



Editorial

Wildlifers are an odd bunch: a small fraction of humankind who don't just stop at finding a connection with wildlife, but who make the connection their life's purpose. No wildlifer can agree on what this purpose is, but every wildlifer shares the feeling it evokes. It's the feeling you get when you hike in shola-grasslands, swim amidst young groupers, learn in a classroom, read in a library or chat on a verandah, when our attention is tuned to the natural world, or just as often, our place in it. But it takes someone special to go beyond the many definitions of this sense of purpose and unite people in this universal feeling that connects all wildlifers. Ajith Kumar was this special person.

This special issue of Zoo's Print is a festschrift honouring Ajith Kumar. He was a primatologist, conservationist, and a wildlife biologist. He was also a teacher, mentor, and a friend to many. But Ajith's life and times cannot be captured in such pithy titles or monickers. As the essays in this issue illustrate, he built community, inspired wildlifers, and reinforced our relationship with the natural world in ways that will always be impossible to define. Perhaps this is why his passing evoked an outpouring of universal grief that could only be expressed by very specific and personal stories.

This second issue honouring Ajith (the first was published as the March 2026 issue of Zoo's Print) chronicles the legacy he left behind.

In the first piece, historian Mahesh Rangarajan reveals the many dimensions of Ajith, including his power of discernment. In the second essay, marine biologist Rohan Arthur shows how Ajith's magic lay in subverting that very word, legacy. Archivists Venkat Srinivasan and Anjali Ramachandran and ecologist Samira Agnihotri reveal

Ajith's key role in preserving the history of ecology in India. Next, wildlife biologist Ranjit Daniels recalls the care that Ajith showered him with in his career. Retired Kerala Forest Officer James Zacharias reminisces about the walks he had with Ajith, and the trails he walked later in his memory. An essay by some of his students at the Wildlife Conservation Trust is replete with stories that show how Ajith balanced rigour with humour as their professor. Retired Head of Forest Force, Tripura, AK Gupta shares how Ajith kickstarted his academic career and stayed alongside him as a pillar of support. Tanushree Srivastava, his PhD student, shares how Ajith facilitated her growth during the Sikkim-DBT project and beyond.

In a full-length research article, wildlife biologists Barry Noon, Ravi Chellam and Karthikeyan Vasudevan describe how they conceptualized and implemented a study of herpetofauna of the Western Ghats in collaboration with Ajith Kumar. A reprint of an article by Krithi Karanth and Deepa Padmanabhan of the Centre for Wildlife Studies chronicles the early interactions of Ajith with the organization and its founder, Ullas Karanth, and the foundation of the MSc programme that Ajith helmed for 16 years.

Another reprint of a piece by the Wildlife Trust of India reveals the profound influence Ajith Kumar had on the organization and its various members. The editor of this magazine, Sanjay Molur takes us back to the key moments of encouragement and support that Ajith showed him and his endeavours.

Eco-hydrologist Jagdish Krishnaswamy and primatologist Anindya 'Rana' Sinha trace the origins of his power of discernment to his training in primate observations and spotlight that he was that rare creature: a good human being. The penultimate essay, a partial reprint of a piece by Meera Anna Oommen and Kartik Shanker, regales us with an exhaustive list of the tangibles and intangibles that defined Ajith. And in the final essay of this special issue, ecologist Madhuri Ramesh shares the 10 lessons she learnt from observing Ajith.

Poet David Whyte describes an elegy as a conversation between loss and celebration. The essays in this special issue of Zoo's Print (and the seven essays in the March 2026 issue) are an attempt at this conversation, an elegy to Ajith Kumar. They show that although his passing has left us all a little alone, Ajith's grace, camaraderie and care will serve as a template for a connected future.

**- Akshay Surendra & Samira Agnihotri, Co-editors of
the 2nd Ajith Kumar Memorial Issue**