



Annual Report

2025-26

FigTree
NATURALIST FOUNDATION

THE
Naturalist
SCHOOL

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THE Naturalist SCHOOL

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2025–2026**

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FOUNDER'S NOTE



Five years may be a small number on paper.

But in the life of an organisation like The Naturalist School, it feels like a forest beginning to take root.

When we started, we carried a simple belief: that conservation begins with observation. That if people could slow down, notice, understand and care, something will shift. Five years later, that belief has travelled further than we could have imagined.

It has travelled to tiger reserves, grasslands, lakes, zoos, campuses, forests, museums and city parks. It has travelled with naturalists, nature guides, forest staff, tribal youth, educators, urban citizens, volunteers, partners and many others who have walked with us. We have learnt that a nature trail is never just a trail. It is a turning point.

This fifth year has been especially meaningful. It has reminded us that The Naturalist School is about nurturing people who can become bridges between landscapes and communities. People who can translate wonder into care, and care into action.

We have also learnt some humbling lessons along the way. That local knowledge is not something to be added to a curriculum; it is often where the curriculum should begin. That a good guide does not merely name species, but helps people understand relationships. That cities need naturalists as much as forests do. And that building anything meaningful in conservation takes patience, stubbornness, and a fairly high tolerance for mud, leeches, bad network and last-minute logistics.

But most of all, these five years have taught us that nature awareness is the foundation of conservation.

If one course can change how a person sees a forest, a city, a livelihood or even themselves, what does that make our work? These are not small outcomes. They are seeds. And like all seeds, they need time, care and the right conditions to grow.

As we complete five years, I feel deep gratitude. To our team, facilitators, partners, supporters, advisors, volunteers and participants. Thank you for believing in this work, even when the path was not always clear. Five years later, I think this is our real work.

Not to teach people the names of birds, trees, insects or mammals. But to return to them something they did not know they had lost. Attention. The first five years have shown us that the naturalist in each one of us is not a poetic idea. It is real. It is patient. It waits under the noise of our lives. Our work is to wake it. And perhaps, in doing so, we are not only helping people see nature again.

We are helping them become more alive to the world.



PRIYA VENKATESH

FOUNDER DIRECTOR,

THE NATURALIST SCHOOL

THE NATURALIST SCHOOL

“To foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of our natural world by bringing alive the naturalist in each one of us.”

At The Naturalist School, we believe that meaningful conservation begins with curiosity, observation, and connection. In a time where people are becoming increasingly disconnected from the natural systems around them, our work seeks to create spaces where individuals can slow down, observe deeply, and build a more conscious relationship with the environment.

Through experiential learning, nature interpretation, and interdisciplinary engagement, we aim to nurture ecological sensitivity while building pathways for nature-based livelihoods, education, and stewardship. Our programmes bring together students, educators, guides, professionals, local communities, and citizens from diverse backgrounds to engage with the natural world through learning, reflection, and practice.

Over the years, The Naturalist School has evolved into a platform that supports the growth of nature guides, interpreters, educators, and naturalists through certified courses, public engagement initiatives, collaborations, and field-based learning experiences. Rooted in the belief that everyone has the capacity to observe, learn from, and connect with nature, our work continues to focus on making ecology accessible, inclusive, and deeply human.

WHAT WE OFFER



OUR VALUES

Vision Statement:

"To build a sustainable future for the planet that encourages coexistence with nature."

Mission Statement:

"To foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of our natural world by bringing alive the naturalist in each one of us."

Our Goals

Bring nature education and wildlife interpretation into mainstream academics

Skilling and capacity building to enhance employability & livelihood

Evolve Best practices, Global benchmarks & Professional standards of competency for the Asian region

Advocate, Promote and Practise environmentally responsible tourism

Magnify conservation impact through creating awareness & impactful nature experiences

Foster participatory science by enabling citizen networks to contribute to large-scale data collection and research across the Global South, while enhancing the credibility, accessibility, and impact of citizen-generated data.

Empower youth-led conservation and scientific leadership through global partnerships that enable the collection, analysis, and application of citizen-generated data to advance research, conservation, and policy outcomes

SDG Global Goals

Our goals are aligned to the UN Sustainable Development Goals to build a greener, fairer and better world for everyone on the planet.



“

When one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world.

– John Muir



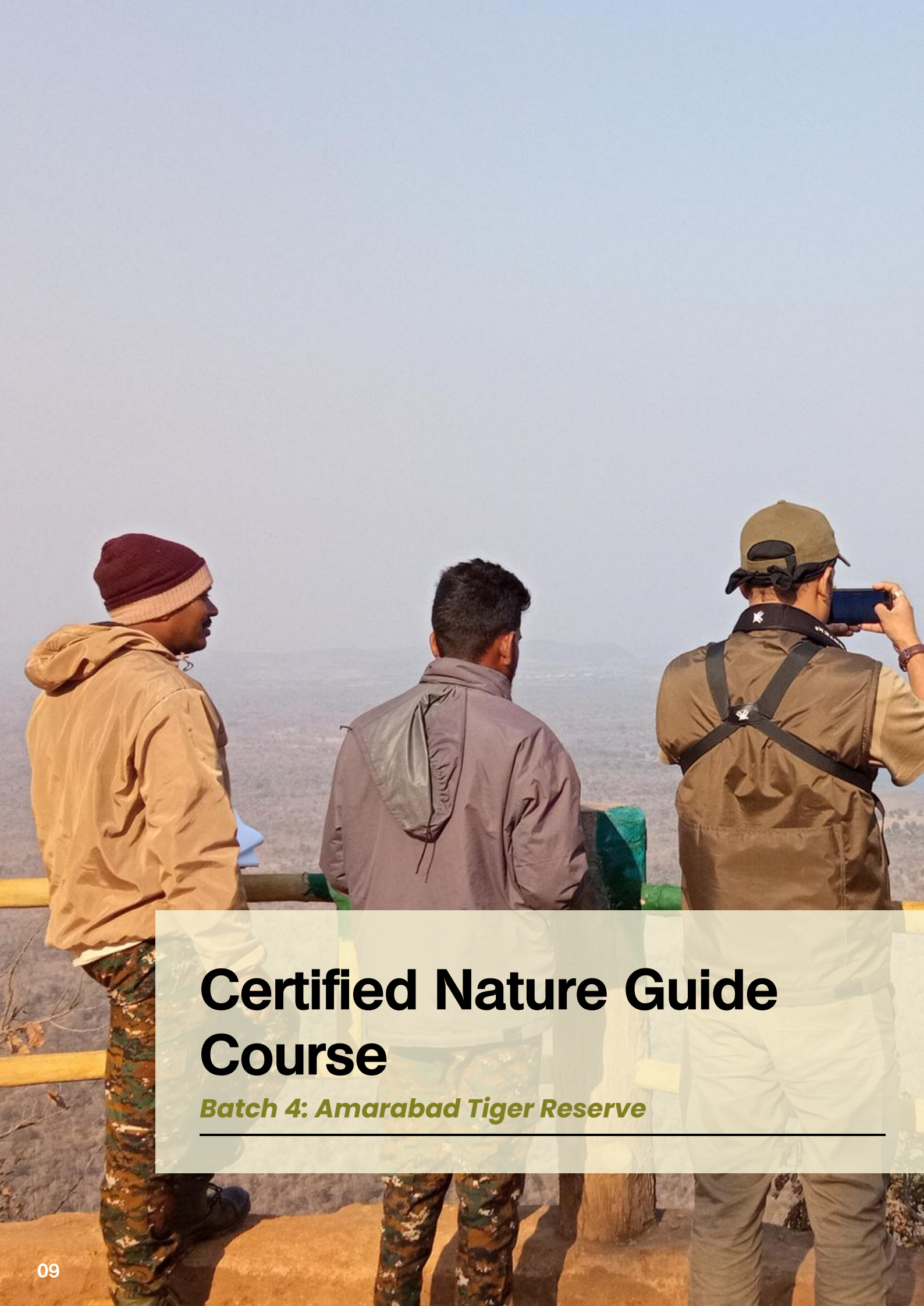


A person in a green jacket stands in a field, looking at a phone. In the background, there are rolling hills or mountains under a clear sky. Another person in a blue shirt is visible further back on the right, also looking at a phone.

Certified Courses

The Naturalist School's certified courses are long-term, hybrid learning programmes designed to nurture nature guides, naturalists, and ecological interpreters through experiential and field-based learning. Rooted in observation, storytelling, interpretation, and ecological understanding, these programmes create pathways for conservation, eco-tourism, and nature education.

Aligned with nationally recognised skill development frameworks, the courses are accredited by bodies such as NSDC, THSC, NCVET, and initiatives under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC). The Naturalist School currently offers three certified programmes – Certified Nature Guide (CNG), Certified Naturalist (CNAT), and Citizen Naturalist – each designed to foster deeper ecological awareness, professional skill-building, and meaningful engagement with the natural world.

A photograph of three people standing on a rocky ledge, looking out over a vast, hazy landscape. The person on the left is wearing a tan jacket and a maroon beanie. The person in the middle is wearing a grey jacket. The person on the right is wearing a tan jacket, a green cap, and is holding a smartphone to take a picture. The background is a hazy, open landscape under a clear sky.

Certified Nature Guide Course

Batch 4: Amarabad Tiger Reserve



Amarabad Tiger Reserve, Telangana March – April 2025



Conducted from 16th March to 10th April 2025, the programme brought together 32 participants, primarily from the Chenchu tribal community and existing safari guides from the Amarabad landscape. The course combined residential learning modules, immersive nature-based experiences, and On-the-Job Training (OJT) to create a holistic learning environment rooted in ecological understanding and interpretation skills.

The first residential phase at Bannerghatta Nature Camp focused on building connections with nature, understanding biodiversity, and strengthening guiding and interpretation skills. Through nature walks, journaling exercises, storytelling sessions, and modules on mammals, reptiles, butterflies, tracking, guest handling, ethics, grooming, and eco-tourism, participants were introduced to both the scientific and experiential aspects of nature guiding. The sessions were facilitated by an interdisciplinary team of educators, naturalists, and practitioners from The Naturalist School.

A key component of the programme was the experiential exposure visit to Mysuru, where participants explored Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary, Lingambudhi Lake, the Regional Museum of Natural History, and Mysuru Zoo.

These visits enabled participants to engage directly with conservation spaces, guiding practices, and interpretation methods across varied ecological and institutional settings.

The third phase involved an intensive OJT module at the Amarabad Tiger Reserve, Telangana, where participants gained firsthand exposure to the functioning of eco-tourism and safari operations. The practical immersion allowed participants to understand hospitality systems, guest engagement, field interpretation, and the realities of working within protected area landscapes.

The final residential week focused on reflection, peer learning, assessments, and independent observation practices. Participants revisited their learnings through group studies, safari-based interpretation, and nature journaling while also engaging in sessions on guest handling and the importance of wildlife conservation. The programme concluded with a valedictory ceremony and Skill India assessments conducted through practical and viva examinations.



Nature Guide Course RPL - KVNP

Recognition of Prior Learning



Forest Department
GOVERNMENT OF CHHATTISGARH



The Naturalist School conducted a Nature Guide RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) programme at Kanger Valley National Park, Chhattisgarh, under the Skill India Mission in collaboration with the Forest Department, Jagdalpur. The programme focused on strengthening the guiding, interpretation, communication, and safety skills of local youth and existing nature guides from the Uttar Kanger Valley landscape.

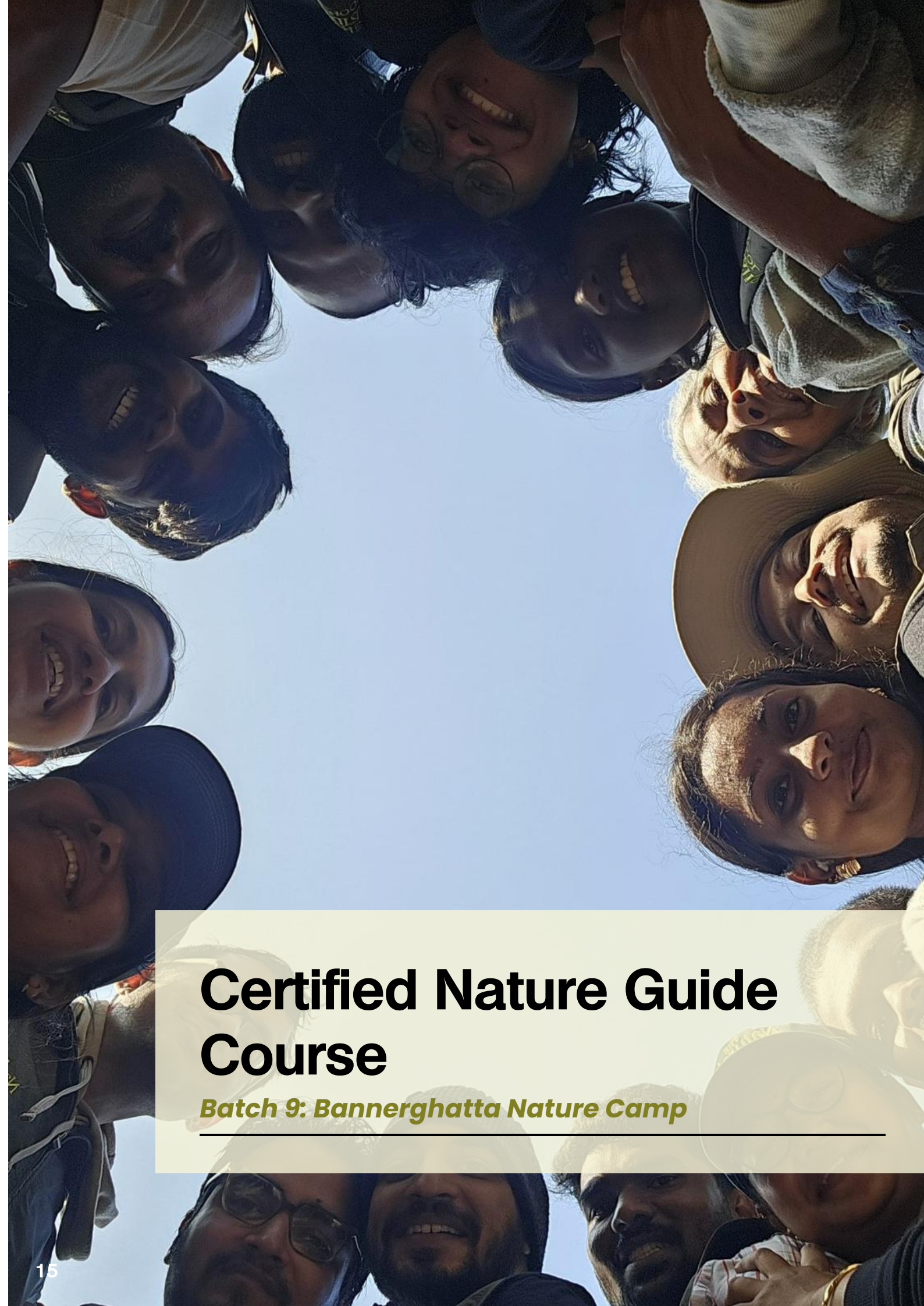
Conducted from 25th to 29th October 2024, the programme brought together 31 participants for an intensive learning experience rooted in experiential and field-based pedagogy. Sessions focused on safari guiding, nature walks, communication with guests, green practices, gender sensitivity, first aid, and safe wilderness practices.



The training incorporated activities such as storytelling, mock safaris, nature interpretation exercises, journaling, and reflective discussions that encouraged participants to engage deeply with their local ecology and improve their guiding techniques. Participants also explored concepts such as Leave No Trace practices, snakebite awareness, patient analysis, and visitor engagement through hands-on sessions and role-based learning.

A strong emphasis was placed on building confidence, communication, and interpretation skills. Feedback from participants highlighted the value of learning storytelling techniques, understanding biodiversity, and developing more meaningful ways of engaging visitors during nature experiences.





Certified Nature Guide Course

Batch 9: Bannerghatta Nature Camp



Bannerghatta Nature Camp November – December 2025



The Naturalist School conducted the ninth batch of the Certified Nature Guide (CNG) programme at Bannerghatta Nature Camp during November–December 2025. This batch stood out for the diversity of its participants, bringing together individuals from varied professional, academic, and personal backgrounds, all united by a shared interest in nature, ecology, and experiential learning.

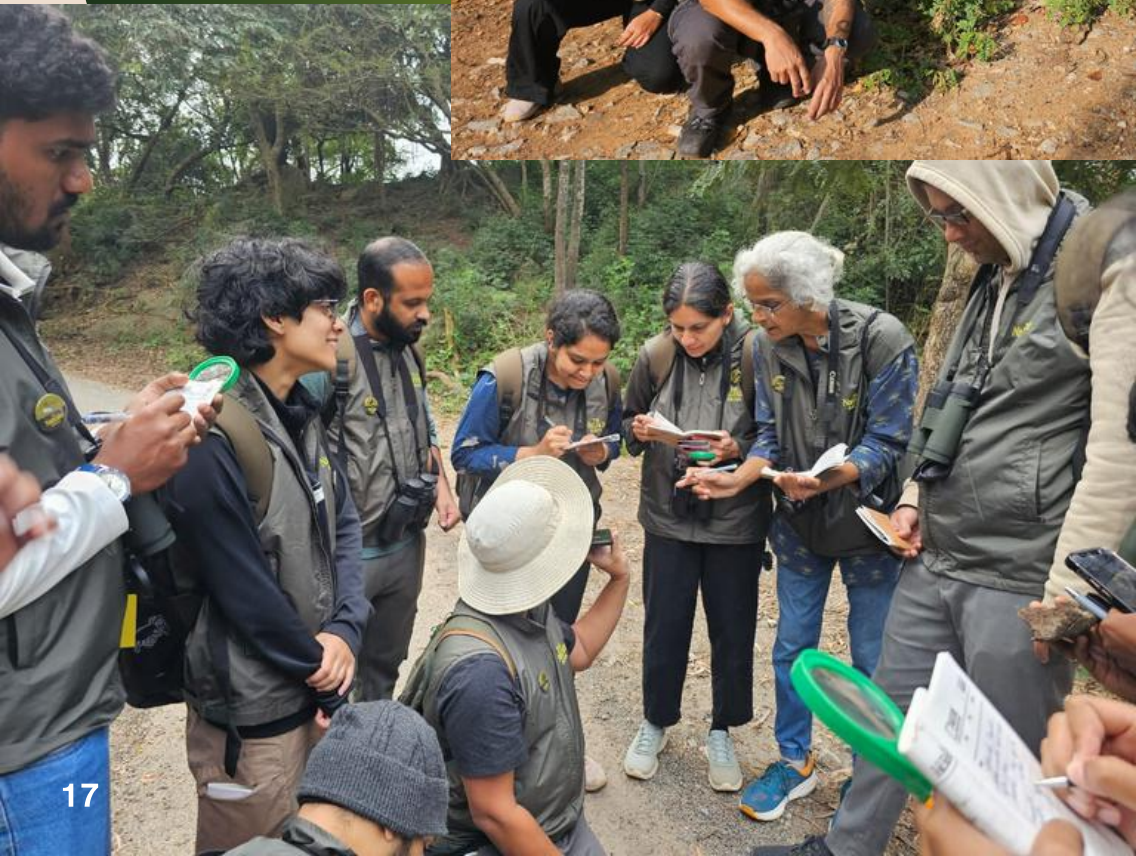
The cohort included educators, entrepreneurs, psychologists, hospitality aspirants, conservation enthusiasts, and professionals transitioning from entirely different careers into the field of nature interpretation and eco-tourism. Among the participants was a 62-year-old school principal from Uttarakhand, individuals already working closely with animal behaviour and ecology, freelancers associated with organic farming initiatives, as well as professionals from the health sector and marine ecosystems. The batch also included participants supported through sponsorships, creating opportunities for wider accessibility and participation.

The programme focused on immersive and experiential modes of learning, encouraging participants to engage deeply with the natural world through observation, interpretation, storytelling, reflection, and guided interactions with the landscape. Nature walks, discussions, journaling, storytelling exercises, and group-based activities formed the core of the learning experience, allowing participants to bring their own lived experiences and professional perspectives into the programme.

A strong emphasis was placed on understanding ecosystems not merely through scientific information, but through connection, curiosity, and interpretation. Participants explored different approaches to nature guiding, communication, and guest engagement, and reflected on how ecology intersects with education, psychology, hospitality, conservation, and everyday life.

Batch 9 became a unique confluence of perspectives and practices, highlighting how nature education can bring together people across generations, professions, and disciplines.





A group of approximately 15 people, mostly men, are gathered in a grassy field under a blue sky with light clouds. They are dressed in casual outdoor attire, including jackets, backpacks, and hats. One person in the center is gesturing with their hand while speaking to the group. The background shows a line of trees and a clear horizon.

Responsible Tourism in Hesaraghatta (CNG)

Batch 10: Hesaraghatta Grasslands



The Naturalist School, in collaboration with Native Jungle and Our Native Village, initiated the Responsible Tourism in Hesaraghatta project under the Skill India Mission, supported through the Bengaluru Sustainability Forum's Small Grants Programme. The initiative focused on building a locally rooted network of nature guides and eco-preneurs while creating awareness around the ecological significance of the Hesaraghatta grassland ecosystem.

The Certified Nature Guide (CNG) programme was conducted through a hybrid structure consisting of weekend in-person sessions, a residential module at Bannerghatta Nature Camp, and On-the-Job Training (OJT). The course focused on experiential learning and combined classroom sessions, games, outdoor activities, field visits, and reflective practices. Participants engaged with themes such as biodiversity, natural history, bird watching, ecology, storytelling, guiding techniques, nature journaling, citizen science, hospitality skills, ethics, and Leave No Trace practices.



The project began with an extensive outreach and mobilisation phase involving local communities, educational institutions, and governing bodies around Hesaraghatta. Awareness sessions highlighted the importance of grassland conservation, biodiversity, and the role of responsible eco-tourism in creating sustainable livelihoods for local youth.

Following interviews and selection processes, 15 participants from diverse backgrounds, including students, IT professionals, and underemployed youth, were shortlisted for the programme.

The OJT phase involved participants facilitating nature engagement sessions for school children at Nriyagram, Hesaraghatta, enabling them to apply their learning through real-world interactions and environmental education activities.

The residential module at Bannerghatta Nature Camp further deepened participants' understanding of ecological systems through immersive field-based learning focused on mammals, reptiles, tracks and signs, first aid, wildlife interpretation, and guiding practices.

An important highlight of the residential phase was a screening and discussion around the film Gandhadagudi, followed by an interaction with filmmaker Amoghavarsha, where conversations centred on ecological storytelling, personal conviction, and eco-preneurship.

The programme concluded with Skill India assessments, a valedictory ceremony attended by stakeholders and forest officials, and the successful certification of participants as nature guides.





Certified Nature Guide Course

Batch 11: Rajgir Zoo

The Naturalist School conducted the eleventh batch of the Certified Nature Guide (CNG) programme at Rajgir Zoo Safari, Bihar, in collaboration with Rajgir Zoo Safari. The programme was designed to strengthen the ecological understanding, interpretation skills, and guiding practices of existing zoo safari guides through immersive and experiential learning methods.

The training brought together 25 participants who were already working as safari guides at the zoo. To ensure that safari operations and visitor management continued smoothly during the training period, participants were divided into two working batches attending sessions in morning and afternoon shifts.



The course combined nature walks, outdoor observations, classroom sessions, and activity-based learning to deepen participants' understanding of biodiversity and natural history. Sessions covered themes such as botany, birds, butterflies, mammals, biodiversity, entomology, natural history, guest handling, and the role of a nature guide. Participants explored ecological concepts through practical exercises including the "Web of Life" activity, guided birding sessions, tree life cycle exercises, and field observations around the zoo safari landscape.

A strong emphasis was placed on experiential learning and interpretation skills. Participants engaged with local flora, medicinal plants, avian diversity, and ecological interconnections while also strengthening their communication, guiding, and hospitality skills. The programme encouraged participants to move beyond factual information and understand the role of a nature guide as a storyteller, educator, and bridge between visitors and the natural world.

The training also created opportunities for participants to refine their practical guiding techniques during nature walks and safari-based interactions. Through a combination of scientific understanding and field engagement.





Certified Naturalist Course (CNAT)

Batch 3: Bannerghatta Nature Camp



Bannerghatta Nature Camp, Bangalore July–August 2025

The Naturalist School conducted the third batch of the Certified Naturalist Course (CNAT) as an intensive residential programme from 19th July to 14th August at Bannerghatta Nature Camp. The programme brought together participants for an immersive learning journey rooted in natural history, ecology, interpretation, and experiential education.

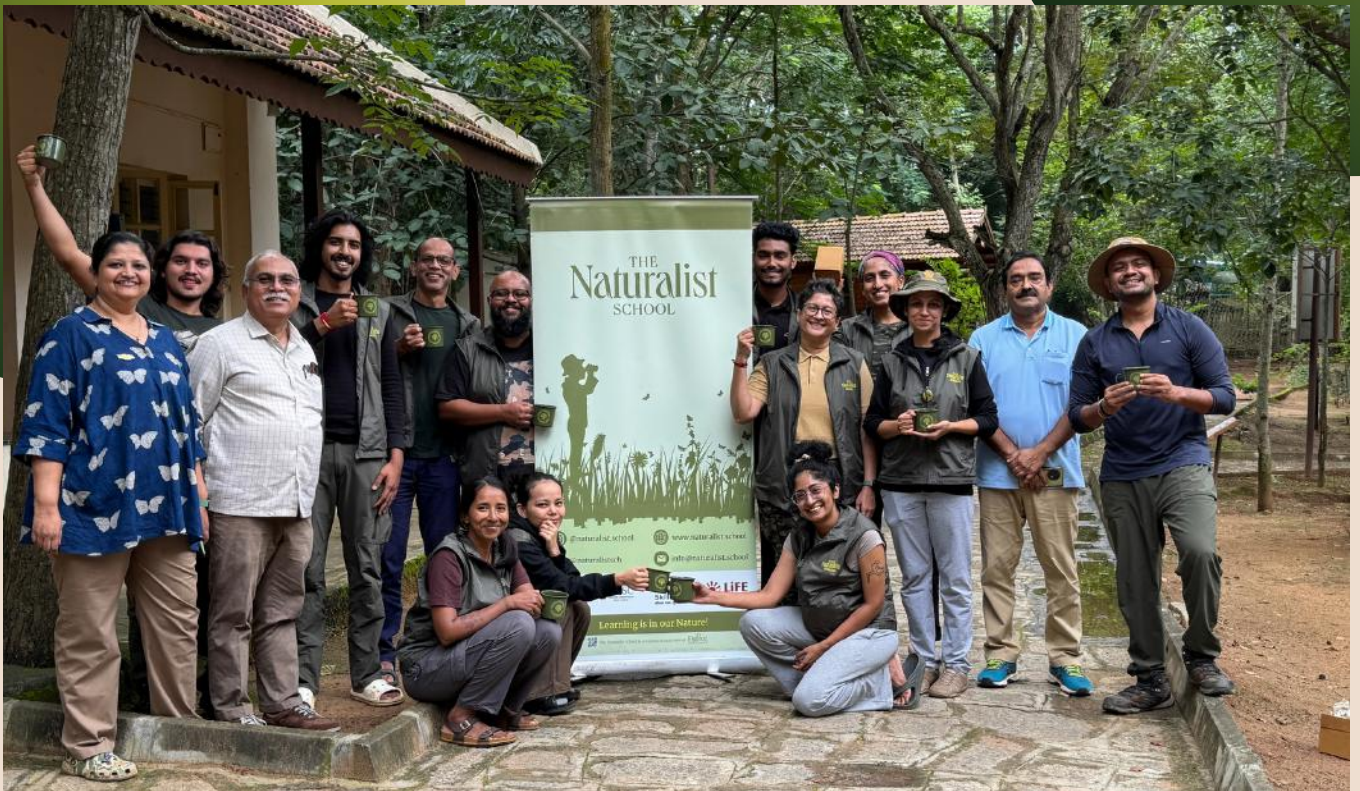
The course began with orientation sessions, introductions, and keynote talks that introduced participants to India's natural heritage, conservation history, and the evolving role of naturalists in today's ecological landscape. Through a combination of nature walks, storytelling, debates, journaling, field observations, and interactive activities, participants explored themes such as ecotourism, biodiversity, guiding techniques, birding, insects, butterflies, plants, fungi, and ecological relationships.

A strong emphasis was placed on experiential and interdisciplinary learning. Sessions on communication, improv theatre, photography, videography, hospitality, personality exploration, and interpretation helped participants build both technical knowledge and interpersonal skills essential for nature education and guiding. Field-based learning at locations such as GKV, Butterfly Park, Shivanasamudra, RMNH Mysore, Karanji Lake, and Bannerghatta National Park enabled participants to engage deeply with ecosystems and observe biodiversity in diverse contexts.

The programme also focused on responsible and ethical engagement with nature. Participants explored topics such as forest laws, sustainability, Leave No Trace principles, wildlife tourism ethics, ecosystem services, and conservation practices through discussions, documentaries, reflective exercises, and guided field sessions. Practical learning components included first aid training by the Red Cross, snakebite management, guiding practice sessions, tracks and signs interpretation, and guest interaction during nature walks.

Throughout the residency, participants were encouraged to build a personal connection with nature while developing observation, interpretation, communication, and leadership skills.





A person wearing a cap and a backpack is standing on a hillside at night, shining a powerful flashlight beam into the dark vegetation. The background shows a hilly landscape under a twilight sky with orange and pink hues.

Citizen Naturalist Course (CitiNAT)

Batch 3: Bannerghatta Nature Camp



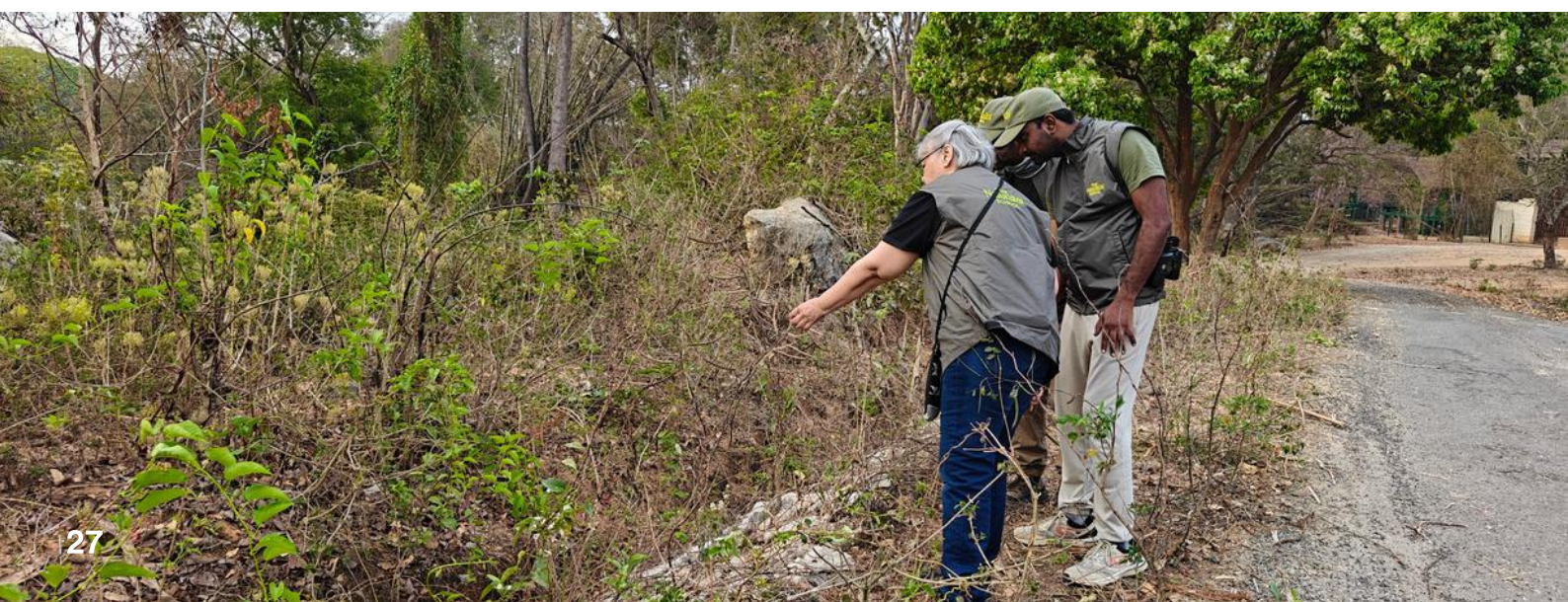
Bannerghatta Nature Camp, Bangalore

January – February 2026

The Naturalist School conducted the Citizen Naturalist Programme from 17th January to 22nd February 2026 as a six-weekend hybrid learning experience designed to help participants engage more deeply with the natural world through observation, interpretation, and experiential learning. The programme combined online and offline sessions, with the first and final weekends conducted in person at Bannerghatta Nature Camp.

The cohort brought together participants from diverse professional and personal backgrounds, including technology, architecture, healthcare, entrepreneurship, conservation, education, and research. Many joined the programme to deepen their understanding of nature, strengthen observation skills, contribute to citizen science initiatives, and learn how to share ecological knowledge more confidently with children, communities, and wider audiences

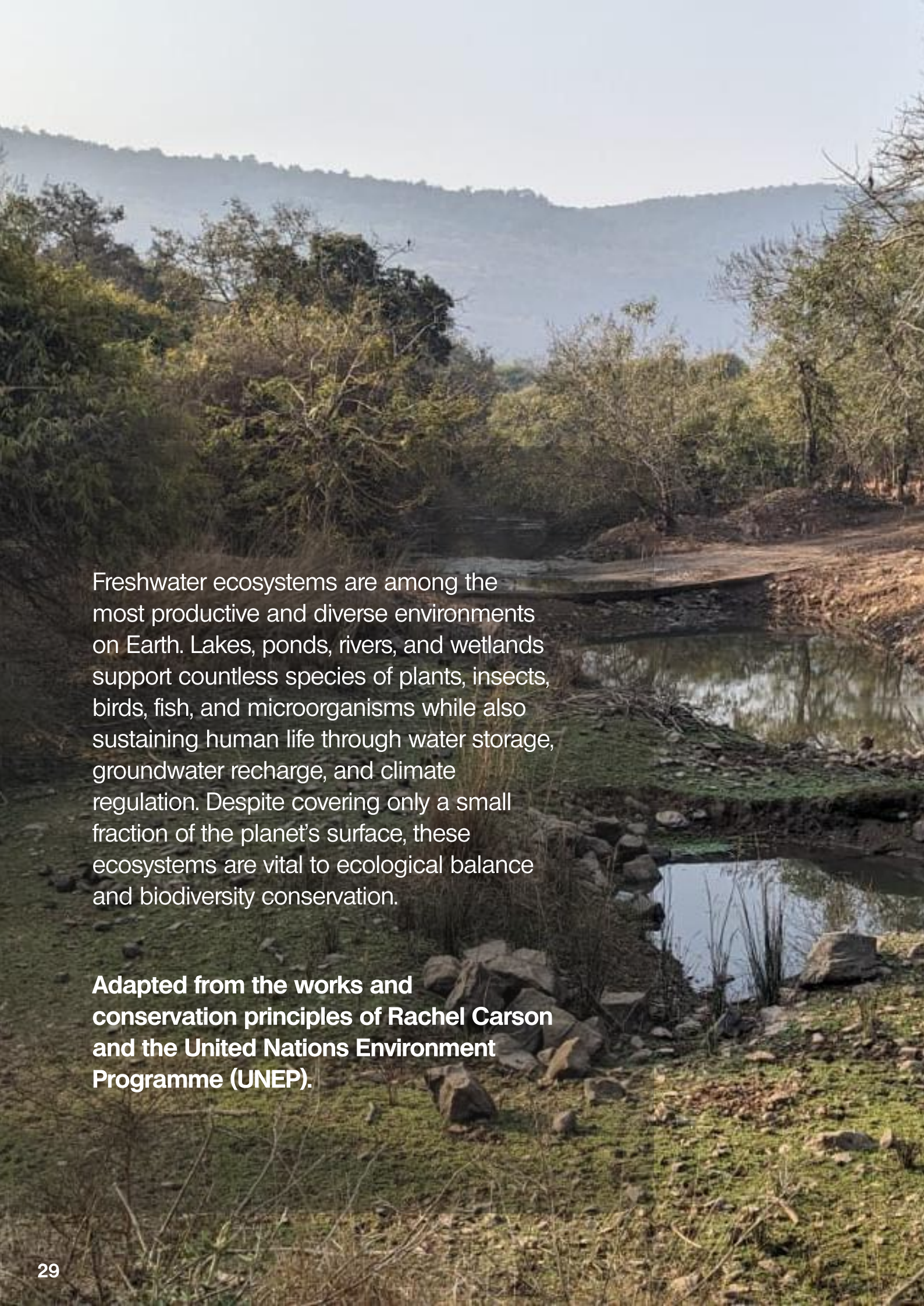
The course explored a range of interdisciplinary themes through sessions on bird sketching and nature journaling, bird behaviour, insects, fungi, ecology, and guided nature walks. Participants also engaged with discussions on the forgotten ecology of the Kaveri Basin, experiential observation practices, and field immersion exercises facilitated by naturalists and educators from The Naturalist School.





One of the most memorable highlights of the programme was a night walk at Bannerghatta Nature Camp, where participants spent nearly an hour observing a single tree and collectively discovered more than 30 life forms – demonstrating the richness of biodiversity that emerges through patience and attentive observation. Another significant experience was the visit to the Bear Rescue Centre at Bannerghatta, where participants learnt about bear rehabilitation, enrichment practices, rescue histories, and the lives of Kalandar communities associated with sloth bear captivity.

The programme concluded with reflective sessions, shared experiences, and moments of stillness under the night sky, creating a strong sense of connection, curiosity, and community among participants.



Freshwater ecosystems are among the most productive and diverse environments on Earth. Lakes, ponds, rivers, and wetlands support countless species of plants, insects, birds, fish, and microorganisms while also sustaining human life through water storage, groundwater recharge, and climate regulation. Despite covering only a small fraction of the planet's surface, these ecosystems are vital to ecological balance and biodiversity conservation.

Adapted from the works and conservation principles of Rachel Carson and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

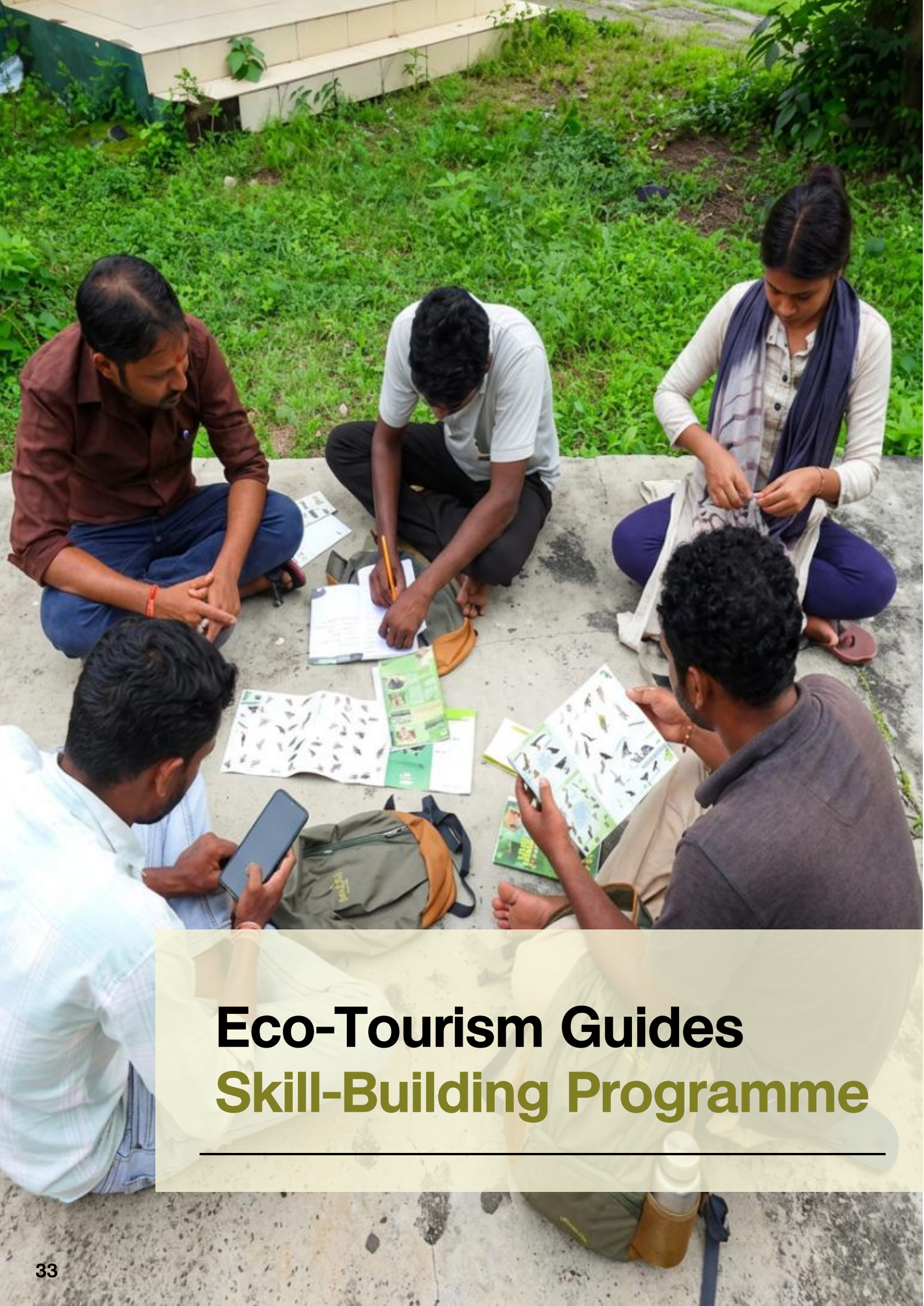






Community Courses

The Naturalist School's community courses are designed to support forest-dependent communities, local youth, tribal groups, forest staff, and eco-guides through experiential and field-based learning. Through programmes such as youth camps, eco-guide trainings, capacity-building workshops, and nature educator programmes, the courses aim to strengthen ecological awareness, guiding skills, conservation practices, and sustainable livelihood opportunities for communities living within and alongside natural landscapes.



Eco-Tourism Guides

Skill-Building Programme



Barnawapara Wildlife Sanctuary, Chhattisgarh October 2025



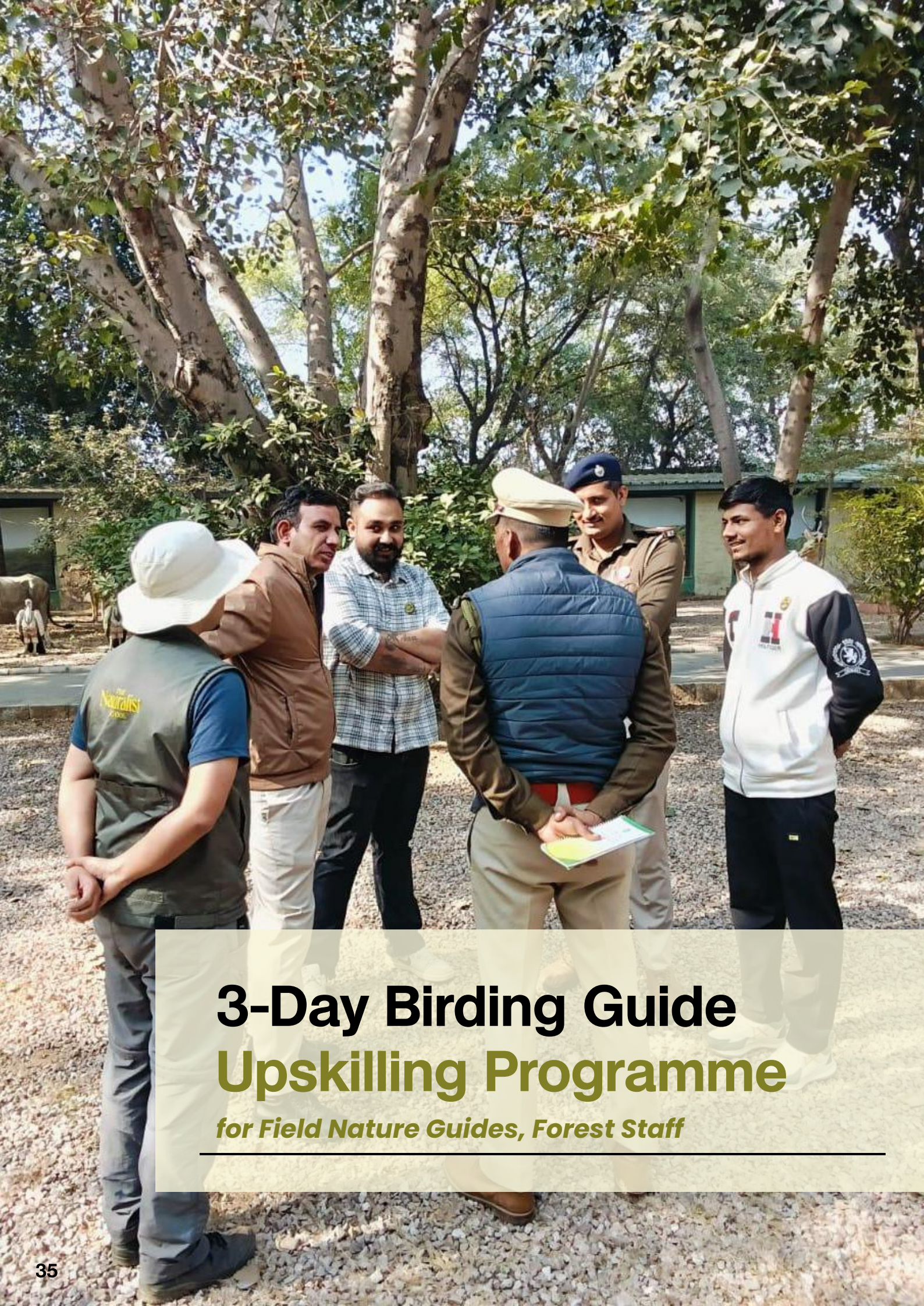
The Naturalist School, in collaboration with the Chhattisgarh Forest Department, conducted the Eco-Tourism Guides Skill-Building Programme at Barnawapara Wildlife Sanctuary, Chhattisgarh, from 7th to 11th October 2025. The programme aimed to strengthen local capacity for sustainable tourism and conservation-linked livelihoods by training community members and aspiring eco-tourism guides in ecological interpretation and responsible tourism practices.

The five-day programme brought together 28 participants, including local youth, eco-guides, and community members from villages surrounding the sanctuary. Through a combination of classroom learning, field-based sessions, group activities, and experiential exercises, participants explored the biodiversity and ecology of Barnawapara while developing practical guiding and communication skills.

The curriculum focused on key areas such as eco-tourism ethics, bird identification, wildlife tracking, storytelling, visitor management, nature journaling, conservation practices, and field documentation. Interactive activities, nature games, and team-building exercises encouraged participants to engage deeply with the landscape and strengthen their observation and interpretation skills.

Sessions were facilitated by naturalists and trainers from The Naturalist School along with forest officials and subject experts from the Forest Department. The programme adopted a participatory and experiential learning approach, encouraging dialogue, reflection, and hands-on engagement with the sanctuary ecosystem.

The programme contributed towards enhancing participants' confidence in guiding visitors, interpreting ecological relationships, and understanding responsible tourism practices. It also strengthened community involvement in conservation efforts and helped identify opportunities for eco-tourism development within the Barnawapara landscape.



3-Day Birding Guide Upskilling Programme

for Field Nature Guides, Forest Staff



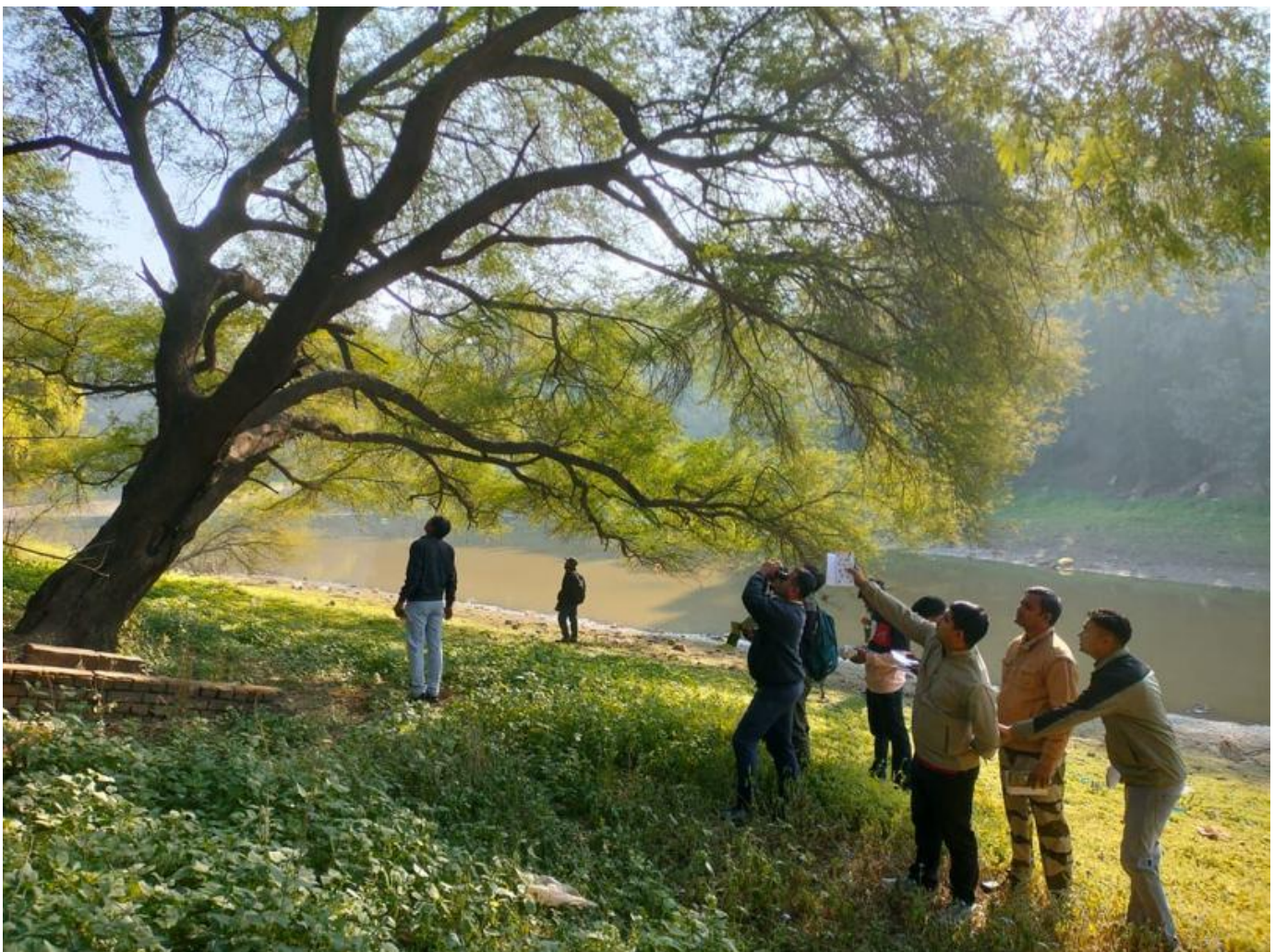
Sultanpur National Park, Haryana

December 2025



The Naturalist School conducted a three-day Birding Guide Upskilling Programme for field nature guides, forest staff, and local eco-guides at the Forest Training Centre, Bhondsi, and Sultanpur National Park, Haryana, from 8th to 10th December 2025, in collaboration with the Haryana Forest Department. The programme aimed to strengthen birding knowledge, guiding techniques, interpretation skills, and responsible tourism practices among participants engaged in nature tourism and conservation education.

The residential programme brought together 27 participants, including existing nature guides, fresher guides, forest guards, and watchers. Designed around experiential learning methodologies, the course integrated nature walks, bird observation, journaling, storytelling, interpretation exercises, and reflective sessions to create a practical and immersive learning experience.



Participants were introduced to bird identification using field marks, behaviour, bird calls, and ecological understanding, while also engaging with topics such as guiding ethics, diversity and inclusion, visitor management, responsible tourism, and wetland conservation. Interactive exercises including mind mapping, spider diagrams, bird sketching, and the Bird Survival Game encouraged collaborative learning and strengthened participants' observation and interpretation skills.

Field-based sessions formed a central component of the programme. During guided birding walks at Bhondsi and Sultanpur National Park, participants practised species identification, checklist preparation, bird behaviour observation, and peer-based learning. The use of birding tools and digital platforms such as Merlin and eBird introduced participants to contemporary methods of documentation and ecological monitoring.

The programme also created space for reflection and dialogue around the evolving role of local nature guides in conservation and sustainable tourism. Participants expressed increased confidence in conducting nature walks, communicating with visitors, and applying their newly acquired skills in real-world guiding contexts.





Eco Guide Skill Development Course



The Naturalist School conducted the Eco Guide Skill Development Course from 21st to 25th November 2025 at Nagarjuna Srisailem Tiger Reserve (NSTR), Andhra Pradesh, in collaboration with the Andhra Pradesh Forest Department and Nagarjuna Srisailem Tiger Reserve authorities. The programme focused on skill building and upskilling rural youth, local community members, and existing nature guides in the areas of nature interpretation, eco-tourism, and responsible guiding practices.

The five-day residential course brought together 25 participants and adopted an experiential learning approach integrating nature walks, storytelling, journaling, field observations, group activities, and reflective sessions. The programme aimed to strengthen participants' confidence, communication abilities, guiding techniques, and ecological understanding while encouraging responsible and inclusive tourism practices.

Participants engaged with themes such as eco-tourism concepts, guest handling, biodiversity mapping, bird behaviour, guiding ethics, grooming and hygiene, safety practices, green practices, and communication skills.

Interactive exercises including mind mapping, nature resemblance activities, bird drawing, journaling, and species-based group presentations encouraged participants to build stronger observation and interpretation skills.

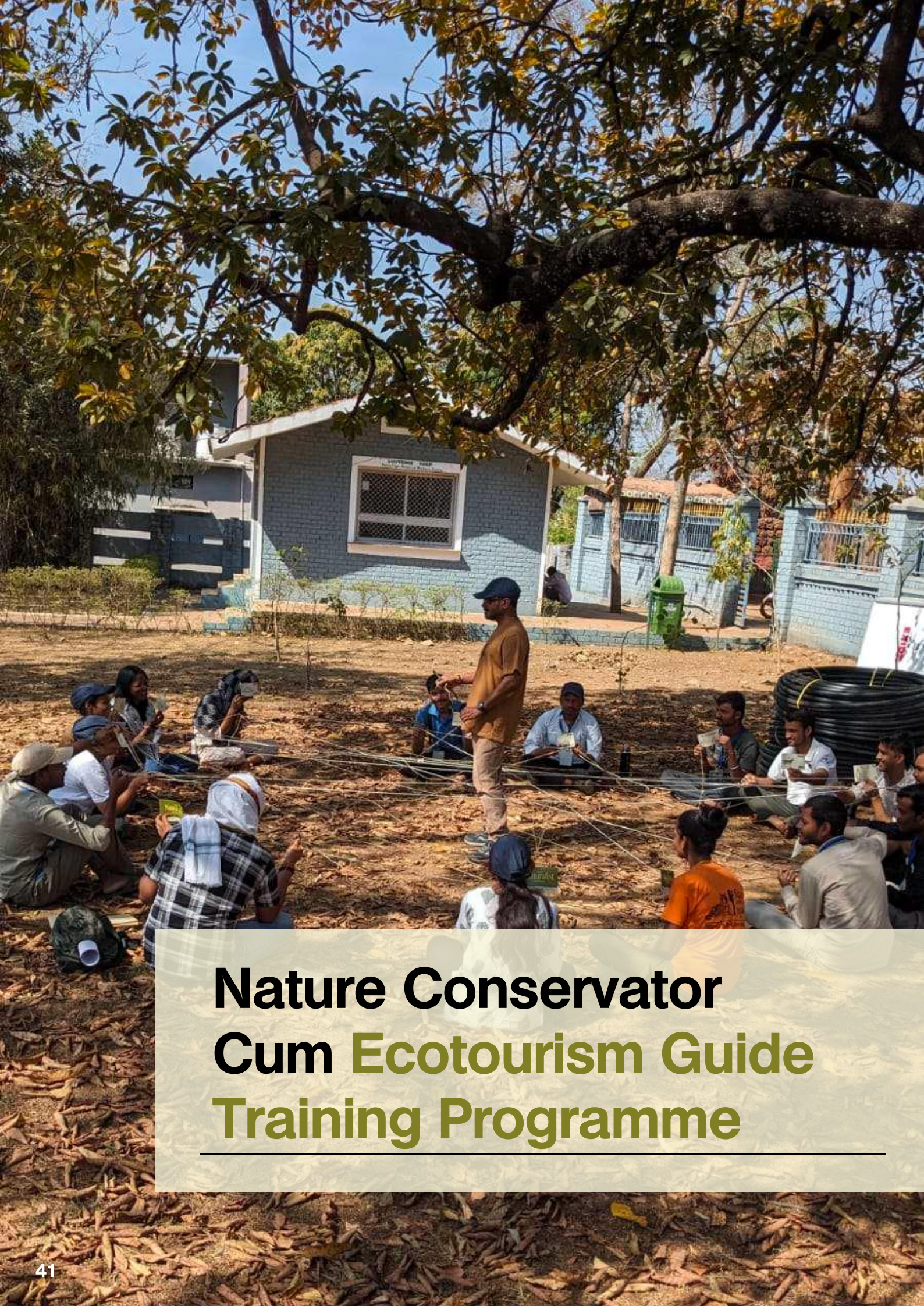
Field-based learning formed a key component of the programme. Participants undertook safaris, birding sessions, and guided nature walks across locations such as Tummalabailu, Rollapadu Wildlife Sanctuary, Pacherla, and Diguvametta Nature Trail. Through practical guiding exercises, participants learnt how to engage with different kinds of guests, communicate ecological concepts effectively, and facilitate meaningful nature experiences.

The programme also created space for discussions on gender sensitivity, ethical tourism, snakebite awareness, conservation practices, and the ecological significance of grasslands and species such as the Great Indian Bustard. Participants reflected on their role as nature guides not only as interpreters of biodiversity, but also as facilitators of conservation awareness and sustainable tourism.



The course concluded with practical nature walk facilitation sessions, participant presentations, and a valedictory ceremony attended by forest officials and stakeholders. Feedback from participants highlighted increased confidence in guiding, improved communication skills, and a stronger understanding of ecological interpretation and visitor engagement.





Nature Conservator Cum Ecotourism Guide Training Programme



Panna Tiger Reserve – Hinouta Ecotourism Campus

March 2026



The Naturalist School conducted the Nature Conservator cum Ecotourism Guide Training Programme (GSDP) at the Hinouta Ecotourism Campus, Panna Tiger Reserve, in collaboration with WII-EIACP during March 2026. The programme focused on strengthening the ecological understanding, guiding practices, conservation ethics, and ecotourism management skills of participants through immersive and experiential learning methodologies.

Conducted across two training batches, the programme integrated classroom discussions, field immersion, nature walks, role-play exercises, storytelling sessions, journaling, and interactive group activities. Participants explored themes such as guiding techniques, ecological interpretation, waste management, conservation ethics, campsite management, trekking foundations, biodiversity observation, first aid, and responsible tourism practices.

A strong emphasis was placed on experiential pedagogy and interpretation skills. Through activities such as mind mapping, spider diagrams, role-play simulations, storytelling exercises, and the “Web of Life” activity, participants developed observation, communication, and guest engagement techniques.

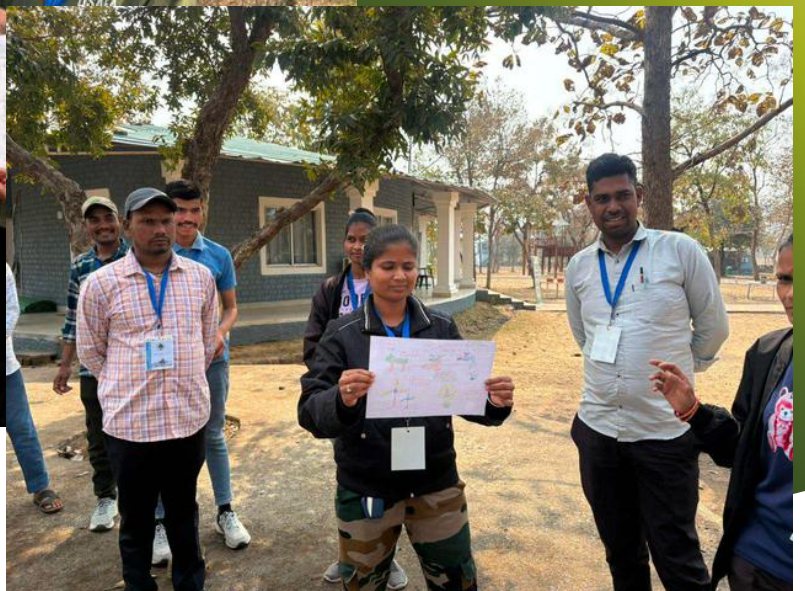
Sessions encouraged participants to move beyond factual interpretation and build emotional and sensory connections between visitors and natural landscapes.

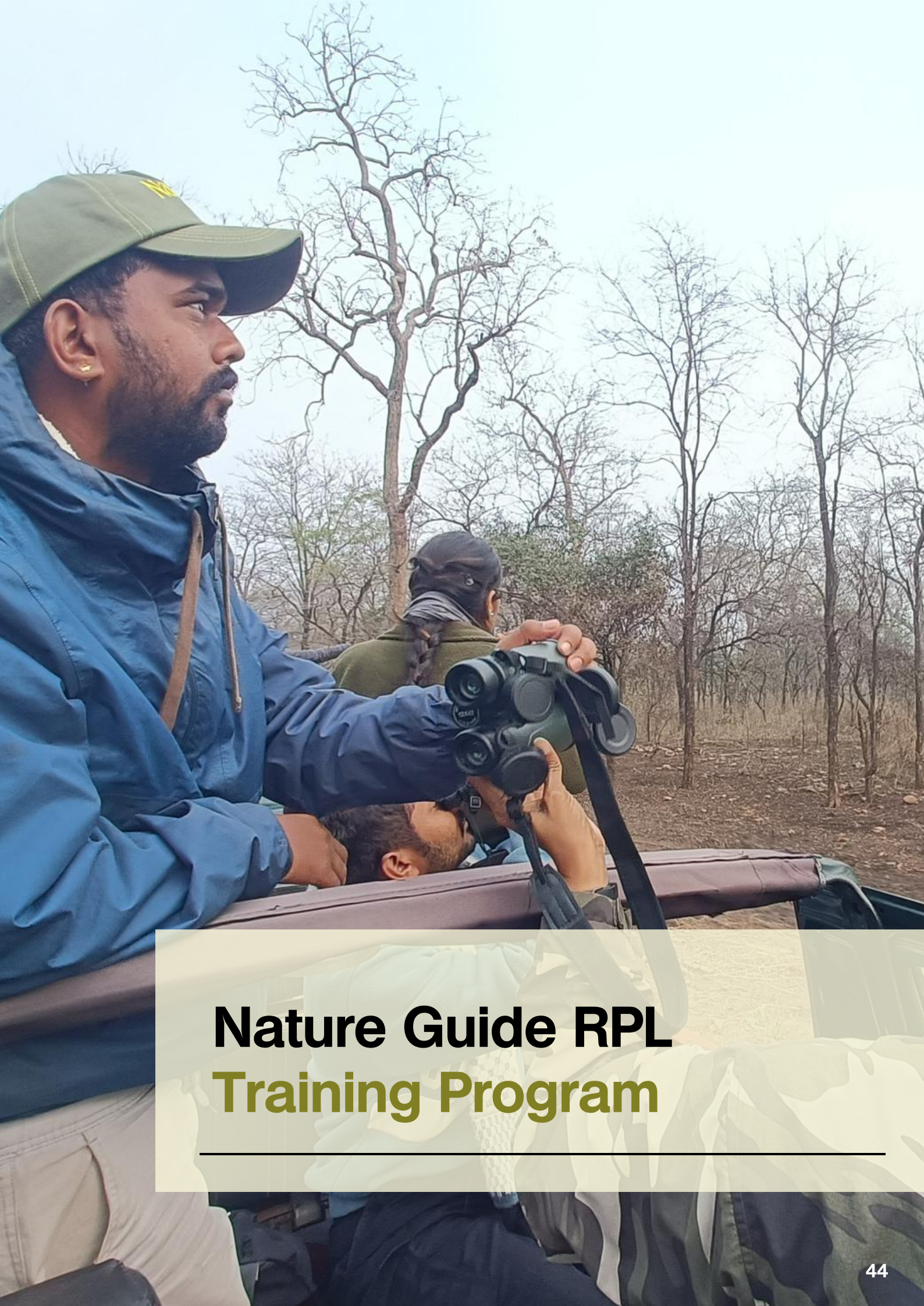
Field-based learning formed a key component of the programme. Nature walks and guided outdoor sessions enabled participants to practice ecological interpretation, identify flora and fauna, understand habitat relationships, and apply briefing and debriefing techniques in real-time situations. Sessions on insects, mammals, ecological relationships, and traditional wildlife tracking techniques further deepened participants’ understanding of biodiversity and ecosystem functioning.

The programme also focused on sustainability and responsible ecotourism practices through sessions on waste segregation, Leave No Trace principles, campsite management, guest education, and alternatives to environmentally harmful tourism practices. Participants reflected on the role of nature guides as facilitators of conservation awareness and behavioural change among visitors.

An important aspect of the programme was the integration of local and indigenous knowledge systems. Participants undertook a forest walk with members of the Pardhi community, learning about traditional tracking methods, animal signs, and the interpretation of forest landscapes through indigenous ecological knowledge.

The programme concluded with sessions on first aid, conservation ethics, and reflective learning, reinforcing the role of ecotourism guides as interpreters, educators, and conservation ambassadors within protected landscapes.





Nature Guide RPL Training Program



The Naturalist School, in partnership with the Last Wilderness Foundation (LWF) and the Forest Department, conducted a five-day Nature Guide Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Training Programme at Kuno National Park from 1–5 February 2026. Designed under the Skill India framework, the programme aimed to strengthen the professional capacities of practicing nature guides while recognising and validating skills acquired through field experience. A total of 18 nature guides participated in the training, with 13 participants successfully obtaining Skill India certification, while the remaining participants were supported to reappear for the assessment process.

The training combined classroom sessions, field-based learning, practical assessments, and experiential activities to enhance participants' skills in nature interpretation, wildlife conservation, biodiversity awareness, guest engagement, safety protocols, and professional guiding practices. Led by Prakruthi from The Naturalist School, along with Vidya from Last Wilderness Foundation, the programme focused on transforming guides into effective ambassadors for conservation and ecotourism.

Field-based sessions along the Kuno Nature Trail introduced participants to wildlife identification, biodiversity assessments, resource mapping, bird observation, and interpretation techniques. Special emphasis was placed on observation skills, ecological storytelling, ethical behaviour within protected areas, and communicating natural history in engaging ways for visitors. Participants also underwent training in guest hospitality, professional conduct, conflict resolution, public speaking, and visitor engagement, strengthening their ability to deliver meaningful nature-based experiences.

A major highlight of the programme was a special session on the Cheetah Reintroduction Project at Kuno National Park, delivered by Forest Range Officer Yashwandhu. The session provided participants with insights into cheetah ecology, monitoring efforts, habitat requirements, and the broader conservation significance of one of India's most important wildlife restoration initiatives. Additional sessions on avian biodiversity, emergency response, first aid, safari operations, and field safety further expanded participants' professional competencies.



The programme concluded with competency assessments, feedback sessions, and certification processes that recognised participants' knowledge and skills. Beyond certification, the initiative contributed to strengthening local livelihoods linked to ecotourism while creating a network of professionally trained guides capable of promoting conservation awareness among visitors and local communities.



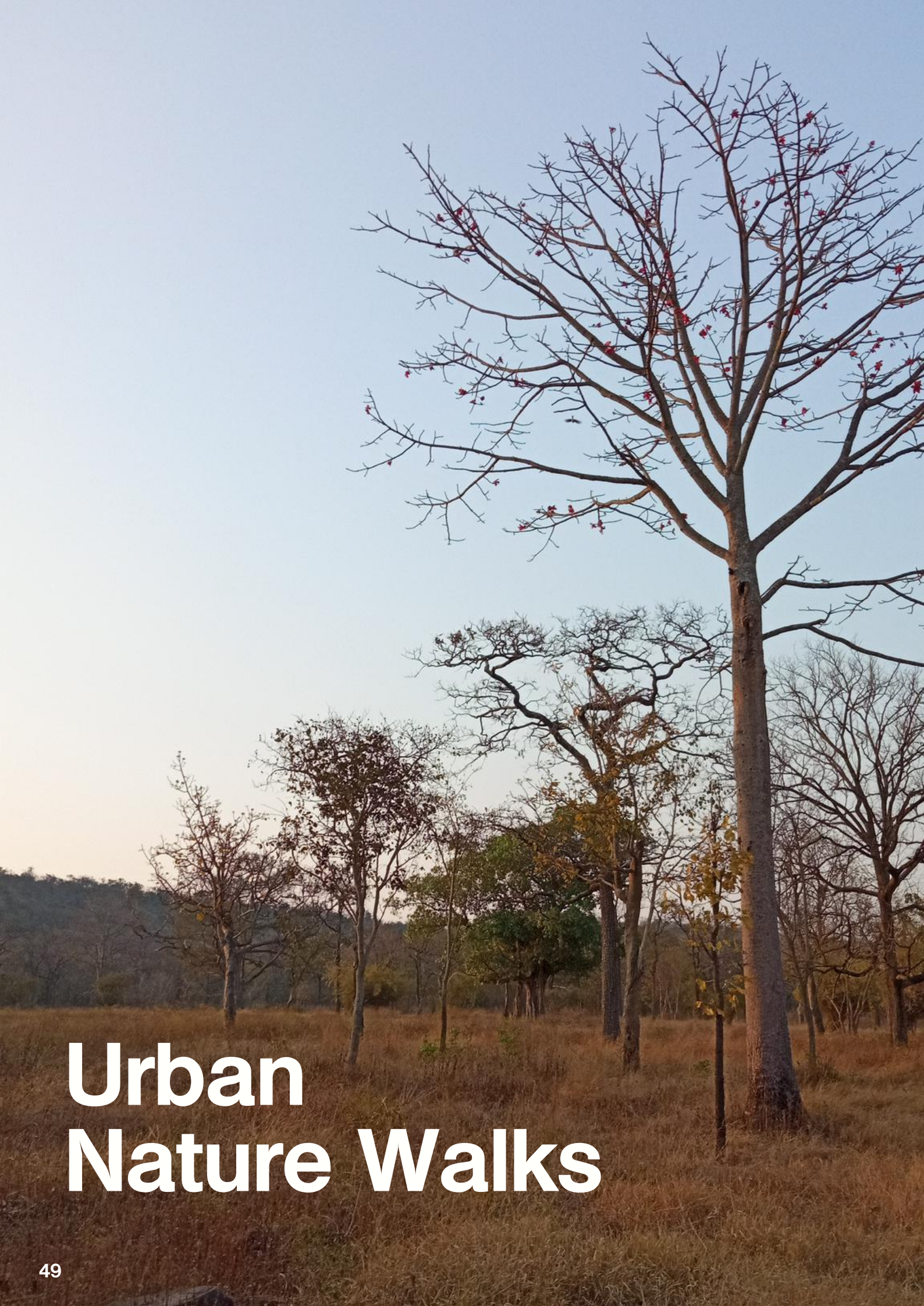




Citizen Engagement

The Naturalist School's citizen engagement initiatives aim to make ecology and nature interpretation more accessible to wider audiences through biodiversity walks, public talks, workshops, and community events conducted primarily across Bengaluru and Hyderabad.

Alongside public nature walks and ecological conversations, TNS has also expanded its engagement through citizen science initiatives such as the Asia Nature Challenge (ANC) and City Nature Challenge (CNC), while collaborating with organisations and networks such as CAPS and UNEP. These initiatives contribute towards biodiversity documentation, conservation awareness, ecological research, and building larger public participation in science and conservation efforts.



Urban Nature Walks

As part of its Citizen Engagement initiatives, The Naturalist School continued to create accessible and immersive nature experiences for diverse urban audiences through a series of guided walks, public programmes, and institutional collaborations conducted across Bengaluru throughout the year. These engagements aimed to encourage ecological curiosity, strengthen people's relationship with urban biodiversity, and introduce nature interpretation as a participatory and reflective experience.

In collaboration with institutions such as the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore (IIMB), Ramaiah University, National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), and Alliance Française de Bangalore, The Naturalist School facilitated nature-based engagements for participants from varied backgrounds, age groups, and professions. The walks were led by members of the TNS team including Lakshmi, Ashish, Poomima, Rashmi, and other naturalists who brought their own unique approaches and perspectives into the experience.

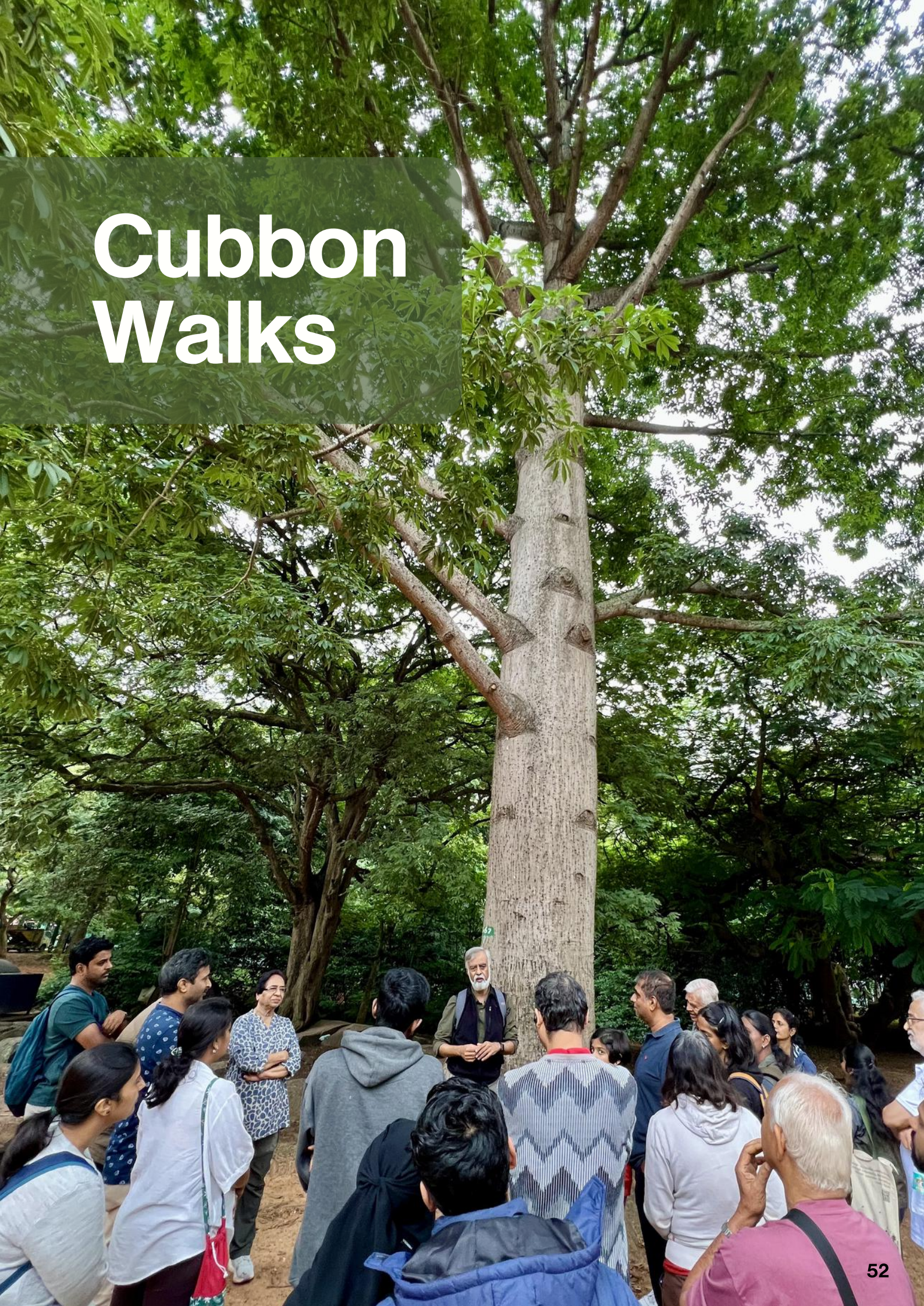
At IIMB, a large-format campus nature walk was conducted for nearly 80 participants from the defence sector who had recently completed their training programmes. The walk introduced participants to the ecological diversity present within the campus landscape and encouraged observation, reflection, and interaction with urban ecosystems.

Nature walks conducted at Hebbal Lake in collaboration with Ramaiah University formed part of the induction programme for undergraduate students from diverse academic backgrounds. Through multiple guided walks, participants were introduced to urban biodiversity, bird life, ecological interconnections, and observational practices as a way of engaging more deeply with their surroundings.





Cubbon Walks





One of the most significant citizen engagement initiatives undertaken by The Naturalist School during the year was the launch of the Cubbon Nature Walks – a recurring public programme aimed at making urban ecology and nature interpretation more accessible to the people of Bengaluru. The initiative was inaugurated on 27th July 2025 in the presence of the Chief Secretary of the Government of Karnataka, Dr. Shalini Rajneesh, IAS, and has continued consistently every weekend since its launch.

Hosted at Cubbon Park, the walks are facilitated by naturalists from The Naturalist School and create an open platform for participants to engage with the biodiversity, history, ecology, and seasonal changes within one of Bengaluru's most important urban green spaces. The programme is available in both Kannada and English, making it more accessible and encouraging participation across diverse audiences and age groups.

Each walk attracts an average of 20 participants, bringing together students, working professionals, families, senior citizens, artists, photographers, and first-time nature enthusiasts.



Over the course of the year, the initiative collectively engaged more than 1000 participants, reflecting a growing interest in urban nature experiences and ecological learning within the city.

The walks focus on observation, storytelling, interpretation, birding, ecological relationships, and everyday urban biodiversity, encouraging participants to slow down and engage more consciously with the natural systems around them. Different naturalists bring their own approaches and perspectives into the walks, making each session unique while fostering a strong sense of community and curiosity around urban ecology.

The Cubbon Nature Walks have emerged as an important public-facing initiative for The Naturalist School, strengthening its vision of creating inclusive, multilingual, and experiential spaces for ecological awareness, citizen participation, and nature connection within urban landscapes.





Karthikeyan Sairam



Walking through Cubbon Park's secret life; one blossom at a time

For generations of Bengalureans, *namma* Cubbon Park has been more than green — it's childhood, magic and wonder rolled into one



R Prashanth Vidyasagar

DID YOU KNOW?

Here's the thing about Cubbon Park. For a whole generation that grew up in the '80s and '90s, it wasn't just a park — it was the class picnic you waited for all year, the first theme-park ride you ever sat on, the summer horse ride that felt braver than it looked, and those pushcarts serving ragi ball that no funfair snack has ever quite matched. And of course, the Putani Express chugging under the trees — for many kids, it was the closest thing to magic Bengaluru ever offered.

This chapter in the series takes us back to that place the city holds close. Cubbon Park, officially Sri Chamara-jendra Park, sits at Bengaluru's centre and has grown from a 100-acre garden in 1870 to the 300-acre green cathedral we wander through today. Its name changed with the city around it — Meade's Park at birth, then Cubbon

Participants wander the paths, spotting birds, studying trees, and uncovering the park's hidden stories

Tabebuia Rosea

Every spring, Cubbon Park bursts into pink as the Pink Trumpet Trees bloom. Their flowers turn the avenues into a tableau — perfect for a wander.

I've been walking these paths for ages. But hearing stories from a naturalist's perspective opens up the

DH
DECCAN HERALD

Cubbon Park calling: Where trees talk, and history walks with you

The programme, developed in partnership with The Naturalist School and BangaloreWALKS, aims to raise ecological awareness and appreciation for the park's biodiversity and heritage.

Bengaluru: In an effort to reconnect Bengaluru residents with nature, the Department of Horticulture launched the 'Wonders of Nature' guided walk at Cubbon Park on Sunday.

The programme, developed in partnership with The Naturalist School and BangaloreWALKS, aims to raise ecological awareness and appreciation for the park's biodiversity and heritage.

Chief Secretary Shalini Rajneesh formally inaugurated 'Cubbon Walks' in the presence of Horticulture Department Secretary Shamla Iqbal and other officials.

"These walks cover only 5 per cent of the park for now, but we plan to take participants to other parts in the coming days," said Arun Pai, tour guide with BangaloreWALKS. "The idea is to help people see trees and biodiversity in a new light and build a deeper connection with nature."

A close-up photograph of a green grasshopper resting on a large, vibrant green leaf. The leaf has prominent veins and some small brown spots. The grasshopper is positioned on the left side of the frame, facing towards the right. Its long hind legs and antennae are clearly visible. The background is filled with more green foliage, creating a lush, natural setting.

“

If we and the rest of the
backboned animals were to
disappear overnight, the rest
of the world would get on
pretty well. But if the
invertebrates were to
disappear, the land's
ecosystems would collapse.

– **David Attenborough,**
Life in the Undergrowth (2005)



राष्ट्रीय आधुनिक
कला संग्रहालय
NATIONAL GALLERY
OF MODERN ART

NGMA- Walks, Films & Nature Festival





One of the key public engagement collaborations undertaken by The Naturalist School during the year was its partnership with the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), Bengaluru, which began in October 2025. Conceived as an interdisciplinary initiative bringing together ecology, art, cinema, and public dialogue, the collaboration created a recurring platform for citizens to engage with the natural world through both experiential and reflective formats.

The collaboration was inaugurated through a special nature walk led by Karthikeyan S for a group of nearly 20 retired IAS officers, many of whom were over 80 years of age. The walk became a meaningful beginning to the initiative, demonstrating how ecological engagement and curiosity about nature can transcend age and professional backgrounds.



As part of the collaboration, nature walks have been conducted every second Saturday at the NGMA campus, introducing participants to the biodiversity and ecological relationships present within the urban green space. Facilitated by naturalists from The Naturalist School, the walks encouraged participants from across the city and across age groups to observe, reflect, and reconnect with urban nature through storytelling, interpretation, and guided exploration.

Complementing the walks, DocuDialogues has been conducted every fourth Saturday as a public engagement series centred around ecology, conservation, and environmental awareness. The initiative involved screenings of films and documentaries focused on the natural world, followed by discussions and conversations that brought attention to contemporary ecological issues, conservation challenges, environmental storytelling, and human relationships with nature.

Through the integration of walks, films, and dialogue-based engagements, the collaboration created an accessible and inclusive space for ecological learning and exchange.





Ministry of Culture
Government of India

THE Naturalist SCHOOL

Indian Museums Against
Climate Change - #muse

National Gallery of Modern Art, Bengaluru
(Ministry of Culture, Government of India)
in collaboration with The Naturalist School
invites you to Docu Dialogues

Run, River, Run!

Rivers are born to run.
Along their banks, civilizations have flourished
and thriving ecosystems
are a part of their lives. From the Himalayas to the
coast, rivers have shaped the land.
As the climate changes, rivers are under threat.
Let's explore the rivers that shape our lives.
Join the conversation at DocuDialogues.

28 February 2026, Saturday | 11:00 AM - 1:00 PM

at the National Gallery of Modern Art, #48, Monkivayalu Mansion, Police Road, Bengaluru - 560002,
telephone: 080-22342338, ngmbengaluru@gmail.com, www.ngmbengaluru.org, [facebook.com/ngmbengaluru](https://www.facebook.com/ngmbengaluru), [instagram.com/ngmbengaluru](https://www.instagram.com/ngmbengaluru)
On weekdays: 10:00 AM - 5:00 PM | On weekends: 11:00 AM - 5:00 PM | Mondays and National Holidays closed

Scan the QR code
for registration

Ministry of Culture
Government of India

THE Naturalist SCHOOL

Indian Museums Against
Climate Change - #muse

National Gallery of Modern Art, Bengaluru
(Ministry of Culture, Government of India)
in collaboration with The Naturalist School
invites you to Docu Dialogues

**BIRDS FOR ALL
REASONS**

From kings to commoners, birds fit every space in our
world. Let's take a peek into their world, and the
reasons why our worlds often collide.
Watch, Talk, Share.

Saturday, 24 January 2026 | 3:00 pm - 5:00 pm

at the National Gallery of Modern Art, #48, Monkivayalu Mansion, Police Road, Bengaluru - 560002,
telephone: 080-22342338, ngmbengaluru@gmail.com, www.ngmbengaluru.org, [facebook.com/ngmbengaluru](https://www.facebook.com/ngmbengaluru), [instagram.com/ngmbengaluru](https://www.instagram.com/ngmbengaluru)
On weekdays: 10:00 AM - 5:00 PM | On weekends: 11:00 AM - 5:00 PM | Mondays and National Holidays closed

Scan the QR code
for registration



Ministry of Culture
Government of India



राष्ट्रीय आधुनिक
कला संग्रहालय
NATIONAL GALLERY
OF MODERN ART



THE
Naturalist
SCHOOL

National Gallery of Modern Art, Bengaluru
(Ministry of Culture, Government of India)

in collaboration with The Naturalist School
& Lila - artist research studio
invites you to

anubandha
celebrate art in nature
ಅನುಬಂಧ



**Come! Be a part of
this deep bond between art, nature and self**

workshops | photography exhibition | guided walks | theatre | film screenings | nature talks | performances

12-21 December, 2025

at the National Gallery of Modern Art, #49, Manikyaavelu Mansion, Palace Road, Bengaluru - 560052,
Telephone: 080-22342338, ngma.bengaluru@gmail.com, www.ngmaindia.gov.in/ngma_bengaluru.asp,
facebook.com/NGMABengaluru, x.com/NGMABengaluru, instagram.com/ngma_bengaluru
Daily from 10.00 am to 6.00 pm (Mondays and National Holidays closed)



NGMA, Bengaluru
December 2025



राष्ट्रीय आधुनिक
कला संग्रहालय
NATIONAL GALLERY
OF MODERN ART

Anubandha was a two-week nature festival conceived as a celebration of the connections between people, nature, and art. Organised through a collaboration between The Naturalist School (TNS), the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), and the Lila Artist Research Studio housed at Srishti Manipal Institute of Art, Design and Technology (SMI), the festival was held from 12th to 25th December 2025.



Ministry of Culture
Government of India



THE
Naturalist
SCHOOL



National Gallery of Modern Art, Bengaluru
(Ministry of Culture, Government of India)

anubandha
celebrate art in nature
अनुबन्ध



Register now!

Friday
12 Dec'25

Inauguration
5:00 PM - 6:30 PM

Literature
& Books

Saturday
13 Dec'25

Clay Meditations
Inner Landscapes

Shubham Shrivastava
11:30 AM - 1:00 PM

Illustrating Memory
Connections

Divyani, Trina Ray, Shree
3:00 PM - 4:30 PM

Interactions
4:30 PM to 5:00 PM

Movement Expression
Becoming wild earth

Priya Venkatesh
5:00 PM - 6:30 PM

Sunday
14 Dec'25

Lens & Writing
Watching time fly

Harini M S
11:30 AM - 1:00 PM

Photography
When the camera looks within

Sanath Kumar
3:00 PM - 4:30 PM

Nature Walks

Conversations
4:30 PM to 5:00 PM

Talk
Connections in Nature

Karthik S
5:00 PM - 6:30 PM

Tue-Fri
15-19 Dec'25

Exhibition
10:00 AM - 6:00 PM

Ganesh HS
Art in Nature
(Photography)

Dr. Srivi Kalyan
Prāṇa: Breathing together
(Fine Art & Artistic Meditations)

Nature
journaling

Badge Making

Saturday
20 Dec'25

Art- Eco grief
Weather With Me

Preethi Aiyer
11:30 AM - 1:00 PM

Kid's Corner
Folding and Unfolding
Aravindh & Lakshmi S
Character Kitchen
Harini M S
Writing with the Trees
Kavya Srinivasan

2:00 PM - 5:00 PM

Docu Dialogues
Trees for Tomorrow

Bijoy Venugopal
3:00 PM - 5:00 PM

Performance
Bandha- Dance. Art. Poetry

Namratha R
Sanath Kumar
& Srivi Kalyan
5:00 PM - 6:30 PM

Sunday
21 Dec'25

Reflections
Entanglements & Art

Divyarajsinh Rana
& Jeena Mary Chacko
11:30 AM - 1:00 PM

Talk
Art in Nature
Photography

Ganesh H S
3:00 PM - 4:30 PM

Explore with
WASI

Gatherings
4:30 PM to 5:00 PM

Movement Immersion
Falling into language

Kaylenn Sullivan TwoTrees,
Dr. Srivi Kalyan & Priya V
5:00 PM - 6:30 PM

Treasure
Hunt

at the National Gallery of Modern Art,

#49, Manikya Velu Mansion, Palace Road, Bengaluru - 560052, Telephone: 080-22342338

ngma.bengaluru@gmail.com, www.ngmaindia.gov.in/ngma_bengaluru.asp, facebook.com/NGMABengaluru, x.com/NGMABengaluru, instagram.com/ngma_bengaluru

On weekdays: 10.00 AM - 6.00 PM | On weekends: 11.00 AM - 8.00 PM | Mondays and National Holidays closed

The festival emerged from a shared belief that nature can be experienced and understood through multiple entry points beyond science alone. Through art, music, poetry, movement, storytelling, craft, and reflection, Anubandha sought to invite citizens into meaningful encounters with the natural world and foster a deeper sense of ecological awareness and belonging.

Each day of the festival began with a guided nature walk, encouraging participants to observe and engage with the biodiversity within the NGMA campus. The walks were followed by two workshops every day, facilitated by artists, educators, naturalists, and practitioners from diverse disciplines. Alongside these activities, a photography and painting exhibition remained open throughout the festival, offering visitors visual interpretations of nature and ecological relationships.



The workshops explored a wide range of themes and mediums. Early sessions included clay work and nature illustration, while subsequent days introduced participants to photography, reflective explorations of grief and nature, and conversations around personal and ecological connections. The final phase of the festival expanded into origami, creative writing, dance, meditation, film screenings, and other artistic practices that encouraged participants to experience nature through imagination, creativity, and embodied engagement.

By bringing together ecology, art, and public participation, Anubandha created a unique platform for interdisciplinary learning and dialogue. The festival demonstrated how art can become a powerful medium for environmental awareness, helping participants discover new ways of seeing, feeling, and connecting with the natural world around them.



THE
Naturalist
SCHOOL

Talks & Sessions

junglelodges.

As part of its ongoing outreach and citizen engagement efforts, The Naturalist School conducted a series of talks, lectures, and interactive public sessions across educational institutions, organisations, and community platforms throughout the year. These engagements focused on introducing wider audiences to ecology, urban wildlife, conservation, and the growing possibilities within nature-based careers and environmental stewardship.

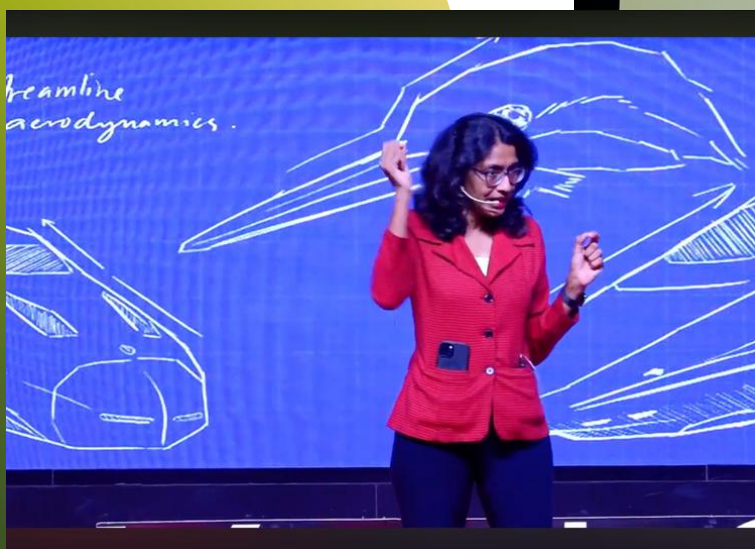
One of the major talks during the year was Green Jobs: A New Career, delivered by Suhas Saya to nearly 55–60 students at MGMA College. The session explored emerging career opportunities within ecology, conservation, eco-tourism, nature education, and interpretation, while introducing participants to the role and journey of becoming a naturalist in contemporary times.



Suhas also conducted multiple talks and engagements across institutions and organisations during the year. These included Urban Wildlife and the Role of a Naturalist at Ramaiah University for nearly 300 students, a session on urban wildlife for participants associated with INTACH, a session titled Becoming a Naturalist with the OSBI Group for 18 participants, and another engagement for WASI at Galibore. Across these sessions, participants engaged with conversations around biodiversity in urban spaces, ecological observation, conservation awareness, and the importance of nature interpretation in fostering environmental sensitivity.

Further strengthening the public engagement initiatives of the organisation, Arvinth Sethuraman conducted a session titled Patterns in Nature at NGMA for an audience of nearly 75 participants. The session explored recurring forms, systems, and relationships within the natural world, encouraging participants to observe ecological patterns through interdisciplinary perspectives linking nature, design, and observation.

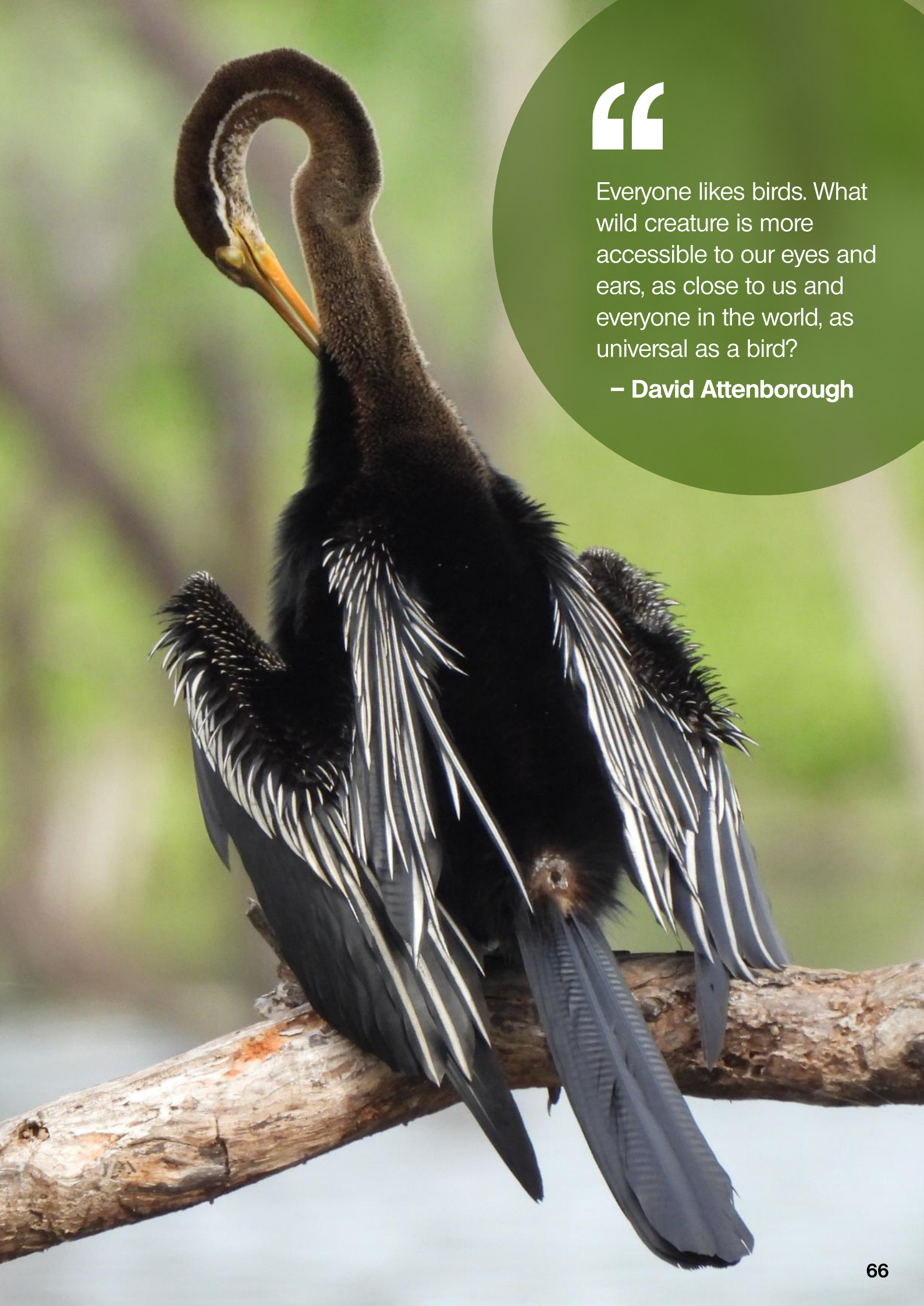




During the year, members of The Naturalist School also contributed to larger public discourse platforms through TEDx talks centred around ecology, observation, design, and the human relationship with nature.

Priya Venkatesh delivered a TEDxYouth talk at JNIS titled *Innovating with Nature: The Power of Biomimicry in Business and Design*. The talk explored how systems, structures, and processes found in nature can inspire innovation, sustainability, and problem-solving across design and business practices, introducing audiences to biomimicry as a bridge between ecology, creativity, and human systems.

Another notable public engagement was a TEDx talk delivered by Ram Dayal Vaishnav at TEDxOsmaniaU titled *The Joy of Noticing: Why Paying Attention Could Save The Planet*. The talk reflected on the importance of observation, attentiveness, and deep engagement with the natural world, highlighting how cultivating awareness and curiosity towards everyday ecological relationships can play a meaningful role in conservation and environmental stewardship.



“

Everyone likes birds. What wild creature is more accessible to our eyes and ears, as close to us and everyone in the world, as universal as a bird?

– **David Attenborough**



Citizen Science

Citizen Science is an important part of The Naturalist School's Citizen Engagement vertical, focusing on biodiversity documentation, ecological research, and conservation participation. Through initiatives such as the Asia Nature Challenge (ANC) and City Nature Challenge (CNC), citizens become active contributors to science by recording and documenting species observations.



Citizen Science plays a valuable role in biodiversity monitoring, conservation planning, and environmental awareness. Through these initiatives, TNS aims to bridge the gap between people, science, and conservation while encouraging greater public participation in understanding and protecting the natural world.



City Nature Challenge 2025



April – May 2025

CITY NATURE CHALLENGE IS ORGANIZED BY



The City Nature Challenge (CNC) India 2025 marked another milestone in India's citizen science journey, bringing together thousands of participants to document and celebrate urban biodiversity across the country. Part of a global initiative organised by the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County and the California Academy of Sciences, CNC encourages people to observe and record wild plants, animals, fungi, and other life forms using the iNaturalist platform, generating valuable biodiversity data while fostering public engagement with nature.

India witnessed its strongest participation yet, with more than 70 cities joining the challenge and contributing to a nationwide effort to document biodiversity. Conducted between 25–28 April 2025, followed by an identification phase until 5 May, the challenge invited participants from cities, towns, and neighbourhoods across the country to record species observations and collaborate in identifying them. The event was designed to be accessible and inclusive, enabling both first-time participants and experienced naturalists to contribute meaningfully to biodiversity monitoring.

The scale of participation was unprecedented. Participants collectively recorded 232,365 observations, documenting 10,753 species, with contributions from 3,025 observers and 1,597 identifiers. The challenge also generated 241,795 identifications, demonstrating the strength of community-led verification and collaborative learning within the iNaturalist ecosystem. These numbers represented a significant increase over previous years, continuing a steady upward trend in both biodiversity documentation and citizen science participation across India.

The challenge saw enthusiastic participation from cities across the country. Hyderabad emerged as the leading city with 33,995 observations, followed by Nanakmatta in Uttarakhand with 27,130 observations and Eluru in Andhra Pradesh with 25,897 observations. Other major contributors included Goa, Kerala, Delhi NCR, Coimbatore, Darjeeling, Chennai, and Assam, reflecting the growing geographic spread and diversity of participation in citizen science initiatives nationwide.

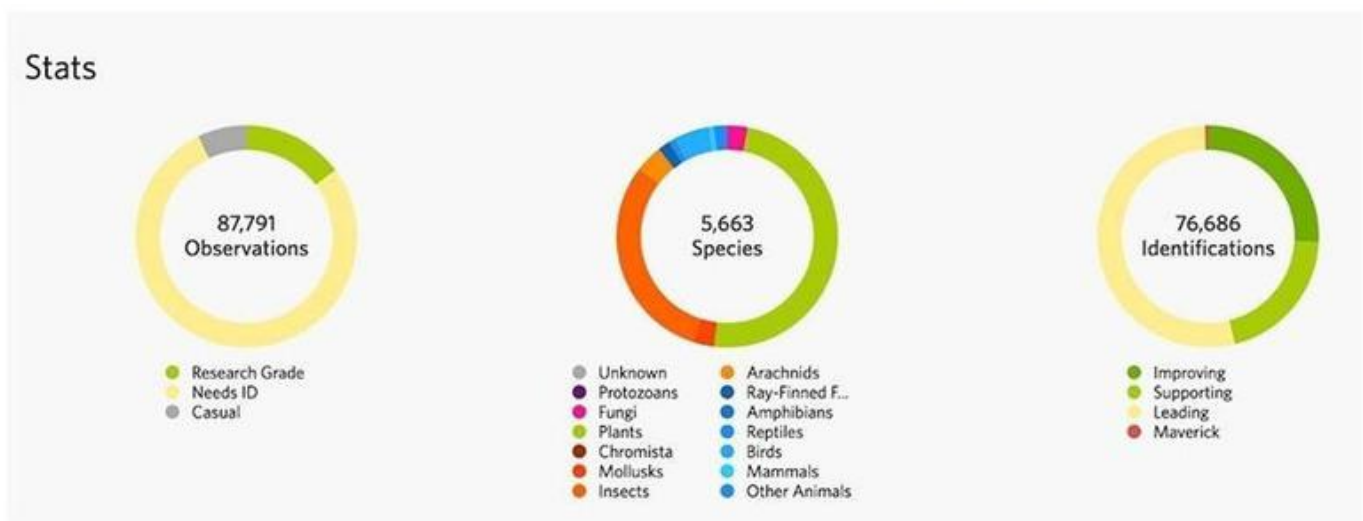
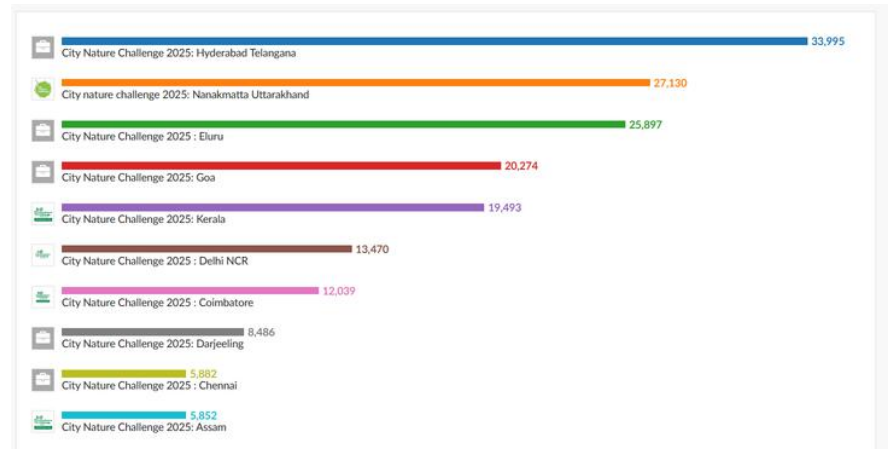
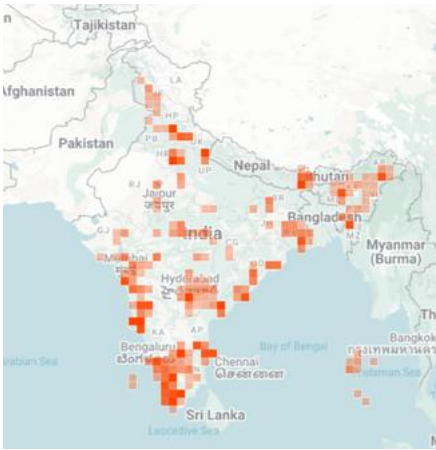


Figure 3: Summary of Key Statistics from the City Nature Challenge 2023.



Public engagement formed a cornerstone of CNC India 2025. Through webinars, workshops, guided biodiversity walks, educational sessions, social media campaigns, and digital communication platforms, participants were introduced to urban biodiversity, species identification, and the use of citizen science tools. Local organisations, schools, colleges, nature clubs, and conservation groups played an active role in mobilising communities and fostering ecological awareness.

The challenge also resulted in several noteworthy biodiversity discoveries. One of the most significant was the rediscovery of *Phidiana unilineata*, a marine nudibranch recorded along the Visakhapatnam coast after more than 160 years since its original description in 1862. Another important finding was the first Indian record of the fly genus *Megapalla*, documented at Kalkere Arboretum in Bengaluru, highlighting the potential of citizen science to contribute meaningfully to biodiversity research and species discovery.

The Naturalist School played a leading role in coordinating and supporting CNC India 2025 through outreach, partnerships, participant engagement, capacity building, and nationwide coordination efforts. Working alongside organisations such as WWF-India, DiversityIndia, and several regional partners, TNS helped strengthen a growing network of citizen scientists contributing to biodiversity documentation across the country.

CNC India 2025 demonstrated the power of collective action in documenting biodiversity and fostering environmental stewardship. Beyond generating valuable ecological data, the challenge created opportunities for learning, collaboration, and deeper engagement with nature, reinforcing the role of citizen science as an important tool for conservation, research, and public participation in biodiversity monitoring.

Media Coverage







Capacity Building Initiatives

Citizen Science continued to be a major focus area within The Naturalist School's Citizen Engagement vertical, creating opportunities for citizens, students, researchers, naturalists, and conservation practitioners to contribute meaningfully to biodiversity documentation, ecological research, and conservation action. Through biodiversity challenges, workshops, exhibitions, training programmes, and international collaborations, TNS strengthened public participation in science while building capacity for long-term conservation efforts.

A significant milestone during the year was the Biodiversity Data Mobilization Workshop, conducted in Bengaluru on 27–28 September 2025. Hosted at Ashirvad Centre, the two-day workshop brought together 25 participants from diverse biodiversity and conservation backgrounds. Led by biodiversity informatics expert Dr. Vijay Barve, the programme focused on biodiversity informatics, open-access biodiversity data, data standards, and publishing datasets through global platforms such as the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF). Through practical exercises and discussions, participants developed skills in managing, mobilising, and sharing biodiversity data, contributing towards stronger biodiversity research and conservation outcomes.

The year also witnessed active participation through focused biodiversity documentation initiatives. Big Butterfly Month 2025, conducted in Hyderabad and Nagpur, encouraged citizens to document butterfly diversity through the iNaturalist platform. The Hyderabad chapter alone recorded 1,492 observations representing 72 species, contributed by 42 observers and verified by 114 identifiers. Similarly, National Moth Week Hyderabad 2025 highlighted the richness of nocturnal biodiversity, generating 742 observations of 169 species, contributed by 31 observers and supported by 51 identifiers. These initiatives demonstrated the growing role of community participation in documenting urban biodiversity and generating valuable ecological datasets.

The Naturalist School also contributed to national conversations around citizen science through participation in the Citizen Science Session at CASFOS, one of the first government-supported citizen science initiatives in the country. Representing TNS, Priya Venkatesh conducted a session for approximately 30 participants, highlighting the role of citizen science in biodiversity monitoring, conservation, and public engagement.



GBIF Workshop



Big Butterfly Month Hyderabad 2025



National Moth Week Hyderabad 2025

IUCN website: www.iucn.org

IUCN Briefs: www.iucn.org/iucn-briefs

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CITIZEN SCIENCE

January 2026



Community participating in a bioblitz in Karnataka, India.
(Photo: The Naturalist School, India)



Water monitoring in Oregon, USA, for the Adventure Scientists' Wild and Scenic Rivers project (Photo: Josh Daniels)

IUCN CSTF - Citizen Science Workshop

As part of the Asia Nature Challenge (ANC) 2025, TNS organised a series of online capacity-building programmes that collectively engaged over 500 participants from across Asia. Sessions included Introduction to iNaturalist, Beyond Basics – Advanced Features of iNaturalist, How to Make Good Observations on iNaturalist, Let's Meet the Odonates, and Learning About Moths with Roger Kendrick. These workshops strengthened participants' skills in biodiversity documentation, species identification, and citizen science methodologies while building a stronger regional network of contributors.

The year also saw the celebration of the Independence Day Nature Festival, a nationwide biodiversity documentation initiative that generated 17,139 observations, documenting 3,979 species through contributions from 1,585 observers and 1,208 identifiers, with nearly 40% of observations achieving Research Grade status. The initiative further demonstrated the potential of citizen science to mobilise large-scale public participation while generating scientifically valuable biodiversity data.

Beyond events and training programmes, TNS continued to play an active role in shaping the global citizen science movement. The organisation contributed to workshops and engagements under the IUCN Commission on Education and Communication's Citizen Science Task Force (CSTF), including sessions such as Citizen Science in Action: Advancing IUCN's Vision Through Motion. TNS also co-authored the IUCN Citizen Science Explainer Brief, contributing to global discourse on the role of citizen science in conservation, research, and public participation. Further strengthening its international engagement, TNS remained actively involved with the Citizen Science Global Partnership (CSGP), with team members contributing to international working groups, knowledge exchanges, and publications focused on advancing citizen science worldwide.

Additional outreach efforts included citizen science talks, exhibitions, and public engagement programmes such as the Mantis Exhibition at Chitrakala Parishath, Bengaluru, online learning sessions, and public talks including a citizen science session delivered by Ram Dayal Vaishnav at LCOY Hyderabad.



Expert Talk Session: Discovering Nature



A man with glasses and a beard, wearing a dark blue shirt, stands at a wooden podium, speaking into a microphone. The podium features a blue banner for the LBS Institute of Technology for Women, a Government of Kerala Undertaking, with logos of the Higher Education Department and the Ministry of Education. Behind him, a large screen displays the title 'Nature's Engineering Blueprint' over a background of green leaves and a butterfly. To the left, a vertical banner lists various topics related to engineering and technology. The room has a polished floor and several red chairs are visible in the background.

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April – May 2025

As part of its efforts to expand ecological awareness and introduce citizen science to younger audiences, The Naturalist School continued to engage with educational institutions through talks, workshops, and interactive learning sessions. One such engagement took place at LBS Institute of Technology for Women (LBSITW), Thiruvananthapuram, where Ashwin A, Project Lead for the Asia Nature Challenge 2025, was invited as the keynote speaker for the inaugural event of SigNature Nexus, the institution's Nature Club.

The session, titled “Discovering Nature: Observing, Documenting, and Connecting with the World Around Us,” introduced students to the fundamentals of nature observation, biodiversity documentation, and citizen science. Designed to encourage participants to look beyond conventional classroom learning, the session explored how mindful observation of the natural world can foster both personal connection and scientific contribution. Students were introduced to the importance of documenting biodiversity and the role that ordinary citizens can play in generating valuable ecological knowledge.

A key component of the session focused on practical observation skills. Participants were introduced to methods for becoming better observers, including techniques such as listening to bird calls, observing behavioural patterns, and developing awareness of seasonal and ecological changes in their surroundings. The session also explored local bird diversity, conservation concerns surrounding threatened species, and the importance of biodiversity monitoring in a rapidly changing world.

The event witnessed enthusiastic participation, particularly from first-year students, reflecting a growing interest in environmental awareness and nature-based learning among young learners. Through interactive discussions, questions, and real-world examples, the session helped introduce students to the values of observation, curiosity, and stewardship that form the foundation of both natural history and citizen science.



SIGNATURE NEXUS

presents

**“Discovering Nature:
Observing,
Documenting and
Connecting with the
world around us”**

Ashwin A
Project Lead - ANC 2025
iNat ambassador
Citizen Scientist &
Zoologist

8 October 2025
 10:30 am
 Main Seminar Hall

Republic Day Nature Festival 2026





India

January 23–26, 2026

The Republic Day Nature Festival (RDNF) 2026 was a nationwide citizen science initiative organised by the CNC India Team and The Naturalist School as part of the India Nature Festival Series. Conducted from 23rd to 26th January 2026, the festival celebrated India's biodiversity while encouraging citizens across the country to actively participate in documenting nature through the iNaturalist platform.

Designed to coincide with Republic Day, the initiative encouraged people to observe and record flora and fauna from their surroundings, contributing to a growing open-access biodiversity database for India. The festival aimed to promote citizen science, strengthen biodiversity documentation, encourage participation from across states and union territories, and build momentum towards the City Nature Challenge 2026.



Republic Day Nature Festival

RDNF 2026

From 23-26 Jan

- Create an iNaturalist account
- Join Republic Day Nature Festival 2026
- Observe nature from Jan 23–26, 2026
- Upload your observations from anywhere in India



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THE
Naturalist
SCHOOL

 iNaturalist

The event witnessed remarkable nationwide participation from students, educators, researchers, amateur naturalists, and experienced biodiversity observers. Over the four-day period, participants recorded 8,073 observations representing 2,247 species, with contributions from 907 observers and 707 identifiers. The collaborative nature of the initiative highlighted the power of citizen science in generating reliable biodiversity data while fostering learning and engagement among participants.

Observations documented a wide range of taxa including birds, plants, insects, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and fungi from diverse habitats across the country. The festival also recorded several notable species observations, including the Vulnerable Fishing Cat from Assam, the Endangered Malabar Silurus endemic to the Western Ghats, the rare Pine Bunting from Jharkhand, and a number of significant insect and migratory bird records. These observations contributed valuable information to open-access biodiversity databases and strengthened baseline knowledge for future ecological research and conservation planning.





“

“Little things that run the world.”

– E. O. Wilson

Scaling Citizen Science for Global Targets

Like a tiger beetle locking onto movement, The Naturalist School is turning public participation into core conservation infrastructure. If our first five years planted the idea, our next phase is growing a global forest of data-driven local action.

I am very happy to share our increasing footprint at the global scale. Through the IUCN Citizen Science Task Force, and Citizen Science Global Partnership we standardize global knowledge tools, while initiatives like the World Tiger Beetle Bioblitz feed high-quality community data directly into IUCN Species Survival Commission's red list assessments.

Most critically, TNS bridges grassroots action and multilateral policy. At International Youth Biodiversity Conference 2026, we facilitated the Youth Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (YBSAP), a framework explicitly mapped to the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). By reporting these commitments to the CBD framework, we translate local engagement into measurable policy compliance.

Recognized by global organisations like Asia Environmental Youth Network and CitiObs, TNS integrates regional roots with international standards in so many different ways. People protect what they learn to notice. As an agile civil-society partner, we are fully ready to align with global oversight bodies to accelerate our shared global targets.

– Ram Dayal Vaishnav

Contributions to Global Environmental Partnerships



Unpacking Data Quality in Citizen Science: An Analysis of City Nature Challenge India

▼ Ram Dayal Vaishnav, Vijay Barve, Lavanya Bhat, A. Ashwin, Anukriti Sharma, Chitra Shanker

Abstract ▲

The City Nature Challenge (CNC) has seen a surge in biodiversity observations over the long-term research and conservation value, including particularly the proportion of observations of native species and patterns and barriers related to reporting. We analysed 10 years using iNaturalist data (iNaturalist Community 2025).



The Naturalist School continued to strengthen its role within the global citizen science community through international collaborations, conferences, biodiversity challenges, knowledge exchanges, and capacity-building initiatives. These engagements expanded TNS's contribution beyond biodiversity documentation by fostering global partnerships, supporting citizen science networks, and advancing conversations around conservation, climate action, and public participation in science.

A significant contribution during the year was TNS's active involvement with the Citizen Science Global Partnership (CSGP) and the IUCN Commission on Education and Communication's Citizen Science Task Force (CSTF). TNS members contributed to international working groups, workshops, and knowledge-sharing initiatives focused on strengthening citizen science globally.

Notably, Ram Dayal Vaishnav served as the Honorary Secretary of the Citizen Science Climate Change Mitigation (CSCCM) Working Group, contributing to the development of a global report exploring how citizen science can support climate action and behaviour change. TNS members also contributed to report drafting, research, communications, and international collaboration efforts within the working group.

The organisation further contributed to global biodiversity initiatives through participation in international biodiversity challenges and bioblitzes. TNS collaborated on the World Tiger Beetle Bioblitz 2025, a month-long biodiversity documentation initiative conducted across India, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka in partnership with conservation organisations such as Roar. The programme included biodiversity documentation efforts, public participation campaigns, and online learning sessions featuring experts such as Roger Kendrick.

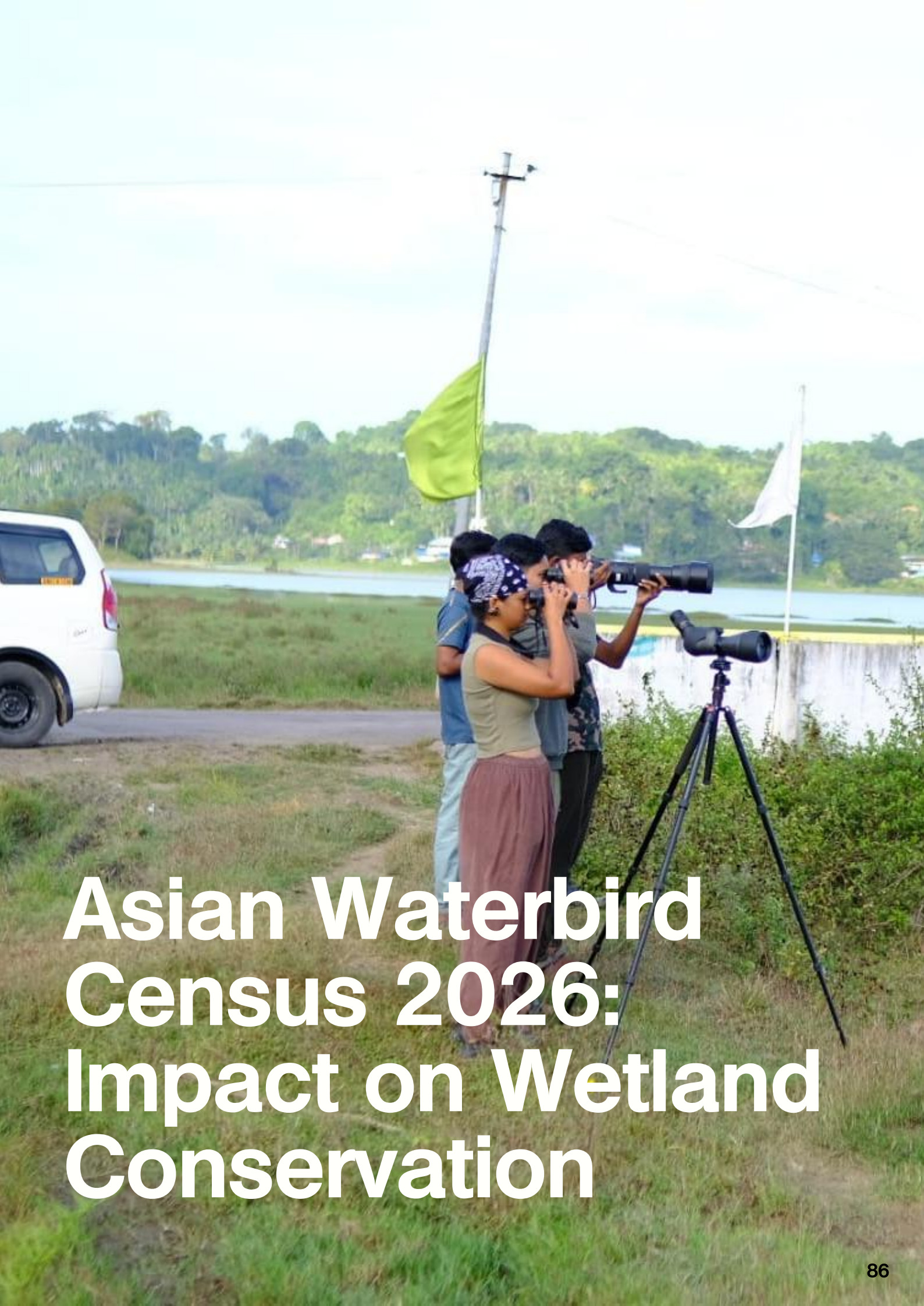
TNS also supported the IUCN World Conservation Congress (WCC) Bioblitz 2025, encouraging biodiversity documentation through the iNaturalist platform while engaging participants from multiple countries in recording and sharing biodiversity observations. Similarly, the organisation contributed to the UNEA7 Nairobi Biodiversity Challenge, strengthening global participation in biodiversity monitoring and citizen science-led conservation initiatives.

Knowledge sharing and international outreach formed another important component of TNS's work during the year. Ashwin A conducted an online session at the Africa Youth Biodiversity Conference, introducing participants to citizen science through iNaturalist 101: An Introduction to Citizen Science and Biodiversity Documentation Apps. The session connected young conservation practitioners and biodiversity enthusiasts across Africa with tools and methodologies for biodiversity monitoring and citizen participation.

TNS members also contributed to international conferences and forums through presentations and research dissemination. Nibedita Chakraborty presented a session titled Urban Wetlands as Mini Biodiversity Hotspots at the Tropical Biosummit, highlighting ecological insights from the East Kolkata Wetlands. The organisation also participated in the Citizen Science India Conference at IISER Tirupati, where analyses from the City Nature Challenge were presented and a dedicated TNS exhibition booth facilitated conversations around citizen science, biodiversity documentation, and public participation in conservation.

Through these international collaborations, conferences, biodiversity challenges, and working groups, The Naturalist School continued to strengthen connections between local conservation action and global citizen science movements.





Asian Waterbird Census 2026: Impact on Wetland Conservation



The Naturalist School played an active role in the Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) 2026, a long-standing citizen science initiative coordinated by Wetlands International that monitors waterbird populations and wetland ecosystems across Asia. Marking the 40th year of the Asian Waterbird Census and the 60th year of the International Waterbird Census, the programme brought together birdwatchers, researchers, students, conservation organisations, and government agencies in a collective effort to document and better understand the health of wetland habitats.

As part of the initiative, The Naturalist School supported outreach, coordination, capacity building, and citizen participation across multiple regions of India. Surveys were conducted across diverse wetland landscapes including the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Kerala, Arunachal Pradesh, and Ladakh, involving volunteers, regional coordinators, researchers, forest department personnel, and local birding communities. A preparatory workshop on wader identification was also organised in Port Blair, helping strengthen field skills and awareness prior to the census.

The census covered at least 15 wetland sites and engaged more than 60 participants in field surveys and preparatory activities. These efforts contributed valuable observations on waterbird populations, migratory species, and wetland conditions while strengthening local capacity for biodiversity monitoring.

Notable records from the Andaman & Nicobar Islands included species such as Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Garganey, and Black-winged Stilt, highlighting the ecological significance of these wetland habitats.

Beyond species documentation, the census generated important insights into the changing condition of wetlands. Several surveyed regions reported lower bird numbers and reduced species diversity compared to previous years, reinforcing the importance of long-term monitoring and conservation interventions for wetland ecosystems. The initiative also strengthened public awareness through media coverage, volunteer participation, and field-based learning opportunities that connected citizens directly with conservation efforts.



Asian Waterbird Census 2026 underway across Andaman & Nicobar Islands

Over 40 Species recorded at Ograbraj Wetlands; strong presence of endemic Andaman Teal noted

Sri Vijaya Puram, Jan. 11
The Asian Waterbird Census (AWBC), conducted annually by Wetlands International to monitor wetland bird populations and assess the status of wetland habitats across the Asian subcontinent, is currently underway in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands. The Andaman Avians Club (AAC), which has been conducting this census for several years, has continued the survey this year as well. The census commenced on January 3, 2026 and will conclude on January 18, 2026.

This year, AAC has collaborated with several organisations to



ensure the participation of all concerned stakeholders, including the Department of Environment & Forests, ANI, Directorate of Education, A&N Administration, Andaman Nicobar Environment Team (ANET) - Dakshin Foundation, ANI, The Naturalist School,

Bengaluru; and Tribemen.in, a Private Tour firm based in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

On the morning of January 11, birders from AAC assembled near Government School, Ograbraj. Members of ANET, Wildlife Institute of India, Tribemen.in, staff of the

Forest Department, school teachers from GSSS Tushnabad and GMS Ograbraj, students from Classes VI to VIII, children of staff from the nearby IRBn campus, and tourism students from ITI Dollygunj participated in the survey. A few parents who had accompanied

the students also volunteered and joined the exercise.

The programme was graced by the chief guest, Shri Dinesh Kannan, IFS, Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife), Environment & Forests, accompanied by Shri Sandeep Belua, IFS, Deputy Conservator of Forests (Wildlife), South Andaman. Secretary (Tourism), Ms Jyothi Kumari, IAS, was also present on the occasion.

Participants were divided into groups and assigned team guides. They were briefed on wetland habitats and their dependent bird species, the use of

(Contd. on last page)



IUCN Commissions Knowledge Hub



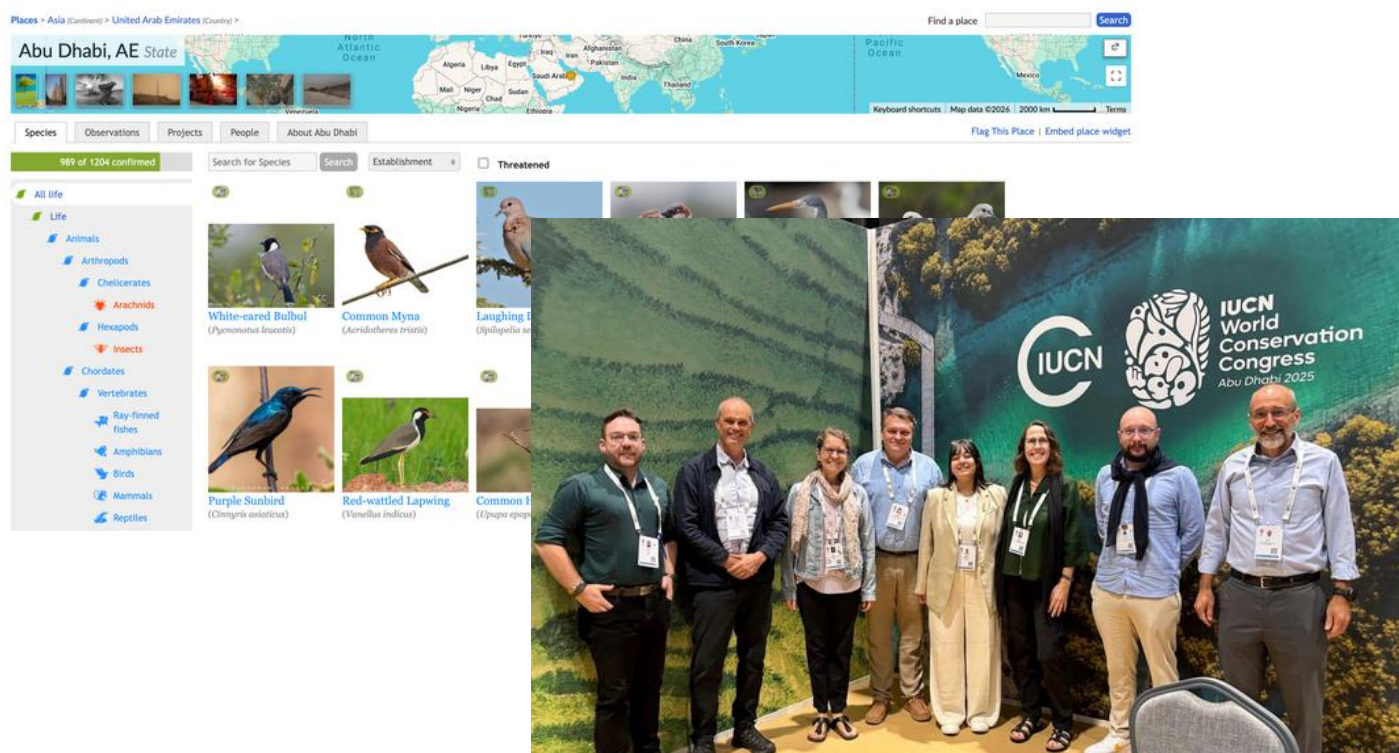
IUCN CSTF and WCC Engagement

The Naturalist School continued to strengthen its international engagement in citizen science through its active involvement with the IUCN Commission on Education and Communication's Citizen Science Task Force (CSTF). As a founding member of the Task Force, TNS contributed to global efforts aimed at advancing citizen science as a tool for biodiversity monitoring, environmental education, research, and conservation action.

During the year, TNS hosted and supported webinars and knowledge-sharing sessions for the CSTF network, contributing to international capacity building around citizen science approaches, public participation in research, and biodiversity documentation. TNS also contributed to the development and dissemination of communication resources and global engagement initiatives associated with the Task Force, strengthening the visibility of citizen science within international conservation discourse. Citizen science was also formally recognised at the IUCN World Conservation Congress 2025 as an important tool for conservation, research, and policy, marking a significant step for the field globally.

TNS's engagement with the IUCN World Conservation Congress (WCC) 2025 in Abu Dhabi further extended this work. As an active enabler of the IUCN WCC Bioblitz, TNS supported public participation in biodiversity documentation through the iNaturalist platform, helping connect citizen science with one of the world's foremost international conservation gatherings. The Congress brought together more than 10,000 participants from governments, civil society, academia, Indigenous organisations, and environmental institutions, creating an important global platform for dialogue on biodiversity conservation and sustainability.

Through its engagement with the CSTF and the World Conservation Congress, The Naturalist School contributed to strengthening the international visibility of citizen science while building bridges between public participation, biodiversity monitoring, and global conservation policy. These engagements reflect TNS's growing role in international environmental networks and its commitment to making conservation more participatory, collaborative, and evidence-based.



TNS member serving as a founding member in the citizen science task force



ASIA NATURE CHALLENGE

The Asia Nature Challenge (ANC) 2025 was a continent-wide citizen science initiative coordinated by Citizen Science Asia in collaboration with The Naturalist School. Established to strengthen biodiversity documentation and public participation in conservation across Asia, the challenge sought to address a significant gap in global biodiversity databases despite the continent's extraordinary ecological richness. By creating a common platform for observation, learning, and collaboration, ANC encouraged citizens across Asia to become active contributors to ecological research and conservation.

Conducted between 3rd and 12th October 2025, the challenge was organised in two phases: an observation phase where participants documented wild organisms using the iNaturalist platform, followed by an identification phase that brought together taxonomic experts, experienced naturalists, and volunteers to verify observations and improve data quality. This collaborative approach ensured that biodiversity records generated through the challenge were both accessible and scientifically valuable.

A major focus of ANC 2025 was capacity building. Leading up to and during the challenge, participants engaged in a series of training programmes and workshops including organiser orientations, beginner and advanced iNaturalist sessions, taxonomic workshops on dragonflies, damselflies and moths, as well as sessions on biodiversity data stewardship and species identification. These initiatives helped participants strengthen their observation, documentation, and identification skills while fostering a deeper understanding of citizen science methodologies.

The challenge witnessed significant participation from across the continent, bringing together students, educators, amateur naturalists, photographers, conservation practitioners, and professional researchers. Collectively, 7,340 participants contributed 98,942 observations, documenting 15,985 species and generating 148,193 identifications. More than 40% of all observations achieved Research Grade status, highlighting the scientific quality and reliability of the data generated through the initiative.





CELEBRATING THE JOURNEY: ASIA NATURE CHALLENGE 2025 WRAP-UP SESSION

Calling all Collaborating Organisers to join us in celebrating our journey

- Reflect on the journey and collective achievements
- Review key findings and biodiversity data gathered
- Celebrate the collaborative spirit that made it all possible

20th Nov, 2025 6 PM

JOIN THE SESSION USING THE QR CODE

FROM OBSERVATION TO CONFIRMATION
A Thoughtful Approach to Species ID

Learn to identify species, make necessary corrections, and explore identification tips and best practices on iNaturalist.

KRISHNA CHAITANYA
Active Identifier & iNaturalist Ambassador
Plant Enthusiast
WWF Volunteer
India

7 PM IST
FRIDAY

REGISTER FOR THE WORKSHOP USING THE QR CODE

Join our online session on the **MOTH MAGIC - A ROUGH GUIDE TO MOTH RECORDING USING iNATURALIST**

Dr. Roger Clive Kendrick (hkmaths)
Lepidoptera & Conservation Expert
Founder, Asian Lepidoptera Conservation Symposium
Hong Kong

September 30
4:30 PM HKT, 2:00 PM IST

Discover moths with us - Join the Asia Nature Challenge 2025 and share your observations.

REGISTER FOR THE WORKSHOP USING THE QR CODE

Join the session **TAXONOMIC INSIGHTS INTO ODONATA**

Discover nature with us - Join the Asia Nature Challenge 2025 and share your observations.

September 26
6:30 PM IST

Anita Prasanna
Biomimicry Odontoptera expert
M.Phil. University of Colorado
Insect Conservation Society
USA

Register for the workshop using the QR code

MEETING ID 855 0480 2517
PASSCODE 127351

COLLABORATING ORGANISERS MEETING

First meeting
SEPTEMBER 22 2025 9 PM IST

Second meeting
SEPTEMBER 24 2025 6 PM IST

Third meeting
SEPTEMBER 26 2025 3 PM IST

Fourth meeting
SEPTEMBER 28 2025 12 PM IST

Scan the QR code below to join the meeting on your chosen date and time

BEYOND BASICS - ADVANCED FEATURES OF iNATURALIST

Discover nature with us - Join the Asia Nature Challenge 2025 and share your observations.

Join our advanced session to sharpen your iNaturalist skills—learn how to improve species IDs, take part in bioblitz projects, use data tools, and link your observations to global biodiversity efforts.

DR. VIJAY BARVE
A biodiversity informatics expert and digital project Manager at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles

18th September 2025 6 PM IST

Register for the workshop using the QR code

JOIN US FOR THE BEGINNER-LEVEL WORKSHOP ON iNATURALIST!

Discover nature with us - Join the Asia Nature Challenge 2025 and share your observations.

Sign up today and join the first session, where you'll learn the basics of iNaturalist—how to observe nature, take clear photos, upload your findings, and identify species with ease.

Pavindu Sathian
Active Identifier & iNaturalist Ambassador
India

Ram Dayal Varshney
Coordinator of the National Museum of Natural History
India

SEPTEMBER 14 2025 5 PM IST

Register for the workshop using the QR code

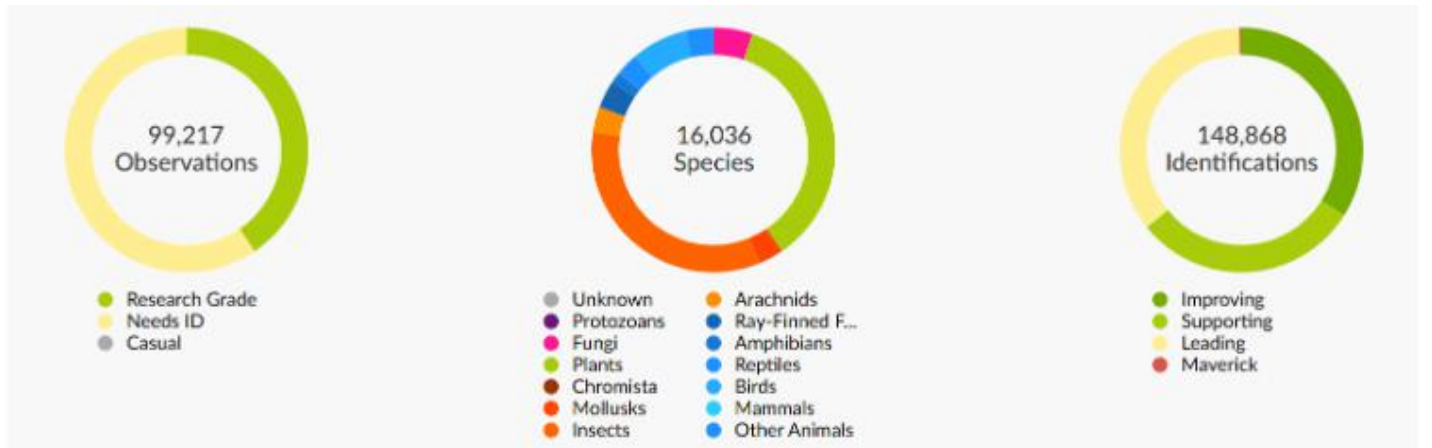
WRAP-UP SESSION: ASIA NATURE CHALLENGE 2025

Calling all Participants and Collaborating Organisers to join us in celebrating our journey

- Reflect on the journey and collective achievements
- Review key findings and biodiversity data gathered
- Celebrate the collaborative spirit that made it all possible

20th Nov, 2025 6 PM

JOIN THE SESSION USING THE QR CODE



ANC 2025 also demonstrated substantial growth compared to its inaugural edition in 2024. Participant numbers increased by approximately 29%, observations grew by 34.8%, and species documentation increased by 18%. The challenge expanded its reach into previously underrepresented regions and significantly improved documentation across a wide range of taxonomic groups including insects, plants, fungi, reptiles, and amphibians, contributing to a more representative understanding of Asia's biodiversity.

The event generated several noteworthy biodiversity records from across Asia, including first iNaturalist records, endemic species observations, vulnerable species, newly described taxa, and important range extensions.

These findings contributed valuable information to global biodiversity databases and strengthened baseline ecological knowledge for future research, monitoring, and conservation planning.

Through its role as a coordinating partner, The Naturalist School contributed to outreach, participant mobilisation, training, and regional collaboration efforts that strengthened citizen science participation across the continent. The Asia Nature Challenge 2025 stands as an important example of how collective observation, community engagement, and open-access science can contribute meaningfully to biodiversity conservation while fostering a growing culture of ecological awareness and stewardship across Asia.





Dehradun



Turkey/Izmir



Museum Alam Sulawesi



Iran



Wales (UM-Wales), Malaysia



Seoul National University, South Korea



Taiwan Env Ecology Industry Union



Nature Society Singapore





Citizen Science Global Partnership (CSGP)



UNEA-7



December 2025, Nairobi, Kenya

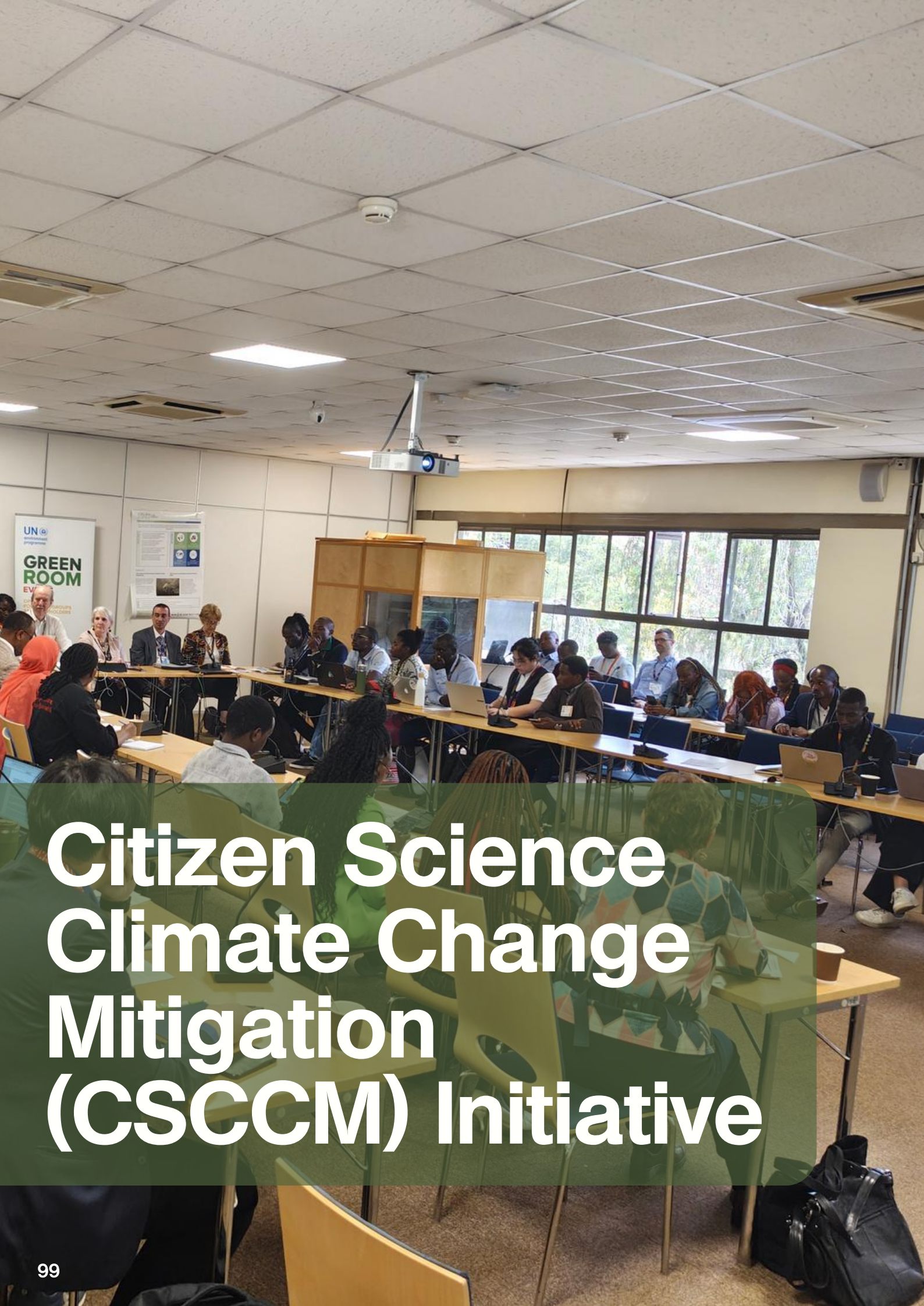
The Naturalist School participated in the Seventh Session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-7) in Nairobi, Kenya, through its engagement with the Citizen Science Global Partnership (CSGP). Representing TNS on-ground, Ram Dayal Vaishnav and Anukriti Sharma attended the assembly as part of a 33-member CSGP delegation, while Ashwin A and Nibedita Chakraborty supported the effort through coordination, documentation, and technical inputs from India. Held under the theme “Advancing sustainable solutions for a resilient planet,” UNEA-7 brought together governments, scientists, institutions, and civil society organisations to deliberate on the interconnected global crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution.



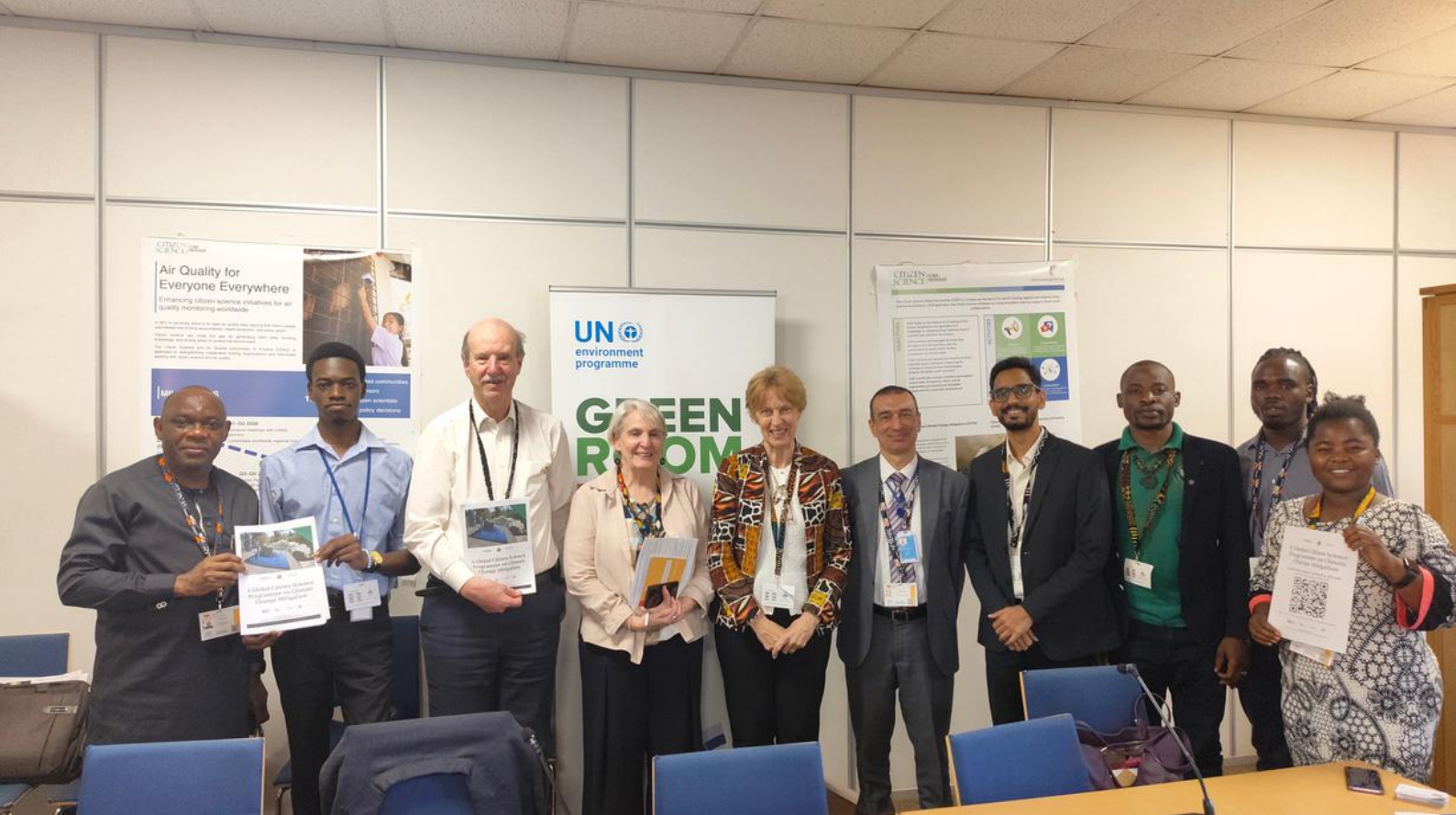
Through this participation, TNS contributed to international conversations on the role of citizen science in environmental governance and multilateral environmental agreements. As part of the broader CSGP delegation, the organisation supported advocacy efforts calling for greater recognition of citizen science, local knowledge, and community-generated data within global environmental decision-making processes. The assembly created an important opportunity for TNS to connect grassroots biodiversity documentation and public participation in science with high-level policy discussions taking place at the United Nations.

UNEA-7 marked an important international milestone for TNS, strengthening its role within global citizen science networks and positioning the organisation within conversations on how citizen-led data, biodiversity monitoring, and local environmental action can contribute to international environmental policy and sustainability goals.





Citizen Science Climate Change Mitigation (CSCCM) Initiative

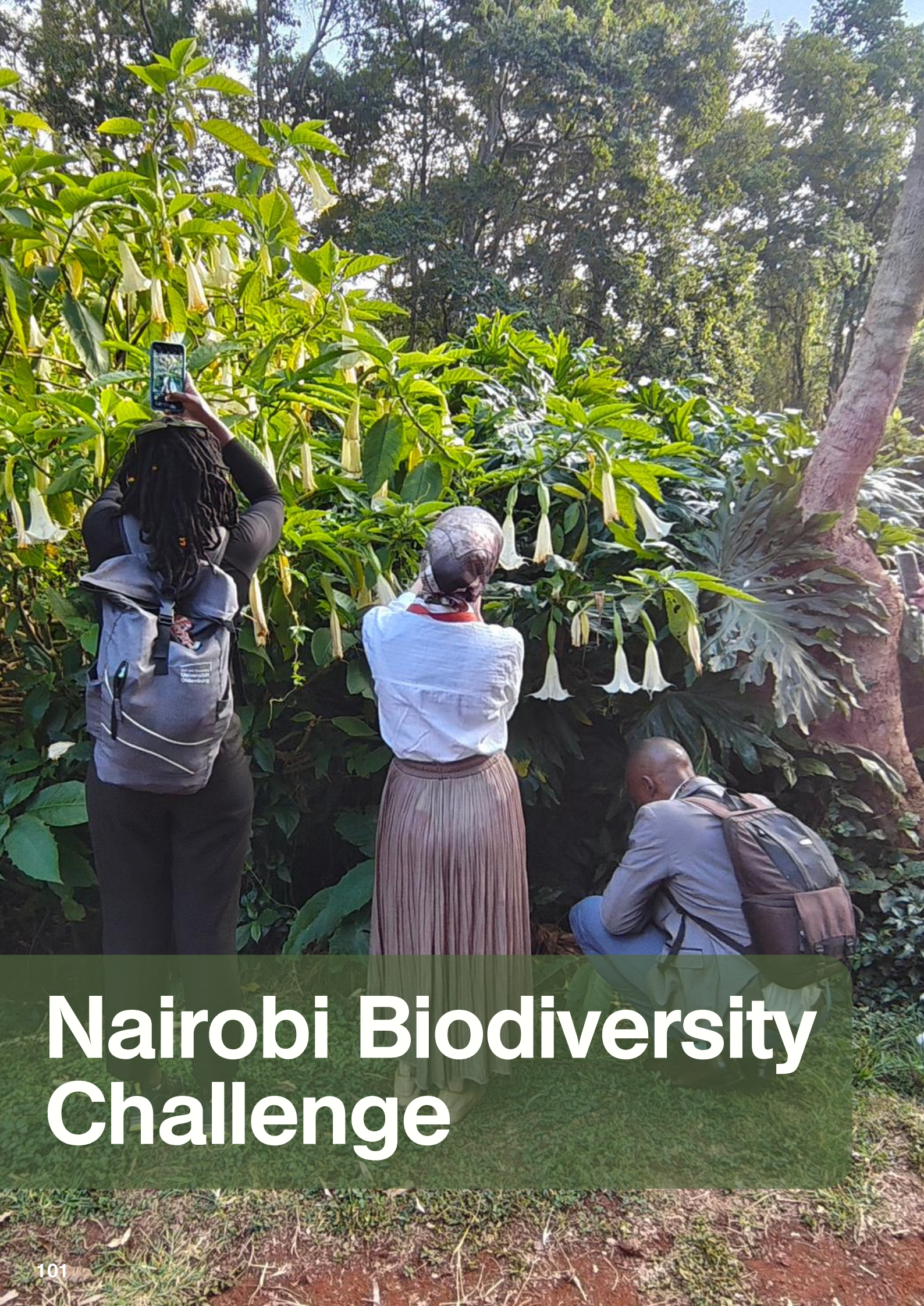


The Naturalist School played an active role in the Citizen Science Climate Change Mitigation (CSCCM) initiative under the Citizen Science Global Partnership (CSGP), contributing to a global working group focused on exploring how citizen science can support climate action, behaviour change, and environmental decision-making. TNS was involved in the working group's consultations, strategy discussions, and green room meetings that informed the development of the CSCCM Report, a collaborative international knowledge output examining the role of citizen-generated data and participatory approaches in climate change mitigation.

TNS members contributed to the initiative through research support, drafting, communications, and engagement within the working group. Ram Dayal Vaishnav served as Honorary Secretary of the CSCCM Working Group, while the organisation supported the development and release of the report as part of its broader commitment to advancing citizen science within global environmental policy spaces. The report was formally released during a side event at UNEA-7 in Nairobi, before an audience that included international delegates, environmental practitioners, and representatives from major environmental institutions.

The CSCCM initiative represents an important strand of TNS's international work, demonstrating how the organisation is contributing not only to biodiversity documentation and public engagement, but also to wider conversations on climate action, evidence-based policy, and the role of communities in shaping environmental solutions at a global scale.





Nairobi Biodiversity Challenge



As part of its international citizen science work during UNEA-7, The Naturalist School co-organised the Nairobi Biodiversity Challenge (NBC), a citizen science initiative designed to document urban biodiversity and demonstrate the value of community-generated ecological data within a major global environmental forum. Conducted in Nairobi during the United Nations Environment Assembly, the challenge encouraged participants to use the iNaturalist platform to record species observations from across the city, creating a biodiversity snapshot that connected local ecological knowledge with an international policy gathering.

TNS served as a co-organiser of the challenge, supporting coordination, outreach, and participant engagement. The initiative resulted in the documentation of more than 330 species in Nairobi during UNEA-7, offering a powerful demonstration of how citizen science can generate meaningful biodiversity data even within the context of a global conference. By linking biodiversity documentation with the assembly, the challenge helped showcase the relevance of citizen-led observation and open ecological data to international environmental discussions.



The Nairobi Biodiversity Challenge reflected TNS's approach to citizen science as both a conservation practice and a public engagement tool. Beyond generating observations, the initiative created visibility for citizen science at an international platform and reinforced the importance of local participation, urban biodiversity monitoring, and community-driven data in shaping broader environmental awareness and policy conversations.



A Global Citizen Science Programme on Climate Change Mitigation

AURORA
CITIZEN SCIENCE
NATURALIST

Report prepared by the
Citizen Science Climate Change Mitigation (CSCCM) Working Group

Global Partnerships in⁸⁶ Research and Capacity Building





Livelihood Partnerships in East Africa

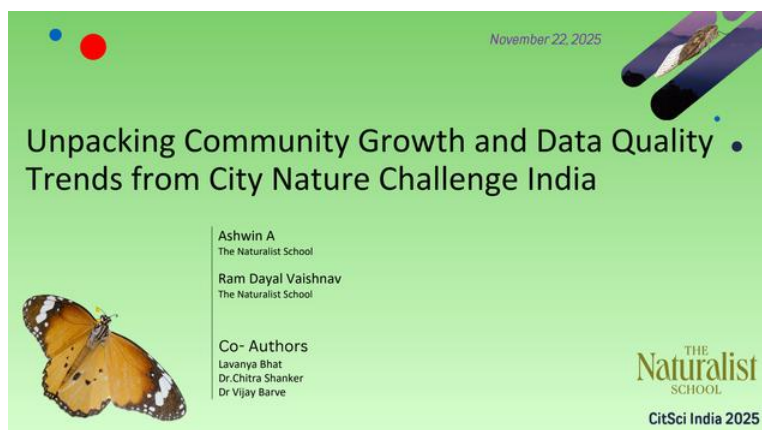
As part of its growing focus on nature-based livelihoods and community-linked conservation, The Naturalist School initiated international partnership-building efforts in Kenya and Rwanda during the year. These engagements were aimed at exploring collaborative models for training, local capacity building, and livelihood generation rooted in nature interpretation, citizen science, and conservation practice.

TNS began developing relationships with organisations working in East Africa, including through Memoranda of Understanding and Letters of Intent with partners such as WIFOMA, Kenya, to identify opportunities for joint programmes and shared learning. These early partnerships mark an important step in extending TNS's livelihood-oriented work beyond India and building South-South collaborations around conservation-linked employment, ecological education, and community leadership.

Living Data 2025: Research Publications and Conference Presentations

Bogotá, Colombia 2025

The Naturalist School contributed to the Living Data 2025 Conference in Bogotá through research publications and presentations focused on citizen science, biodiversity data, and participatory ecological monitoring in India. Members of the TNS team authored two papers published in Biodiversity Information Science and Standards (BISS), based on work around City Nature Challenge India and broader questions of data quality, research-grade observations, participation patterns, and long-term engagement in citizen science initiatives. Alongside these publications, the TNS team also prepared and presented two conference presentations, contributing to international dialogue on biodiversity documentation, open ecological data, and the role of citizen-generated observations in research and conservation. Together, these outputs strengthened TNS's presence within global biodiversity informatics and citizen science networks while showcasing insights emerging from its work in India.



Unpacking Data Quality in Citizen Science: An Analysis of City Nature Challenge India

by Ram Dayal Vaishnav, Vijay Barve, Lavanya Bhat, A. Ashwin, Anukriti Sharma, Chitra Shanker

Abstract

The City Nature Challenge (CNC) has rapidly expanded across India from 2023 to 2025, leading to a surge in biodiversity observations on iNaturalist. While the volume of data is impressive, its long-



Harnessing Citizen Science for Urban Biodiversity: Insights from the Hyderabad Annual Tree Biodiversity Survey

by A. Ashwin, Ram Dayal Vaishnav, Lavanya Bhat, Farida Tampal

Abstract

Rapid urban expansion in Hyderabad continues to present significant challenges to sustaining urban biodiversity, particularly the intricate fauna-flora relationships underpinning city ecosystem



World Tiger Beetle Bioblitz 2025

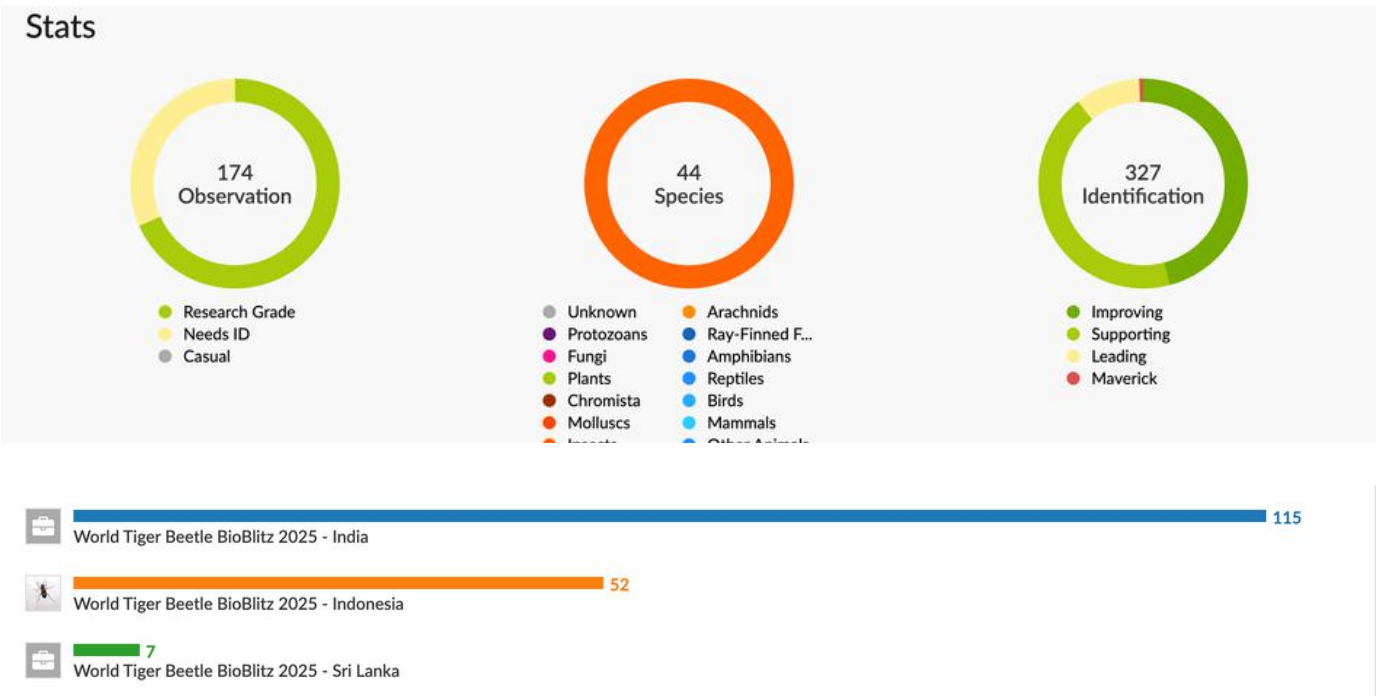
International Citizen Science Collaboration for Conservation

The Naturalist School co-organised the World Tiger Beetle Bioblitz 2025, a month-long international citizen science initiative conducted throughout November to document the diversity and distribution of tiger beetles (Subfamily: Cicindelinae). Launched on World Tiger Beetle Day (11 November), the initiative brought together citizen scientists, naturalists, researchers, photographers, and biodiversity enthusiasts across multiple countries to contribute observations through the iNaturalist platform.

Working in collaboration with Roar – The Tiger Beetle Conservancy and a network of regional coordinators, TNS played a central role in organising the initiative, conducting outreach, managing participation, facilitating biodiversity documentation, and coordinating observation efforts across countries including India, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka. The project served as a global umbrella platform that aggregated observations from participating regional projects, creating a shared dataset on tiger beetle diversity and distribution.

As part of the initiative, TNS organised online knowledge-sharing sessions and training programmes featuring international experts, including tiger beetle specialist Roger Kendrick, helping participants improve their identification skills, documentation practices, and understanding of tiger beetle ecology. These sessions strengthened capacity among participants while encouraging greater engagement with insect conservation and biodiversity monitoring.

Beyond public participation, the initiative carried significant scientific value. The Tiger Beetle Watch programme uses citizen science observations to support biodiversity research and conservation assessments.





Data generated through the initiative contributes to species assessments undertaken by the IUCN Species Survival Commission (SSC) and helps improve understanding of species distributions, conservation status, and ecological trends. Through its role in data coordination and participant training, TNS helped ensure that observations collected during the bioblitz met standards useful for research and conservation applications.

The World Tiger Beetle Bioblitz 2025 demonstrated how international collaboration and citizen science can contribute meaningfully to biodiversity conservation. By connecting participants across countries through a shared conservation goal, the initiative strengthened global awareness of an often-overlooked group of insects while generating valuable biodiversity data that can inform future research, conservation planning, and species assessments.

WORLD TIGER BEETLE DAY 2025

Expert Talk on –

‘Journeys with Indian Tiger Beetles: From Field Trails to Forgotten Species’

Speaker



Dr. David Pearson
Professor, Arizona
State University, USA
11 Nov, 2025 6PM IST



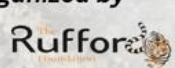
Register via the link or scan the QR
code:
<https://tinyurl.com/29ywfxfhn>



 **11 Nov, 2025**
1100 Hrs.
 **Porta Cabin, Wildlife Institute
of India, Dehradun**

Coordinated by:
Dr V.P. Uniyal- Professor, Graphic Era (Deemed to be University) &
Dr K. Ramesh- Scientist F & EIACP Coordinator, Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun

Organized by







INTERNATIONAL YOUTH BIODIVERSITY CONFERENCE - 2026

An Initiative of
Telangana Biodiversity Board

(An Autonomous & statutory body of Govt. of Telangana)

Biodiversity for LiFE: Skilling Youth for a Sustainable Future

WELCOME VICTORY CEREMONY



**International
Youth Biodiversity
Conference
(IYBC) 2026**

Youth Leadership, Biodiversity Policy and Global Engagement

The Naturalist School played a significant role in the International Youth Biodiversity Conference (IYBC) 2026, contributing to discussions on biodiversity conservation, citizen science, youth leadership, and environmental action. As an official partner of the conference, TNS supported the design and delivery of multiple sessions including a Youth Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (YBSAP) Workshop, Citizen Science Workshop, Green Skilling Panel Discussion, and other engagement sessions aimed at empowering young environmental leaders. The organisation's partnership was reflected across conference materials and outreach efforts, highlighting its growing role in youth-led biodiversity initiatives.

A major outcome of the conference was the launch of the Youth Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (YBSAP), a youth-led policy framework aligned with the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). The Naturalist School played a leading role in facilitating the drafting, development, and release of the document, helping create a platform through which youth voices can contribute meaningfully to biodiversity policy and implementation. More than 140 policy bookmarks and outreach materials were circulated to support awareness and engagement around the initiative.

The YBSAP was formally released in the presence of government representatives, biodiversity board officials, youth delegates, and conservation leaders, marking an important step towards strengthening youth participation in biodiversity governance. TNS will also support the reporting of YBSAP commitments to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) reporting framework and contribute towards presenting its progress at future CBD engagements.

The conference also served as a platform for recognising leadership in conservation and citizen science. During the event, Ram Dayal Vaishnav, Head of Citizen Engagement at The Naturalist School, was conferred the Dharmavana International Youth Biodiversity Award 2026 for his contributions to biodiversity conservation, citizen science, and youth-driven environmental action. The award recognised his work in expanding biodiversity participation, strengthening citizen science networks, and fostering public engagement in conservation both nationally and internationally.

Through its participation in IYBC 2026, The Naturalist School strengthened its commitment to supporting youth leadership, biodiversity policy engagement, and citizen science. The conference provided an important platform for connecting young leaders, practitioners, educators, and policymakers while demonstrating the growing role of youth-led action in shaping the future of biodiversity conservation.







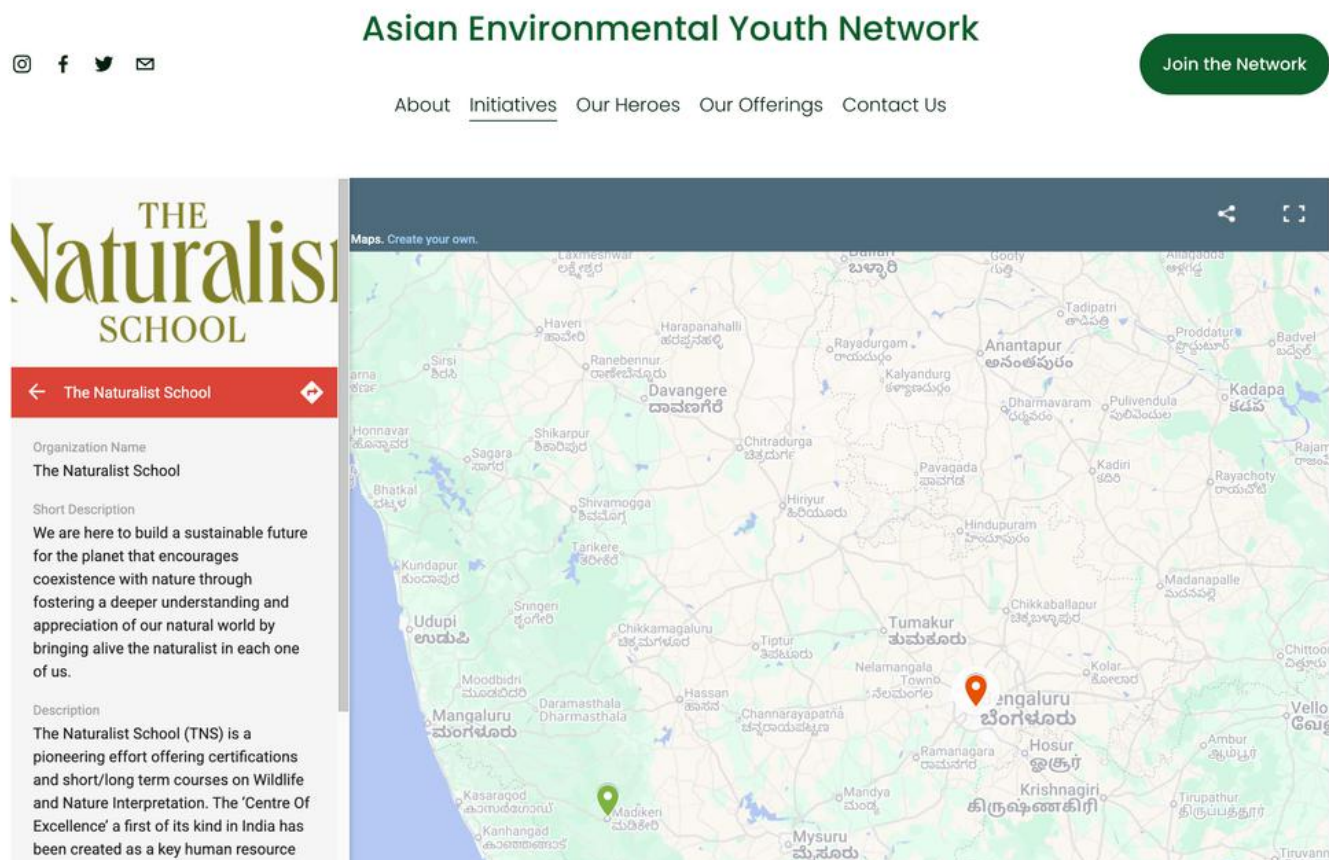


Expanding Our Global Footprint

Recognition under the AEYN TRAIL Network

During the year, The Naturalist School was recognised as part of the AEYN TRAIL (Tracking, Research, Action, Innovation and Leadership) Network, an international platform that brings together youth-led organisations, environmental initiatives, and emerging leaders working on biodiversity conservation, climate action, and sustainability. The inclusion of TNS within this network reflects the organisation's growing contribution to nature education, citizen science, youth engagement, and conservation leadership.

Being part of the TRAIL Network provides opportunities for international collaboration, peer learning, knowledge exchange, and participation in global environmental initiatives. The recognition also strengthens TNS's visibility within international youth and conservation networks, creating pathways for future partnerships and collaborative action across regions.



CitiObs Demonstration Fellow Case

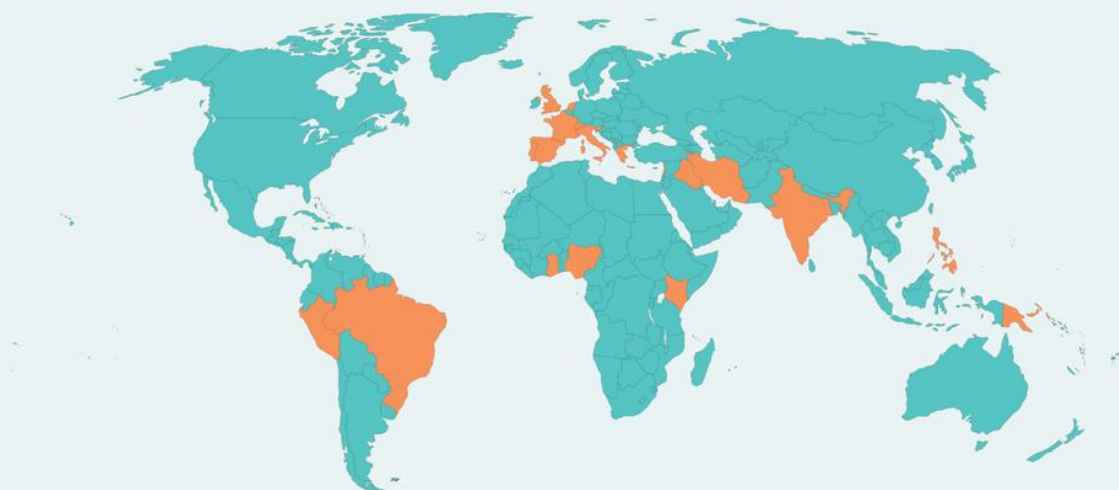
The Naturalist School was selected as a Demonstration Fellow Case under the CitiObs Project, a European initiative focused on advancing citizen science, environmental monitoring, and public participation in scientific research. The programme supports organisations and communities working to strengthen local environmental observation and data collection through innovative citizen science approaches.

As part of this collaboration, TNS will receive specialised monitoring equipment, technical guidance, and access to an international network of practitioners working on community-based environmental monitoring. The partnership represents an important milestone in strengthening TNS's citizen science capabilities and creating opportunities to integrate global best practices into local biodiversity monitoring and conservation efforts.

Fellow Cases

Citizen Observatories Learning from Shared Experiences and Tools

Fellow Cases are newly engaged Citizen Observatories and Initiatives from around the world that joined the CitiObs project in its final year.



Team TNS



CORE TEAM



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Lavanya Raju
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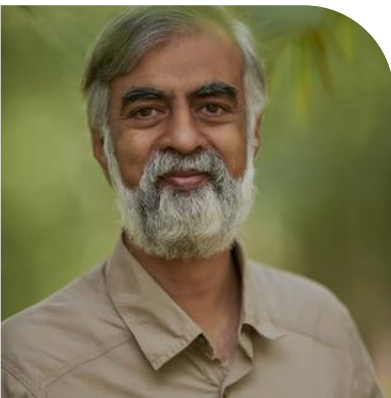
ADVISORY TEAM



Mentor & Advisor

Sanjai Mohan IFS HOFF (Rtd)

Shri. Sanjai Mohan IFS is ex-Head of Forest Force, Karnataka. He has managed various positions in the Forest Department throughout his tenure including being the Chief Wildlife Warden of the State. Among other positions, he has worked as CEO of Karnataka Ecotourism Development Board and MD of Jungle Lodges and Resorts. He has initiated projects for conservation of smaller wildlife (canids), Great Indian Bustard, Floricans, endemic Mahseer and established the states first Vulture breeding centre.



Chief Naturalist JLR & Technical Advisor

Karthikeyan Srinivasan

Karthikeyan has been educating and creating awareness among the young and old on various aspects of natural history through nature camps, talks and nature-based activities for over 40 years. He began as an Education Officer, Karnataka State Office with WWF-India for 14 years and currently serves as the Chief Naturalist, Jungle Lodges & Resorts Ltd. since 2006. He also serves concurrently as the Chief Trainer KEDB, Karnataka State. . He has been conferred the Carl Zeiss Award for Conservation in 2013.



Academic Advisor

Prof. Dr. N. Nandini

Dr. Nandini a professor and the chairperson of Dept. of Environmental Science, Bangalore University (Retd.). She has a teaching and research experience spanning 30 years. In 2008, As an active member of the Biodiversity Management Committee (BMC), Dr. Nandini has documented Bengaluru's biodiversity for its first People's Biodiversity Register (PBR). 11 years after the PBR submission, she has been again invited on the new board constituted by the BBMP in 2021.



Academic Advisor

Dr. Bitapi Sinha

Dr. Bitapi Sinha as faculty in the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) has been involved in nature interpretation, conservation education and wildlife tourism since 1993. Her interests include low-cost planning and development of interpretive facilities, understanding the attitudes of tourists and benefit of wildlife tourism to the community living around the protected areas. She has developed nature interpretive facilities in India and Bangladesh along with training guides for visitor management in protected areas.



Leadership Coach & Technical advisor

Vinay Sirsi

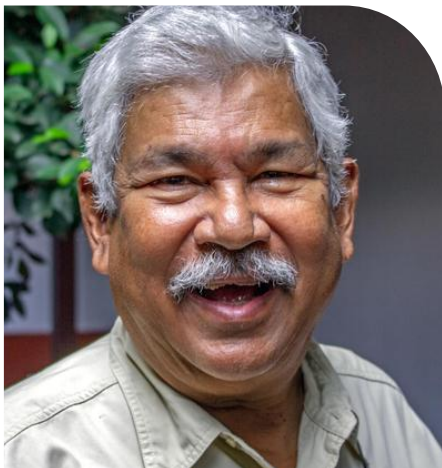
A leader with a unique blend of experiences, from serving as a pilot with the IAF, a mountaineer, an outdoor educator, risk management consultant and a serial entrepreneur. With a Masters in Outdoor Education Vinay is a Certified Professional Facilitator & Coach. His outdoor resume as a Mountaineering Field Instructor (NOLS), Wilderness Medicine Faculty (WMI) has allowed him to work with teams in diverse environments from the silicon valley to Ivy league business schools. He has served on the boards of several industry bodies including the AEE, ATOAI & WEA that work across hospitality, tourism & skill development sectors. He brings to TNS a laser-like focus on strategy & scale.



Advisor

Gayatri Raghwa

Gayatri Raghwa joined UNEP in early 2019 as UNEP's sole environmental education consultant based in India. She launched the Tide Turners Challenge in India and focuses on higher education work. As of mid-2021 Gayatri is in the process of setting up the India Green University Network. She has ensured the dissemination of Earth School (where India is second to the USA in terms of participation) and supported UNEP initiatives such as the Little Book of Green Nudges and the Race to Zero. A teacher by training, with 22 years of experience at college and school levels in India, Gayatri also spent 15 years raising the profile of environmental education in the UAE.



Advisor

Sandeep Chakrabarti

In the late 1970s, Sandeep became a passionate trekker, exploring the Himalayas through numerous planned and rugged expeditions. Professionally, Sandeep advanced rapidly through leadership roles at prestigious companies including Nerolac, Singer, the Oberoi Hotels, Stan Chart and AT&T, where he eventually retired early as Vice President of Marketing. He founded "Outrigger," an adventure tourism initiative that introduced many enthusiasts to the joys of camping, angling and other outdoor activities along the Cauvery River. His work there was instrumental in advancing conservation and research efforts to protect the iconic Mahseer fish and its habitat within the Cauvery basin.

OUR SUPPORT TEAM



Suchi Govindarajan



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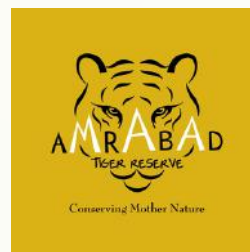


Anukriti Sharma

Government Associations



Industry Partners



International
Partnerships



Convention on
Biological Diversity

CITIZEN
SCIENCE | GLOBAL
PARTNERSHIP



CitiObs



Knowledge Partners



SOCIETY to SAVE ROCKS

Support





our
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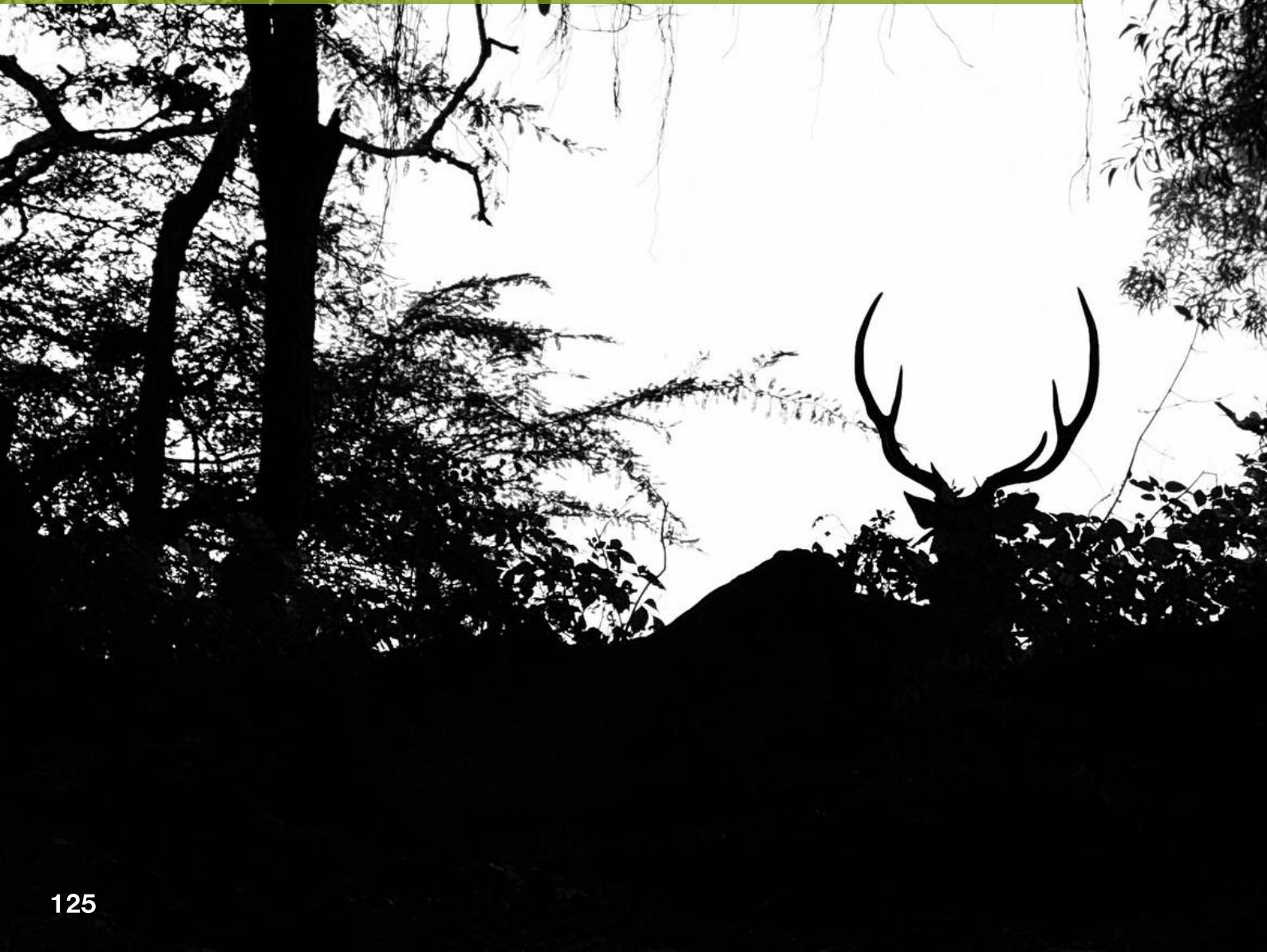
Acknowledgements

Our heartfelt gratitude to all our partners, collaborators, and supporters who have strengthened The Naturalist School's journey through their trust and commitment.

We extend special thanks to our donors – TVS, KSDL, Prestine and Orchid Laminates – whose support has made our programs and initiatives possible.

We are also deeply thankful to Mr. Sandeep Chakrabarti for his generous individual contribution.

To our core team, advisors, volunteers, and extended community – your dedication continues to shape and nurture the spirit of this movement.



Future Vision

Like a tiger beetle locking onto movement, TNS enters its next five years with sharper focus, quicker stride and a clearer sense of the ground it must cover.

The first five years were about belief, proof and persistence. We set out with a simple idea: that nature education, interpretation and field-based learning can change how people relate to the living world. Five years later, we have seen this idea take root in many forms. These changes may look small from a distance. Up close, they are the first signs of a different relationship between people and nature.

The next five years must build on this foundation. Our vision is to make nature interpretation a recognised, respected and accessible public good. It begins simply: we need more people who can read landscapes, ask better questions, tell better stories and help others understand why the living world around them matters.

This means creating strong learning pathways, building programmes that work across landscapes and treating nature interpretation as conservation infrastructure. Because without interpreters a forest becomes a backdrop. A lake, scenery. A city can forget that it is still alive.

We want to help change that.

Over the next five years, TNS will focus deeply on nature-based livelihoods. We want to work with local youth, women, forest-fringe communities, eco-guides and aspiring naturalists to create pathways that bring income, dignity and leadership closer to home through structured learning, mentorship, certification, partnerships and long-term support. Urban nature will be another major focus. For too long, nature has been treated as something that exists elsewhere: in sanctuaries, reserves and forests far away from traffic, deadlines and apartment blocks. But cities are living landscapes too.

Through walks, citizen science, public programmes, cultural institutions and neighbourhood initiatives, we want to make urban ecological literacy mainstream. The future must also be regional and multilingual. India cannot have one generic model for nature education. A grassland in Hesaraghatta, a wetland in Sultanpur, a tiger reserve in Central India, a zoo safari in Bihar, a forest village in the Northeast and a city park in Bengaluru each need their own language, rhythm and context.

Our goal is to build learning systems that can travel without becoming shallow, respecting local knowledge while offering structure, quality and professional standards. The next five years will ask more of us: more clarity, more discipline, more collaboration, more courage and, very likely, more spreadsheets than anyone originally signed up for. But the heart of the work will remain the same.

People protect what they learn to notice. They care for what they begin to understand. And they fight for what they come to love.

If the first five years were about planting the idea, the next five must be about growing the forest.

THE
Naturalist
SCHOOL

**“We believe in the
ripple effect of every
trained naturalist.”**

*Be Part of the Movement
Support our mission by enrolling,
donating, or volunteering today!*

The Naturalist School

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