

# 5<sup>th</sup> Ram Hattikudur Advanced Training in Conservation

The fifth batch of Zooreach's flagship program, the Ram Hattikudur Advanced Training in Conservation, began on 14 September 2025. Since 2021, Zooreach has been conducting the four-month in-house conservation training program in Coimbatore, bringing 10 youth from different parts of the country every year and giving them an opportunity to meet the stalwarts in the field, in India and abroad, and learn from them. The course brings more than 50 mentors every year and acts as a bridge between theory and field-based conservation, shaping the youth to lead the conservation platform for tomorrow. Today we stand with a strong alumni of 40 Fellows who are working across India in different disciplines of conservation as researchers, naturalists, artists, filmmakers, restoration practitioners, communicators, and photographers.

This year we have our 10 Fellows coming from 7 Indian states with varied educational backgrounds. The course was inaugurated on 14 September in Coimbatore with all our well-wishers online and offline. The event marked an opportunity for the Fellows to meet all the supporters Zooreach has and create connections.

Like every other year, the first session was 'Welfare of Wildlifers' conducted by Bhavna Vijay and Priya Vijay, to help Fellows deal with all the different psychological stresses

people in the climate space go through.

The Fellows

then interacted

with Dr. Sanjay Molur, understanding the

importance of Conservation Optimism

& Realism and the crucial role it plays in

making our actions successful. Dr. Molur

explained to them the importance of

understanding the journey of DNA, the

shared thread weaving together all living beings across Earth's unfolding story.

Following this, the Fellows delved into the fascinating role of nonsense codons, tracing the evolution of life on Earth with Sanjay.

Later, they engaged in spirited discussions

on fact versus fiction, uncovering how

science provides the foundation for

informed debate and discovery. Throughout

the first week of the course, the Fellows

engaged in thought-provoking discussions

on fact versus fiction, exploring how

emotions influence scientific decisions.

On 17 September, the Fellows joined the

Zooreach team for their first field trip

to the Nilgiri Biosphere Nature Park,

a 30-year-old restoration site by Zoo

Outreach Organisation. Guided by Dr. Molur,

they explored restoration's foundations,

challenges, and its vital role as the enduring

path forward for conservation. Following

the field trip, Fellows accompanied the

Zooreach IOCEAN team to Vidya Vanam





School, where they participated in the vibrant launch of the “Magic of the Ocean” website, celebrating marine wonders.

During the course, the Fellows got opportunities to discuss and analyse different conservation and animal welfare actions around the world; this year they got into a group dialogue on the Supreme Court’s ruling on Delhi’s dogs, analysed through a factual, evidence-based perspective. In the second week, the Fellows engaged with Trisa to explore the urgency of COP on biodiversity and climate, reflecting on their 2025 priorities. They concluded by playing the Solution Trees game, collaboratively designing an ecologically sustainable conservation model for the Himalaya.

‘Follow the Leader’ is one of RHATC’s ongoing events where leaders from different fields of conservation interact with the Fellows. As part of the session on 20 September, Fellows interacted with Selva Ganesh, a teacher from Coimbatore whose passion for birding has made him one of the city’s most active birders, leading bird atlas projects and documenting avian diversity across India. Later in the week, Fellows interacted with Byju H., one of the RHATC mentors, discussing the importance of shorebird & vulture conservation, their ecological significance, population decline threats, and ongoing recovery programs across India.

On 23 September, the second field trip was organised to Pitchandikulam Forest, Auroville Botanical Gardens, sacred groves, and active restoration sites.

Through guided nature walks, expert sessions with Joss Brooks and Aurosil, and visits to Dr. Loganathan’s herbology centre and Nadukuppam School, Fellows gained firsthand experience in ecological restoration and community-based conservation approaches. The field trip concluded with visits to the Madras Crocodile Bank Trust (MCBT) and Siruseri Lake, where Fellows explored reptile conservation strategies and urban wetland ecosystems before returning with enriched field perspectives.

On 29 and 30 September, soon after the field trip, the Fellows got into 2 days of rigorous Research & Publication Ethics Workshop with the Journal of Threatened Taxa team: Dr. Sanjay Molur, Chief Editor; B. Ravichandran, Managing Editor; and Chaitrashree, Assistant Editor. Fellows understood the principles of ethical research conduct, data collection, and scientific integrity, steps to write a scientific paper, along with the insights of the editorial process of peer-reviewed international journals.

In the following week, Fellows spent 3 days with Dr. Rajeev Raghavan from KUFOS, understanding the basics of freshwater conservation, taxonomy, evolution, subterranean fishes & their habitat, and the conservation challenges to freshwater biodiversity. The Fellows then took part in mock COP to strengthen action for Himalaya, understanding the intricacies of international multi-stakeholder meetings.

From 9–12 October, Fellows took part in Conservation Education & Outreach





Workshop with Payal Molur, a wildlife educator working across different regions in India to bring behaviour change in people towards wildlife conservation. Fellows learned different approaches to interact with communities, break down scientific knowledge for communities, simplify wildlife knowledge into games, and plan their own education plan.

Following the workshop, Fellows spent time with Obuli Chandran, Mango Education, understanding how to differentiate science from pseudoscience. Later, Usha Ravindra and Priyanka Iyer delved into marine biodiversity conservation discussions with the Fellows. They discussed the problems related to bycatch, shark fisheries, pollution,

and the unprepared fishing system in the country, followed by different conservation measures Zooreach has adopted to fight the same.

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