We have been publishing this since February 2020 and have received very good responses and commendations from all over India and some parts of the world as well. We have 38500+ E - distributions (Including Email & What's App) & 2500+ Hard Copies distributions all over India and abroad which is increasing per volume.

With the vision of Nature Conservation (wildlife conservation preferably) and Sensitization to youth as well as people in action i.e. in the field we started organizing a 2-day National conference on “Lesser known species of MP, to plan and highlight conservation efforts and management challenges of those species. The first Conference was organized in Jan 2023 followed by the second in Jan 2024.

Our NGO - SNHC India through this annual conference is basically focusing on Nature Conservation & Restoration, Lesser Known /Endangered Species Conservation, Forestry, Wetlands, Organic Farming, Environment Degradation, Climate change, Community Development, Green Initiatives and works, Sustainable Living, Wildlife and Ecosystems like lakes, ponds, rivers etc.

To push the conservation efforts we are coming up with the 3rd edition of the conference Dated 17-18 & 19th of January 2025 which will help in consistent planning for conservation of lesser known species of MP and in reviewing ongoing research & conservation action plans for them.



India being a party to Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) enacted Biological Diversity Act in 2002. A three tier structure has been established for implementation of Biological Diversity Act, 2002 with National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) at the apex, State Biodiversity Boards (SBBs) at provincial level and Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs) at the local body level. As per the provisions of BD Act, 2002, Madhya Pradesh State Biodiversity Board was constituted on 11th April, 2005. The objectives of the Board are Conservation of biodiversity, Sustainable use of its components and Equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the use of biological resources and associated traditional knowledge.

Madhya Pradesh State Biodiversity Board has an advisory role in promoting Biodiversity concerns amongst various stakeholders. One of the focus areas of the Board includes promotion of research & documentation on various facets of biodiversity and advocating policy in gap areas. The lesser-known faunal species is one such gap area which needs focus and action. MPSBB has supported research projects on some important and lesser-known faunal species like Caracal, Forest Owlet, Lesser florican, Vultures, Red-Crowned Roofed Turtle (Batagur Kachuga), Mahseer, Malabar Pied Hornbill and four horned antelope to improve the understanding of these species.

ABOUT THE CONFERENCE

SNHC India started organising a 2 day National Conference on "Lesser known species of Madhya Pradesh" with the vision of Wildlife Conservation and sensitisation to youth as well as people in conservation, to plan and highlight conservation efforts and management challenges of Lesser Known species. Lesser known as in, species with very low distribution, less researched, rapid population decline, data deficient and Endangered.

To fill the conservation gap the first conference was organised in **Jan 2023** followed by 2nd and 3rd in **Jan 2024 & 25** respectively, with expected outcome being, to come up with better conservation action plans and management strategies for these species through utilisation of available research data focusing on their current status, conservation issues or challenges and the way forward that is recommendations from the researchers and scientists for the implementing agencies like Forest Departments, Forestry & Wildlife institutes and NGO's to execute on the field and if data is deficient or not available in any of the species then detailed research is suggested to analyse the issues as without that nothing can be figured out.

In the first 2 days of the conference, around 15 technical sessions are held in which speakers share their rich experience and hard work in the field and throw light on different aspects of Biology to Ecology, from conservation challenges to conservation strategies. People active in the field of nature conservation come together under one roof to plan and act for the conservation of these lesser-known species.

For a broader and more scientific approach after conducting our 3rd Conference in Jan 2025 we are moving to Landscape conservation resulting in the addition of around 08 more states and a lot more diverse lesser-known species seeking attention there. The conference will now be titled as "**National Conference on Lesser-Known Species of Central Indian Landscape**" which will be a pivotal step in strengthening the conservation community of Central India.

SNHC India is trying to fill the gap and strengthen the conservation community of Central India by highlighting very important and much needed topics of lesser-known species that are equally important as flagship species. We in Collaboration with **MP State Biodiversity Board** are coming up with the 4th edition of the conference in **Jan 2026** to push the conservation efforts & Management plans of lesser known Faunal species of Central Indian landscape.



ABOUT MPSBB

Madhya Pradesh State Biodiversity Board has been constituted by the State Government as per the provisions of Biological Diversity Act, 2002 notified by the Government of India. Objectives of the Board being Conservation of biodiversity, Sustainable use of its components and Equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the use of biological resources and associated traditional knowledge.

Board has an advisory role in promoting biodiversity concerns among various stakeholders. One of the focus areas of the board includes promotion of research and advocacy of policy in gap areas. The lesser known faunal species is one such gap area which needs focus and action.

OUTCOME

- To Make these Lesser-Known, Known among conservation Community.
- To create connection between field and academic work of conservation.
- To give a platform to the national experts of lesser-known species and review the available research data of these species.
- To highlight the conservation efforts & Management Challenges for these species.
- To highlight Lesser-Known Faunal diversity of Central Indian Landscape in National scenario.
- To promote more and more research and study of Lesser-Known Species.
- To propose effective conservation action plans and management strategies for these species.
- Promotion and presentation of Lesser Known Species open windows for new species to be explored and studied by researchers and then tourists respectively and hence new aspects of tourism as well as wildlife can be witnessed rather than the traditional ones.

KEY SPEAKERS



Dr. Asad R. Rahmani

Ornithologist &
Former Director BNHS,
Mumbai



Prof. B C Choudhury

Former Sr. Prof. WII Dehradun
Advisor WWF-INDIA
& Exec. Trustee, WTI



Dr. Jai Singh Parihar

Scientist (Retd.), Space
Applications Centre (SAC)
ISRO, Ahmedabad



Dr. V. P. Uniyal

Professor, Graphic Era
University Former
Scientist-G, WII



Mr. Subhranjan Sen

PCCF Wildlife & CWLW
Madhya Pradesh



R Sreenivasa Murthy

Retd. IFS, State Coordinator
AWC MP, Ex. Member
Secretary MPSBB



Dr. Shomita Mukherjee

Senior Principal
Scientist, SACON-WII
Coimbatore



Dr. Rajendra P Mishra

Dy. Director & Regional Head
Central India,
Wildlife Trust of India



Dr. Yash Veer Bhatnagar

Country Representative
IUCN India



Prof. R.J. Rao

Former Vice Chancellor
Barkatullah University
Bhopal, MP



Dr. Rajat Bhargava

Ornithologist
Bombay Natural History
Society, Mumbai



Dr. Sumit Dookia

Asso. Prof. University
School of Env. Mgmt.
GGSIIP, University, New Delhi



Mr. Saurabh Popli

Associate Professor
Landscape, SPA Bhopal



Megha Moorthy

Editor-in-Chief
Roundglass Sustain



Tarun Nair

Lead-Programme
Makara, WCT
Mumbai



Sharda Kosankar

Principal Scientist &
Associate Professor (AcSIR)
CSIR - Neeri, Nagpur



Dr. Oishimaya Sen Nag

Senior Editor, WorldAtlas
and Conservation Science
Communicator



Dr. Shriparna Saxena

Professor and Head
Dept. of Aquaculture
SAGE University, Bhopal



Nitin Kaushal

Director - Rivers,
Wetlands & Water Policy,
WWF-India



Shailesh Shrivastava

Senior Editor
Mongabay-India



Pallav Jain

Co-founder and
Editor in Chief
Ground Report



Utsow Pradhan

Environmentalist and
Founder of TIEEDI,
Darjeeling, West Bengal



Dr. Vipin Vyas

Professor, Bioscience, Head
Department of Zoology &
Applied Aquaculture



Dr. R. K. Sharma

Wildlife Scientist &
Ex. Forest Research
RO, Chambal Sanct.



Kashif Farooq Bhat

Sanctuary Asia
Mud-on-Boots Project
Leader, Srinagar, J&K



Gautam Kadam

PhD Research Scholar
Sacred Heart College
Kochi, MGU, Kottayam



Prachi Hatkar

Sr. Project Officer, ARC for
Ecology & conservation
DES, Pune University



Akshita Jain

Wildlife and Conservation
Photographer,
Software Engineer, Microsoft
Hyderabad



Dr. Nidhi Rana

Research Affiliate
Graphic Era, Deemed to be
University, Dehradun



Inauguration





Keynote Address by Prof. B.C. Choudhury

The keynote address was delivered by Prof. B.C. Choudhury (Former Senior Professor, WII Dehradun; Adviser, WWF India; Executive Trustee, WTI), introduced as having begun his wildlife conservation career in July 1975 with the FAO/UNDP/Government of India Crocodile Conservation Project in Odisha and as having completed five decades of active service in July 2025. Although asked to speak for five minutes, the address ran longer and situated the conference within the wildlife conservation history of Madhya Pradesh and the central Indian landscape.

Prof. Choudhury opened with George Schaller's *The Deer and the Tiger* as the foundational text that introduced generations of wildlife researchers to Madhya Pradesh. He traced the institutional history from the establishment of the Indian Board for Wildlife in 1952, through the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972, and the launch of Project Tiger in 1973 with the creation of nine tiger reserves, with Kanha as the "jewel in the crown." After 52 years of Project Tiger, India now has about 57 tiger reserves, "some of them don't even have tigers."

Drawing highlighted Madhya Pradesh's distinctive contribution in conservation:

Tiger reserves and wildlife tourism: Kanha set the model for wildlife tourism in India, and the rest of MP's tiger reserves came up partly to ease tourism pressure on Kanha.

Cheetah reintroduction: a transcontinental species translocation, with MP also having a historical precedent in the Gwalior princely state's introduction of African lions.

Species recovery: Kanha's barasingha recovery from very small numbers stands as a model for the country's 11–12 ongoing species recovery programmes. From the floor, he urged

the MP government to translocate barasingha to Sunabeda Tiger Reserve in adjoining Odisha, expressing a personal hope to "see barasingha in my state in my lifetime."

Mass capture and translocation of herbivores: including the successful reintroduction of Indian bison (often wrongly called gaur) to multiple areas. He raised a scientific caution about Bandhavgarh, where two large mega-herbivores have been introduced and elephants invited; bringing back barasingha as a third may exceed forage capacity and warrants assessment.

Gharial recovery and the 540 km Chambal River: the gharial survives today largely because of the Chambal, contradicting the common assumption that the species depends on snow-fed Himalayan rivers. He called for genetic studies to determine whether snow-fed and rainfed gharial populations represent distinct stocks, both of which would feed into the newly declared Gharial Project announced by the Prime Minister.

Deccan mahseer reintroduction in MP river is a less-discussed achievement.

Wildlife veterinary infrastructure: MP is the only state with wildlife veterinarians in all its protected areas, starting from the Jabalpur centre.

State Wildlife Research Institute, Jabalpur: a distinctive state-level institutional asset.

Indian skimmer recovery in the Chambal: he acknowledged Mr. Vinod Johari (the first nine-month diploma holder from the Central Crocodile Breeding and Management Training Institute, whom Prof. Choudhury had taught) for setting up the Deori Eco Centre that brought gharial back, and Mr. R.K. Sharma for sustaining the longest continuous gharial

monitoring programme in the country since 1981.

Research facilitation: Jiwaji University under Dr. R.J. Rao brought wildlife research into major focus, with WII, WTI, WWF, WCT, and other institutions now benefiting from MP's facilitation of wildlife research.

Wildlife crime control: MP set the tone and institutional mechanism for wildlife crime control, with the contribution of Mr. Suhas Kumar (Former PCCF, M.P.) acknowledged.

Prof. Choudhury then turned to some of the challenges in the State of M.P. as follows:

1. The loss of the Great Indian Bustard from Karera in MP was acknowledged, citing his old colleague Dr. Asad Rahmani's repeated reminders. Recovery of GIB to MP remains a possibility worth pursuing.
2. Wild buffalo extinction in central India, with an agreement with Assam to bring wild buffalo, but with unresolved scientific questions about whether Assam's genetic stock matches the central Indian wild buffalo.
3. Decline of sarus crane in MP, with institutions like SNP having brought numbers up in the Bhoj wetland landscape, but with the long-term future uncertain.

4. While MP has a strong vulture population in Panna, the Ken-Betwa linkage and large-scale water-body creation, the future of vultures are uncertain.
5. Human-wildlife conflict as the structural future challenge, born paradoxically from the success of the 1972 Wildlife Protection Act, the Indian Forest Service, and the research community in pulling species back from the brink of extinction. Increasing populations of some megafauna are now becoming "problematic to manage," and HWC handling now rests with the next generation under Mr. Subharanjan Sen's framework.
6. On promoting tourism as a "panacea", he begged to differ with the framing that tourism is the cure-all for community livelihoods. Unplanned tourism, and tourism targeted at certain groups rather than local communities, benefits neither wildlife nor people.

He closed by tying the keynote to the conference theme. He said that the central Indian landscape is now being looked at not for its charismatic megafauna but for its lesser-known fauna, and he shared his appreciation of research talks on species like fireflies being presented later in the conference.

Introductory Remarks



*Mr. V.N. Ambade (IFS),
PCCF & HoFF, Madhya
Pradesh*

Mr. Ambade acknowledged Prof. Choudhury and Mr. Suhas Kumari as his teachers during his diploma days, and praised previous forest officers for their landmark initiatives in wildlife conservation. He recounted that on joining the State Biodiversity Board as Member Secretary in early 2024, his first question to Mr. Vikas was whether the conference would also cover flora and not only fauna, since "lesser-known" should encompass both, and noted with satisfaction that the conference had since reached the landscape level.

He gave examples from his time in the regional office handling Forest Conservation Act diversion proposals, urging that linear projects (such as railways, roads, and canals) account for habitat fragmentation impacts not only on megafauna but also on lesser-known species and reptiles. He also stressed that mitigation measures, such as underpasses, must extend across the full project length rather than being limited only to forest stretches. He expressed concern over the diversion of open natural ecosystems for mega infrastructure projects without recognising these areas as habitats for several lesser-known species, including nesting sites of critically endangered species such as the Great Indian Bustard. He also urged greater attention to wetland conservation as ecosystems in their own right, citing Madhya Pradesh's five Ramsar sites. He concluded by emphasising the need to conserve habitats both within and beyond forests and protected areas, by recognizing them as community conservation reserves.

Mr. Sen welcomed the conference's evolution from an MP-centric event in earlier editions to a central Indian focus in this fourth edition. He acknowledged Madhya Pradesh's leadership in wildlife management by any metric, while honestly listing the state's failures alongside its successes. He named the Great Indian Bustard and Lesser Florican as the two clearest losses, with the GIB lost long ago and the Lesser Florican now apparently on the way out. He announced that, after a long gap, MP had restarted a Lesser Florican project with a survey conducted in the previous monsoon, and that the State's plan is to retain habitat that can support both species and prepare for eventual reintroduction once breeding programmes mature.

He shared positive news on Caracal. He informed that photographic records had emerged from the cheetah enclosure at Gandhi Sagar, with



*Mr. Subharanjan Sen (IFS),
Chief Wildlife Warden
(CWLW), Madhya Pradesh*

another sighting of a caracal swimming in the Chambal preceding it. The previous caracal project had not produced positive signs, but a new project on caracal in the Gandhi Sagar landscape is being launched in partnership with the Global Tiger Forum (GTF). He also highlighted MP's vulture conservation, including white-rumped and red-headed vultures, and the state's bird and butterfly surveys involving citizen scientists, with current efforts focused on standardising and making counts more data-driven for year-on-year comparability.

On Forest Owlet, he said that long-term research is ongoing and that the state is working on establishing two sanctuaries specifically to protect the species. He concluded by noting that MP is one of the few states with a State Wildlife Action Plan, drawn up under the chairmanship of Dr. Suhas Kumar, with strong emphasis on lesser-known fauna, ecosystems, and unique habitats.

Mr. Ravichandran congratulated SNHC for organising the conference on what he described as the most critical and important element of the landscape and ecosystem, the lesser-known species. He observed that whether one is a forest manager, scientist, researcher, or academician, lesser-known species are usually given the lowest order of priority despite being central to ecosystem structure, function, and services. Drawing the link to agriculture, he pointed out that pollinators, themselves lesser-known species, are essential to productivity.

He urged the organisers to expand the scope of the conference to



*Mr. K. Ravichandran (IFS),
Director, Indian Institute of
Forest Management (IIFM)*

seascapes, and briefly discussed the importance of hydrozoans and gorgonians. He noted that he had been closely following SNHC's activities for the last three years and that the conference had grown both in size and in the breadth of themes covered, and looked forward to the conference document for academic institutions like IIFM.

An introductory speech delivered by Mr. Ajay Yadav. Representing the Madhya Pradesh State Biodiversity Board, the speaker emphasizes the urgent need to address the conservation of lesser-known and threatened species. He highlights specific birds at risk, such as the Great Indian Bustard and the Lesser Florican, noting that their habitats are facing significant degradation. The workshop serves as a collaborative platform for technical experts and government officials to share research and strategize on protecting overlooked wildlife. By coordinating these efforts, the organizers



*Mr. Ajay Yadav, IFS
APCCF & Member Secretary,
MPSBB*

aim to establish a national milestone for biodiversity awareness and environmental action. This gathering encourages integrated discussion to better understand the current status and various threats facing rare species across India.

Panel on Commemoration of India's Glorious & Successful Crocodile Conservation Project (1975–2025)-an indicator of aquatic ecosystem health



Moderator



Dr. R.J. Rao, former Vice
Chancellor, BU, Bhopal



Panelists



Prof. B.C. Choudhury,
Former Senior Prof. WII
Dehradun



Mr. Subharanjan Sen,
PCCF-WL, Madhya Pradesh



Mr. Suhas Kumar, Former-
PCCF, Madhya Pradesh



Mr. R Sreenivasa Murthy, Retd.
IFS, State Coordinator, AWC
MP, Ex. Member Secretary
MPSBB



Dr. R.K. Sharma, Wildlife
Scientist & Ex. Forest Research
RO, Chambal Sanctuary



Mr. Tarun Nair, Lead – Programme
Makara, Wildlife Conservation
Trust, Mumbai

Key Insights

1. Crocodile conservation in India represents one of the country's earliest successful species recovery programmes, the 50-year journey from 1975 to 2025 combines scientific intervention, habitat protection, and long-term institutional commitment.
2. India's three native crocodilian species Gharial, Mugger, and Saltwater Crocodile face distinct ecological and management challenges, requiring species-specific conservation strategies.
3. Gharial conservation depends heavily on maintaining free-flowing river systems, nesting sandbanks, and ecological flows, while Mugger and Saltwater Crocodile conservation is closely tied to ecosystems integrity and human interface management.
4. Captive breeding and reintroduction programmes played a major role in early crocodile recovery, but long-term survival depends more on habitat security and reducing anthropogenic pressures.
5. River regulation, dams, sand mining, fishing pressure, nest flooding, and riverbank disturbance remain major threats, especially for Gharial populations in river sanctuaries like Chambal and Son.
6. Gharial has entered the illegal pet trade in the recent year and requires immediate enforcement attention
7. Human–crocodile negative interaction is increasing in certain landscapes, making coexistence strategies and local community engagement central to conservation success.
8. Crocodile conservation is also a river governance issue. Without healthy rivers, nesting habitat, and fish availability, species recovery cannot be sustained.

Key Policy Takeaways

1. Shift conservation focus from species-only recovery to long-term protection of river systems, nesting banks, wetlands, and ecological flows.
2. Regulate dam operations, sand mining, and unseasonal water releases that destroy nesting habitats and juvenile recruitment, especially for Gharial through enforcement of Section 29 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act on flow changes into protected stretches of rivers.
3. Formally recognize the lateral expanses of biodiversity rich rivers like Chambal to remove any legal ambiguity regarding inclusion of sand banks, floodplains, nesting sites on lands alongside river channels as part of the Wildlife Sanctuary to protect sand banks and nesting sites alongside the river from encroachment.
4. Conduct genetic studies of gharial populations across rainfed and snow-fed river systems to determine whether Chambal gharials represent a distinct conservation unit from Himalayan-fed populations.
5. Strengthen fishery regulation and reduce disturbance in breeding habitats to improve survival of hatchlings and breeding adults.
6. Build coexistence models with local fishing and river-dependent communities instead of conflict-based enforcement approaches alone.
7. Integrate crocodile conservation with basin-level planning involving Forest, Fisheries, Irrigation, and River Development authorities.
8. Recognise crocodiles as flagship species for river ecosystem conservation rather than only as protected reptiles.





Short Presentation on First Citizen Science Report on Vultures by R. Sreenivasa Murthy

SUMMARY: A short-format presentation was made by Mr Murthy marking the release of a long-delayed publication on vulture counts from the Panna–Ken River Valley landscape described as “India’s first citizen science report” on vultures. The publication had been in draft for roughly 12 years before finally being released at the 4th SNHC Conference. The publication is being distributed free of cost to support further conservation work.

Key Insights

1. Panna’s Ken River Valley is one of India’s most important vulture landscapes and functions as a true “Vulture Valley” and nursery for the larger Central Indian landscape.
2. A 35 km stretch of the Ken River valley recorded approximately 338 live nests in a single survey, with Panna Tiger Reserve overall supporting close to 400 live nests, making it an exceptional breeding landscape.
3. Before systematic work began, only four vulture species were commonly reported from the area; citizen-led surveys revealed much larger nesting populations and stronger landscape significance.
4. Large cliff systems along the Ken River provide ideal nesting habitat and make the valley a natural breeding stronghold for vultures.
5. The Panna model later inspired statewide replication, and Madhya Pradesh now records nearly 13,000 vultures statewide, showing the value of systematic monitoring.
6. Vulture conservation is directly linked to ecosystem services including safe carcass disposal, disease control, and ecological sanitation which makes them critical to both biodiversity and public health.



Key Policy Takeaways

1. Recognise the Ken River Valley in Panna as a priority Vulture Conservation Landscape and protect nesting cliffs, breeding colonies, and open foraging habitats.
2. Institutionalise citizen science-based monitoring models for vultures across Madhya Pradesh and other states instead of relying only on departmental surveys.
3. Assess ecological impacts of the Ken–Betwa river link project on Panna’s vultures such as large-scale water-body creation and habitat alteration may affect cliff-nesting conditions and carcass availability.

Dr. Shomita Mukherjee

Senior Principal Scientist
SACON-WII, Coimbatore



Profile: Dr. Shomita Mukherjee is currently employed at the Sálím Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, South-India Centre of the Wildlife Institute of India, in the Conservation Biology Division as a Senior Principal Scientist. Since the 1990's, she has been involved in multiple studies on several species of small cats in India exploring their diets, distributions and genetic aspects. Her work explores the link between ecology, evolution and genetic variation in small cats and how such information could contribute towards their conservation. She is a member of the IUCN Cat Specialist Group and the Species Survival Commission.

Chair: Mr. Jasbir Singh Chauhan (IFS Retd., Former PCCF Wildlife, MP)

Small carnivores in and around a pastoral land in Kachchh, Gujarat

SUMMARY: The 130 km² study area centred on Chadva Rakal, a 50 km² pastoral land owned historically by the erstwhile royal family of Bhuj and one of only two OECMs (Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures) of this type in India. The land is classified as “wasteland” in land-use records despite being ecologically a mosaic open natural ecosystem

Key Insights

1. “Wastelands” in Kachchh are biodiversity-rich Open Natural Ecosystems (ONE) supporting at least 12 wild carnivore species.
2. Chadva Rakhal, a pastoral landscape shows how biodiversity conservation can succeed in human-dominated land. Small carnivores coexist with Maldhari pastoral systems through spatial segregation and fine-scale habitat partitioning.
3. Habitat mosaics of grasslands, scrub, agricultural fields, water bodies, and hillocks together form a critical habitat mosaic for species survival.
4. “Common” species like jungle cat and rusty-spotted cat are often under greater threat than assumed. Common does not mean generalist or secure.
5. Camera-trap bycatch data from tiger monitoring is useful but cannot replace focused ecological studies. For instance, molecular scat analysis in this study found rusty-spotted cats widespread whereas camera traps missed them.
6. Caracal conservation requires habitat protection, not captive breeding. Low detections and captures do not justify captive intervention when decline is driven by land-use change.

Key Policy Takeaways

1. Include grasslands and scrublands in wildlife planning, land diversion approvals, and restoration policies.
2. Reclassify ecologically rich “wastelands” as Open Natural Ecosystems to prevent diversion for infrastructure and development.
3. Expand OECM recognition for biodiversity-rich pastoral and private landscapes outside protected areas.
4. Promote coexistence-based conservation by involving Maldharis and local communities in habitat stewardship.
5. Shift from flagship-species focus (like caracal) to ecosystem-based protection of the full habitat mosaic.
6. Recognise India's global duty-bearer status for jungle cat and rusty-spotted cat in national conservation frameworks.
7. Encourage multi-method sampling (camera trap + molecular scat + occupancy + community-based surveys) as the standard for small-carnivore baselines conducted by government.
8. Strengthen genetic studies, corridor mapping, and population monitoring for small carnivores outside tiger landscapes.
9. Simplify permits and improve funding support for long-term lesser-known species research.
10. Prioritise habitat security over captive breeding for naturally rare species like caracal and other small cats.

Mr. Sumit Dookia

Associate Professor, University School of Environment Management, GGSIP University, New Delhi Group



Profile: Working in the field of wildlife conservation since 1999, through PhD on Indian Gazelle or Chinkara and later worked on various large mammals from tiger to desert cat and foxes. Served in Zoological Survey of India as JRF, did Post Doc from Wildlife Institute of India, Scientist in BNHS Mumbai and also Assistant Professor in Govt. Lohia College, Churu before joining Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University (Govt of NCT of Delhi) in 2010. Having research and teaching experience of over 25 years, awarded DST Young Scientist Award cum Project in 2009. Successfully supervised 3 PhD students and completed 8 research projects funded by DST, UGC Major Project, MoEFCC, Ruffords Foundation (UK) and Oriental Bird Club (UK).

Working on Community Conservation theme for a long time in Western Rajasthan and developed the Great Indian Bustard Community Conservation Program in Jais-

almer landscape. Published over 120 research articles and having around 500 citations. Currently serving as Associate Professor in University School of Environment Management at GGS Indraprastha University, New Delhi.

Chair: Dr. Asad Rahmani, Veteran Ornithologist & Former Director BNHS, Mumbai

Conservation beyond protected area boundaries: Building community Youth Network for conservation of GIB in Western Rajasthan

SUMMARY: Dr. Dookia presented 25 years of community-rooted conservation work on the Great Indian Bustard (GIB) in Jaisalmer, western Rajasthan, largely pro bono and built around local volunteer networks rather than government funding. In his opening remarks, the chair Dr. Asad Rahmani set the context with the losses of GIB and lesser florican from Madhya Pradesh, the broader decline of grassland birds, and his framing of the “neglect of the majority”— the tendency for one or two flagship PAs (Kaziranga, Dudhwa) to overshadow dozens of neglected ones in the same state.

Key Insights

1. Great Indian Bustard conservation cannot succeed within protected areas alone; most critical habitats lie outside formal protected boundaries.
2. The current wild GIB population is extremely low (around 130–150 birds), with fragmented sub-populations that are not interacting, increasing extinction risk.
3. GIB requires large landscape-scale movement, with daily ranging of 2 km and use of up to 32 km² of area, making fenced or small protected zones inadequate for survival.
4. GIB coexists with livestock (cows, sheep, camels share the same landscape) - the threat is fencing of commons, not grazing.



5. Desert National Park remains a wildlife sanctuary on record; the 1981 proposal to upgrade it to a national park was never notified.
6. Local communities are the strongest conservation allies; trained village youth and volunteers can detect threats faster than formal systems.
7. Community empowerment creates both conservation outcomes and livelihoods through nature guides, local monitoring, and stewardship.
8. Power line collisions are a major cause of mortality, especially in non-protected landscapes far from Desert National Park.
9. Conservation should focus on protecting landscapes and habitats, not only species-specific protected zones, as the same landscapes also support species like caracal and other grassland fauna.

Key Policy Takeaways

1. Shift GIB conservation from PA-centric management to landscape-level conservation across entire grassland ecosystems.
2. Prioritise undergrounding, rerouting, or mitigating power lines in all GIB landscapes, not just inside protected areas.
3. Recognise and protect GIB habitats outside Desert National Park through conservation reserves, OECMs, and community stewardship models.
4. Formally notify Desert National Park's legal status and mandate a GIB population census every 3–4 years.
5. Build formal village-level conservation networks (GIB Mitras / volunteer systems) for rapid monitoring and local protection.
6. Support community-led ecotourism and nature guide programmes to link livelihoods with species conservation.
7. Avoid fencing of village commons; ensure free movement across habitat mosaics and ecological corridors.
8. Require ecological clearance before pesticide spraying operations in GIB habitat.
9. Plan for genetic connectivity between the isolated Pokhran and DNP sub-populations through corridor or managed-exchange interventions.
10. Integrate grassland conservation into mainstream land-use planning, as grasslands remain India's most neglected ecosystems.





Dr. Rajat Bhargava
Independent Ornithologist,
Meerut

Profile: A ornithologist by profession and passion, formerly working with BNHS as an Assistant Director. My main interest is conservation of threatened endemic Indian birds, with my favourite Finn's Weaver and Green Munia. Growing up as an aviculturist, my interest lies in Conservation Breeding.

Chair: Mr. R. Sreenivasa Murthy, IFS Retd, Former APCCF & Member Secretary, MPSBB

Conservation of Hill Myna - A case study from Chhattisgarh

SUMMARY: Dr. Rajat presented a 25-year perspective on the Hill Myna (*Gracula religiosa*), drawing from his fieldwork in Chhattisgarh. The talk broadened into a critique of India's wildlife trade enforcement, captive-breeding practice, rescue-centre protocols, and bird-park culture. The central thread was the pet trade as the species is the world's best vocal mimic of human speech, which has made it a high-value target for international trafficking.

Key Insights

1. Hill Myna decline is driven mainly by habitat loss and illegal trapping for the pet trade.
2. Protecting habitat and reducing trade pressure allowed Bastar Hill Myna populations to recover from near-extinction in 2000 to around 200–300 birds today.
3. Captive breeding alone is ineffective if founder populations are poorly selected, human-imprinted, or genetically unsuitable.
4. Subspecies identification is critical; releasing the wrong population in the wrong landscape can harm conservation outcomes.
5. DNA testing should be mandatory for captive founder stock to ensure correct sexing and genetic suitability before breeding programmes.
6. Synanthropic species like the common myna often displace Hill Mynas from limited tree cavities in core habitat, including inside protected areas.
7. Traditional and tribal knowledge on small-scale bird breeding can be useful and should be integrated into formal conservation strategies.
8. Large mature nesting trees remain essential; rapid loss of old trees threatens long-term survival even where protection improves.



Key Policy Takeaways

1. Prioritise habitat protection and anti-trade enforcement over captive-breeding-first approaches.
2. Strengthen monitoring and enforcement across the full trade chain including source landscapes in India and demand-side export routes through the Gulf and Southeast Asia.
3. Make DNA sexing and subspecies verification mandatory before any captive breeding or release programme.
4. Use founder birds only from core native populations; avoid human-imprinted individuals.
5. Employ trained ornithologists, aviculturists, and experienced bird handlers, including former bird trappers, in zoos and rescue centres.
6. Remove synanthropic species from core Hill Myna habitats where they compete for limited tree cavities.
7. Protect large nesting trees and key cavity-bearing tree species through habitat restoration and landscape-level planning.
8. Integrate local and tribal breeding knowledge into formal species recovery programmes.
9. Shift zoo and state funding from exotic bird parks toward conservation of native birds like Hill Myna and other threatened endemics, and include native birds in existing collections to generate awareness.



Dr. Rajendra Prasad Mishra

Deputy Director & Regional Head Central India, Wildlife Trust of India



Profile: Working as Deputy Director & Regional Head-Central India, Wildlife Trust of India.

Ph.D. on Wild buffalo (Maiden) in 2001.

28 years of experience in Wildlife conservation & management and Natural resource management.

Published 15 books, Workshop proceedings: 08, Research/technical reports 22, Research papers & articles in various National & International journals: 65 Served as a member of several national and state-level committees, like IUCN- SSC Asian Wild Cattle Specialist Group, NTCA (urgent appraisal and village relocation), Wildlife Advisory Board of MP & Chhattisgarh, Chhattisgarh state Biodiversity Board, Chhattisgarh state Tiger Conservation Foundation, Gate money, Flaxy fund, SoP of Elephant, Leopard and Sloth bear etc. Winner of Chhattisgarh State Biodiversity Conservation Award and Chhattisgarh State Wildlife Conservation Award

Chair: Dr. Shailendra Singh, IFS, Former APCCF, CG

Wild Buffalo in Central India

SUMMARY: Dr. Mishra (Deputy presented on the conservation status of the wild water buffalo (*Bubalus arnee*), India's third-largest land mammal after rhino and elephant, listed as endangered on the IUCN Red List, in Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, and on Appendix III of CITES. He drew on 25+ years of work on the species, including his PhD and a 2006–2025 WTI programme with the Chhattisgarh Forest Department that has included two rounds of translocations from Manas to Udanti.

Key Insights

1. Wild buffalo are important ecosystem grazers. Restoring their population also supports grassland ecosystem function.
2. Wild buffalo survives in very small, fragmented populations with fewer than 50 individuals across central India, compared to around 4,000 in North-East India.
3. Chhattisgarh holds the last major central Indian population and declared the wild buffalo as its State Animal in July 2001 to strengthen protection.
4. Small isolated herds, skewed sex ratios, and intraspecific male conflict increase inbreeding and local extinction risks.
5. Hybridisation with domestic buffalo is one of the key long-term threats, risking permanent loss of genetic purity.
6. Wild buffalo requires a specific habitat signature-grasslands, wetlands, perennial wallowing water bodies, coarse grasses, and low-disturbance landscapes that standard forest-management regimes rarely provide.
7. Translocated buffalo from Manas (Assam) adapted successfully in Udanti–Sitanadi (Chhattisgarh) across two rounds (2020 and 2023); both translocated females subsequently calved, demonstrating strong restoration potential.



Key Policy Takeaways

1. Prevent hybridisation by separating wild and domestic buffalo populations in critical habitats.
2. Mandate genetic verification of founder animals before any translocation, to confirm pure *Bubalus arnee* stock.
3. Identify and secure landscape connectivity between fragmented habitats to support long-term viability. Establish formal cross-state coordinations for a single central-India wild buffalo recovery plan.
4. Restore grassland–wetland mosaics and notify perennial wallowing water bodies for protection, rather than treating buffalo habitat as incidental to forest management.
5. Institute fire-management protocols for the dry-season grassland–forest mosaic in all wild buffalo ranges.
6. Reassess the potential future translocation in former ranges of the species, and fast-track central government approvals for the next round of translocations.



Dr. Jai Singh Parihar

Scientist (Retd), Space Applications
Centre, ISRO, Ahmedabad



Profile: (Born August 12, 1952); B.Sc. (Agri.), M.Sc. Agri. (Agronomy) and PhD, Environmental Biology worked at Space Applications Centre (SAC), Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), Ahmedabad for nearly 40 years. Superannuated as Outstanding Scientist. Held positions of Mission Director, Earth Observation Applications Mission (EOAM) and Dy. Director- Earth, Ocean, Atmosphere, Planetary Science and Applications Area (EPSA), Space Applications Centre. As the Project Director, guided formulation, validation and implementation of the concept of “Foresighting Agricultural output using Space, Agrometeorology and Land based observations (FASAL). It has been institutionalised by Ministry of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmer’s Welfare (GOI) by setting up “Mahalanobis National Crop Forecast Centre” (MNCFC), at New

Delhi. As the Mission Director- EOAM, coordinated and guided development of application on: a) Methane Emission from Wetland rice, b) Methane emission by cattle in India, c) Energy and Mass Exchange in Vegetative Systems, and d) Cropping systems analysis of Indo-Gangetic Plains (IGP) Region. Several national level projects- National Wetland, National Snow & Glacier, Coastal Zone, Desertification (For UNCCD). These have been developed and successfully implemented.

As the Task Executive Director, Agriculture Monitoring (AGMON) task of Group on Earth Observations (GEO)- An inter-governmental agency based in Geneva; coordinated formulation of Global Agriculture Monitoring programme (GEOGLAM). GEOGLAM has been hosted by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations (UN) under its Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS) on the recommendation of G-20 in 2013. Dr. J. S. Parihar conducted pioneering research on wildlife habitat suitability analysis and wildlife corridors mapping using geomatics, as early as in 1980’s. Later participated and led teams for studies on grasslands in Wildlife Protected Area (WPAs) and Niche modelling of Barasingha, Caracal and Giant Squirrel, using geomatics. Contributed in drafting the project proposal on “Restoration Ecology and Monitoring of Grasslands in Kanha Tiger Reserve” in 2023. Continuing to guide the project team for its implementation.

Recipient of several prestigious awards: i) Performance Excellence Award of Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) ii) Rafi Ahmed Kidwai award of Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR); iii) Bhaskara award of Indian Society of Remote Sensing (ISRS); iv) Space Science and Applications award of ISRO-ASI; v) Geospatial Excellence Awards (Team) by v.i) Geospatial Today, and v.ii) GIS Development.

Currently: Science Advisor, Restoration Ecology and monitoring of grasslands in KTR, Project of Kanha Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh Forest Department.

Member- Research Advisory Committee (2025-27), Central Institute for Arid zone Horticulture, ICAR, Bikaner.

Chair: Mr. Jasbir Singh Chauhan (IFS Retd., Former PCCF Wildlife, MP)

Geomatics applications for lesser-known wildlife species: retrospect, prospect and challenges

SUMMARY: Dr. Parihar presented four decades of geomatics work applied to Indian wildlife covering remote sensing, GIS, GPS positioning, and modelling tools as an integrated toolkit. Case studies spanned Kanha barasingha habitat modelling, the Kuno-Chambal caracal habitat model, Indian giant squirrel distribution, grassland NDVI monitoring in Kanha, and corridor mapping done in 1982–85 whose ISRO report was eventually accepted by a Supreme Court committee in 2008. The session was chaired by Mr. Jasbir Singh Chauhan, a long-standing collaborator on the Kanha work.

Key Insights

1. Conservation decisions for lesser-known species must be based on landscape-scale habitat understanding, not species observations alone.
2. Geomatics supports conservation planning beyond protected areas by identifying ecological linkages across agricultural landscapes, forest edges, and community-managed spaces.
3. Unlike flagship species, lesser-known wildlife often lacks long-term field datasets; geomatics helps identify habitat distribution, movement corridors, seasonal patterns, and ecological change at landscape scale.

4. Temporal monitoring is as important as spatial mapping. Regular satellite observation on a fixed decadal schedule helps track seasonal habitat changes, continuity of landscapes and tracking impact of development projects on wildlife habitats.
5. High-resolution satellite imagery and drone-based monitoring are especially useful for wetlands, grasslands, river systems, caves, nesting grounds, and fragmented habitats where lesser-known species persist.
6. Buffer-zone cropping change has systematic wildlife consequences. For instance, the sorghum–urad–arhar cycle in Sheopur (adjacent to Kuno) has been replaced by irrigated rice, removing tall vegetation cover used by multiple species.

Key Policy Takeaways

1. Make geomatics-based habitat monitoring a standard tool in wildlife management plans and develop standard protocols for seasonal satellite monitoring of wildlife habitats using field validation.
2. Use NDVI and phenology mapping to guide grassland restoration, fodder planning, and habitat improvement.
3. Use predictive habitat modelling to identify undocumented or poorly studied habitats for reptiles, amphibians, insects, bats, freshwater species, and grassland fauna.
4. Strengthen collaboration between ISRO institutions, forest departments, universities, and field biologists for applied conservation mapping.
5. Train forest field staff in GIS interpretation and actionable habitat mapping, not just species monitoring.
6. Factor buffer-zone agricultural policy (cropping patterns, irrigation shifts) into wildlife policy rather than treating them as separate domains.
7. Use geomatics for monitoring infrastructure impacts such as of roads, dams, mining, plantations, and river-linking projects on lesser-known species habitats.
8. Shift policy focus from species-centric protection to ecosystem-based planning supported by spatial data and long-term monitoring.



Dr. Nidhi Rana

Research Affiliate, Graphic Era –
Deemed to be University, Dehradun



Profile: She has completed my Ph.D. research on the fireflies of the Doon Valley, Uttarakhand, under the guidance of Dr. V. P. Uniyal and Dr. Rajesh Rayal. For over five years, She has been actively involved in studying firefly diversity in the Western Himalayan region, Her work primarily focuses on documenting species diversity and understanding the ecological roles of fireflies, alongside efforts aimed at their conservation. In addition to research, She has organized several awareness workshops to engage and educate diverse communities about the importance of fireflies and the threats they face. From 2021 to 2025, we successfully led a nationwide firefly survey, aiming to gather comprehensive data on their distribution and promote conservation initiatives across India.

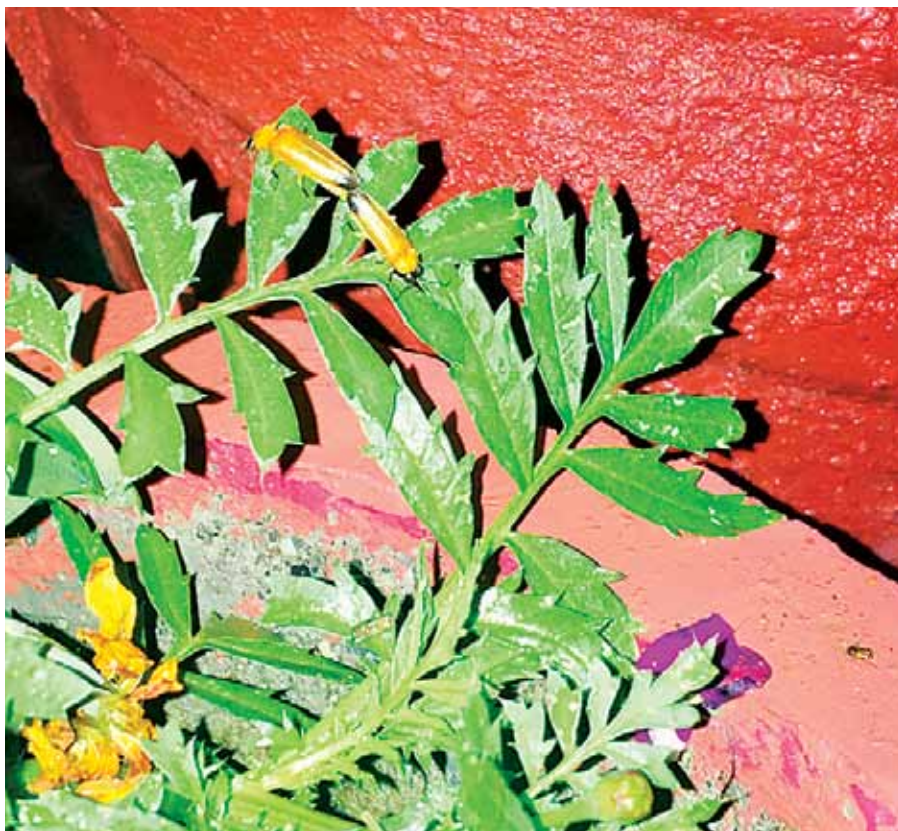
Chair: Dr. V.P. Uniyal, Professor, Graphic Era University; Former Scientist-G, WII

Firefly of the Western Himalaya: Diversity, Pressures and Conservation Strategies

SUMMARY: Dr. Rana presented their five years of PhD-level fieldwork on fireflies in the Doon Valley. The talk covered firefly biology, habitat associations, anthropogenic pressures (particularly light pollution), and a citizen-science programme built around World Firefly Day since 2021.

Key Insights

1. Fireflies are soft-bodied beetles and strong bioindicators of healthy ecosystems due to their sensitivity to habitat change and artificial light.
2. The study documented 6 firefly species under 3 genera- *Abscondita*, *Lamprigera*, and *Asymmetricata* in Doon Valley.
3. Firefly larvae act as natural bio-control agents by feeding on snails and slugs, supporting ecological balance in gardens and forests.
4. Habitat fragmentation, blue LED light pollution, pesticide use, and vegetation removal are major drivers of population decline.
5. Fireflies prefer low-disturbance habitats, but vegetation diversity often matters more than disturbance level alone.
6. Citizen-science surveys on World Firefly Day helped document firefly occurrence across ~20+ states and improved public awareness.



Key Policy Takeaways

1. Recognise fireflies as indicator species and include them in biodiversity monitoring and forest health assessments.
2. Regulate LED lighting and promote dark-sky policies near forests, wetlands, and riparian habitats.
3. Incorporate light-pollution criteria into ecological clearance for construction and infrastructure projects in known firefly habitats.
4. Avoid blanket vegetation removal during restoration; retain suitable shrub and resting vegetation for fireflies.
5. Reduce pesticide use around forest edges, agricultural landscapes, and riparian habitats.
6. Expand citizen-science firefly surveys through forest departments, universities, and local communities for national-level mapping.
7. Integrate fireflies and other bioindicator invertebrates into state biodiversity action plans.
8. Develop firefly watching tourism and firefly sanctuaries in suitable landscapes for conservation-linked livelihoods.



A Panel on Future of Indian Rivers, their Health, Biodiversity & Ecosystem services - Issues, Concerns & Way Forward



Moderator



Mr. Saurabh Popli, Associate Professor, Dept. of Landscape, SPA Bhopal



Speakers



Mr. R. Sreenivasa Murthy (IFS Retd., Former APCCF & Member Secretary, MPSBB)



Mr. Tarun Nair, Lead – Programme Makara, Wildlife Conservation Trust, Mumbai



Prof. Vipin Vyas, Barkatullah University, Bhopal



Mrs. Sharda Kosankar, Principal Scientist & Associate Professor, AcSIR, CSIR-NEERI

SUMMARY: The panel debated the current state of Indian rivers and the adequacy of existing protocols, institutions, and legal frameworks to sustain them as living ecosystems. Discussion ranged across hydrological flows, sand mining, dam-led habitat loss, inter-linking projects, riparian zone degradation, institutional fragmentation, and legal personhood for rivers.

Key Insights

1. Rivers must be understood as complete ecosystems, and not merely channels carrying water, but living systems supporting biodiversity, sediment flow, floodplains, groundwater recharge, and livelihoods.
2. Around 70% of Indian rivers are in degrading condition; CPCB data shows only 55 of 351 polluted stretches identified in 2018 had been cleaned by 2025.
3. India still lacks strong institutional and legal frameworks for river protection, including clear riparian zone management policies and defined river boundaries; e-flow provisions in the 2012 National River Policy remain non-mandatory.
4. Encroachment into floodplains, channelization, dams, mechanised sand mining, pollution, excessive extraction, and river-linking projects are major drivers of river degradation. Examples were cited from Chambal river where a sand deposit that was once a prime gharial and skimmer nesting habitat was lost to illegal activities.
5. Environmental flows are essential for river health, but existing policy does not mandate water allocation to ecosystems; Ken-Betwa and similar inter-linking projects rely on limited data to justify “surplus water” claims.
6. Rivers have both longitudinal and lateral connectivity; disrupting floodplains and riparian systems weakens the entire ecological function of the river. Engineering approaches that treat rivers as “pipes” ignore ecological realities.
7. Aquatic biodiversity indicators like Gangetic dolphin, skimmers, native fishes, and even organisms found on a single river stone can reveal river health better than engineering metrics alone.
8. India has been energy-surplus since 2014, weakening the case for new large dams; international evidence (Aral Sea, Louisiana delta, Yangtze) shows ecosystems recover after dam decommissioning.

Key Policy Takeaways

1. Develop a national legal framework for riparian zone management, floodplain protection, and clear ecological demarcation of river boundaries. Laws such as Riparian Regulation Zone must be notified.
2. Make ecological flow requirements and sediment-impact assessment based on historical data mandatory in river basin planning before allocating water for irrigation, industry, and proposing any infrastructure projects such as dams and large-scale basin-modification projects.
3. Reassess river-linking and large infrastructure projects like dams and thermal plants through full ecological impact evaluation, not only engineering feasibility including cumulative-impact EIA across projects in the basin.
4. Prohibit development projects on floodplains (such as riverfront development, parks, etc) and river channelization efforts that disconnects rivers from their natural lateral systems.
5. Use biodiversity indicators (dolphins, fish, skimmers, aquatic insects, benthic life) as formal river health indicators in monitoring systems.
6. Bring water resource departments, irrigation agencies, and biodiversity institutions into the same decision-making platform instead of working in silos.

Dr. Shriparna Saxena

Professor & Head, Dept. of Aquaculture, SAGE University, Bhopal



Profile: 32 year's research experience in Inland fisheries development, habitat characterization, assessment of fish diversity and fisheries, conservation biology, stock characterization and impact of climate change on inland fisheries and developing adaptation and mitigation measures. Ecosystem based fisheries in the open waters and vulnerability assessment. Assessment of Water Quality. Riverine Ecology. Applied Aquaculture.

- Vigyan Bhushan. Awarded by NCSTC- Department of Science and Technology, New Delhi 2018. For outstanding Leadership and contributions for the popularization of science in community and Learners of science in school of M.P State.
- State Biodiversity Award Outstanding contribution in the field of Mahseer Conservation (State Fish of MP) 2018.
- Bhumi Samman. Conferred on International Women Day for the Outstanding contribution in the field of Biodiversity Conservation.

Chair: Mr. R. Sreenivasa Murthy (IFS Retd., State Coordinator AWC MP, Ex. Member Secretary, MPSBB)

State Fish of MP, Mahseer (Tor tor), Status and Conservation Strategy

SUMMARY: Dr. Shriparna Saxena who has been researching for over three decades on freshwater ecosystems, and aquatic biodiversity presented their observations on the status and conservation of the Mahseer (Tor tor), the State Fish of Madhya Pradesh. The talk drew on her MP State Biodiversity Board-funded projects along the Narmada and introduced her proposed conservation framework and the MIRACLE strategy (Mapping, Involvement, Research, Advocacy, Conservation measures, Livelihood connection, Extension).

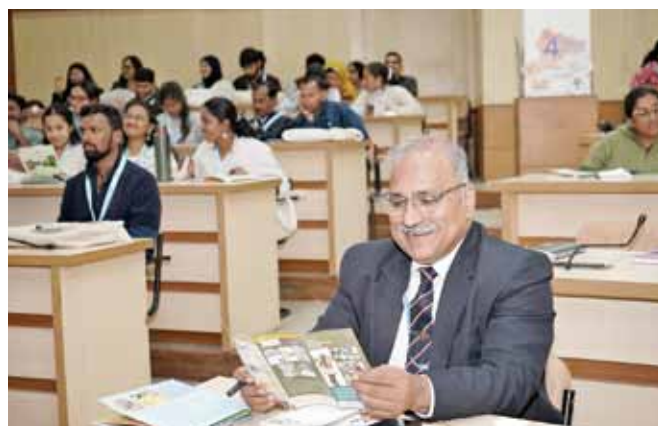
Key Insights

1. Mahseer (Tor tor), the State Fish of Madhya Pradesh, has declined to less than 2% of former levels in the open Narmada with decline of over 80% over a 60-year span.
2. Mahseer is already locally extinct in three central Indian basins: the Mahi, the Kwari, and the Tons sub-basin.
3. Forested river stretches are the last strongholds of Mahseer, and foresters are the primary custodians of these habitats.
4. Mahseer is a flagship indicator of clean rivers and healthy freshwater ecosystems
5. Habitat degradation, migration barriers, brood fish killing, illegal fishing, and spawning-ground destruction are the main causes of decline.
6. Hatchery-bred Mahseer released in the Deccan has driven out the endemic Hump-backed Mahseer, a direct evidence that ex-situ breeding without ecological scrutiny can accelerate species loss.
7. Mahseer taxonomy remains ambiguous. Central Indian populations may be pure Tor tor or hybrids between Tor tor and Tor putitora, requiring genetic clarification.
8. The Narmada has three confirmed Mahseer breeding grounds- Omkareshwar, Choral, and Barwaha requiring dedicated protection.
9. Captive breeding is useful, but ex-situ conservation alone cannot save Mahseer; in-situ breeding and habitat protection are essential.
10. Community-led patrolling converted poachers into river guards, linking livelihoods with conservation success.



Key Policy Takeaways

1. Prepare a detailed Mahseer Atlas for all river systems of Madhya Pradesh to identify priority conservation stretches. Protect spawning and nursery grounds through strict in-situ habitat conservation in forested watersheds and notifying critical river stretches and tributaries as Mahseer conservation reserves or sanctuaries.
2. Policies for restricting hatchery releases of non-endemic Mahseer species into river systems.
3. Clarify the taxonomic status of Tor tor populations through genetic study for accurate IUCN evaluation and conservation planning.
4. Control unlawful fishing and brood fish harvesting during breeding migration through strict seasonal enforcement. Develop an immediate action plan for securing key habitats and regulating commercial fishing pressure.
5. Support local fishing communities as conservation partners, with institutionalised support during closed breeding seasons, independent of project cycles.
6. Create an integrated Mahseer management strategy involving Forest, Fisheries, Irrigation, and River Basin agencies..
7. Mobilise greater funding and develop capacity to support and sustain long-term conservation programmes of fishes like Mahseer.



Mr. Tarun Nair

Lead – Programme Makara, Wildlife Conservation Trust



Profile: He is a conservation biologist with an affinity with crocodilians and rivers. His work largely focused on understanding the conservation needs of gharials in North-Central India, particularly along the Chambal, Son and Gandak Rivers. He is also interested in human-wildlife interactions, conservation philosophy, policy, and the human impacts on wildlife and ecosystems.

He has been interested in wildlife and wild places ever since he can remember, and his first chance at being able to work with wildlife came immediately after high school. He opted out of formal education and spent the next three or so years as a wildlife rescue-and-rehabilitation volunteer, and monitoring wildlife crime — the pet trade, wild meat, performance animals, quackery and ritual hunting. An accident forced him back into higher secondary school which, luckily, was The Valley School — a wooded campus adjacent to a Reserved Forest. He completed his graduation through

open-university whilst still staying involved with conservation-related work, and a M.Sc. in Wildlife Biology and Conservation, soon after, helped pursue a career in conservation biology.

Chair: Mr. K. Raman (IFS Retd., Former APCCF, MP)

Ecological flow of Rivers: A study to access the impact on Aquatic & Avi-Fauna, dependent on River Hydrology

SUMMARY: Mr. Tarun Nair presented findings from a study of ecological flows in the Son Gharial Sanctuary, a 210 km stretch downstream of the Bansagar Dam in Madhya Pradesh

Key Insights

1. Ecological flow means “water for nature”, the quantity, timing, and quality of flow needed to sustain river ecosystems, not just leftover water after human use. Ecological flows are different from environmental flows as they prioritise ecosystem function itself rather than only human use or pollution control.
2. There is no single “minimum flow” number; species depend on seasonal flow variation and natural hydrographs, not fixed discharge values.
3. Rivers require both longitudinal flow and lateral connectivity with floodplains, wetlands, and riparian zones for full ecological functioning.
4. In the Son River, Bansagar Dam has created ecologically degraded stretches downstream the dam, with flow sustained mainly by tributaries like Banas and Gopad.
5. Official dam flow data is often grossly inaccurate. For instance, there was a significant discrepancy between the dry season flow measured by independent instrumentation when compared to figures claimed by the Bansagar Dam authority.
6. Hydrological data for all Gangetic basin rivers is treated as classified by the Central Water Commission, requiring independent field instrumentation for any conservation assessment.
7. Sudden unseasonal dam discharge floods gharial and skimmer nesting sites and creates ecological traps. Such species respond to water-level changes as breeding cues, then get stranded when levels drop.
8. Section 29 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, which requires Chief Wildlife Warden approval for any change in water flow into a protected area, is routinely violated in practice.
9. Long-lived reptile populations mask recruitment failure. Adults accumulate over years so population counts appear stable, but cohort collapses become visible only 30–40 years later.



Key Policy Takeaways

1. Define ecological flows legally and allocate them before irrigation, hydropower, and industrial use.
2. Regulate dam operations to avoid sudden unseasonal releases that destroy nesting sites and breeding habitats. Enforce Section 29 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act which would require Chief Wildlife Warden approval before any dam releases water (increase or decrease) into protected areas containing aquatic fauna.
3. Replace fixed minimum-flow thinking with seasonality-based flow regimes that mimic natural hydrographs, using the life-history hydrologic method where species breeding biology is known.
4. Protect and restore longitudinal and lateral connectivity by safeguarding floodplains, wetlands, riparian zones, and sediment transport, including mandated flushing flows during reservoir filling.
5. Reject the “species will adapt to stochastic events” framing in environmental approvals for dams as evolutionary adaptation timescales do not match anthropogenic change rates.
6. Monitor gharial, fish, dolphins, skimmers, and benthic species as formal indicators of river health and flow quality, with cohort-structure monitoring for long-lived reptiles.
7. Strengthen basin-level governance and revise inter-state water agreements such as the Son tripartite agreement between MP, UP, and Bihar to formally incorporate ecological flow requirements.
8. Declassify or share CWC hydrological data from Gangetic basin rivers, at least for biodiversity rich stretches of rivers and their tributaries with state forest departments and research institutions.



Dr. Yash Veer Bhatnagar
Country Representative, IUCN India



Profile: Dr. Yash Veer Bhatnagar, PhD, is the Country Representative of the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) India office (since November 2022). He brings over three decades of work experience in conservation science and practice, and in programme development and management nationally and internationally. He has led and facilitated multi-stakeholder partnerships across India with government agencies including the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change (MOEFCC) and state forest departments, NGOs, universities, and private-sector organisations.

He has served as a scientist with the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Dehradun, an autonomous body under the MOEFCC (1999-2003) till he joined the Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF), Mysore, as Senior Scientist where he served as the Country Programme Director for the Snow Leopard Trust (SLT) India. He joined the Global Snow Leopard Ecosystem Protection (GSLEP) Programme Secretariat in Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic as Landscape Management

Planning Coordinator. Dr. Bhatnagar holds a PhD and master's in wildlife science from Saurashtra University/WII, and master's and bachelor's degrees in agriculture from G. B. Pant University of Agriculture & Technology, India. His primary interests are in enabling science based, participatory conservation at scale that effectively involves all stakeholders, including community, government, and private sector.

IUCN National Red Listing: Access, Plan & Act for Species Conservation

SUMMARY: Dr. Bhatnagar presented an overview of the IUCN's role in species conservation, the Red List assessment process, and the collaborative national effort to assess and prioritise Indian species by 2030. IUCN is the largest international conservation union, established by the UN General Assembly in 1948, operating through seven commissions with over 17,000 expert members; the Species Survival Commission alone has around 11,000 members.

Key Insights

1. IUCN Red Listing is a scientific process to assess extinction risk using population trends, range, threats, habitat condition, and ecological context.
2. Only about 5% of India's 1.5 lakh documented flora and fauna have been assessed, creating a major conservation knowledge gap. Only around 8,000 Indian species have been assessed globally, out of ~48,000 worldwide.
3. Most Indian species are assessed only at the global scale, which often hides severe national-level declines. For eg. The Tibetan gazelle is "near threatened" globally but has only ~200 individuals remaining in Ladakh and Sikkim.
4. National Red Listing is necessary to reflect India-specific extinction risks and improve legal and management decisions.
5. Current Wildlife Protection Act schedules do not always reflect real conservation urgency; for example, both peafowl and Great Indian Bustard are Schedule I despite very different extinction risks. Lesser-known species such as Forest Owlet, Lesser Florican, Mahseer, Pangolin, and Central Indian Leaf-nosed Bat need the same evidence-based prioritisation as flagship species.
6. India's Vision 2025–2030 for the National Red List Assessment is targeting 11,000 species assessed by 2030 through a partnership between IUCN India, the Ministry of Environment, ZSI, BSI, and WTI's Centre for Species Survival, with close to 100 assessors already trained.
7. The conservation pathway should follow Assess> Plan> Act> Communicate> Network, linking science directly to field action and policy.

Key Policy Takeaways

1. Accelerate National Red Listing for Indian species and prepare National Red Data Books for priority taxa and threatened endemic species.
2. Establish and strengthen a National Species Specialist Group (NSSG) for rigorous scientific assessment, peer review, and Red List validation.
3. Use Red List outcomes to identify Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs) and guide NBSAP / SBSAP, species recovery plans, and habitat prioritisation.
4. Use National Red Listing to directly inform species recovery plans for CR, EN, and VU species, especially lesser-known taxa. This may be done by linking the Schedules under the Wildlife Protection Act to the extinction-risk categories (e.g., Schedule I–CR, Schedule I–LC) for better prioritisation.
5. Use Red List data to steer conservation finance, public communication and policy reforms.



Mr. Gautam Kadam

PhD Research Scholar, Sacred Heart College Kochi, MGU, Kottayam



Profile: I am a PhD scholar at Sacred Heart College, Kerala. My research focuses on arachnid taxonomy, covering spiders, Amblypygi and Opiliones. To date I have described 16 new spider species from across India and am now studying the ecology, taxonomy and illegal trade of tarantulas in the country.

Chair: Dr. VP Uniyal, Professor, Graphic Era University; Scientist-G (Former), WII

An Integrative Approach to Systematics, Ecology, and Conservation of Indian Ornamental Tarantulas

SUMMARY: Mr. Kadam presented on Indian tarantulas, their taxonomy, ecology, and the threat posed by the illegal pet trade. India is home to 125 old world spiders with 98% endemic to the country. The talk covered his rediscovery of the Salem Ornamental Tarantula (*Poecilotheria formosa*) at the Tamil Nadu-Karnataka border. He also spoke about his ongoing PhD on the critically endangered Peacock Spider (*Poecilotheria metallica*).

Key Insights

1. Indian ornamental tarantulas (*Poecilotheria* spp.) are ancient mygalomorph spiders and often referred to as “living fossils” due to their high evolutionary, ecological, and conservation significance.
2. They are important ecosystem indicators, natural pest controllers, and many species are highly endemic with very restricted geographic ranges.
3. India has around 65 true tarantula species, with *Poecilotheria* being the key ornamental arboreal genus found mainly in the Western Ghats, Eastern Ghats, and Deccan Plateau.
4. The entire *Poecilotheria* genus (Indian tiger spiders) is listed on CITES Appendix II, and 22 Indian tarantula species are in Schedule II of the Wildlife (Protection) Act — but enforcement is weak on the ground.
5. Illegal pet trade is the biggest threat driven by attractiveness, rarity, long lifespan, and high collector demand. Juveniles are openly sold through social media and urban hubs.
6. Trade direction has reversed. Although endemic to India, these animals are captive bred outside of India and then supplied world over. Most current smuggling brings exotic tarantulas from Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Myanmar) into India, exploiting weak airport enforcement and the fact that small arachnids are invisible to standard baggage scanners. Bengaluru, Chennai, Mumbai and Kolkata are major hubs of trade in India.
7. Habitat loss from mining, coffee plantations, afforestation with unsuitable species, and loss of cavity-bearing native trees is causing rapid decline. Species like the Salem Ornamental Tarantula have already been extirpated from its 1899 type locality.
8. Tarantulas show strong microhabitat specificity — they depend on specific tree cavities, especially in native trees like *Albizia*, with low canopy cover, little leaf litter, and downward-facing cavities of particular dimensions.
9. Lesser-known spider diversity in Central India remains poorly studied. M.P. is home to a total 336 species of spiders belonging to 136 genera and 30 families. There is no published record of any tarantula from the State.



Key Policy Takeaways

1. Recognise spiders as ecosystem indicators, and include their habitat protection and improvement as part of State wildlife surveys, management/ working plan and ecological restoration projects.
2. Encourage and support field surveys and taxonomic documentation in lesser explored habitats, especially in central Indian States for undocumented primitive spider diversity.
3. Invest in Indian research on tarantula venom, silk, and medical applications, currently dominated by European and US small industries.
4. Prioritise enforcement of illegal wildlife trade and CITES obligations for tarantulas by monitoring of its trade routes, social media market, and urban wildlife markets.
5. Strengthen awareness and training for customs officers, forest departments, and enforcement agencies, where identification capacity is currently weak.



Dr. V.P. Uniyal

(Senior Professor and Scientist-G (Former), WII; Professor, Graphic Era University; Co-Chair, IUCN Tiger Beetle Specialist Group – Asia region)



Profile: Dr. V. P. Uniyal is a distinguished Scientist and ecologist, formerly serving as Scientist-G and Senior Professor at the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun. He holds a Ph.D. in

Zoology from Kurukshetra University, Haryana. With over three decades of dedicated service to the field of biodiversity and natural heritage conservation, Dr. Uniyal has made exceptional contributions to Himalayan ecology, biodiversity assessment, ecosystem services, and the development of long-term ecological monitoring strategies. Dr. Uniyal's research integrates field-based ecological studies with community mobilization, engaging ethnic stakeholders within the Protected Area Networks of the Indian Western and Trans-Himalaya. This approach has yielded novel insights into Himalayan faunal ecology, amalgamating indigenous traditional knowledge and innovative conservation strategies.

As a distinguished entomologist, he has led pioneering research on arthropod ecology, establishing invertebrates as bioindicators to assess ecological health in Himalayan landscapes and gauge community responses to anthropogenic and climate mediated changes. His research has culminated to more than 135 research papers, four influential books, and a multitude of scientific reports. His mentorship has guided over 25 Ph.D.

students and supported the research endeavors of 35 Master dissertations. His significant contributions extend beyond research, as he has played a pivotal role in national and international ecological expeditions. These include the Nanda Devi Ecological Expedition in 2001 and invertebrate assessments in the Kailash Mansarovar region in 2014 under the Kailash Sacred Landscape Project of the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), Kathmandu, Nepal. In recognition of his outstanding contributions, Dr. Uniyal received a lifetime achievement award from the Indian Science Congress Association in 2019 (Amravati Chapter), and was honored as one of India top 50 research guides by the Academic Council of uLektz.

Dr. Uniyal has also served as a consultant for several esteemed international organizations such as The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) with Ministry of Forests and Environment (MoFE), Govt. of Nepal and Kerala Forest Research Institute (KFRI), Peechi India, for building capacities to improve and sustain forest health to enhance the resilience of forests and livelihoods of forest-dependent communities in Nepal, and GIZ on the sustainable management of forest ecosystem services. As an academician, Dr. Uniyal is a member of academic council and boards of studies of various Indian universities and shared his research findings with numerous international research institutions and universities across the globe, including Japan, China, Italy, Greece, Austria, Switzerland, Scotland, USA, UK, Germany, Sri Lanka and Nepal, to Name a few.

In recognition of his profound contributions to arthropod research, Dr. Uniyal has been honored with a sac spider species named *Clubiona uniyali* (Araneae: Clubionidae), discovered from Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve. This recognition not only celebrates his extensive work but also his enduring impact on the study and conservation of lesser-known biodiversity across the Himalaya.

Tiger Beetles of India

SUMMARY: Dr Uniyal presented on tiger beetles (family Cicindelidae) as indicators of ecosystem health.. He positioned tiger beetles within a wider argument about invertebrate bioindicators (ants, dragonflies, butterflies, spiders, native bees) being systematically neglected in Indian wildlife planning. The talk also flagged the under-recognised illegal trade in beetles, butterflies, and other insects for textile design, fashion, and artificial jewellery, noting India's position as a source country for these routes through northeastern trade corridors to Nepal and onward to Southeast Asia.



Key Insights

1. Tiger beetles (Cicindelidae) are highly effective bioindicators because they are extremely sensitive to habitat disturbance, soil condition, moisture, vegetation structure, and riverbank health.
2. In the Indian subcontinent, 247 tiger beetle species are documented, with 127 endemic to India.
3. Strong correlation was observed between tiger beetle diversity and bird and butterfly diversity, confirming their usefulness for rapid ecosystem health monitoring.
4. Different species indicate specific habitats - riverine systems, pine forests, agricultural land, high canopy forests, and vertical forest strata each support distinct tiger beetle assemblages.

5. Insect trade involving beetles, butterflies, and other insects for jewellery, textiles, fashion, and decorative industries remains poorly recognised despite high commercial value.
6. The broader invertebrate indicator case extends beyond tiger beetles as insects like ants, dragonflies, native soil-nesting bees, and butterflies are all under-studied despite established indicator roles.

Key Policy Takeaways

1. Include tiger beetles as formal biodiversity indicators in forest monitoring, river health assessment, and conservation planning.
2. Use tiger beetle assemblages for rapid habitat-quality evaluation in protected areas, riverbanks, plantations, and restoration landscapes.
3. Integrate insect monitoring with bird and butterfly surveys for stronger landscape-level biodiversity assessment, and extend this framework to ants, dragonflies, and native bees.
4. Recognise communal roosting and congregation sites (such as Jamun and Carissa patches) of these insects as microhabitats requiring habitat protection.
5. Strengthen regulation of hidden insect trade through customs surveillance, online market monitoring, and awareness among enforcement agencies.
6. Mainstream World Tiger Beetle Day (11 November) into forest department calendars and schools alongside existing pollinator and firefly observances.
7. Expand conservation policy beyond charismatic megafauna to include insects with major ecological, indicator, and economic importance.



Ms Prachi Hatkar

Senior Project Officer, ARC for Ecology
& Conservation, DES, Pune University



Profile: She is a marine conservationist and researcher currently serving as a Senior Research Officer at the Deccan Ecological Society, Pune University, Maharashtra. She previously worked as a Project Associate on the CAMPA Recovery of Dugongs and Their Habitats in India project at the Wildlife Institute of India. She completed her PhD in Zoology, specialising in marine macrobenthic communities in seagrass ecosystems, from the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda.

Dr. Hatkar is the first Indian woman to receive an international diving grant from the Women Divers Hall of Fame and is a certified PADI Open Water Diver. Her research emphasizes dugong habitat assessment in the Gulf of Kutch, community-based marine conservation, and leveraging flagship species for marine biodiversity protection. She is a member of the IUCN's Commission on Education and Communication (CEC) and the

World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA). She has authored 19 publications and 23 technical reports, aiding policymakers and stakeholders in developing action plans for endangered marine species. She serves on the Research Committee of the IMO GloNoise Project under the Directorate General of Shipping, and is an advisor on marine robotics for Andromeda Maritime Solutions Pvt. Ltd. A finalist for the WeNaturalist Conservationist of the Year – Marine Award, Hatkar's work has been featured in podcasts, newspapers, and blogs. She contributes to academia as Associate Editor of Progress in Aqua Farming and Marine Biology (PAFMB) and as a reviewer for the Uttar Pradesh Journal of Zoology and Chronicle Of Aquatic Science.

Chair: Prof. B.C. Choudhury, Former Senior Professor, WII Dehradun

Meet the Mermaids of the Ocean - Dugong

SUMMARY: Dr. Hatkar presented on the dugong (Dugong dugon) which is referred to as India's only herbivorous marine mammal and the State Animal of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The talk covered dugong biology, the three Indian sub-populations, field methods developed for a shy, murky-water species, threats from fishing, pollution, and hunting, and outputs of the WII dugong conservation action plan running since 2017.

Key Insights

1. Dugong (sea cow) is the only existing marine mega-herbivore and the only completely herbivorous marine mammal, feeding entirely on seagrass beds.
2. Dugong is Critically Endangered in India, with fewer than 200 individuals left and highly fragmented populations across three coastal regions (Gulf of Kachchh, Tamil Nadu / Palk Bay–Gulf of Mannar, and Andaman & Nicobar Islands).
3. Dugongs are closely related to elephants evidenced by rudimentary tusks used in fighting and mating rituals and serve as flagship species for marine ecosystem conservation because protecting them protects seagrass ecosystems.
4. Seagrass beds support fisheries, carbon storage, biodiversity, and coastal resilience; dugongs maintain these systems through grazing and habitat shaping.
5. Net entanglement, illegal shore seine nets, boat strikes, hunting, habitat loss, and pollution are the major threats, with fisheries-related mortality being the most immediate risk.
6. Indian dugongs form a unique genetic lineage, making national conservation especially important for global species survival.
7. Heavy metal contamination (arsenic, cadmium, chromium, mercury, lead) and micro-filament ingestion show serious long-term toxicological risks.
8. The first live dugong sighting in the Gulf of Kachchh in decades was recorded in 2021 via drone survey, and 28 strandings docu-



mented in the Gulf show evidence of an actively breeding population previously thought locally extinct.

9. Dugongs live up to ~70 years but have extremely slow reproductive rates (around 14 calves per female over a lifetime, with two years of mother-calf dependency) - making recovery a multi-decade proposition.

Key Policy Takeaways

1. Protect and restore seagrass beds as the primary strategy for dugong recovery
2. Strengthen fisheries regulation by reducing shore seine nets, trawl pressure, and accidental net entanglement in dugong habitats.
3. Expand protected areas like India's first Dugong Conservation Reserve in Palk Bay, Tamil Nadu, and secure more dugong habitats through marine reserve planning.
4. Build stronger enforcement capacity through Indian Coast Guard, Forest Department, Marine Police, and local fisher engagement.
5. Expand Dugong Volunteers networks, scholarship programmes, and coastal awareness campaigns including World Dugong Day (28 May) to make community-led marine conservation sustainable.
6. Recognise seagrass ecosystems as national biodiversity and blue-carbon priorities under coastal and climate policy, not only as supporting habitat for dugongs.



Mr. Nitin Kaushal

Director – Rivers, Wetlands & Water Policy, WWF India



Profile: Water Resources Management & Environment Conservation Expert with over 24 years of working experience in international NGO, multinational consultancy firm and in an organization set-up by the Government of India. The expertise includes – research, projects and programmes implementation, involving integrated water resources management, river basin management, in general and Environmental Flows, Water Allocations and Water Policy in specific. Besides this, another area of expertise includes environmental aspects in hydropower development. Besides this, he has sound understanding and working exposure to participatory irrigation management and Water Users Associations.

Specialized experience in programmes of multilateral funding agencies including the World Bank assisted Water Sector Restructuring Projects, internationally

funded Corporate Social Responsibility projects and Government of India projects. Nitin has extensive work experience in Ganga basin with multi-disciplinary teams coming from different areas of expertise, working towards a common goal of conservation and sustainable management of water resources for people and nature.

Nitin has authored/co-authored over 22 research-papers/technical-reports/project-reports; out of this, about 10 papers are published in peer-reviewed journals.

Chair: Mr. Saurabh Popli, Associate Professor, Dept. of Landscape, SPA Bhopal

River Rejuvenation approaches: WWF India's Experiences

SUMMARY: Dr. Kaushal presented 17–18 years of WWF India's work on integrated river rejuvenation across several Indian river basins, mainly Ganga and its sub-basins (including Ram Ganga), Chambal, Brahmaputra, and southern rivers including Arkavathi, Noyyal, and Bhavani. The talk set out three tested and scalable approaches: dam and barrage releases for environmental flows, agricultural water management to recover water for rivers, and river-wetland co-management.

Key Insights

1. River rejuvenation must focus on the entire hydrological system, i.e. rivers, wetlands, groundwater, catchments, and local livelihoods- not just river channels or cleaning drives.
2. WWF's model follows a clear sequence: situational analysis → catchment mapping → integrated management plan → implementation → monitoring, making restoration a continuous governance process rather than a one-time project.
3. The Hareoli Barrage on the Ramganga is now an E-Flows site on UNESCO IHP's global map. For almost the entire lean season, the stipulated E-Flow releases have been met.



4. Community institutions such as Nadi Mitra, Wetland Mitra, and Aaranya Mitra were created to involve farmers, local citizens, universities, industries, and government departments as shared custodians of rivers and wetlands.
5. Community-based River Health Assessment uses a Report Card framework so local stakeholders can read river condition directly.
6. Water-smart agriculture and irrigation efficiency are critical conservation tools; WWF demonstrated that agricultural water savings can directly restore ecological flows but efficiency gains alone risk being cancelled out by the Jevons paradox (where saved water gets diverted to expanded cultivation or thirstier crops).
7. River conservation discussions often exclude the most important actors such as Water Resources Departments, Irrigation Departments, and industries, while these institutions actually control river flows and outcomes.

Key Policy Takeaways

1. Replace fragmented river-cleaning projects with integrated river rejuvenation plans based on catchment restoration, wetland recovery, groundwater recharge, and ecological flow restoration.
2. Operationalise the Government of India's 2018 E-Flows Notification through site-specific implementation, building on the Ramganga Hareoli Barrage model where 50–60% of recommended E-Flows are now consistently met during the lean season.
3. Apply E-Flows assessment across all six recognised components - hydrology, hydraulics, fluvial geomorphology, river health, aquatic biodiversity, and socio-cultural/socio-economic dimensions - rather than relying on minimum-flow numbers alone.
4. Adopt WWF's three-pronged approach (Supply-Side Management, Demand-Side Management, Institutional Strengthening) in irrigated canal command areas as a standard model for recovering water for rivers.
5. Shift policy language from "river cleaning" to river ecosystem rejuvenation, with measurable ecological outcomes such as restored flows, and biodiversity recovery.



The Communities - Their role in conservation, and maintaining healthy Ecosystem



Moderator



Dr. Oishimaya Sen Nag, Managing Editor, World Atlas, Canada



Speakers



Mr. Utsow Pradhan (Founder, TIEEDI - Darjeeling Hills, Permaculture-based regenerative Tourism).



Mr. Kashif Farooq Bhat (4th-generation conservationist, J&K; Mud-on-Boots Project Leader, Sanctuary Nature Foundation) Hangul conservation work in Dachigam since 1980s).



Ms. Akshita Jain (Wildlife and conservation photographer; software engineer, Microsoft; IIT Guwahati alumna from Bhopal).



Mr. Pankaj Bishnoi (Community Engagement Officer, BNHS) representing the Bishnoi community of Pokhran, Rajasthan.

Key Insights

1. Conservation is most effective when communities are treated as knowledge holders, custodians, and co-creators, not merely beneficiaries or enforcement subjects.
2. Traditional communities like the Bishnoi community demonstrate that cultural values and faith-based stewardship can provide stronger and longer-lasting wildlife protection than formal enforcement alone.
3. In Great Indian Bustard landscapes, community protection of habitat, tolerance toward wildlife, and social norms against hunting remain critical conservation foundations with active collaboration between non-government organizations and Bishnoi communities delivering measurable habitat restoration and power-line bird-collision mitigation.
4. Visual storytelling and local narratives are powerful conservation tools. They help bridge the gap between scientific knowledge and community ownership of species conservation.
5. Permaculture-based conservation shows that restoring soil, water, farming systems, and livelihoods together creates stronger biodiversity outcomes than species-only interventions..
6. Hangul in Dachigam is a critically threatened species with a male-to-female ratio of 1:12 and female-to-fawn ratio of 100:13, signalling acute recruitment failure that can only be addressed through community partnership with Bakarwal and Gujjar graziers.
7. Livelihood security and ecological restoration are interconnected; when communities benefit from conservation, compliance and stewardship improve significantly.
8. Community conservation is lived courage, not rhetoric. Radheshyam Bishnoi lost his life in 2024 saving chinkara from poachers, having presented at this same conference in a previous year.
9. Conservation institutions often fail because they approach communities only after project design, rather than involving them from the beginning in planning and decision-making.

Key Policy Takeaways

1. Shift from exclusionary conservation to co-created conservation models where local communities are formally recognised as partners and co-managers.
2. Strengthen rural institutions such as village conservation groups, pastoral networks, Bishnoi stewardship systems, fisher groups, and local river/wetland collectives through formal support and funding.
3. Integrate conservation with livelihoods through sustainable agriculture, ecotourism, stewardship payments, and conservation-linked local employment.
4. Recognise faith-based and culturally rooted conservation practices (such as Bishnoi protection ethics) as legitimate conservation governance models.
5. Recognise voluntary community land donation for conservation restoration under OECM policy, with tax incentives and legal protection for donating families.
6. Establish a national “conservation martyrs and community conservation” awards scheme, giving formal state recognition to figures like Radheshyam Bishnoi par with forest-department martyrs.
7. Use storytelling, education, and community-led communication as formal tools in species recovery programmes not only technical interventions — with mandatory regional-language translation.
8. Include traditional ecological knowledge and local observations in biodiversity monitoring, planning, and policy decisions.
9. Ensure conservation planning begins with communities at the table, rather than seeking consent only after decisions are already made.
6. Establish a national “conservation martyrs and community conservation” awards scheme, giving formal state recognition to figures like Radheshyam Bishnoi par with forest-department martyrs.
7. Use storytelling, education, and community-led communication as formal tools in species recovery programmes not only technical interventions — with mandatory regional-language translation.
8. Include traditional ecological knowledge and local observations in biodiversity monitoring, planning, and policy decisions.
9. Ensure conservation planning begins with communities at the table, rather than seeking consent only after decisions are already made.

Panel Discussion on Scope of Media Exposure in Nature and Wildlife Conservation Reporting



Moderator



Mr. Debadityo Sinha, Lead Climate and Ecosystems, Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy, New Delhi



Speakers



Ms. Megha Moorthy, Editor-in-Chief, Round Glass Sustain.



Mr. Shailesh Shrivastava, Editor, Mongabay India.



Mr. Pallav Jain, Co-Founder & Editor-in-Chief, Ground Report.

Key Insights

1. The media plays a critical role in shaping public understanding of conservation by deciding which species, landscapes, and crises receive visibility and urgency.
2. The media can bridge the gap between science, policy, and citizens by translating technical ecological issues into accessible public narratives.
3. Poor reporting or sensational wildlife coverage creates fear, misinformation, and conflict. Often this happens due to the centralized newspaper desks where the same editors handle the environment alongside politics, crime, and films.
4. “Slow journalism” or “long-gestation journalism” - fact-checked, multi-round editorial review, multiple-perspective sourcing is the structural differentiator from daily-deadline newspaper models.
5. Access to basic forest and wildlife information is structurally broken. Internet search for terms like “Forest Department” returns “book safaris” first, while the department’s own official websites are sometimes inaccessible or do not contain enough information a journalist looks for before engaging with officers.
6. Academic paywalling makes critical conservation knowledge inaccessible to stakeholders, and many scientists self-censor from speaking on record, making scientific knowledge undemocratic by design.
7. Visual storytelling, documentary work, and regional journalism are often more effective than formal reports in building long-term public engagement with conservation.
8. Social media has become a powerful conservation tool for awareness, citizen science, and rapid mobilisation, but also enables wildlife trade, misinformation, and superficial engagement.
9. Conservation storytelling must include communities, livelihoods, and ecological systems, not just species-focused crisis narratives.
10. Scientists and researchers must think like storytellers as they have first-row access to conservation events and the memory, history, and experience that nobody else can bring.

Key Policy Takeaways

1. Mandate functional and up-to-date web presence for all state forest and environment departments.
2. Mandate open-access publication for all publicly funded conservation and wildlife research.
3. Capacity building among staff of state forest and environment departments, publish timely press releases of important events and to designate media-responsive officers with reasonable response-time standards, replacing the current pattern of non-response or anonymous off-record caveats.
4. Build stronger collaboration between scientists, forest departments, and journalists so reporting is accurate, evidence-based, and policy-relevant.
5. Support regional and local-language conservation journalism, which often reaches communities directly affected by biodiversity decisions.
6. Develop ethical reporting guidelines for wildlife and human-wildlife conflict coverage to reduce sensationalism and misinformation.
7. Recognise storytelling and public communication as conservation infrastructure, not as optional outreach after technical work is complete.



Poster Presentation



Day 01
YouTube Live Link



Day 01
YouTube Live Link

Day 01 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0RrMDXtNd5c&t=1062s>

Day 02 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1jePhhCRALA>

Valedictory Ceremony



The proceedings included the announcement of poster competition winners, the inauguration of a forthcoming SNHC compilation report drawing on the last three conferences, a two-day summary by Mr. Manoj Solanki (Assistant Member Secretary, MP State Biodiversity Board), concluding remarks from four senior dignitaries, and the vote of thanks.

Poster Competition Results

Shivangi Sanjiv Bendre (1st place), Akshay Sudhakar Dalavi (2nd place), Hitesh Bhaskar Hatwade (3rd place), and Sarthak R Gadre (Special Mention).





Concluding Remarks

Mr. R. Sreenivasa Murthy recounted an early citizen-science effort that recorded 673 individuals of vultures in a single year. He described it as the first citizen-science report of its kind in India, flagged the long delays the work faced before publication, and emphasised the importance of sincere on-ground work and the SNHC platform as a rare forum for such results.

Mr. Jasbir Singh Chauhan described the conference as “unparalleled” in its four-year run. He praised the quality of presentations, with special mention of the sessions on spider, firefly, community, and media sessions as particular highlights, and acknowledged the MP Forest Department and State Biodiversity Board for sustaining the platform.

Prof. V.P. Uniyal reflected that the conference had reached “from Kashmir to Kanyakumari,” with presentations from across the country. He celebrated the cross-generational engagement between retired foresters and young students, and urged the audience to “keep your eyes open and observe something very minutely” so as to draw both meaning and energy from working with nature.

Prof. B.C. Choudhury proposed that after two days of proceedings, the conference should be renamed from “Lesser-Known Species” to “Better-Known Species of the Landscape.” Drawing on the framing that “we have not inherited this from our forefathers but we have borrowed it from the next generation,” he proposed that Madhya Pradesh’s conservation model, with its multi-talented network of practitioners, should be India’s future template, observing that “the seeds have already been sown, the leaves are coming out, and in the next four to five years we will see flowering and fruits.”

Vote of Thanks



The vote of thanks was delivered by Mr. Mohammad Khalique, who acknowledged the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department; partner organisations such as Wildlife Conservation Trust; institutional partners EPCO and IIFM (Indian Institute of Forest Management); travel partners MP Tours and Travels; print partners SNHC Journal; knowledge partners Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy, WTI, BNHS, WWF India and others; and media partners RoundGlass Sustain, Ground Report, and Mongabay India. Special acknowledgement was made to Prof. B.C. Choudhury for choosing the forum to commemorate the golden jubilee (1975–2025) of India’s crocodile conservation project.

VAN VIHAR



Glimpses



Glimpses



Glimpses



Registered Participants list

SNo	Name	Organization/Institution	E-mail	Category
1	Mr. V N Ambade	IFS, PCCF & HOFF MP		Chief Guest
2	Mr. Subhranjan Sen	IFS, PCCF Wildlife & CWLW MP		Guest of Honor
3	Mr. K Ravichandran	IFS, Director, IIFM, Bhopal		Special Guest
4	Dr. Asad Rahmani	Veteran Ornithologist & Former Director BNHS Mumbai	rahmani1.asad@gmail.com	Eminent Guest/ Speaker
5	Prof. B.C. Choudhary	Former Senior Scientist WII & Advisor WWF India & WTI	bcchoudhury77@gmail.com	Eminent Guest/ Speaker
6	Dr. Suhas kumar	Former PCCF, M.P.		Eminent Guest/ Speaker
7	Mr. Jasbir Singh Chauhan	IFS Retd., Former PCCF Wildlife, MP		Eminent Guest/ Speaker
8	Mr. Rajababu Singh	IPS, ADGP, MP Police Department	adg_trg@mppolice.gov.in	Eminent Guest
9	Dr. R. J. Rao	Former VC, BU Bhopal		Eminent Guest/ Speaker
10	Mr. R. Shreenivasa Murthy	Retd. IFS, Ex. Member Secretary, MPSBB	rseenu60@gmail.com	Eminent Guest/ Speaker
11	Mr. K. Raman	IFS Retd., Former APCCF, MP		Eminent Guest
12	Mr. Shailendra Singh	Retd. IFS, Former APCCF, CG	skhisk@yahoo.com	Eminent Guest/ Speaker
13	Mr. Ajay Yadav	IFS, Member Secretary, MPSBB, Bhopal		Eminent Guest
14	Mr. Vikram Singh Parihar	Retd IFS, Former Field Director Pench TR		Eminent Guest
15	Mr. V. K. Johri	Retd Forest Officer		Eminent Guest
16	Dr. V.P. Uniyal	Graphic Era University Former Scientist - G, WII		Eminent Guest/ Speaker
17	Mr. Yash Veer Bhatnagar	IUCN Country Representative	yash.bhatnagar@iu.cn.org	Eminent Guest/ Speaker
18	Dr. Yogesh Dubey	Professor, IIFM Bhopal		Eminent Guest

19	Mr. Advait Edgaonkar	Associate Professor, IIFM Bhopal		Eminent Guest
20	Dr. R.K. Sharma	Wildlife Scientist & Ex. Forest Research RO, Chambal Sanctuary	rksharmanacs@yahoo.com	Speaker
21	Dr Vipin Vyas	BU Bhopal		Speaker
22	Mr. Tarun Nair	Lead Makara Program, WCT Mumbai	tarun@wctindia.org	Speaker
23	Mr. Nitin Kaushal	Director – Rivers, Wetlands & Water Policy, WWF India		Speaker
24	Dr. Shomita Mukherjee	Senior Principal Scientist. SACON-WII, Coimbatore		Speaker
25	Dr. R.P. Mishra	WTI	rajendra@wti.org.in	Speaker
26	Mr. Saurav Popli	SPA Bhopal	Prop.saurabh73@gmail.com	Speaker
27	Mr. Sumit Dookia	GGSIIP University New Delhi	sumitdookia@gmail.com	Speaker
28	Dr. Jai Singh Parihar	Scientist SAC ISRO, Ahmedabad	jsparihar@yahoo.com	Speaker
29	Ms. Prachi Hatkar	Senior Project Officer, ARC for Ecology & Conservation, DES, Pune University		Speaker
30	Dr. Nidhi Rana	Research Affiliate, Graphic Era – Deemed to be University, Dehradun		Speaker
31	Dr. Oishimaya Sen Nag	Worldatlas, Canada	wildlifestoriesoishi@gmail.com	Speaker
32	Mr. Rajat Bhargava	BNHS Mumbai		Speaker
33	Dr. Sharda Kosankar	CSIR - NEERI Nagpur	Sharda.kosankar@cir.res.in	Speaker
34	Mr. Shailesh Shrivastava	Editor, Mongabay India		Speaker
35	Mr. Pallav Jain	Editor, Ground Report	Pallavjain@gmail.com	Speaker
36	Ms. Megha Murthy	Round Glass Sustain		Speaker
37	Mr. Debadityo Sinha	Lead Climate and Ecosystems, Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy, New Delhi		Speaker

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42	Dr. Shriparna Saxena	Department of Aquaculture, SAGE University Bhopal	shriparna.s@sageuniversity.edu.in	Speaker
43	Mr. Gautam Kadam	PhD Research Scholar, Sacred Heart College Kochi, MGU, Kottayam		Speaker
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