



A Tribute to Dr. Ravi Sankaran

Dr. Ravi Sankaran, Director of Sálím Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON), passed away on the morning of 17th January 2009 at Coimbatore due to cardiac arrest.



Dr. Ravi Sankaran
(1963-2009)

His area of studies included many biogeographic zones such as Indian Desert, Indo-Gangetic Plains, Deccan Plateau and Islands. He was particularly interested in studying endangered species, especially the Avifauna; Lesser and Bengal floricans, Great Indian Bustard, Narcondam

Hornbill, Nicobar Megapode and Edible-nest Swiftlet. Dr. Sankaran was an action oriented conservationist who strongly felt the importance of the involvement of local communities in conservation of nature. His foresighted research, Strengthening Community Conservation Efforts in Nagaland and *In-situ & Ex-situ* Conservation of the Edible-nest Swiftlet in Andaman and Nicobar Islands vouch for this.

A student of the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), he had been sharpened in nature conservation and action oriented research by Mr. J. C. Daniel, the then Curator and Dr. A.R. Rahmani, Project Scientist and present Director, BNHS. Dr. Ravi Sankaran's research findings have been recognized by both National and International organizations. The Wildlife Trust of India, New Delhi awarded him the "Endangered Species Conservationist of the Year 2003" for his outstanding contributions in nature conservation. Research publications of Dr. Ravi Sankaran include variety of topics; habitat, breeding and behavioural ecology of Birds. He has over 40 research papers and 10 high quality technical reports to his credit.

Dr. Ravi Sankaran took over as the Director of SACON on 12th June 2008. With his untimely and tragic demise, the conservation community has lost an ardent and committed scientist; SACON, a promising and an able leader; his family and friends, a caring, an affable and jovial individual.

Born on 4th October 1963, Dr. Ravi Sankaran is survived by his wife Deepa and daughter Yamini.

Research Papers of Dr. Ravi Sankaran

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Mobile Towers as Bird Nesting Sites

In spite of the wide spread worries about the mobile towers and their possible impacts, it is interesting to note that birds are nesting on the mobile towers. SACON is studying the ecology of urban birds in Coimbatore city. Common urban bird species such as Crows and Pariah Kites, basically platform nesters on trees were found nesting on high telephone masts/ towers. The towers might appear to the birds functionally analogous to the branches of a tree in which they make nest. The nests are placed high up on the towers, at about 30-40m.

The apparent questions arising from the nesting behaviour of the birds in the towers are many. Is it due to the lack of natural habitats / Lack of trees/ or competition among urban birds? Is it advantageous to avoid human /

predator / other disturbances? Is it something to do with changes in the canopy structure of trees found in cities? It is also known that many species of birds adapt to or adopt new sites for building nests; as Mynas do in light hoods. More observations and analyses are required to figure out the possible reasons and

impact of radiations on the long term survival of these and other species. [Contact: cranjini@gmail.com](mailto:cranjini@gmail.com)

Management Evaluation of Protected Areas

The Ministry of Environment and Forests constituted five Regional Expert Committees, each comprising three members, for the Management Effectiveness Evaluation (MEE) of Protected Areas in the country. The evaluation is sought to be done at site and at state level. The committees were constituted in 2006 for a period of three years. As a member of the Committee for the Western Region (Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan), Dr. S. N. Prasad has visited Bhima Shankar Sanctuary in Maharashtra, Marine National Park and Wild Ass Sanctuary in Gujarat, and Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary and Desert National Park in Rajasthan from November 2008 to March 2009. The MEE exercise is



being coordinated by the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehra Dun on behalf of the Director General of Wildlife, MoEF. [Contact: snarendra.prasad@gmail.com](mailto:snarendra.prasad@gmail.com)

Nature Education

Nature Education Web Site of SACON

On 22nd March 2009, a new interactive web site (www.saconeducation.org) for disseminating information on nature education activities of SACON was inaugurated by Mr. Jose Mathew IFS, Principal of the State Forest Service College (SFSC), Coimbatore. The web site showcases the nature

education activities of SACON such as Salim Ali Nature Club Network, Salim Ali Nature Forum and DNA clubs in Andaman & Nicobar Islands. It has a login area through which nature lovers can interact with SACON and among themselves. Members of the nature education clubs have varying access facilities in the web pages. [Contact: neosacon@gmail.com](mailto:neosacon@gmail.com)

Salim Ali Trophy

The Salim Ali Trophy for Nature awareness and prizes were distributed to the winners of the Nature Competitions 2008-09 on 22nd March 2009. Mr. Jose Mathew, IFS, Principal of SFSC was the Chief Guest of the function, which was presided over by Dr. P. A. Azeez, Director in charge of SACON. In all, 135 students from 22 schools received various prizes. The G. D. Matriculation Higher Secondary School, Coimbatore was awarded the Salim Ali Trophy for best school in nature awareness campaigning and activities for the third consecutive year. The Konguvelalar Matriculation Higher Secondary School, Karumathampatti and Kadri Mills Higher





Secondary School, Ondiputhur stood in second and third positions respectively. Contact: neosacon@gmail.com

World Wetlands Day

The ENVIS Centre of the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India on Wetland Ecosystems has been functioning at SACON since 2005. The centre strives to collect, collate and disseminate information and data on wetland ecosystems of India. As



a part of the Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA) of the ENVIS centre, World Wetlands Day 2009 celebrations were held on 2nd February 2009 at Uppalapadu in collaboration with JP School Uppalapadu, Andhra Pradesh Forest Department and Divisional Office of the Indian Railways, Guntur. The participants, especially the students were taken to the Uppalapadu wetlands. The Uppalapadu, an important Bird Area of India, harbours one of the largest breeding colonies of the Spot-billed Pelican and many other heronry species including the Painted Stork and Black-headed Ibis. Contact: www.wetlandsofindia.org, snarendra.prasad@gmail.com

Conferences, Seminars & Workshops

Climate Change

Climate Change has become a catchy cliché for a large number of debates and subsequently several conferences on climate issues have been happening in different parts of the globe; Kyoto meet was a landmark

development and thereafter a series of negotiations in the form of Conference of Parties (COPs). The 15th COP is scheduled to be held in Copenhagen towards the end of this year and as a prologue, the University of Copenhagen, Denmark in collaboration with the International Alliance of Research Universities (IARU)



organised an international Congress, 'Climate Change: Global Risks, Challenges, and Decisions' in Copenhagen during 10-12 March 2009. Eminent scientists, journalists and decision makers from 89 countries took part in the Congress, which had 53 sessions. The main objective of the congress was to assimilate the findings on climate change from various parts of the globe and make them available for decision makers participating in the COP-15. Mr. Nikhil Raj from SACON presented a paper in the Congress, 'Changes in rainfall events in the Palaghat Gap, India'. Contact: nikhilsacon@gmail.com

International Hornbill Conference

The 5th International Hornbill Conference was organised from 22 to 25 March 2009 by the National Parks Board, Singapore and Hornbill Research Foundation, Thailand at the Singapore Botanic Gardens. In all, 130 participants from 20 countries attended this



conference. Major technical sessions of the Conference included; (i) Status and distribution of Hornbills (ii) Ranging and behaviour (iii) Conservation (iv) Research techniques and (v) Ecology. Dr. P. Balasubramanian of SACON presented a paper, 'Habitat features and



restoration initiatives in Sathyamangalam Forest Division, Eastern Ghats'. A field visit was organised to the Jurong Bird Park and Pulau Ubin Island. The Jurong Bird Park has one of the largest collections of Hornbills in Southeast Asia with 82 hornbills of 19 species. The Oriental Pied Hornbill conservation program is in progress in the Pulau Ubin Island.

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Conference on Conservation Science

The Student Conference on Conservation Science – 2009 was conducted at the Department of Zoology, University of Cambridge, UK from 24 to 26 March 2009. Mr. L. Joseph Reginald of SACON attended and



presented a paper, 'Conservation of the Indian Flying Fox, *Pteropus giganteus*'. The student also went through the "Miriam Rothschild Internship Programme" with Prof. John Altringham at the Institute of Integrative and Comparative Biology, Faculty of Biological Sciences, University of Leeds, UK. Information on effective ways to use Pettersson Bat Detector D-240X and techniques of recording, analysing and using appropriate software and setting up an echolocation call library were acquired during this programme. It is hoped that these information would be useful for the research on the bats of Western Ghats initiated recently by Mr. Reginald. The University of Cambridge provided financial support for travel to attend this conference.

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Conserving Nature in a Globalizing India

The Bombay Natural History Society, as a part of its 125th year celebrations organised an international conference, 'Conserving Nature in a Globalizing India' during 17-19 February 2009 in Bangalore. The conference mainly focussed on the emerging/ current conservation issues and policy imperatives. A team of scientists (Drs. P. A. Azeez, S. Bhupathy, S. Muralidharan and P. Pramod) and research students from SACON attended

the conference. Dr. (late) Ravi Sankaran was to deliver an invited talk on the conservation of the Edible-nest Swiftlet in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which was delivered by Mr. Shirish Manchi, Research Fellow of the Swiftlet Project. Mr. M. A. Raja Mamannan and Ms. J. Ranjini, Research Students of SACON presented their research findings in the conference.

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Thematic Workshop on Avian Biology

The DST-SERC Thematic Workshop on Avian Biology was organised by Dr. Dinesh Bhatt at Gurukula Kangri University, Haridwar from 27 to 30 November 2008. A management advisory committee was set up with Prof. Mewa Singh as Chairman, Dr. B.P. Singh as Member Secretary, Dr. Dinesh Bhatt as Organiser and six other members including Dr. Lalitha Vijayan of SACON. In all, 40 researchers from 25 institutions including three researchers from SACON (Drs. S. Somasundaram, P. Balakrishnan and Mr. Shirish Manchi) attended the workshop. Dr. Ravi Sankaran, as one of the resource persons, delivered a lecture titled, 'Birds and Conservation'. Contact: vijayanlalitha@gmail.com,
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National Seminar on Current Herpetology

A National Seminar on Current Research in Herpetology and Workshop on Prioritization of Amphibian and Reptile Species for Conservation Breeding was organised at the North Orissa University, Baripada, Orissa during 28 - 31 March 2009. Scientists, academicians and research students working on amphibians and reptiles from all over India attended the seminar and presented their findings. The seminar was inaugurated by Prof. S. P. Rath, Honourable Vice Chancellor of the North Orissa University in the presence



of special guests namely Prof. S. K. Saidapur, Honourable Vice Chancellor, Karnatak University, Dharwad and Dr. B. P. Singh, Advisor, SERC - DST, Government of India.



SACON Research Fellows, G. Srinivas and N. Sathish Kumar presented papers in the seminar, and Dr. S. Bhupathy delivered an invited lecture on the ecology of Indian python. These programmes were convened by Prof. S. K. Dutta of North Orissa University, Baripada. Contact: sriniherp@gmail.com, bhupathy.s@gmail.com

International Congress of Global Warming on Biodiversity of Insects

An International Congress of Global Warming on Biodiversity of Insects: Management and Conservation was conducted at the Department of Zoology, School of Life Sciences, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore from 9 to 12 February 2009. The conference was inaugurated by Prof. G. Thiruvassagam, Honourable Vice Chancellor of the Bharathiar University. Eminent scientists, academicians and research students participated in the event. Main focus of the conference was on the climate change and the insect community. The programme had three technical and a poster session. Ms. R. Dhanya from SACON presented a poster, Monitoring the insect food sources of the House Sparrow chicks at different scales of urbanization. Contact: chippysparrow@gmail.com

University Departments of SACON

The following students of SACON have been awarded Ph.D. / M. Phil. Degree by the Bharathiar University, Coimbatore from January 2008 to April 2009.



Ph. D. Degree

1. **Balakrishnan P:** Status, Distribution and Ecology of the Grey-headed Bulbul *Pycnonotus priocephalus* in the Western Ghats, India.
Supervisor: Dr. V. S. Vijayan
2. **Bhoj Kumar Acharya:** Bird Communities and their Distribution Pattern along the Elevation Gradient of Teesta Valley, Sikkim.
Supervisor: Dr. Lalitha Vijayan

3. **Anoop Das K.S:** Bird Community Structure along the Altitudinal Gradient in Silent Valley National Park, Western Ghats, India.
Supervisor: Dr. Lalitha Vijayan



4. **Basundhara Chettri:** Distribution and Resource Use Patterns of Reptiles along the Teesta Valley, Eastern Himalayas, Sikkim, India.
Supervisor: Dr. S. Bhupathy
5. **Jaya Thapa:** Communities of Small Mammals and Small Carnivores in the Teesta River Basin, Sikkim Himalaya, India. Supervisor: Dr. S. Bhupathy
6. **Jayakumar R:** Heavy Metal Contamination in the Fishes of Inland Wetlands of India.
Supervisor: Dr. S. Muralidharan
7. **Anjan Kumar Prusty:** Distribution of Select Nutrients and Metals in the Soils of a Wetland-Terrestrial Ecosystem Complex: A Case Study of Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur, India.
Supervisor: Dr. P. A. Azeez
8. **Gunasekaran M:** Studies on Taxonomy, Ecology, Distribution and Conservation Values of Sthalavrikshas (Temple Plants) in Tamil Nadu, Southern India. Supervisor: Dr. P. Balasubramanian

M. Phil. Degree

1. **Deivanayaki M:** An Assessment of Spatial Distribution Pattern and Current Status of Birds in Nilgiris, Western Ghats, India.
Supervisor: Dr. Lalitha Vijayan
2. **Sindhu S:** Physico- Chemical Properties of Water, Sediments and Accumulation of Select Heavy Metals in Fishes collected along the Harbour Line, Mumbai.
Supervisor: Dr. S. Muralidharan
3. **Vinny R Peter:** Persistent Organochlorine Contaminants in Sediment, Water and Fishes From Harbour Line Mumbai.
Supervisor: Dr. S. Muralidharan
4. **Anbarasu C:** Studies on Woody Species Diversity and Regeneration in Two Forest Sites of Southern Eastern Ghats. Supervisor: Dr. P. Balasubramanian



Awards

UNEP Eco-peace Leadership Award



The UNEP Eco-Peace Leadership Programme is provided for those who wish to initiate action oriented research with respect to environmental problems in their region. The main focus of this programme is to

improve environmental conditions in Asia Pacific region, which is being supported by the UNEP and Eco-Peace Leadership Centre in South Korea. Applications are considered in the following (seven) sections; Water & Dam, Desertification & Forest, Urban Ecology & Environment, Peace & Cooperation, Environment & Culture, Renewable Energy and Local Community Revival. SACON research scholar R. Dhanya has been selected for the leadership award under the category Urban Ecology & Environment. The recipients of this award are guided by an external advisor assigned by the UNEP Eco-peace Leadership Programme. Orientation programme, field work and presentation of results are important components of this Programme.

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trend in the population of this species and the rate of decline was steep between 2004 and 2008 in the coastal wetlands. Apart from anthropogenic activities, natural calamity, the tsunami of 26th December 2004 adversely affected both the habitat and population of this endangered Anatid species.

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The Hornbill Festival

The Hornbill Festival of Nagaland, celebrated every year during the first week of December, is a must see cultural extravaganza. It is a melange of Naga culture on



display in one place. This festival is held at Naga Heritage village, Kisama which is about 12 km from Kohima and is permanently created for celebrating this festival. Typical Naga boys' dormitories (*morungs*) of each tribe are constructed in their respective architectural designs to simulate a real village scene. Naga

boys' *morungs* are places where impressionable boys learn to socialize and live in a community, where traditional values of survival are taught. It is also a school where they learn the lessons of life such as bravery, loyalty, honesty, arts and crafts. Hornbills, culturally important to Nagas, are currently hard to see in the forests of Nagaland due to extensive hunting and shortening of *jhum* cycles.

Abstracted from: Nagaland, The State with a Difference: Directorate of Tourism, Nagaland.

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Field Notes

Andaman Teal

The Andaman teal *Anas albogularis*, a threatened endemic species, inhabits the coastal and inland wetlands of Andaman Islands. A survey was conducted in South, North and Little Andaman from December 2007 to May 2008. The present study compared the data in select sites with earlier work prior to tsunami, i.e. during 1998 - 2004. Past 10 years of data showed a declining



Support to Educational Institutions

Since inception, SACON had supported about 100 Post Graduate students from various Institutions to conduct research in partial fulfilment of their degree in Zoology, Wildlife Biology, Botany and Environmental Science. During the last academic year, SACON faculties have guided and supported over 15 students from Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, Avinashilingam University for Women, Coimbatore, Madras University, Chennai, Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli and Pondicherry University, Puducherry and various colleges such as PSG College of Arts and Science, Nirmala College for Women, Government Arts College (Coimbatore), AVC College (Mayiladuthurai) and Government Arts College (Ooty).

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SACON Alumni

SACON is updating the current contact details and status (position) of its Research Students to facilitate contact and interactions. All fraternity of SACON, faculty members and research fellows are requested to send in details of their students and senior colleagues respectively to salimali@vsnl.com or bhupathy.s@gmail.com at the earliest. Kindly provide wide publicity to this important initiative among colleagues and students. The following details are required: Name of the Research Student, Tenure at SACON, Project Name, Project fellow/ Ph.D. / M. Phil. Scholar, Present employment with designation, address, contact numbers and a Passport size photo.



The Mission of SACON

“Help conserve India's biodiversity and its sustainable use through research, education and people's participation, with birds at the centre stage”

Book Post

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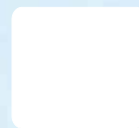
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