

Vol. 5: November 2008

Training Programmes and Workshops

In House Programmes

Training programmes for the students of SACON in Biostatistics and Communication skills are organised at the Centre as per requirement. Limited seats are open for students from other institutes. A course in Biostatistics has been conducted by Prof. K.Thiyagesan of the A.V.C. College, Mayiladuthurai from 29 July to 2 August 2008. Prof. P. Elango, Specialist in English communication has conducted two courses during 25-27 June and 22-23 August 2008. In all, 25 research students benefited from these courses. Contact: salimali@vsnl.com



The Darwin Scholarship Programme - Monitoring and Communicating Biodiversity

The Darwin Scholarship Programme is supported by the Field Studies Council of the UK. This programme was held to (i) strengthen the exploration and observational competencies of young field scientists (ii) develop national biodiversity databases and (iii) enhance the ability of scientists to communicate with a variety of groups, and develop resources and materials to promote exploration and observation. The programme was organised at Shrewsbury, Shropshire, UK during 8-18 August 2008. In all, 28 participants from 21 countries attended the programme. From SACON Ms. Aruna Ramachandran attended the programme. This programme was a special event as it is part of the celebrations that are planned as 200th birth anniversary of Charles Darwin. The programme comprised various field works, visits to museums, lectures on natural history,

species identification, survey techniques and science communication. Contact: arsbot@gmail.com



School in Herpetology

The School in Herpetology is a programme of the Science and Engineering Research Council (SERC) of Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India. This visionary five year programme has been initiated in 2007, thanks to the efforts of Prof. S.K. Dutta, North Orissa University, Baripada, Orissa. The school aims at developing young researchers in the field of Herpetology. About 25-30 students are selected each year for the school including representations from SAARC nations. Prominent National and a few International faculties train the students on various aspects of herpetology for about two weeks. The first school was held at North Orissa University, Baripada during December 2007 - January 2008. The second school was organised at the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehra Dun from 1 to 14 September 2008. SACON researchers, Mr. G. Srinivas and Mr. N. Sathish Kumar attended the second school, and Dr. S. Bhupathy served as one of the faculties in both the schools. Contact: sk_dutta@yahoo.com, karthik@wii.gov.in, bhupathy.s@gmail.com



Workshop - EIA on Mining

SACON undertakes Environmental Impact Assessment and Management Plan (EIA & EMP) projects. Considering the need for developing expertise in the field, one of our researchers, Ms. Rachna Chandra attended a five day training workshop, 'EIA on Mining', organised by the Centre for Science and Environment, Delhi from 28 July to 1 August 2008. In all, 32 members from Central and State Pollution Control Boards, Industries and NGOs attended the workshop. Major aspects covered were; (i) impact analysis and criteria for predicting the significance of impacts on land and catchment areas (ii) evaluation and interpretation of data (iii) mitigation measures (iv) mine reclamation and procedures (v) legislation related to Mine Closure Plan (vi) social issues and rehabilitation and (vii) waste generation and safe disposal. Contact: rachnaeia@gmail.com

Training Programme in Analytical Techniques

SACON has been conducting training course in Instrumentation and Analytical Techniques since 2005. Till date, eight such courses have been conducted, where about 200 students from various academic and research institutions, and industries attended. During the course, both theoretical and practical exposure was given to various analytical tools for qualifying and quantifying inorganic and organic compounds in biological and non-biological samples. Operation of various instruments from simple pH meter to sophisticated Spectrophotometers and Chromatographs were demonstrated. Prof. K. Natarajan, Dean, School of Chemical Sciences, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore inaugurated the recent course conducted from 9 to 13 June 2008. Contact: ecot_mur@yahoo.com

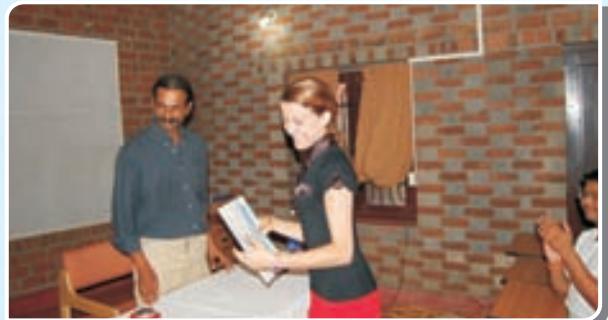


ArcGIS Training Course

The Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI), Chennai has conducted a five day training programme on ArcGIS (Introduction to ArcGIS- 9) software during the last week of March 2008. A team of five participants were selected for the course, and Mr. Nikhilraj from SACON was one among them. The training provided a general understanding of the software, various tools and its applications. Contact: pnnraja@gmail.com

Student-volunteer from USA

Ms. Nichole Bennett, a graduate final year student from Clemson University, South Carolina, USA, worked as a volunteer in the ecotoxicology laboratory at SACON during May - July 2008. She also attended a training course in Instrumentation and Analytical Techniques during this period. Ms. Bennett interactively learnt contaminant analysis procedures in the laboratory, and also visited Wildlife Sanctuaries in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Contact: ecot_mur@yahoo.com



Amphibian Biodiversity Conservation Course-South Asia

An international course for amphibian conservationists managing the species in captivity and wild was organised by Durrell, Dice (University of KENT) in collaboration with Central Zoo Authority, Government of India, Amphibian Network South Asia, Zoo Outreach Organisation, Coimbatore and Wildlife Institute of India, Dehra Dun. The course was conducted at Periyar Tiger Reserve, Kerala from 10 to 16 December 2007. Thirty participants from four countries (India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka) attended the course and Mr. G. Srinivas represented SACON. Modules included in the course were; (i) understanding amphibian decline (ii) prioritising and planning for action and (iii) research techniques for amphibian conservation. Contact: itc@durrell.org, sriniherp@gmail.com, herpinvert@gmail.com



Vacation Training Programme on Bio-resources

SACON has arranged the Vacation Training Programme on bio-resources in Andaman for school children during 25 May to 13 June 2008. This programme was sponsored by Department of Biotechnology. Twenty students attended

the programme, and 27 experts from 12 institutions provided inputs as resource persons. The programme comprised lectures, film shows, field work and a short project work. Contact: neosacon@gmail.com

Training Programme in Purchase Policy and Procedure

The Junior Administrative Manager of SACON, Mr. R. Jayakumar attended a Training Programme on "Purchase Policy and Procedure in Government Departments" during 23-25 July 2008 at New Delhi. In all, 29 officers from 17 organisations participated. The programme was conducted by Centre for Training and Social Research, New Delhi. Contact: saconadmin@yahoo.co.in

Environmental Issues

Decline of Bird Species

Recent studies report that urbanization ranks the highest among various causative factors leading to endangerment of species. Development issues coupled with technological innovation triggers environmental transition resulting in issues such as population decline, homogenisation, loss of species and finally ending up in a state of 'biological poverty'. Various factors are attributed to such a decline of biodiversity in an urban environment; increased predation, competition for food, loss of potential breeding sites, disease, increased traffic, pollution from vehicles and increased use of pesticides in parks and gardens. Apart from the above, factors such as electro-magnetic radiation, socio-economic and cultural changes of the inhabitants, and changing architecture of buildings are also considered causing decline of the biological diversity.

The House Sparrow, once familiar and abundant resident wherever man is present, in towns, villages and countryside, is now declining and becoming rare in India and other parts of the world. Decline of this once ubiquitous species have been puzzling the bird lovers of the entire world. During early 1970s, there were estimates



of approximately 25 million House Sparrows breeding in Britain, but now the number is down to 13 million. In India, widespread decline is perceived, but the records are anecdotal. The

rarity of sparrows in our surroundings reveals that we need to be more circumspect in our approach to the environment. SACON is trying to quantify the impact of urbanisation on fauna using the House Sparrow as a model. Contact: chippysparrow@gmail.com, azeezpa@gmail.com

Bird Flu

Bird flu was first reported in Italy during 1878, which caused massive poultry epidemic and was then known as 'Fowl Plague'. This disease devastated the United States during 1924-25, and then again in 1929. In 1955, it was found that influenza viruses cause this disease, which affects domestic animals (equine, swine, avian) and man. Currently, SACON has undertaken developing a data base on Bird flu based on published information. Its major aim is to examine the issue from an ecological point of view, in view of increasing pressure on wildfowl habitats and possible higher interaction among wild and domestic species, and the increasing genetic homogeneity among the domestic species.

It currently takes up to a week to identify different types of bird flu, including the potentially fatal H5N1 strain. It is reported that scientists at Nottingham Trent University are developing a technique that can detect an outbreak of bird flu in two hours. It is claimed that scientists are in process to develop a portable machine of the size of a briefcase that can be used at the scene of a suspected outbreak. Contact: azeezpa@gmail.com, biobalatech@gmail.com

Advancement of Southwest Monsoon

Advancement or delay in the onset of rain is of great concern especially for an agrarian economy like India. Inconsistent, off-season and deficient rainfall adversely affect all. SACON scientists revisited the historical daily rainfall data for the last several decades from rain gauging stations in the Palakkad gap of Western Ghats. It shows a definite advancement in the first rain event.

It is believed that temperature changes happening in the ocean during the late spring or in the early winter can bring convection current necessary for monsoon. Such temperature changes are already reported from the oceans nearby. Are these changes in rainfall events due to the global climate change? Is there any role for the fast pace of local land conversion in changing the local rainfall patterns? Do growing cities form minor heat islands and change wind flow patterns? Meteorologists suspect that the pre-monsoon rain in Kerala is influenced by local climatic changes. It is also possible that the deforestation happening in different parts of the Western Ghats, particularly in the state of Kerala, reduces the potential cooling effect on the upcoming water-bearing clouds. Contact: ppnraju@gmail.com, azeezpa@gmail.com

New/ Rediscoveries

Three new species and one rediscovery have been reported by SACON scientists since 2001.

- A new ground Orchid, *Zeuxine dhanikariana* has been described from south Andaman (Maina, V.M., Vijayan, L. & P.V. Sreekumar 2001. *J. Econ. Taxon. Bot.* 25(1): 21-23).
- A new day gecko, *Cnemaspis anaikattiensis* has been described from Anaikatti Hills, Western Ghats (Mukherjee, D., Bhupathy, S. & A.M.A. Nixon 2005. *Current Science* 89(8):1326-1327).



- A new wolf snake, *Lycodon flavicollis* has been described from Anaikatti Hills, Western Ghats (Mukherjee, D. & S. Bhupathy 2007. *Russian Journal of Herpetology* 14 (1): 21-26).



- The Grass lizard, *Takydromus sikkimensis* (Günther 1888) has been rediscovered after a gap of over 130 years by the SACON team working in Sikkim. Revalidation of this species assigning neotype is being done. Contact: bhupathy.s@gmail.com



Nature Education

CMS-Vatavaran Film Festival

The Centre for Media Studies (CMS), New Delhi in collaboration with SACON organised a three day film festival at Coimbatore from 17 to 19 October 2008. Shri. R. Venkatachalam, the Worshipful Mayor of Coimbatore City inaugurated the function. Twenty-five films focussing on environment and wildlife were screened to students and public. In addition, Painting competition, Eco-tour, Seminars on Climate change Conservation and livelihood security, and a Workshop on Wildlife filmmaking were conducted. Over 9000 people participated in the festival. Contact: neosacon@gmail.com, salimali@vsnl.com



Brainstorming Session on 'Planet Earth'

In commemoration of the 'Year of Planet Earth' and for the development of an activity guide for the National Children's Science Congress - 2008, a brainstorming session was conducted by SACON in collaboration with NCSTC- Network supported by RVPSP, Department of Science and Technology, Government of India during 10-13 October 2007. Twenty-five scientists and science communicators from 13 organizations attended this interactive meeting. Contact : neosacon@gmail.com, salimali@vsnl.com



DNA Clubs

The Department of Biotechnology, Government of India has launched a programme known as DNA Clubs (DBT's Natural-resources Awareness Club) for making the

students aware of the importance of our natural wealth. The DBT through the M S Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai entrusted SACON to function as the Regional Resource Agency for Andaman. Five DNA clubs have been initiated in schools, and the activities are in progress. Contact: salimali@vsnl.com, neosacon@gmail.com



Sálím Ali Birth Anniversary Celebrations

SACON celebrated the 111th birth anniversary of Dr. Sálím Ali on the 12 November 2007 at the Champion Hall of the Southern State Forest Service College, Coimbatore. Winners of the Sálím Ali Trophy Nature Competitions were given awards on the occasion. GD Matriculation School stood first in overall performance with respect to nature club activities and competition during 2007. Mr. R. Kannan IFS, Conservator of Forests, Coimbatore delivered the memorial lecture and Dr. V. Ramakantha IFS, Principal, State Forest Service College, Coimbatore presided over the function. Contact: salimali@vsnl.com



Glimpses of Academic Activities

Since inception, SACON is a Recognised Research Institute of the Bharathiar University, Coimbatore.

- Recognised Research Guides currently available: Zoology (4), Botany (2) & Environmental Science (2)
- M. Phil. students passed out: 2 (Environmental Science)
- M. Phil. students in progress: 2 (Zoology), 2 (Botany) & 1 (Environmental Science)
- Ph. D. students passed out: 13 (Zoology), 2 (Botany) & 4 (Environmental Science)
- Ph. D. students in progress: 11 (Zoology), 3 (Botany) & 10 (Environmental Science) Contact: salimali@vsnl.com

International Seminars &Conferences

IUCN Word Conservation Congress

The IUCN has organised IVth World Conservation Congress at the port city of Barcelona, Spain from 5 to 14 October 2008. The vision of this Congress was "*a diverse and sustainable world*" and it had three major themes; (i) a new climate for change (ii) healthy environment, healthy people and (iii) safeguarding the diversity of life. In all, 800 forum events, 220 workshops and 160 knowledge cafes covering various issues, challenges and mitigation process to deal with issues of conservation have been organised. Around 8000 experts across the globe attended this Congress. Prominent environmentalist, from India, Dr. Ashok Khosla, was elected as the President of IUCN for the next term. Dr. P.A. Azeez represented the congress from SACON. Contact: azeezpa@gmail.com



Annual Meeting of the Society for Conservation Biology

The Society for Conservation Biology (SCB) is an international professional organisation dedicated to advancing the science and practice of conserving the Earth's biological diversity. The 22nd Annual Meeting of the SCB was held at University of Tennessee, Chattanooga, Tennessee, USA during 13-17 July 2008. The theme of the conference was '*from the mountains to the sea*'. About 1200 researchers from 90 countries attended this conference. From SACON Ms. Basundhara Chettri and Mr. Bhoj Kumar Acharya attended the meeting. The travel of Ms. Basundhara to USA was partially supported by Council of Science and Industrial Research (CSIR). Contact: basundharac@gmail.com



Environmental Impact Assessment of Pollution from Agriculture

The United States Education Foundation in India (USEFI) and Central Rice Research Institute (CRRI) has conducted an International Conference on Environmental Impact Assessment of Pollution from Agriculture at Cuttack from 8 to 11 April 2008. Fifteen participants from two countries attended the conference, and Dr. S. Muralidharan represented SACON. Contact: ecot_mur@yahoo.com

International Conference on Biodiversity Conservation & Management

Rajiv Gandhi Chair, Cochin University has organised an International conference on Biodiversity Conservation and Management at Kochi from 3 to 6 February 2008. A total of 405 scientific papers were presented in nine technical sessions. Over 500 participants from 15 countries attended the conference. SACON researchers, Ms. Ranjini, Ms. Dhanya and Ms. Ezhilarasi presented their research findings. Contact: ranjini@gmail.com



New Horizons in Biochemistry and Biotechnology

The National Institute for Interdisciplinary Science & Technology (NIIST) conducted an international conference, 'New Horizons in Biochemistry and Biotechnology' at Tiruvananthapuram, Kerala during 26-29 November 2007. A total of 607 researchers from 35 countries attended the conference. Mr. V. Dhananjayan from SACON participated in the conference. Contact: dhanjayan_v@yahoo.com

The First Wetland Link International (WLI) Asia Symposium

The First Wetland Link International Asia Symposium (WLI-Asia Symposium) was held at Hong Kong Wetland Park from 24 to 26 January 2007. It was intended to be a step forward to promote wetland conservation and facilitate exchange of information and experience sharing across the Asia-Pacific region. The WLI-Asia network is facilitated jointly by the Hong Kong Wetland Park and the World Wide Fund for Nature (Hong Kong) as the interim coordinator. There were, in all, 53 presentations covering

various issues of wetland conservation by delegates from various Asian and non-Asian (Kenya, UK, Australia) countries. Dr S. N. Prasad from SACON attended the symposium. Contact: snarendra.prasad@gmail.com



Awards

Eco-friendly Office Award to SACON

The office complex of Sálim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History at Anaikatty, Coimbatore has been awarded the "Most Eco-friendly Office". The award assumes importance as it is reported that one-third of world-wide green house gas emissions are from energy used in buildings. This award was constituted and presented by the Residents' Awareness Association of Coimbatore (RAAC) and the Association of British Scholars (ABS), Coimbatore Chapter. Dr. Chris Gibson, Director of British Council, South India presented the award to SACON on 27 March 2008. Contact: salimali@vsnl.com



Maniben Kirtilal Mehta Endowment - Gold Medal

Mr. Debanik Mukherjee, a research scholar of SACON, has been awarded "Maniben Kirtilal Mehta Endowment - Gold Medal", as his Ph.D. thesis was adjudicated as the best thesis in Zoology submitted during 2007-2008. The Gold medal was awarded to Mr. Mukherjee by the Honourable Governor of Tamil Nadu, Shri. Surjit Singh Barnala at the XIII Convocation held on 8 February 2008 at Bharathiar University, Coimbatore. Contact: salimali@vsnl.com



Special Achievement Award

Dr. S. Muralidharan, Sr. Scientist of SACON received Special Achievement Award in January 2008 from the Patuxent Wildlife Research Centre, United States Geological Survey, USA for his contributions in Ecotoxicology. Contact: ecot_mur@yahoo.com

From the Field

Dust Bathing by the Indian Grey Hornbill

Indian Grey Hornbill *Ocyceros birostris*, a canopy lover is known to inhabit the deciduous and open thorn forests of India, Pakistan and Nepal. SACON has been conducting research programmes for more than a decade to understand the ecology of hornbills and their role in seed dispersal. Currently, the ecology of Grey Hornbills is being studied in the Hasanur range of Eastern Ghats. On the



evening of 22 January 2008, three Grey Hornbills were observed on the ground in a dry sandy patch. These birds were found fluttering their wings for about five minutes in the sandy dust. Dust bathing, though rare in hornbills, has been reported in the Indian Pied and Oriental Pied Hornbills. Dust bathing may help the birds to ward off ectoparasites. Contact: balusacon@yahoo.com, sansacon@gmail.com

Edible-nest swiftlet

The Edible-nest Swiftlet, *Collocalia fuciphaga inexpectata* is endemic to the Andaman & Nicobar Islands. This bird builds nest wholly of saliva, which is used in Chinese pharmacy and cuisines. The nest collection has led to decline of its populations. *In-situ* and *ex-situ* research programmes initiated by SACON and Forest Department of Andaman & Nicobar Islands for over one decade resulted in establishing nesting colonies of this species in customised houses. The study found that nests harvested after the breeding of the species would not affect its population. This not only conserves and improves bird population, but would also provide alternate livelihood to the local people. This species is listed in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, which bans collection or hunting. Efforts are being made to de-list this species from Schedules of the WPA 1972, and it is hoped that this would get the support of local people for conservation of swiftlets and other biota. Contact: florikin@gmail.com, salimali@vsnl.com



Welcome to the New Director

Dr. Ravi Sankaran has taken charge as the Director of SACON. The new Director was given warm welcome by all scientific and administrative staff and students in a function at SACON on the 12 June 2008. Dr. Sankaran has conducted extensive field research and conservation programmes for protecting several rare and endangered bird species of India for over 25 years. Contact: salimali@vsnl.com



About SACON

The Sálim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON) is an autonomous centre of the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF), Government of India. The management of SACON is vested in a Governing Council, and its Chairman is the Secretary to the Government of India, Ministry of Environment and Forests. The President of SACON Society is the Honourable Minister for Environment and Forests, Government of India. The mission of the centre is "*Help conserve India's biodiversity and its sustainable use through research, education and people's participation, with birds at the centre stage*".

SACON has a well equipped Laboratory, Computer facility and Library. Apart from research on biodiversity conservation, SACON undertakes Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) & Environmental Management Plan (EMP) for development projects, and extends Analytical service to Industries and Academic Institutions. We also conduct various nature awareness programmes in schools, colleges, and to senior citizens and others.

Core Faculty

Director	:	Dr. Ravi Sankaran
Conservation Ecology	:	Dr. Lalitha Vijayan, Sr. Principal Scientist Dr. S. Bhupathy, Sr. Scientist
Landscape Ecology	:	Dr. S. N Prasad, Sr. Principal Scientist Dr. P. Balasubramanian, Sr. Scientist
Ecotoxicology	:	Dr. S. Muralidharan, Sr. Scientist
Environmental Impact Assessment	:	Dr. P. A Azeez, Sr. Principal Scientist
Nature Education	:	Dr. P. Pramod, Nature Education Officer

Book Post

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The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the Editors or of the Sálim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History

Published in November 2008

Printed & Published by the Director, Sálim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, Anaikatty, Coimbatore – 641 108.

