

FAQs

M.Sc. (Wildlife Science & Ornithology)

[By SACON in academic collaboration with Central University of Tamil Nadu]

1. WHY IS THIS COURSE OFFERED?

India is one of the 17 mega-biodiversity countries in the world with a high degree of species diversity and endemism in flora and fauna. With nearly 25% of its geographical area under forest cover, c. 35,000 sq. km. extent of inland wetlands, about 7,500 km of coastline and the expansive marine waters, and close to 1,000 Protected Areas covering all ecosystems, India's wilderness area and its wildlife require enormous human resource to manage and conserve them. Unfortunately, India's trained cadre of wildlife biologists and managers is too small in strength to cater to the needs and challenges of the country in wildlife conservation. There are only a handful of institutions and universities in India that impart higher education and training in wildlife and conservation studies, and the numbers are clearly inadequate to meet the country's requirements. With this background, this course is offered to augment the country's capacity in research and conservation of its wildlife and their habitats with particular emphasis on birds.

2. WHO CONDUCTS THIS COURSE?

The M.Sc. (Wildlife Science & Ornithology) is a fully residential, two-year, regular course conducted by **Sálim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON)** on its sprawling campus at Anaikatty near Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, in academic collaboration with Central University of Tamil Nadu (CUTN).

SACON was originally established as a Centre of Excellence in 1990 by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), Government of India, and has recently been made as the South India Centre of Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Dehradun – country's premier government agency in wildlife research, training, and management under MoEFCC. SACON's mission is to help conserve India's biodiversity and its sustainable use through research, education, and people's participation with birds at the centre stage. It conducts research and training focusing on ornithology and covering all aspects of biodiversity and natural history. SACON has a vibrant academic infrastructure in place, and the Institute has undertaken over 340 research projects and environmental impact assessments during the last 30 years. It has produced over 70 PhD scholars in ornithology and wildlife science, and SACON scientists have published over 800 scientific papers in national and international peer-reviewed journals.

3. WHAT IS THIS COURSE ALL ABOUT?

The course aims to impart state-of-the-art education and training in Wildlife Science and Ornithology, - covering all aspects of wildlife biology, ecology, wildlife management, 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 two-year, fully residential course, is in academic collaboration with **Central University of Tamil Nadu (CUTN)**, Thiruvarur, Tamil Nadu, which will award the degree. The M.Sc. course is expected to commence in June-July, 2024 and will comprise four semesters, each of which will be of six months duration. The teaching faculty will include, besides SACON's own pool of eminent scientists, India's leading wildlife biologists, ecologists, conservationists, and policy makers.

4. WHAT ARE THE CORE SUBJECTS TAUGHT IN THE COURSE?

The main coursework comprises 15 Core Papers spread across three semesters, and each Core Paper will be taught through 3-5 Modules. The final semester is earmarked for conducting dissertation project work. The Core Papers include Ornithology, Wildlife Biology, Biogeography, Forest Ecology, Research Methodology & Biostatistics, Wetland Studies, Conservation Biology, Wildlife Management, and Wildlife Policy. Besides, the course curriculum also includes three field-tours and several field-trips to protected areas and wildlife habitats. Thus, the coursework is a judicious mix of ornithology, wildlife science and wildlife management.

5. WHO SHOULD TAKE THIS COURSE?

This is a specialized programme with the sole aim of producing highly qualified and well-trained young professionals in the field of ornithology, wildlife science, wildlife management, and biodiversity conservation in the country. So, the course can be taken by any young aspirant with a deep passion for wildlife studies and commitment to nature and biodiversity conservation, and who wants to pursue a career as an ornithologist or wildlife biologist/manager/conservationist. However, note that the coursework will require the students to undergo rigorous training in research methodology and study design, ecological theory & modeling, and use of advanced tools and techniques in wildlife studies – all of which warrant a certain degree of quantitative aptitude in general.

6. WHO ARE ELIGIBLE TO APPLY FOR THE COURSE?

- a) The course is open ONLY to students of Indian Nationality
- b) Candidates should have completed minimum of 15 years of formal education (10+2+3 or 11+2+2).
- c) Candidates should possess a Bachelor's degree in **any Science** (Biology/Life sciences, Physical/Chemical sciences, Mathematical sciences, Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry, Veterinary science, Medicine, Pharmacy, Biotechnology, or Computer science) or in **Engineering / Technology** or a degree recognized as equivalent thereof.
- d) Candidates should have the minimum qualifying mark of 55 per cent in aggregate at the Bachelor's level; candidates belonging to SC/ST category will be required to possess a minimum of 45 per cent in aggregate.
- e) Candidates awaiting final results or appearing for the final examinations in their Bachelor's degree may also apply; however, if selected, they will be required to furnish provisional degree certificate/final pass certificate at the time of joining the course, failing which their admission will be cancelled.
- f) The age limit is 25 years as on 1 July, 2022 with 5 years relaxation for SC/ST and 3 years relaxation for OBC (Non-Creamy Layer) candidates as per Government of India norms.
- g) Candidates, who wish to avail concessions/provisions under the reservation policy, should submit requisite certificate issued by a Competent Authority as authorized by Government of India rules pertaining to reservation in admission/employment.
- h) Candidates with Bachelor's Degree from universities outside India should obtain certificates of equivalence from the Secretary General, Association of Indian Universities, AIU House, 16, Kotla Marg, New Delhi – 110 002 (Website: <http://www.aiu.ac.in/index.asp>). However, the decision of the Central University of Tamil Nadu (CUTN) shall be final with regard to validity of the equivalence certificate and eligibility of the candidate

7. WHAT IS THE ADMISSION PROCEDURE FOR THE COURSE?

Candidates, with eligibility as outlined above, will be required to appear for **Common University Entrance Test-PG (CUET-PG)** to be conducted by National Testing Agency (NTA) of Ministry of Education, Government of India. Based on the CUET-PG score, candidates will be shortlisted for the Interview to be conducted at SACON, Coimbatore. The final selection list for admission to the course, in different categories, will, however, be based on candidates' cumulative performance in CUET-PG and Interview.

Selected candidates will be required to confirm their joining the course within one week of publication of the final selection list, failing which the waitlisted candidates in appropriate categories will be offered the seat. The final selection will, however, be deemed provisional and confirmation of candidature will be subject to verification of eligibility certificates and acceptance of the same by Central University of Tamil Nadu (CUTN).

In case of any vacancies at the time of admission, they will be filled through an Open Counselling that will be advertised on SACON's website during April-May; interested candidates with exceptional interest and knowledge in wildlife science, but haven't taken the CUET-PG examination, may also apply for the course through Open Counselling.

8. WHAT IS THE TOTAL INTAKE OF STUDENTS PER BATCH IN THE COURSE?

The course will admit 12 students per batch. Following the Government of India norms on reservation, these 12 seats will be apportioned among different categories of qualifying candidates as follows: General-5, SC-2, ST-1, OBC (Non-Creamy Layer)-3, and EWS-1. And note that we admit students on alternate years so that there will be only one batch at a time. This small batch size and alternate year of admission ensure high quality of training and personal mentorship for the students.

9. WHAT IS THE TOTAL COURSE FEE?

The Course Fee for the entire programme is approximately Rs. 4,00,000/- (tentative only) that includes tuition fees, library and laboratory fees, dissertation fees, admin fees, and hostel accommodation fees. [Please note that hostel mess charges are NOT included in the Course Fee]. Students selected for admission will be required to pay the Course Fee in four equal instalments at the beginning of each semester. SACON will, however, attempt to secure either full or partial scholarship from potential donor agencies for self-sponsored students, contingent upon availability; however, award of these scholarships, if available, will be solely at the discretion of SACON.

10. WHAT ARE THE CAREER PROSPECTS FOR THIS COURSE?

This is an emerging discipline that has just begun gaining traction in the country. There are several players in the field of wildlife science and conservation: government ministries & departments, government institutions, international agencies, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, independent consultancy firms, and media. Post-graduates in wildlife studies are required at various levels in these places, and it is difficult to generalize the nature of work or pay package as they would vary between organizations. But for fresh post-graduates, hirings are mostly need-based (like

specific projects or programmes); once they gain experience and further skill, they get placed in regular positions.

Suffice to say that opportunities in these places for highly skilled and trained wildlife professionals have multiplied in recent times, and we expect the demand to go up in future, given the very small number of trained post-graduates who pass out each year from Indian universities.

A majority of fresh post-graduates do pursue Ph.D. in wildlife sciences, after securing handsome fellowships offered by institutions and government agencies; and quite a few of them win overseas fellowships to do Ph.D. in universities abroad. And some of the wildlife graduates take UPSC/SSC examinations to gain entry to Indian Forest Service and State Forest Services; though a degree in wildlife science is not mandated for these government services, it does go a long way towards clearing the examinations and interviews.

11. WHAT ARE THE STUDENT FACILITIES AVAILABLE AT SAICON?

SAICON has several student facilities on its campus and these include a separate PG hostel, mess/canteen, sports ground, gym, and wi-fi connectivity. Please click the following link for further details: < <https://www.sacon.in/other-facilities/>>.

12. ARE STUDENTS REQUIRED TO BRING ANYTHING AT THE TIME OF JOINING THE COURSE?

Students will be given a pair of binoculars and a set of field guides (to flora and fauna) on joining the course.

However, they are expected to bring their own personal laptop to the classes. A laptop is a must, for most classes will conduct hands-on data analysis, and all assignments are to be submitted as soft copies only. All the teaching materials and notes will also be furnished only as soft copies.

The PG hostel is a fully furnished block and students are required to bring only their personal wardrobe and personal care products.

The two-year coursework will include frequent visits to wilderness areas (including forests, grasslands, wetlands, etc) and you are advised to keep adequate stock of field-gear including rucksack/knapsack, dayback, field-dress, raincoat, wind-cheater, umbrella, cap/hat, and at least two pairs of field-shoes.
