

In Memoriam: Dr Ajith Kumar (1952 - 2025)

This article is an edited reprint of an obituary that first appeared on the Wildlife Trust of India website, on this link: <https://www.wti.org.in/news/in-memoriam-dr-ajith-kumar-1952-2025/>

Dr. Ajith Kumar's contributions to conservation in India have left an indelible mark on the field. A mentor, researcher, and educator, Dr. Kumar dedicated his life to the study and protection of India's rich biodiversity, inspiring generations of conservationists to follow in his footsteps.

Dr. Kumar's career spanned over four decades, beginning with his pioneering research on the Lion-tailed macaque in the Western Ghats. His work highlighted the critical importance of preserving large, contiguous forest landscapes for the survival of this endangered primate. His contributions extended far beyond primatology, encompassing rainforest ecology, small carnivore studies, and habitat conservation across India.

As a respected scientist, Dr. Kumar played a pivotal role in capacity building for wildlife conservation in India. He led the Master's Programme in Wildlife Biology and Conservation at the National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS), where he mentored and trained numerous students who have gone on to



Ajith planting a *Cullenia exarillata* sapling in the Anamalais. © Divya Mudappa & Shankar Raman.

shape conservation efforts nationwide. His emphasis on rigorous scientific research, combined with a deep passion for the natural world, made him a guiding light for aspiring ecologists and conservationists.

Dr. Ajith Kumar's passing is an immense loss to the conservation community. His wisdom, humility, and unwavering commitment to wildlife protection will continue to inspire those striving to safeguard India's natural heritage. His legacy in wildlife conservation will continue to inspire and guide all who were fortunate enough to know him and work with him.

Ajith at the first edition of the Indian Wildlife Ecology Conference (IWECC), 2024. © G. Umapathy



Ajith was an exceptional wildlife ecologist and teacher who led an exemplary life in the field, walking forests and hiking mountains with his students. He passed away like he lived, with his boots on. What I would like to remember of Ajith is a kind man who shared all he had with those around him; his innate wisdom, his explosive laughter, his gentle ribbing, his love of good food and drink. And between bouts of all that, a fierce passion for science and a yearning to explore all that nature has yet to reveal to us.

- Vivek Menon,
Founder and Executive Director

After his seminal work on the Lion-tailed macaque and a Ph.D. from Cambridge, Ajith joined the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and brought attention to the conservation of the Western Ghats, rainforests, and primates. He was instrumental in introducing computer technology at WII and establishing its computer lab. His planning also contributed to the development of WII's library. Ajith played a major role in bridging the gap between wildlife biologists, researchers, and managers, a role he continued in his later work at SACON in Coimbatore.

- Prof. B. C. Choudhury, Senior
Advisor – Aquatic Realm

Teacher—this word embodied Dr. Ajith Kumar in every sense. It didn't matter if he taught you personally or where you were from; he was always there with his wisdom, knowledge and humour. He was there for me during one of the toughest times in my life and supported me, pushing me to be where I am, without judgment, even when we hadn't spoken in years. Always helpful and supportive, I never heard the word 'no' from him... he will be missed more than words can describe.

**- Dr Bindu Raghavan
Head—Wild Rescue**

I feel incredibly fortunate to have known Dr. Ajith for over 25 years. He was not only a dear senior and mentor but also a hard taskmaster but always available with his knowledge, encouragement, loads of humour and rum. Never missing an opportunity to bring smiles with his clever puns, Dr. Ajith will be deeply missed by all.

**- Dr N M Ishwar
Executive Director, The Nature
Conservancy--India (previously,
Sr. Director & Chief Development
Wildlife Trust of India)**

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