

PhD programme at Zooreach

The Systematics, Ecology, and Conservation Lab at Zoo Outreach Organisation Trust started its PhD programme in Conservation Action, as a Research Institute affiliated with the Manipal Academy of Higher Education (MAHE) in January 2024. There are two renowned scientists/conservationists guiding students/PhD Scholars – Dr. Sanjay Molur and Dr. Bhargavi Srinivasulu. Currently there are five PhD Scholars: Ms. Trisa Bhattacharjee, Mr. Sushanth S, and Ms. Amrin Ansari registered with Dr. Molur. Mr. Asad Gopi and Ms. Ananditha Pascal are with Dr. Srinivasulu. Also, we collaborate with professors from MIT (Manipal Institute of Technology), and Shristi for the work.

Trisa Bhattacharjee registered in April 2024, is studying the different threats to elephants in Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve, and whether it has varied in the past 50 years through documenting anthropogenic changes and people's perception. The study focuses on understanding the impact of humans on forest and elephant conservation, along with analysing the present state of human-elephant interaction in the landscape. The study will help create education outreach programs and stakeholder-led mitigation for human-elephant coexistence in the region.

S. Sushanth registered in October 2024, is working on patterns and underlying drivers of species composition changes of plants, herpetofauna, birds and mammals that occurs during the process of secondary succession in the southern Western Ghats, India. His

work examines biodiversity dynamics, shifts in community structure, functional diversity across successional gradients. The work also aims to generate insights into ecological recovery process and inform conservation planning and restoration strategies in human-modified plantation mosaic landscapes within this biodiversity hotspot of India.

Asad Gopi registered in October 2024, is studying the distribution and movement ecology of the Indian Flying Fox *Pteropus medius* and investigates how land-use and land-cover changes influence their spatial ecology in Greater Hyderabad, Telangana, India. His work examines patterns of habitat use, roost selection, foraging movements, and connectivity across urban, peri-urban, and semi-natural landscapes. The study also aims to assess the impacts of human-modified environments on bat behaviour and population dynamics, generating insights for urban biodiversity conservation, mitigation of human-wildlife conflict, and evidence-



based management strategies for this ecologically important and human-reliant flying mammal in a rapidly urbanizing region of India.

Amrin Ansari registered in October 2025, is looking to understand the ecological drivers behind the negative interaction between humans and Asiatic Black Bears *Ursus thibetanus* in Chamba, Himachal Pradesh. The study aims on generating baseline data from the landscape to form the basis of evidence-based conservation planning for the species.



Ananditha Pascal registered in October 2025, is working on the macroecology of the Hemidactylus geckos and the role in rock outcrops in peninsular India. The work aims to incorporate ecological niche modelling to understand climate change and LULC impacts on hemidactyl geckos, determine the variation in their functional traits in association with eco-geography and also study the role and diversity patterns across rock outcrops, which are important ecosystems for species like the gekkonids. These seemingly divergent, but highly integrated studies, bridge data-driven macroecological approaches to conservation-evidence, bringing much-needed attention to the threatened, yet neglected Hemidactylus geckos and rock outcrops of peninsular India.



Coursework

The PhD programme is also incorporated with course work studies, wherein the students will choose either these or courses outside the

organisation for their mandatory credits. The courses are:

- ✍ IUCN Red List Assessment Training (5 credits): This is a 5-day hands on training workshop conducted to learn all about the IUCN Red List of Species and a mock species assessment from one of the developers of the present-day criteria and categories for assessments along with learning data-interpretation for conservation planning
- ✍ Conservation Translocation Training (4 credits): This is a 3-day hand-on learning workshop to understand the basis for reintroductions done scientifically and systematically to promote conservation, to learn principals of translocation, how to differentiate those that are not promoting conservation, and steps to consider while planning a conservation translocation exercise to increase the probability of success for species conservation.
- ✍ Publication and Research Ethics Course (2 credits): This is a 3-day workshop session with the Journal of Threatened Taxa team to learn how to maintain the integrity of scientific publication and research.
- ✍ Conservation Education and Outreach Course (4 credits): This is a 3-day hands on learning training workshop, where we will learn regarding the nuances of education, what kind of education works? Which audiences? What fails? How to bring about behavioural change to achieve our conservation goals
- ✍ Research Methodology: Conservation Implementation (4–6 credits): This is a course work to make scholars understand the various research methods used in for various studies and aspects. It helps to learn how different data collection methods are carried out, what all parameters should be considered.

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