Announcement

Ten years of Kalinga Foundation – serving India's wildlife and those who protect them

In November 2013, herpetologist Dr. P. Gowri Shankar and Mrs. Sharmila Rajasegaran, aided by like-minded trustees, started the Kalinga Foundation, with its sister concerns Kalinga Centre for Rainforest Ecology (KCRE) and Kalinga Mane, aiming at biodiversity research and conservation. Nestled in Agumbe (13.5754N. 75.1065E; 860 m), one of the wettest places in India (10 m rain / yr), this place is a part of the global biodiversity hotspot – the Western Ghats. With a vast array of diversity at hand, it is the right choice for setting up this conservation center.

Kālinga Foundation

Kālinga Centre for Rainforest Ecology

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Gowri and Prashanth rescuing a king cobra.

Tropical evergreen rainforests are one of the most biodiverse ecosystems on the planet. The Western Ghats is one of the most threatened regions in the Oriental realm, with lot of human pressure mounting on its fragile natural resources.

The Kalinga Foundation's establishments are some of the few available biodiversity research field stations in the Western Ghats, catering to the needs of a wide array of biologists and nature enthusiasts alike. The Kalinga Foundation's base has served instrumental for the study and exploration of several life forms including plants and trees, insects and other invertebrates, birds, mammals and of course herpetofauna – amphibians and reptiles.

Learning on field with the Irulas during during STORM chennai workshop.

Why are snakes so special? Of all the human-animal conflicts, if there is one animal that has the most widespread and frequent such negative interactions of all, it is the snake. That is because snake is perhaps the only animal that broadly cohabits with people and at the same time, is capable of being life-threatening to people (i.e., venomous snakes). Though their (retaliatory) bites lead to human deaths if untreated, snakes are the only animals capable of hunting rodent pest animals like rats inside their burrows and thereby contribute to biological pest control, avoiding potential famines.

Gowri rescuing a king cobra at Agumbe. © Prashanth, P.

Recently in India, several voluntary, self-appointed people have come up aiming to protect snakes by rescuing them from stray situations by translocating them from human households, to nearby vegetated bush belts and green covers. Often, they network and synergise with the government bodies such as the forest department and secondly the fire and rescue service departments. that are officially entrusted with these tasks. To this end, the Kalinga team has contributed a lot in this one decade of its service, conducting several pro-conservation camps, workshops and other such events, as given below.

Kinds of programmes	No. of beneficiaries
No. of snakes saved indirectly	288,000
No. of King Cobras rescued	135
Total school & college students	4,490
Specialised visitors to KCRE	903
STORM workshop (all cities)	667
KCRE camp participants elsewhere	501
Others' camp participants at KCRE	525
Forest Department event officials/staff	345
Dusk to Day event participants	130
King Cobra bionomics participants	153
Student interns and trainees	83
SION & VRM (campus surveys)	52
Villagers attending our events	>20,000

True to its motto, research and informed conservation has been the mainstay of the routine works of the Kalinga Team. Training young people into becoming wildlife conservation professionals is an important task in this endeavor. To this end, since April 2014 till September 2023, the Kalinga team has nurtured and sculpted over 85 such interns and student trainees in various capacities on flora and fauna. Some of such interns have graduated from Kalinga Foundation to do their higher studies in wildlife including PhD and Post Doc in universities both in India and abroad (Germany, Switzerland to name a few).

Training forest officials at Andamans.

Needless to tell, several biodiversity research works and conservation projects have been carried out by the Kalinga team and its allies. Many studies including molecular phylogenetics of the king cobras (in collaboration with Indian Institute of Science, North Orissa University, Uppsala University Sweden and University of Bangor UK, University Malasia Sarawak), radio-telemetry studies on vipers (Mysore University), to agamid lizard ecology and man-crocodile conflict mitigation (University of Warsaw, Poland) and herpetological assemblage structure (University of Leiden, Netherlands) have been conducted by our team.

As summarised above, in this one decade, the Kalinga team has served in proper streamlined rescue of 2,88,000 snakes indirectly, in many parts of India and in educating and improving 7,677 beneficiaries from all walks of life, including students and professionals from

non-government and government sectors, involved in snake conservation. And of course, in a very direct sense, the Kalinga team has rescued and saved nearly 135 King Cobras from distress situations from human settlements in the Shivamogga district of Karnataka, southern India.

At this juncture, we also thank our like-minded, pro-conservation partners such as Rufford, IdeaWild and ERASMUS who sponsored and funded some of our activities. In the years to come, the Kalinga team looks forward to expand its horizon and delve deeper into scientifically-informed conservation.

List of publications by the KCRE team:

Bors, M., N.P. Mohanty & P.G. Shankar (2020). Anti-predatory sleep strategies are conserved in the agamid lizard *Monilesaurus rouxii*. *Behavioral Ecology and Sociobiology* 74: 1–8.

Shankar, P.G., P. Swamy, R.C. Williams, S.R. Ganesh, M. Moss, J. Höglund & S.K. Dutta (2021). King or royal family? Testing for species boundaries in the King Cobra, *Ophiophagus hannah* (Cantor, 1836), using morphology and multilocus DNA analyses. *Molecular Phylogenetics and Evolution* 165: 107300.

Bors, M., N. Mohanty & G.S. Pogiri (2022). Comparison of diurnal and nocturnal escape behaviour of the lizard *Monilesaurus rouxii* (Reptilia: Agamidae). *Herpetology Notes* 15: 839–844.

Blessy, J. & S.R. Ganesh (2023). Observation on self-locking concertina climbing in the Common Indian Krait (*Bungarus caeruleus* [Schneider, 1801]). *Sauria* 45(3): 52–54.

Sathyanarayana, M.C.S. & S.R. Ganesh (2023). First observation on multi-male nerophilic amplexus and mass mortality of amplectant adult females in the Common Asian Toads. Frogleg #148. In: *Zoo's Print* 38(10): 9–11.