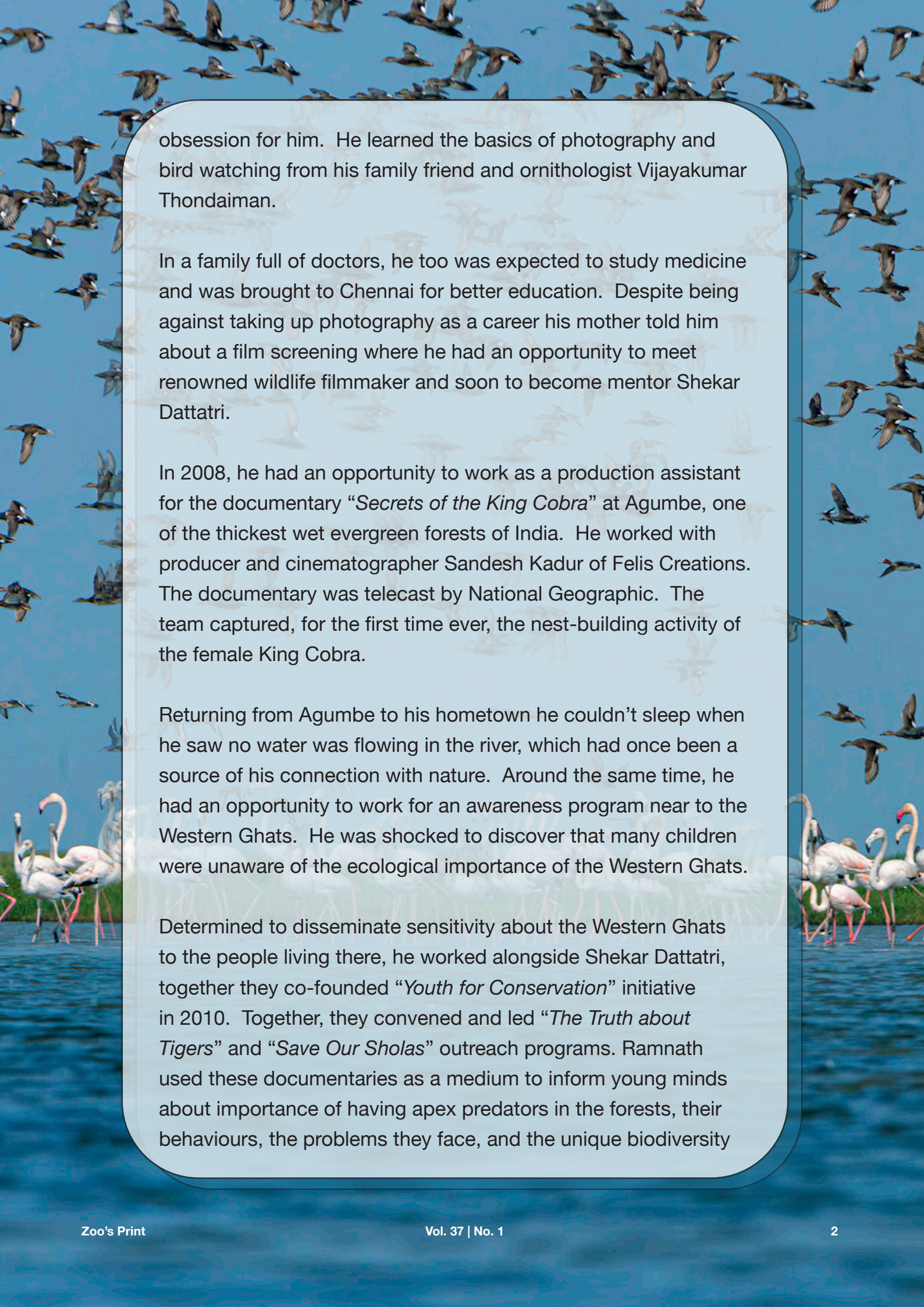


You Can be a conservationist too...

Ramnath was enamoured by nature from his childhood. Born and brought up in Pudukottai, Tamil Nadu, his fascination with nature only grew with time. His home was surrounded by scrub jungle and lots of ponds. He spent most of his time after school hours with birds, lizards, monkeys, and collecting frog eggs and putting them in a tub, waiting for them to hatch into tadpoles. When he was thirteen his father gifted him a camera and capturing nature and its beauty became an

At Moyar Gorge_Mudumalai.



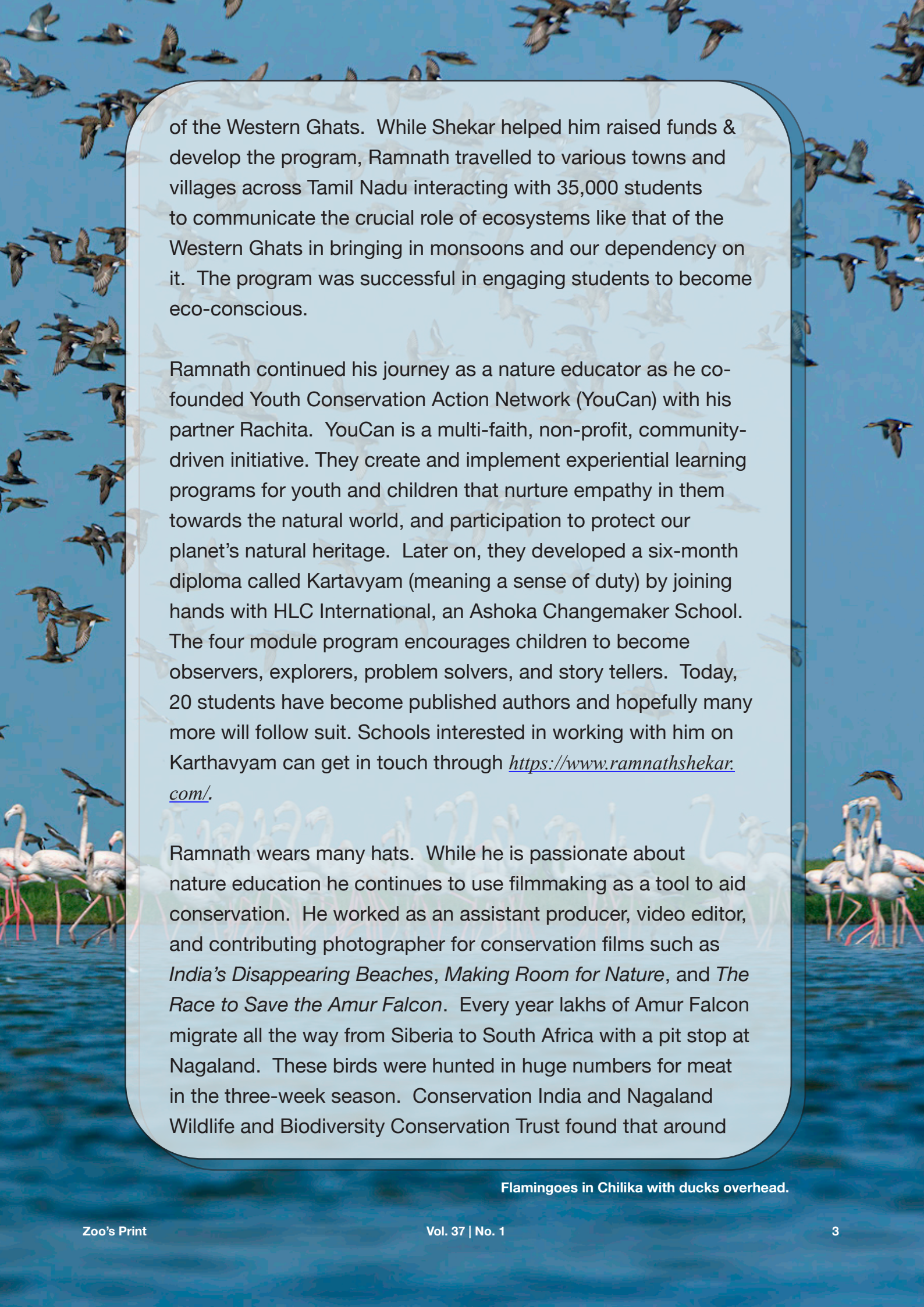
obsession for him. He learned the basics of photography and bird watching from his family friend and ornithologist Vijayakumar Thondaiman.

In a family full of doctors, he too was expected to study medicine and was brought to Chennai for better education. Despite being against taking up photography as a career his mother told him about a film screening where he had an opportunity to meet renowned wildlife filmmaker and soon to become mentor Shekar Dattatri.

In 2008, he had an opportunity to work as a production assistant for the documentary “*Secrets of the King Cobra*” at Agumbe, one of the thickest wet evergreen forests of India. He worked with producer and cinematographer Sandesh Kadur of Felis Creations. The documentary was telecast by National Geographic. The team captured, for the first time ever, the nest-building activity of the female King Cobra.

Returning from Agumbe to his hometown he couldn't sleep when he saw no water was flowing in the river, which had once been a source of his connection with nature. Around the same time, he had an opportunity to work for an awareness program near to the Western Ghats. He was shocked to discover that many children were unaware of the ecological importance of the Western Ghats.

Determined to disseminate sensitivity about the Western Ghats to the people living there, he worked alongside Shekar Dattatri, together they co-founded “*Youth for Conservation*” initiative in 2010. Together, they convened and led “*The Truth about Tigers*” and “*Save Our Sholas*” outreach programs. Ramnath used these documentaries as a medium to inform young minds about importance of having apex predators in the forests, their behaviours, the problems they face, and the unique biodiversity

A large flock of birds, likely ducks or similar waterfowl, is seen in flight against a clear blue sky. Below them, a body of water is visible, with several flamingoes standing in the shallow water. The scene is set in Chilika, India.

of the Western Ghats. While Shekar helped him raised funds & develop the program, Ramnath travelled to various towns and villages across Tamil Nadu interacting with 35,000 students to communicate the crucial role of ecosystems like that of the Western Ghats in bringing in monsoons and our dependency on it. The program was successful in engaging students to become eco-conscious.

Ramnath continued his journey as a nature educator as he co-founded Youth Conservation Action Network (YouCan) with his partner Rachita. YouCan is a multi-faith, non-profit, community-driven initiative. They create and implement experiential learning programs for youth and children that nurture empathy in them towards the natural world, and participation to protect our planet's natural heritage. Later on, they developed a six-month diploma called Kartavyam (meaning a sense of duty) by joining hands with HLC International, an Ashoka Changemaker School. The four module program encourages children to become observers, explorers, problem solvers, and story tellers. Today, 20 students have become published authors and hopefully many more will follow suit. Schools interested in working with him on Karthavyam can get in touch through <https://www.ramnathshekar.com/>.

Ramnath wears many hats. While he is passionate about nature education he continues to use filmmaking as a tool to aid conservation. He worked as an assistant producer, video editor, and contributing photographer for conservation films such as *India's Disappearing Beaches*, *Making Room for Nature*, and *The Race to Save the Amur Falcon*. Every year lakhs of Amur Falcon migrate all the way from Siberia to South Africa with a pit stop at Nagaland. These birds were hunted in huge numbers for meat in the three-week season. Conservation India and Nagaland Wildlife and Biodiversity Conservation Trust found that around

Flamingoes in Chilika with ducks overhead.

1,50,000 were being killed during this time. Conservationists like Bano Haralu, a native from Nagaland and others alike put in colossal efforts to bring the community together and put an end to this massacre. Today the same people who hunted the bird of prey are working for their conservation. Documentaries such as *The Race to Save the Amur Falcon* bring positive news on the conservation front and keep us conservationists motivated to work for wildlife.

In 2017 Ramnath was selected for The Asia-Pacific Leadership Program Fellowship (APLP) which seeks outstanding individuals from all walks of life to participate in an innovative leadership development program at the East-West Center in Hawaii. The program through place-based, experiential and transformative learning aims to create leaders that the world needs. As part of the program Ramnath travelled to Asia where he made short videos for different organizations like East-West Center, Hawaii Nature Center, and The Green School in Bali.

We must create space for people to understand that nature can take care of us if we take care of nature. Ramnath through his life's work has directed young and old to truly understand nature, protect nature, and lead sustainable lives through small steps. A nature educator, trained filmmaker, and passionate conservationist, Ramnath continues to work tirelessly to create an eco-conscious future.



Nambi teaching about plants.



Rohit Varma taking children on a field visit to a museum.



Nisha Bhakat conducting a session on birds.



From the friends of the Amur Falcon education program.



Children observing a session.



Dragon fly in a Shola forest.

C.V. Nishanth¹ & Shweta Madgulkar²

¹ Zoo Outreach Organization

² RHATC Fellow, 2021–22

Zoo Outreach Organization
Coimbatore, TN, India.