

SACON News

Vol. 19 (3-4) July—December 2022





SACON News

July—December, 2022

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Institutional Events

- | | | | |
|-----------|--|-----------|---|
| 1 | One-day Nature Programme with Coimbatore School Students | 13 | Poster Releases on Environment Days |
| 2 | One-day Nature Programme with Coimbatore College Students | 14 | World Elephant Day 2022 |
| 3 | One-day Training Programme for Forest Officials | 15 | National Wildlife Week 2022 |
| 4 | Three-day Workshop for IFS Officers | 16 | Reintroduction of Cheetah in India Campaign |
| 5 | Faculty Training Programmes | 16 | Rashtriya Ekta Diwas |
| 6 | Participation of SACON Faculty & Researchers at Different Forums | 17 | Photography Workshop |
| 8 | SACON Faculty representation at National and International Level | 17 | Homeschooled Children at SACON |
| 10 | Fulbright-Nehru Doctoral Research Fellowship 2023-2024 Awarded | 18 | Special Campaign for Swachhata 2.0 |
| 11 | Visit of MoEFCC delegates to SACON | 19 | Fit India Freedom Run 3.0 |
| 12 | Coimbatore Collector's Programme at SACON | 20 | Sálim Ali Trophy Nature Competitions 2022 |
| 12 | 76 th Independence Day Celebration | 21 | RHATC Programme of Zoo Outreach at SACON |
| | | 21 | Commencement of M.Sc. Wildlife Science (Ornithology) at SACON |



SACON Coimbatore



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SACON Coimbatore



SACON Coimbatore



From the Director's Desk

I am delighted to present the July – December 2022 issue of SACON News. This issue covers various outreach activities, workshops and trainings for Forest officials, faculty and students. During the period we celebrated several environmental days including World Elephant Day and National Wildlife Week and conducted awareness campaigns for the general public through online and offline modes. Under the 'Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav' initiative of Government of India, SACON carried out month-long awareness programmes such as Special Campaign for Swachhata 2.0 and Fit India Freedom Run 3.0. We also coordinated the 'Reintroduction of Cheetah in India' Campaign among Coimbatore citizens. SACON faculty and researchers also actively participated at various forums and represented the institute and the country at both National and International levels respectively. During the reporting period, Hon'ble Minister MEFC, Shri Bhupender Yadav also visited SACON along with other MoEFCC delegates. After a long COVID break, SACON resumed its much loved Salim Ali Trophy Nature Competitions, in which more than 4000 children participated from several Coimbatore schools. In December 2022, SACON fulfilling one of its mandates, started a new Post-Graduate programme [M.Sc. Wildlife Science (Ornithology)], in academic collaboration with Central University of Tamil Nadu and with the financial support of the MoEFCC. In addition to covering all the important activities, this issue also covers delightful account of researcher's field experiences in the popular writing section. Hope you all will enjoy reading this issue.

Dr. S. Muralidharan
Director in charge, SACON

Popular Articles

- 22** How much of life do we know??
- By Ashiq P.P.
- 23** Fudam Bird Sanctuary—
"An Oasis of Serenity"
- By Ritika Singh
- 24** Google Maps—New tool for your
Travel Planning
- By Ashwin C.P.

Front Cover
Barn Swallow
©Praphul G.

Back Cover
Asian Fairy-bluebird
©Praphul G.

INSTITUTIONAL EVENTS

One-day Nature Programme with Coimbatore School Students

During the reporting quarters of July to September 2022 and October to December 2023, 363 students and 37 teachers from nine schools visited SACON for one-day nature programmes. The program's activities were designed to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of natural world. The children ranged in age from third to eleventh grade. The students were taken for nature hikes on the SACON campus trails and were trained to notice birds, butterflies, animal behaviours and interactions. Ms. Sri Sowmiya, Nature Education Assistant, moderated the activities, along with SACON's Research Volunteers, Ms. Aakriti Singh (Ph.D. Scholar), Ms. Harshita Prakash, Ms. Santhosini, and Mr. Arun George (Junior Research Biologists). The sessions also included screening wildlife films, documentaries, and short movies with interesting facts to increase their curiosity towards nature. To build a deeper connection and better understanding of natural surroundings, we also conducted nature games and an interactive presentation on "How to Watch Birds."

List of Schools that visited SACON from July to December 2022

Date	School Name	Grade	No. of Students (+ Staff)
13.07.2022	Vidya Vanam School	3 rd to 5 th	40 (3)
18.07.2022	Vel International Public School	10 th	40 (3)
19.07.2022	Vel International Public School	11 th	18 (2)
21.07.2022	Vel International Public School	9 th	51 (3)
29.07.2022	PSG Sarvajana School	5 th to 8 th	63 (4)
23.09.2022	Mater Dei International School	6 th to 8 th	48 (11)
21.10.2022	The Hill-Side Prep School	3 rd to 8 th	26 (2)
27.10.2022	Chandrananthi Public School, Peelamedu	6 th to 8 th	54 (5)
03.11.2023	Don Bosco School of Excellence	6 th to 8 th	23 (4)



Curiosity with Small Creatures—
Students observing a Leaf insect



Students after a wilderness trail



Learning the different kinds of bird calls and songs

INSTITUTIONAL EVENTS

One-day Nature Programme with Coimbatore College Students

In the past six months, a total of 293 college students and 18 staff from six colleges visited SACON. Dr. Aditi Mukherjee, Scientist, briefed the students on SACON's past and ongoing research activities. They also visited various facilities of SACON, including Library, Avian Eco-toxicology Laboratory wherein Dr. K. Nambirajan, Project Scientist, Mr. Kalaiarasu, Lab Assistant, Mr. Sharma Kalamathan, Ms. Jeevitha (Junior Research Biologist) briefed them about the lab's activities; and Mr. Kunal Mahobiya, Project Assistant, briefed the students about Avian Physiology and Genetic Laboratory's practical tools and techniques. They also explored the campus and went on the nature trails to learn and explore the wilderness with Ms. Sri Sowmiya, Nature Education Assistant and Ms. Harshita, Ms. Santhosini (Junior Research Biologists).

List of Colleges that visited SACON from July to December 2022

Date	College Name	Department	No. of Students (+ Staff)
18.07.2022	Mysore University	Social work	37 (3)
18.08.2022	Tamil Nadu Agricultural University	Environment Science	49 (2)
14.10.2022	Kovai Kalaimagal College of Arts & Science	Mathematics (CA)	58 (6)
20.10.2022	Sri Ramakrishna College of Arts & Science	Biotechnology	56 (2)
16.11.2022	NSF and Nehru College of Institution	Zoology	59 (3)
08.12.2022	St. Joseph's College	Zoology	34 (2)



Students of Mysore University, Dept. of Social Works



St. Joseph's College, Dept. of Zoology



Environment Science Students of Tamil Nadu Agricultural University



Biotechnology Students of Ramakrishna College of Arts & Science

INSTITUTIONAL EVENTS

One-day Training Programme for Forest Officials



A total of 223 Forest Official Trainees from Odisha Forest Ranger's College, Angul; Tamil Nadu Forestry Training College, Vaigai Dam, Thenni; and CASFOS, Dehradun, visited SACON as a part of their training module. During their visit, they had sessions on SACON's past and ongoing research activities with Dr. P. Pramod, Senior Principal Scientist, Dr. Aditi Mukherjee, Scientist, and Dr. Mylswamy Mahendiran, Senior Scientist. They also visited various facilities of SACON including Eco-toxicology and Avian Physiology and Genetics Laboratories for exposure to practical tools and techniques. Dr. Nambirajan, Project Scientist, Dr. Bibhu Prasad Panda, Research Associate, Ms. Jeevitha S, Ms. Lini Kaladharan, Mr. Sharma K, Ms. Anamika Gautam, Mr. Mandar Chowkekar, Ms. Harshita Prakash, Mr. Gaurav Singh, Mr. Ruben Kurien Paul (Junior Research Biologists), Mr. Kunal Mahobiya, Mr. Kalaiarasu, Laboratory Assistant, and Ms. Sri Sowmiya, Nature Education Assistant were the researchers involved in conducting the programme.

List of Forest Officials that visited SACON from July to December 2022

Date	Forest Department	No. of Participants
17.10.2022	Forest Range Officer Trainee, Vaigai Dam, TN	60
28.10.2022	CASFOS, Dehradun	71
31.10.2022	Forest Range Officer Trainee, Vaigai Dam, TN	60
05.12.2022	Forest Range Officer, Odisha	32



INSTITUTIONAL EVENTS

Three-day Workshop for IFS Officers

From 13 to 15 December 2022, SACON hosted a three-day training workshop on "Monitoring and Management of Wetlands" for Indian Forest Service Officers. The programme was sponsored by the MoEFCC, GoI. Following orders from the MoEFCC, Dr. S. Muralidharan, Director in Charge SACON, inaugurated the workshop at SACON, Coimbatore, which was attended by 23 IFS Officers from 16 different states. Dr. Muralidharan welcomed the participants and provided an overview of SACON's history, activities, and contributions to science and society. Dr. Muralidharan emphasised the programme's relevance and the need to enhance the capacity of forest authorities to better protect and manage wetlands in his inaugural presentation. Technical seminars followed the inauguration session. There were ten sessions, with eight delivered by SACON in-house faculty, and two by invited guest scientists. In accordance with the workshop's objectives, a field trip was planned in and around the Coimbatore district's wetlands. The IFS officials visited three wetlands: Nanjarayan Tank in Tirupur District, Singanalur Lake in Coimbatore District, and Ukkadam Lake in Coimbatore City, wherein they also interacted with the local communities to understand their perspectives on the importance of wetlands. Other than the technical sessions and field trips, there was an interactive session with the participants requesting them to share their field experiences and suggestions for the workshop.



INSTITUTIONAL EVENTS

Faculty

Training Programmes

Agricultural Entomology Faculty from Tamil Nadu Agricultural University

19 Staff from the Department of Agricultural Entomology, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore, visited SACON on December 6, 2022. They also visited Avian Eco-toxicology, and Avian Physiology & Genetics Laboratories for brief sessions facilitated by the Faculty and researchers of the respective labs. Later, they went on an "Insect Walk" on the campus trails.



Visit of Agricultural Instructors from Uganda, Canada and Tamil Nadu Agricultural University

A total of 54 Agricultural Instructors from Bukalasa Agricultural College and Vocational Training Institute, Uganda; Dalhousie University, Canada; and Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore, visited SACON on 9 December 2022, as a part of the International Training Programme on "Engaging Africa: Global Partners for Agricultural Development" in collaboration with Centre for Student's Welfare, Tamil Nadu Agricultural University. Dr. Aditi Mukherjee, Scientist, briefed the participants on SACON's research activities. Dr. M. Mahendiran, Senior Scientist, had brief interactive session and accompanied them to various facilities of SACON, including the Laboratories and Library. Dr. Ashutosh Singh, Scientist, briefed the functioning of the Avian Physiology & Genetics Laboratory, and Dr. Nambirajan, Project Scientist, briefed the visitors on practical tools and techniques at Avian Ecotoxicology Laboratory.



INSTITUTIONAL EVENTS

Participation of SACON Faculty & Researchers at Different Forums

Global Tiger Day Celebration

International Tiger Day/ Global Tiger Day is observed annually on July 29 to raise awareness about the magnificent and endangered big cats. SACON's researcher Ms. Yashaswini N, delivered a lecture on the status and conservation of Tigers in India on International Tiger Day 2022 at Kovai Public School, Coimbatore, to raise awareness among School Students.



Participation in ZSI SERB Karyshala 2022

SACON's researcher Mr. Kunal Mahobiya, Junior Research Biologist from Avian Physiology and Genetics Laboratory, participated in the workshop organised by the Zoological Survey of India, ZSI SERB KARYSHALA 2022, on 'Demonstrating SOPs to combat illegal wildlife trade and strengthening wildlife forensic capabilities in India,' from 21 to 31 July 2022 at Kolkata, West Bengal. He was selected as one among 26 participants from applicants all over India.



Participation in the 15th IUCN/SSC Otter Specialist Group, International Otter Congress held at France

The 15th IUCN/SSC Otter Specialist Group, International Otter Congress "Communities and Otters" was held between 19 to 23 September 2022 via the hybrid Whova platform in Sospel, Alpes-Maritimes, France. This conference is a prestigious platform for the scientific community working on Otter ecology around the globe. The conference had 40 talks across nine different themes, which were as follows; Threats, conflicts, and mitigations; Otters across borders: transnational strategies; Red and Green Lists assessment; Action Plans and Conservation Strategies; Otter trade; Ex Situ Population Management and Conservation; Otters of the World and Advanced techniques for otter monitoring and Otter tracks and signs workshop. Most of the studies at the conference discussed ecology and threats, human-wildlife mitigation, participation of communities in otter conservation, educating fishermen communities, involving communities for citizen science and conservation techniques of multiple species of otters. Researchers presented otter work from India, Singapore, South Africa, Brazil, France, Austria, USA, UK, Patagonia, Argentina, Japan and Benin. Mr. Ankit Moun, SACON's DST Inspire Fellow, presented his PhD work titled "Characterising seasonal riparian habitats and drivers of spatio-temporal habitat use of Smooth-coated otter (*Lutrogale perspicillata*) and Asian small-clawed otter (*Aonyx cinereus*) in riverscapes of Coimbatore Reserved Forest".



INSTITUTIONAL EVENTS

Participation of SACON Faculty & Researchers at Different Forums

Participation in the Bird monitoring in India Symposium



The Bird monitoring in India Symposium, organised by Bird Count India, LTEO India, Nature Conservation Foundation and Azim Premji University, was held between 28 to 30 April 2022. The symposium was held virtually on Slack and Zoom and then live-streamed on YouTube. This yearly event brings together and facilitates conversations among ornithologists, wildlife researchers, bird-watching groups, citizen scientists and nature enthusiasts who have systematically recorded and monitored bird species across India using various methods and approaches. The event included two mini-symposia on "Studying birds through telemetry" and 'Bird atlases in India' along with keynote plenary speakers; Dr. Ghazala Shahabuddin and Dr. Neha Sinha, who brought insights into opportunities, challenges and the path ahead in citizen science and ornithology in India. There were 19 invited talks, and 16 contributed posters at the symposium, with a discussion on "Future of bird monitoring in India" on the last day which was open to all participants. Among the poster sessions, Ms. Athira Saleevan, SACON's Junior Research Fellow, had the opportunity to present some preliminary work on "Preparation of Andhra Pradesh Action Plan: Identification and prioritisation of avian conservation issues, their habitats, landscapes and ecosystems". This symposium served as a valuable platform to gain awareness of the latest technological and methodological advances in bird atlas and telemetry studies and learn and discuss avian ecology with eminent ornithologists working in various disciplines of Indian Ornithology.



National Symposium on Avian Biology 2022

SACON researcher Mr. Durgesh Patil ranked 2nd in the Poster Presentation category at the 'National Symposium on Avian Biology 2022' held at Central University of South Bihar, Gaya, from November 9 to 11, 2022. Mr. Durgesh presented a poster entitled "Avifaunal Diversity of Doyang Reservoir: A potential Ramsar site in Nagaland". This was a collaborative work with the Department of Environment, Forests & Climate Change, Government of Nagaland. SACON Faculty Members, including Dr. P Pramod, Dr. Rajah Jayapal, (Sr. Principal Scientists), Dr. Manchi Shirish S., and Dr. Goldin Quadros (Principal Scientists), were invited speakers at the symposium. Other SACON researchers who participated in the event include Ms. Swapna Devi Ray, Mr. Prateek Dey, Mr. Ashiq P.P., Mr. Siddhesh Bhawe, Ms. Anamika Gautam, Mr. C. Divya Prakash, Mr. Harikrishnan C.P., and Mr. Sunilkumar Gupta.

INSTITUTIONAL EVENTS

SACON Faculty representation at National and International Level

SACON Faculty's Participations at Various Workshops and Trainings

Consultant for Habitat Trust Grants:

Dr Shomita Mukherjee, Senior Principal Scientist, SACON, served as a Subjury member on The Habitats Trust Grants Programme from June to December 2022. She reviewed grant proposals and visited field sites (Kachchh, Gujarat and Jaisalmer, Rajasthan) of the proposed projects as part of Field Level Evaluations. She attended the Subjury Roundtable Meeting in NOIDA on 17 & 18 November 2022 and presented her reports on the proposals she reviewed.



Dr Shomita Mukherjee, Senior Principal Scientist, SACON

IUCN Red List Assessor Training:

The IUCN Cat Specialists Group organised an online IUCN Red List Assessor Training Workshop on 18, 19, 25 & 26 October 2022. Dr Shomita Mukherjee successfully completed the training and is leading the global IUCN Red List assessment for the Fishing Cat.



Zoo Biologists Training, Hyderabad:

The Central Zoo Authority, in collaboration with Nehru Zoological Park, Hyderabad, organised a Zoo Biologist/Mid-level Officers training in Hyderabad, Telangana on November 23-25, 2022. The objective of the workshop was capacity building of zoo biologists and mid-level officers working in the zoos of the southern and south-eastern regions in various aspects of captive animal management in Indian zoos. Dr Shomita Mukherjee was invited to deliver a lecture, and she presented a talk on "Deliberations on small mammals in Indian zoos"



GEF Project Inception Workshop, Pakke Tiger Reserve, Arunachal Pradesh

The Global Tiger Forum, New Delhi organised a Project Inception Workshop at the State level for the GEF-7 project titled, "Strengthening conservation and resilience of globally significant wild cat landscapes through a focus on small cat and leopard conservation" on 20 December 2022 at the Pakke Tiger Reserve, Arunachal Pradesh. Dr Shomita Mukherjee was invited to the workshop, and she participated in discussions regarding the initiation of the project and the priorities.



Marbled cat from Eaglenest Wildlife Sanctuary, Arunachal Pradesh
©SACON/IISER Pune Eaglenest Project

INSTITUTIONAL EVENTS

SACON Faculty representation at National and International Level

SACON Faculty representing India at the International Congress of Speleology, France

Dr. Manchi Shirish S., Principal Scientist, SACON, was identified and nominated by the Speleological Association of India, India, to represent the country in the International Union of Speleology (UIS). Further, he was invited to join the UIS' 18th International Congress of Speleology and participate in the General Assembly of the UIS. The Congress was held from 24 to 31 July 2022 in Savoie – Mont Blanc, France. Dr. Manchi, has also been included as a member in the Karst and Cave Protection Commission and Pseudokarsts Commission of the International Union of Speleology (UIS). Moreover, Dr. Manchi, as President, is now heading the Biology Commission of the International Union of Speleology (UIS). This commission deals with global work (research, conservation, education, and others) concerning cave biology.

Dr. Manchi with the
International Union of
Speleology (UIS) Bureau
Members at the UIS General
Assembly in Savoie – Mont
Blanc, France.



Dr. Manchi Shirish S. while
caving in Meghalaya
(Photo: Mark Tringham)

INSTITUTIONAL EVENTS

SACON Faculty representation at National and International Level

Research Collaborative visit by SACON Faculty to Purdue University, USA

As part of Government of India—Purdue University collaborative effort, Dr. T. Ramesh, Senior Scientist, SACON, visited Department of Forestry and Natural Resources, Purdue University, USA, supported by the Science and Engineering Research Board (SERB), Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India. The bilateral research visit was aimed to research team targets and foster long-term collaboration between research teams in Purdue University and SACON, and interaction with students and networking with faculty members from various departments. The tour program was scheduled from 25 August to 20 September 2022 to follow up on SACON's PhD Student, Asit Kumar Behera, Overseas Visiting Doctoral Fellow research on "Landscape level patterns of mammalian assemblages in Bellary district, Karnataka".



Dr. T. Ramesh, SACON (R) with Prof. Patrick Zollner, Purdue University (L)

To explore further potential opportunities to do collaborative research on Biodiversity conservation in India, Dr. Ramesh had given a number of talks and discussion on wildlife research with students and faculty members: Prof. Jeffrey Lucas, Dr. Heidi Arola, Dr. Lee Humberg, Prof. Esteban, Prof. Bryan, Prof. Rob Swihart, Prof. Pat Zollner, Dr. Landon, Prof. Zhao Ma, Prof. Dharmendra Sarawat. This visit provided several opportunities for further plan and execute student exchange and putting joint proposals for funding in various platforms through possible interdisciplinary research collaboration from various departments of Purdue University. This exchange visit helped SACON team and oversea host: Prof. Patrick Zollner with more confidence in putting joint proposals on human-wildlife conflict and habitat fragmentation effect on mammalian communities. The joint collaborative research in application of tools and techniques in effective human-wildlife conflict mitigation will also enhance our mutual research collaboration between SACON and Purdue University. Both are mutually interested in taking this collaborative initiative forward through student exchange, and scientific research projects through various international funding platforms.

Fulbright-Nehru Doctoral Research Fellowship 2023-2024 Awarded

SACON's PhD student, Mr. Prateek Dey, who works under the guidance of Dr. Ram Pratap Singh (SACON Former Faculty), received the prestigious Fulbright-Nehru Doctoral Research Fellowship (FNDR) 2023-2024. He will be working with Dr. Budhan S. Pukazhenth (Research Physiologist) at Smithsonian National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute (SNZCBI), USA, during his FNDR tenure. He works on assembling a high-quality genome of *Coturnix coturnix*, tracing its demographic history through coalescent modelling, and generating a species-level phylogenetic tree. His findings will bring forth a plethora of genome-based evolutionary inferences, which will be of high conservation importance for a wide variety of co-generic species in India.



INSTITUTIONAL EVENTS

Visit of MoEFCC delegates to SAICON

SAICON was delighted to welcome Shri Bhupender Yadav, Hon'ble Minister of MoEFCC on October 8, 2022. Prior to Hon'ble Minister's visit, Dr. S.K. Bajpayee, Joint Secretary, MoEFCC visited SAICON on 25 & 26 August 2022 along with the other MoEFCC delegates, including Mr. Raghu Kumar Kodali, Director, Mr. Manoj Shrivatsav, Director (IFD), Mr. S. P. Singh, Under Secretary (GA), Dr. C. Palpandi, Scientist-D, IRO. During both the visits, the delegates discussed the activities of SAICON with the Faculty and had an interactive session with research scholars. They all also visited various facilities of SAICON including the Avian Ecotoxicology Laboratory, Avian Physiology and Genetics Laboratory, Wetland Laboratory and other facilities of SAICON.



Shri Bhupender Yadav, Hon'ble Minister of MoEFCC with SAICON Director in charge Dr. S. Muralidharan



MoEFCC Delegates including Shri Bhupender Yadav, Hon'ble Minister of MoEFCC and Dr. Bajpayee, Joint Secretary, visiting various facilities at SAICON



MoEFCC Delegates with SAICON Faculty, Staff and Researchers

INSTITUTIONAL EVENTS

Coimbatore Collector's Programme at SACON

In the reporting quarter, Coimbatore Collector, Mr. G.S. Sameeran visited SACON on three occasions. He was accompanied by Government School Children of Coimbatore district. The programme was an initiative by Mr. Sameeran, who is known to be highly involved in such social causes. Around 200 students from Government Higher Secondary Schools from across the Coimbatore district visited SACON on 16 July, 5 November, and 10 December 2022. Dr. P. Pramod, Senior Principal Scientist, interacted with students about birds and created awareness on the topic "*Siragai Virithu Vaanai Allakum Paravaigal*", translating to "Birds spreading their wings and measuring the unmeasurable sky." This motivational talk inspired the young minds that it is possible to achieve everything in life as there are no defined boundaries, similar to how birds use their wings to scale the endless sky. Mr. Sameeran was also keenly looking forward to holding many such interactive gatherings with Coimbatore District's Govt. Schools, and fondly named the programme as "Coffee with Collector". At SACON, the students also explored the wilderness of the campus accompanied by SACON Researchers.



76th Independence Day Celebration

On August 15, 2022, SACON Celebrated India's 76th Independence Day at its campus. All the faculty, staff, researchers, and their family members came together for the celebrations. The tricolour was hoisted by SACON's Director i/c Dr. S. Muralidharan, followed by a brief speech for the audience. SACON's family celebrated the big day by remembering and honouring all the people who sacrificed their lives for the country's freedom.



INSTITUTIONAL EVENTS

Poster Releases on Environment Days

'Hariyali Mahotsav 2022

'Hariyali Mahotsav' or 'Tree Festival' was organised by the MoEFCC at Talkatora Stadium, New Delhi, on 8 July 2022. This event is a medium for encouraging the masses to plant trees and to create awareness about the benefits of forest conservation and the role of forests and green spaces in maintaining the ecological balance. On the occasion of *Hariyali Mahotsav*, SACON ENVIS Resource Partner published a poster highlighting the significance of planting trees and making everyone realise the relationship between all organisms and their physical environment. The team also organised an online *Hariyali Saptah* word search puzzle to create awareness about the 25 hidden words that significantly make the Earth a greener Planet. Around 20 participants actively participated in the quiz competition. The winners were felicitated with SACON souvenirs and certificates.



International Day for the Conservation of Mangrove Ecosystem 2022

SACON ENVIS Resource Partner released an awareness poster on the occasion of "International Day for the Conservation of Mangrove Ecosystem", on 26 July 2022.

World Ozone day 2022

World Ozone Day is observed every year on September 16. This year the SACON ENVIS Team released the poster highlighting this year's Theme, "Global Cooperation Protecting Life On Earth", at Govt. Tribal School, Panapalli, Aanaikatti. They briefed the students on the importance of the Ozone layer and the Impacts of ozone layer depletion.



INSTITUTIONAL EVENTS

World Elephant Day 2022

SACON celebrated "The World Elephant Day 2022" on August 12, 2022, with the rural kids of Doomanur village, who share space with the jumbos. We visited the Government School at Doomanur, Anaikatty, and conducted a Wildlife Art Workshop with resource person Mr. Lenin Raj, Wildlife Artist, and conducted a drawing competition on the topic "Yannaiyum Nannum" translated to "Elephant and Myself" (below top right image). The award-winning documentary on the Human-elephant conflict "Kaliru" was also screened. After the movie, the kids interacted with Mr. Santhosh Krishnan, Director of the film and Wildlife Filmmaker (below top left image). The interactions led to sharing their experiences about their various interactions with elephants. The workshop was a success with the help of SACON's Junior Research Biologists, Ms. Santhosini, Mr. Arun George, Mr. Gaurav Sonawane, Ms. Kanchan Choudhary and Nature Education Assistant, Ms. Sri Sowmiya.



INSTITUTIONAL EVENTS

National Wildlife Week 2022

India celebrates National Wildlife Week every year from October 2 to October 8. Wildlife Week started in 1952 with the goal of raising public awareness about significance of wildlife and its conservation. On the 68th anniversary of Wildlife Week, SACON held a variety of workshops and activities to enhance awareness about wildlife among youngsters aged 14 to 17. SACON ENVIS Partner also released a poster for social media awareness. Mr. Lenin Raj, Wildlife Artist, was one of the key resource persons along with several SACON researchers.



Nature Walks with birds, insects and butterflies

Wildlife Art Workshop



Origami Workshop

Nature Journaling
Workshop



INSTITUTIONAL EVENTS

Reintroduction of Cheetah in India Campaign



The Government of India has brought back long-extinct Cheetahs to India to revitalise and diversify India's wildlife and habitat. The Asiatic cheetah was declared extinct from India in 1952. The African cheetah from Namibia is reintroduced under an MoU signed earlier this year between the respective governments. The reintroduction of Cheetahs in India is being done under Project Cheetah, the world's first inter-continental large wild carnivore translocation project. The first phase of the 'Action Plan for Introduction of Cheetah in India' witnessed 8 Cheetahs being released in the Kuno National Park, Madhya Pradesh. In an endeavour to promote this and create awareness among school children, the SACON ENVIS team visited local schools in and around Anaikatty, Coimbatore and distributed the information kit to the children and screened video clippings of cheetahs. The team also discussed the campaign with the general public and college students.



Rashtriya Ekta Diwas

Commemorating the birth anniversary of India's First Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister, Shri Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, SACON observed Rashtriya Ekta Diwas/National Unity Day on 31 October 2022. The staff and researchers pledged to promise to preserve and strengthen the unity, integrity, and security of the United Bharat.



INSTITUTIONAL EVENTS

Photography Workshop

On September 17, 2022, students from the Photography Club of Yuva Bharathi School, Coimbatore, visited SACON. The students received a briefing about the institution and Wildlife photography from Dr. P. Pramod, Senior Principal Scientist. In addition to experimenting with adjusting lights and image perspectives, they also learned about the importance of wildlife photography and its role in conservation. For the practical sessions, they went on the nature trails inside the SACON campus along with SACON research volunteers, Ms. Harshita Prakash, Ms. Lini Kaladharan, Mr. Mandar Chowkekar, Mr. Gaurav Singh (Junior Research Biologists), and Nature Education Assistant, Ms. Sri Sowmiya M.



Homeschooled Children at SACON

Homeschooling is a non-traditional educational technique in which parents manage their children's education at home rather than sending them to formal schools. While most children attend public or private schools, many also get homeschooled. SACON was delighted to host 24 homeschooled children and their parents for a one-day nature programme on Dec 14, 2022. Dr. P. Pramod, Senior Principal Scientist, discussed about wildlife and conservation with children and parents. The attendees were also taken on a walk through the Nature Trail. Ms. Sri Sowmiya, Nature Education Assistant, conducted the outdoor activities, while SACON Researchers Mr. D. Deepak, Mr. Arun George, Mr. Gaurav Singh, and Ms. Bharti Arora volunteered for the programme.



INSTITUTIONAL EVENTS

Special Campaign for Swachhata 2.0

As directed by the Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DARPG) and MoEFCC, Government of India, the Special Campaign for Swachhata 2.0 was organised at SACON in two phases— Preparatory Phase from 14.09.2022 to 30.09.2022 and Implementation Phase from 02.10.2022 to 31.10.2022. The main aim of the Special Campaign was to identify scraps, including e-wastes, redundant and obsolete materials and their disposal. In addition, the overall cleanliness of Government offices with a special focus on space management, enhancing workplace experience, beautification of offices, review and weeding out of files and records were undertaken.

During the Preparatory Phase from, the cleanliness campaign sites such as administrative and finance offices, store rooms, computer rooms, laboratories, library, guest house, hostel blocks, classrooms and canteen were identified for the campaign. Upon cleaning the above sites, 2555 kg of scrap materials, including wooden waste, metal waste, plastic waste, chemical bottles and 28 kg of e-waste, were identified for disposal. In addition, 791 physical files and NIL e-files were identified for review under record management.

During the implementation phase, the identified scrap materials of 2575 kg and e-waste of 28 kgs were disposed of for Rs. 1,31,933/-. Out of 791 files identified for review, 634 files were identified for weeding out, and the same have been weeded out as per the extant guidelines issued by the Government of India. During the Special Campaign 2.0, 163 Sq. Ft area at this centre was cleared and freed from scrap materials.



INSTITUTIONAL EVENTS

Fit India Freedom Run 3.0

Fit India Mission is a Government of India's initiative to encourage fitness and raise awareness among Indian residents. Fit India Freedom Run started in 2020 during Covid Pandemic, when the nation began following social distancing in a 'new normal' lifestyle to maintain the urgent desire for fitness, even while adhering to social distancing rules. The campaign aims to promote exercise by engaging residents in physical activity. This year, Fit India Mission organised the 3rd edition, i.e. Fit India Freedom Run 3.0, from 2 to 31 October 2022 under Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav initiative. SACON actively participated during the campaign period. We conducted trekkings and runs for several school and college students, teachers, researchers and forest officer trainees inside the campus. Dr. M. Mahendiran, Senior Scientist and Sports Faculty, interacted with the participants and created awareness about the importance of physical fitness in our everyday lives.



INSTITUTIONAL EVENTS

Sálim Ali Trophy Nature Competitions 2022

The Sálim Ali Nature Trophy Competition was conducted for Coimbatore School Children on November 20, 2022. The event was held at G.D. Matriculation Higher Secondary School. We conducted competitions under several categories including Elocution, Pencil Shading, Essay Writing, Short Story Writing, Poetry Writing (in both English and Tamil), Painting, Quiz, and Bird Watching. This year's competition theme was "Conservation of Wetlands and Waterbodies." More than 4000 children from nearly 50 Schools participated in the programme.



INSTITUTIONAL EVENTS

RHATC Programme of Zoo Outreach at SACON

Trainees of Ram Hattikudur Advanced Training in Conservation (RHATC) programme of Zoo Outreach Organisation visited SACON for a two-day training programme on 5 & 6 December 2022. During their visit, they had several lectures on a wide array of topics by the subject experts of SACON, including the faculty and researchers. Dr. H.N. Kumara, Principal Scientist, SACON, organised the training programme.



Commencement of M.Sc. Wildlife Science (Ornithology) at SACON

In fulfillment of one of its core mandates, SACON started a new Post-Graduate programme [M.Sc. Wildlife Science (Ornithology)], the first of its kind in South Asia from the academic year 2022–23. The commencement of the Second batch of its flagship PG programme in M.Sc. Wildlife Science (Ornithology) started on 19 December 2022 in academic collaboration with Central University of Tamil Nadu and with the financial support of the MoEFCC. Nine students from six states joined the course based on their cumulative performance in the CUET-PG 2022 examination and interview. The course aims to impart state-of-the-art education and training in Wildlife Science with a specialisation in ornithology, covering all aspects of wildlife biology, ecology, conservation science, and policy, and to produce a highly qualified and motivated league of young wildlife scientists and ornithologists who will bring professionalism to wildlife conservation and management in India. The PG programme is central to SACON's commitment to India's capacity building in wildlife conservation and sustainable development.



L to R in order of appearance: Prajwal Kumar, Siddhi Sunil Damle, Srinidhi Sridhar, Sudhanva Jahagirdar, Disha Mondal, Pradeeshwar RJ, Dipika Das, Keerthana M, and Bhavesh



POPULAR ARTICLES

How much of **LIFE** do we know??

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Every year, more and more new life forms are being introduced to us by science. Scientists, particularly taxonomists, probe and explore every location we know and beyond, returning with new species we were unaware of. Additionally, those who have been lost or are hardly seen are continually being rediscovered. Explaining the time and effort put into investigating the different living forms is impossible. Sometimes new species that have never been described before are discovered accidentally or via arduous research into many museum collections and specimens. It will often take years or even decades of perseverance to describe a new species.

In 2020 alone, scientists at the California Academy of Sciences added 213 new plant and animal species to the tree of life, documented in several peer-reviewed scientific articles. The list of those new species includes 101 ants, 22 crickets, 15 fishes, 11 geckos, 11 sea slugs, 11 flowering plants, eight beetles, eight fossil echinoderms, seven spiders, five snakes, two skinks, two aphids, two eels, one moss, one frog, one fossil amphibian, one seahorse, one fossil scallop, one sea biscuit, one fossil crinoid (or sea lily), and one coral!! Introducing these species into the scientific community was the tireless effort of two dozen Academy scientists and many more collaborators worldwide.

A very interesting story about the description of a new tree species became the news when it was finally described and published in 2019 after almost 35 years since it was known in the wild. The newly described tree species was already known to the public for years. The researchers from the National Institute of Amazonian Research (Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas da Amazônia or INPA) in Manaus, Brazil, learned about it for the first time during one of their surveys in the Madeira River Basin in the Brazilian Amazon in 1982. The new tree named *Coccoloba gigantifolia* is a flowering plant found in the region's tropical rainforests. The genus is characterized by the gigantic leaf, which can go up to the size of 2.5 meters in length, hence the name *Coccoloba gigantifolia*. Even though the tree was known to scientists in INPA since 1982, they could not establish it as a new species because, during the time, the tree didn't produce any flowers or fruits; fertile parts of a plant very essential for distinguishing itself from closely related species. Moreover, their leaves were too large to be collected for a herbarium. In 1993, some leaves of the tree were collected and framed in INPA for display. In August 2005, expeditions to the nearby Jamari National Forest enabled the collection of inflorescences, mature seeds, and fruits. Since the flowers were not in good condition, it did not help identify the species' status. The seeds were propagated, and the saplings were grown in the institute. After 13 years of waiting, finally, in 2018, one of the trees flowered and produced fruits, confirming that it was a new species not described before. This was a joyful moment for all those scientists who invested their lives into introducing this new species of a tree characterized by giant leaves into the spotlight. Similarly, each new species discovered has a unique story and

the tireless effort of many people behind it. From the time of Linnaeus till now, the discovery of new species has continued without interruption. The invasion of Europeans into a new land, both in the West and East, resulted in the discovery of several species and exploration of the hotspots of life. However, their main objective was to conquer new land and take the resources back to Europe. Even in 2020, new species are still being described with even more intensity.

In the Western Ghats, which is one of the ancient and most studied biodiversity hotspots, efforts to discover new organisms from various groups of animals (taxa), such as butterflies, dragonflies, fishes, crabs, and plants, are underway. During our fieldwork in the flood-hit areas of Nelliampathy Forest Reserve near the Palghat Gap of Western Ghats, a group of researchers, including me, discovered a new species of water beetle named *Sandracottus vijayakumari*. The paper was published in the Journal of Threatened Taxa (JoTT) in 2021. From the same Forest Reserve, another group of researchers described a new plant species, *Glycosmis nelliampathiensis*, described as the *Glycosmis* plant from Nelliampathy. In May 2021, a new tree species was described from the sky islands of Nelliampathy Forest Reserve named *Euginia pokkudanii* in honour of the great Indian environmentalist and activist Kallen Pokkudan. Both papers were published in 2021 in a botanical journal, Phytotaxa. Additionally, scientists are discovering more and more fish species from various parts of the Western Ghats. These include the famous living fossil, *Aenigmachanna gollum* or Gollum snakehead from the subterranean waters of Kerala, published in 2020. Others include a new species of filament barb, *Dawkinsia uttara* discovered from Northern Western Ghats (*uttara* in Sanskrit is North) in 2020 and the description of a new genus *Rakthamichthys* published in 2020 by researchers from Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Studies (KUFOS). Many other groups of organisms were discovered, including two new species of freshwater crabs, *Rajathelphusa ala* and *R. muni*, by researchers of Kerala University; a new taxon of *Nacaduba* butterflies (Lineblue butterflies), *Nacaduba sinhala ramaswamii*; a new species of damselfly (Odonata) *Protostica rufostigma* Kimmins; the rediscovery of the club tail dragonfly called Martin's Dushkhawker (*Anaciaeschna martini*); five new species of shrub frogs; a new species of wood snake and it goes on.

The extensive list of recently identified species reveals the repository of diversity that is yet to be explored. As the extinction rate of living beings is increasing alarmingly, describing new species is necessary to understand the depth of our issue. The loss of unnamed species is comparable to destroying a library's volumes before being catalogued. Before the volumes in the library of life disappear from the face of the world, we must at least perceive them. We won't be able to protect them from the current sixth major extinction catastrophe unless we find them. At least we can attempt to buy some time!

POPULAR ARTICLES

Fudam Bird Sanctuary "An Oasis of Serenity"

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Being a part of the "Management Plan for Fudam Bird Sanctuary, Diu" project, I had the opportunity to visit Diu, which was fascinating as it is a well-known tourist destination. It's a tiny island in Gujarat's southernmost region, covering 40 square kilometres and surrounded by the Arabian Sea. Fudam Bird Sanctuary (FBS) is an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) and Sanctuary notified by the Administration of the Union Territory of Daman and Diu in 1991 under Section 18 of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972. FBS, with an area of 218.57 ha, is located along the intertidal zone between Diu Island and the Gujarat mainland. FBS is densely packed along the creek with diverse habitats such as mangroves, salt pans, tidal mudflats, and woody forest patches. These habitats harbour a diverse range of flora and fauna.

My month-long field investigations included biodiversity surveys and interactions with many stakeholders. During this period, the FBS watchtower on the edge of a wetland virtually became my field office, and my camera and binoculars were my best companions. My stay at FBS was highly productive, as I documented roughly 70 types of flora, with *Avicennia marina* being the most dominant mangrove plant species. I also recorded over 80 avifaunal species, dominated mainly by waders, 12 butterfly species, and seven odonate species. Some near-threatened bird species of conservation importance, such as the Painted stork, Eurasian curlew, Bar-tailed godwit, Black-tailed godwit, and Black-headed Ibis, were also seen prospering in FBS. Smaller flamingos congregate on the shallow tidal mud flats in the winter, drawing bird enthusiasts and tourists. My favourite memory from FBS was when a head-like thing jumped out of the creek water, completely surprising me. I didn't identify it initially, but that massive 'head' repeatedly popping out turned out to be a critically endangered Green Sea Turtle, which according to the staff and people, was frequently observed along the FBS creek.

In addition to a diverse range of bird species, the woody forest patches of FBS are home to several reptiles and mammals. Despite observing the rich diversity of FBS, I did come across some unpleasant anthropogenic components throughout my tour, including solid waste management sites near the Sanctuary and the intrusion of feral dogs. The dumping site was inoperable during my visit, contaminating the surrounding creek water. I also witnessed feral dogs attacking the wild birds and damaging nesting sites in the region. People visiting FBS often have frequently witnessed the unecological butchery of feral dogs on native wildlife species and demanded culling or ethical elimination of dogs from the premises of the Sanctuary. Numerous recommendations from the public were recorded during the questionnaire survey pointed towards developing a robust ecotourism plan and gave an insight into the local inhabitant's attitude towards FBS. The survey helped me a lot to understand the importance of FBS and to work for betterment of the area through a proper management plan. The current short-term study also indicated that the actual number of faunal species using the

FBS area could be substantially higher if studied at different seasons on a long-term basis. Except for brief documentation by BNHS in 2005, no documented studies are available from FBS. Conservation managers must propose and conduct detailed research on numerous elements of FBS biodiversity and take the necessary actions to monitor and delimit the prevailing threats to this rich and underexplored *Oasis of Serenity*.



Mangrove habitat of Fudam Bird Sanctuary



Tidal mudflats at low tide near FBS



A feral dog chasing birds in FBS

POPULAR ARTICLES

**Google Maps**

New tool for your Travel Planning

Who doesn't enjoy travelling? I've always been fascinated with automobiles and the people that drive them. It had always been my dream to ride my motorcycle across the country. My father was a heavy vehicle driver who used to take me along on his weekend trips. I'd always wanted to sit next to him and observe his actions and how he drove. My passion for travel and automobiles developed as I grew older, and I practically couldn't wait to become 18 to receive my driver's licence. Soon after finishing my master's degree, I was offered a research position with SACON, which changed my life.

I was thrilled to join SACON as a JRB in the House Sparrow project titled 'Assessing the population status of synanthropic bird species of India, including House Sparrow and House Crow, and their response to urbanisation.' The enthusiasm stemmed from the fact that it was a whole India trip package. I was given a Bajaj Discover 125 motorcycle to go around the country and undertake the project's field survey. As part of the fieldwork, I had the opportunity to visit all of India's southern and central Indian states and perform field surveys in all of the districts. SACON provided the motorbike for the field study, and because it was my first motorcycle, I felt much more attached to it right from the beginning.

With all the enthusiasm around the project, I began my field visits. I travelled to Telangana for fieldwork; the field survey began in Hyderabad, and I drove across all of Telangana's districts in less than two months. After finishing Telangana, I continued to other states for the following two years, covering over 40,000 kilometres on the bike. Time rushed by as I tried to visit as many locations as possible. Different places, people, and lifestyles gave me a better insight of life. The paved and unpaved roads (paved roads, to be exact) were enthralling and brought me much delight during my field surveys. I had the impression that my dream was coming true as I enjoyed my field surveys as much as my cross-country rides. For the first time in my life, I felt ecstatic and fulfilled. I'd always wanted to work in the field, so I began doing field surveys as quickly as possible, knowing that after I finished one state, I'd be granted permission to move on to the next. I began the journey solo and eventually added Priyanka and Shantanu as travel companions (Junior Research Biologists in the same project). We formed a strong emotional relationship and camaraderie while travelling together. Most field locations were new to us, as were the roads and other services such as hotels and restaurants. We relied entirely on Google Maps for our journey plans, particularly for navigating and lodging. Before leaving for the field, we would load our sampling sites onto an application called Map marker, and from there, we utilised Google Maps to reach our sampling locations. After finishing fieldwork in a particular location, we visited nearby tourist attractions such as monuments, temples, parks, and forts. We utilised Google maps to locate the new sites and began calling our bucket list items one by one. We were ecstatic to see the new places and never felt homesick.

As for the synanthropic bird survey, most of the surveys were done in India's rural, semi-urban, and urban landscapes. We used to stay

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Team Sparrow (L to R: Shantanu, Priyanka and Ashwin)

in hotels around the country since we were always travelling. We would choose our lodging based on user evaluations (Google Maps local guides) and images of the place on Google Maps. The user evaluations or reviews are provided by 'Local Guides', which is a worldwide community of explorers who write reviews, share images, answer questions, add or update places, and verify information on Google Maps. Millions of people rely on these contributions to determine where to go and what to do. The local guide initiative aims to improve Google Maps services and keep current regional developments up to date. Anyone may volunteer to be a Google Local Guide and assist others. Most of them, like myself, regard it as a hobby. One can earn points for each location they evaluate, photograph, update, amend, or contribute new information on Google Maps. Contribution points will assist in raising the local guide's profile and are recognised and rewarded. All these contributions lead to several features on Google Maps that help navigate smoothly. Out of interest, I regularly updated Google Maps as I visited new places. Of the ten levels, I levelled up to 8 and even received a gift from Google for my contributions. Google rewards top contributors with benefits like early access to Google features and special rewards from merchandise partners.

Once you've signed up as a local guide, Google will keep track of all your excursions and provide a detailed breakdown of how many areas you've visited. Furthermore, Google will provide information on how many people have seen your images, have read your reviews, and found your contributions helpful. All those notifications gave me immense satisfaction as I happily continued my newfound hobby of being a Local Guide on a digital platform.

I am eternally thankful to SACON for providing me with the opportunity to work on something I've wanted to since I was a youngster. As a researcher, I enjoyed travelling and exploring our country's diverse culture and ethnicity. As part of SACON's House sparrow project, I've visited more locations than I could ever imagine. While undertaking my journeys, I discovered some beneficial features in Google Maps as a travel and field work tool. I am still a local guide with Google and continue it as a pastime, which brings me great joy in assisting other travellers.



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