



Contact Programme in Conservation Biology from ATREE

In 1996, in Bangalore, the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and Environment (ATREE) was founded in an effort to address the environmental challenges facing India. ATREE is a non-profit organisation that utilises an interdisciplinary approach to address issues of environmental degradation and economic development. ATREE's efforts are focused on the Western Ghats and the Eastern Himalayas. These regions are considered hotspots for their extraordinarily diverse species of flora and fauna, many of them endangered like the Lion Tailed Macaque, Nilgiri Tahr, Red Panda and Golden Langur. This unique organisation strives to protect wildlife, conserve biodiversity and promote sustainable development while seeking to advance the protection of environment.

For the past several years, ATREE in association with the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India, has been organising the field based training programme on Tropical Conservation Biology for senior graduate and postgraduate students. Over the years, participants from diverse backgrounds like engineering, veterinary, agriculture, forestry, management and life sciences have attended this training programme. Since every state gets an equal representation in the training programme, there is considerable biodiversity among the participants as well. The course, usually conducted in the second week of June every year, provides good opportunity for the young minds to share their concerns and learn more about the value of wildlife, threats to biodiversity and importance of conservation.

The 15-day programme divided into theory and practical sessions is mainly aimed to introduce the participants to the emerging field of conservation biology. Experts in the field of wildlife and conservation from India and abroad interact with the participants and give them an overview of the science of conservation biology, the distribution, value and threats to biodiversity. They share their experiences in wildlife conservation efforts at the species, population and community levels. Each and every aspect of the sound principles underlying this new field of science is made known to the participants through lectures, video films, slides and photographs.

After the interactive theory session the participants are asked to undertake a field-based study in areas of their own interest. They are taken to the ATREE field station in the Biligiri Rangaswamy Temple Wildlife Sanctuary, commonly known as the BRT hills.

The BRT Wildlife Sanctuary in the Karnataka State is unique in that within its boundary, there is a wide variety of habitat types. There is considerable altitudinal and habitat variation within the sanctuary limits, lowest being the plains at the periphery where it is very dry and highest being the shola-grassland complex. Owing to all these factors, the sanctuary supports a good faunal diversity in the wild, which encompasses nearly 26 species of mammals, over 215 species of birds, 22 species of reptiles and 11 species of amphibians. The environment is ideal for amateur wildlife enthusiasts and environmentalists to ask questions and find answers on their own, under the strict guidance of the experts. ATREE provides all the instrumental support needed for each participant's field of study. Daily review of the each participant's study is shared with everyone and suggestions taken to get meaningful results.

Biological diversity in general encompasses all living organisms (all plants, animals and microorganisms), the genes they contain, the communities they form and the ecosystems in which they live in. Genetic diversity both within the population and between populations is important for the survival of a species. The species diversity in turn depends on the number of species and the evenness. Ultimately the community and ecosystem diversity depends on the biological communities, ecosystems and their interactions. The global distribution of biodiversity is uneven and some areas have more species than others do. World's richest ecosystems are the tropical rain forests, coral reefs and deep sea. The tropical rain forests accounts for only 7% of the land surface but sustains more than half of the world's species. The great barrier reefs, which occupies only 0.1% of the ocean surface is the home for 8% of the world's fish species. These figures signify the importance of wildlife and conservation efforts in countries of the Third World, where the majority of biodiversity hotspots are located. The training programme from ATREE with its theory and practical sessions is specially designed to create awareness about the importance of wildlife and conservation.

All expenses of the selected candidates are borne by ATREE. Interested persons can visit ATREE at www.atree.org for further information.

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