



# Annual Report

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**2024-25**

FigTree NATURALIST FOUNDATION THE SCHOOL Naturalist



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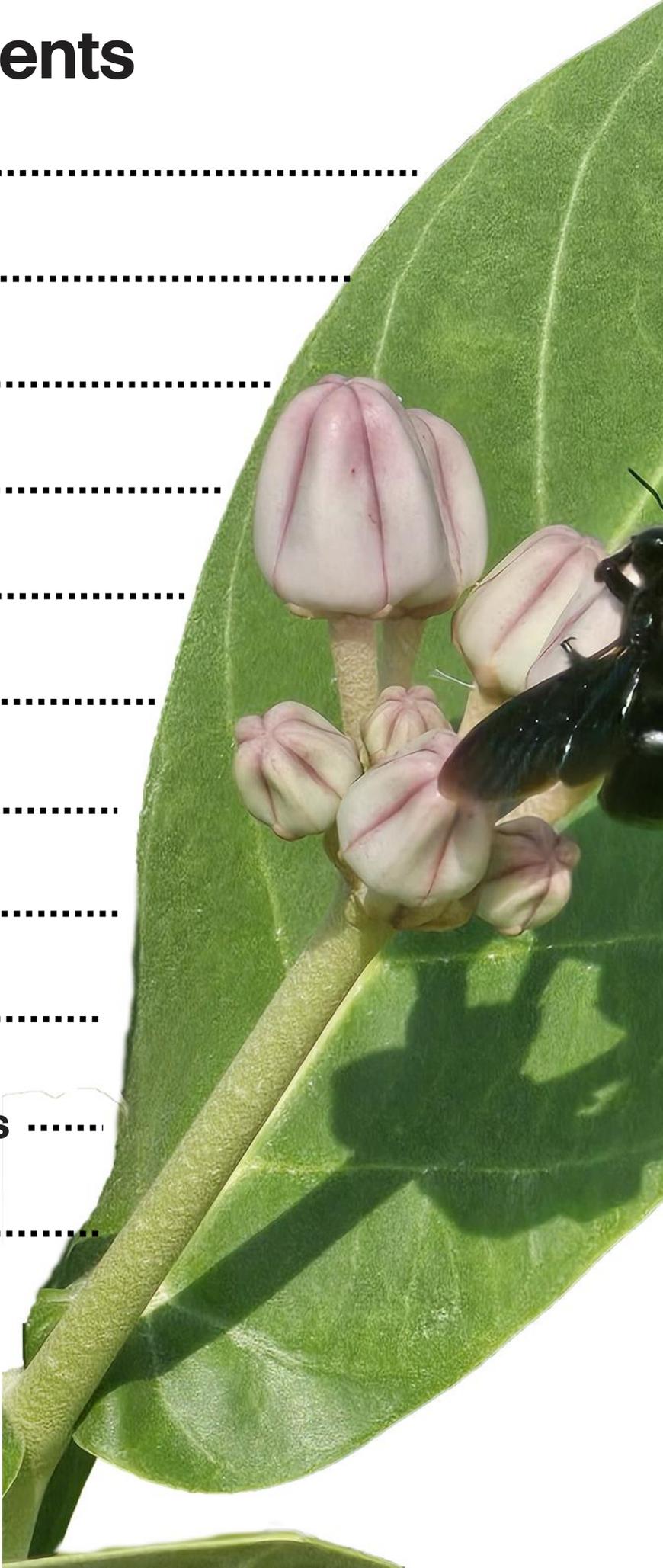
# THE Naturalist SCHOOL

**Annual Report  
2024-2025**

The Naturalist School is a registered trademark of the Fig Tree Naturalist Foundation.

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Nature education fosters awareness, empathy and a sense of responsibility toward the living world. It reconnects people to place, cultivates curiosity and inspires care.

**In learning to observe, we strive to protect.**

# Founder's Note

## Dear Supporters, Partners and Friends,

*"Together, we are redefining conservation—one naturalist,  
one forest, one community at a time."*

As I reflect on the journey of The Naturalist School, I am filled with immense gratitude and pride. From a passionate idea to a growing force for conservation and education, our organisation has made significant strides in capacity-building, eco-tourism and biodiversity awareness across India.

The year 2024-2025 has been one of unprecedented growth, deeper collaborations and a strengthened ability to create lasting impact.

This year, we grew from a three-member team to a dynamic six-member core team, allowing us to execute multiple programs simultaneously across various landscapes—be it the forests of Nagaland and Meghalaya, the wildlife reserves of Uttar Pradesh, or the mountain trails of Uttarakhand.

THE  
Naturalist  
SCHOOL



In addition, we have formalised an organisational structure with dedicated full-time professionals specialising in diverse areas of expertise. This has significantly enhanced our efficiency, scalability and impact.

Stepping into our 4th year of operations, we recognise the key milestones we have achieved and remain mindful of the many more that lie ahead. The work we embarked on in our first year has now evolved into structured and refined training models, catering to different communities through our Certified Naturalist, Citizen Naturalist, Certified Nature Guide, Eco Nature Guide and Nature Educator programs. This evolution reflects our commitment to customising learning experiences, professionalising nature education and fostering a new generation of conservation leaders.

Our collaborations have reached new heights. We are proud to have partnered with IndiaHikes, Centre for Wildlife Studies (CWS), National Commission for Women and multiple state forest departments, reinforcing our mission to train, empower and uplift communities through ecotourism and conservation education. Through these partnerships, we have not only amplified our reach but also built a stronger foundation for long-term impact.

A heartfelt thanks to our partners, funders, collaborators and volunteers who have stood as our backbone. To those who have given us the platform to present our work, recognised our contributions and facilitated new opportunities—thank you for believing in our mission. Signing MoUs for long-term partnerships, inviting our team to address global conservation concerns and providing strategic inputs have all contributed immensely to the growth of The Naturalist School.

We extend our deepest gratitude to our Advisory & Strategy Team for their valuable insights in structuring our organisation and work, to our vendors for their unwavering support and to every individual who has played a role in shaping and strengthening our brand. A special note of appreciation to our expert facilitators and specialised trainers, whose dedication and expertise have been the key drivers behind the success of all our courses. Their commitment to high-quality training has empowered countless individuals and strengthened the foundation of conservation education.

Your support has been instrumental in our journey and we look forward to many more years of impactful work, expanding our reach and deepening our commitment to conservation education and eco-tourism.



**PRIYA VENKATESH**  
**FOUNDER DIRECTOR,**  
**THE NATURALIST SCHOOL**

# Who We Are

## Vision Statement:

"To build a sustainable future for the planet that encourages coexistence with nature."

## Mission Statement:

"To foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of our natural world by bringing alive the naturalist in each one of us."

## Our Objectives:

### *Ecologise*

Bring nature education and wildlife interpretation into mainstream academics

### *Upskilling*

Skilling and capacity building to enhance employability & livelihood

### *Harmonise*

Evolve best practices, Global benchmarks & Professional standards of competency for the Asian region

### *Sustain*

Advocate, Promote and Practise environmentally responsible tourism

### *Educate*

Magnify conservation impact through creating awareness & impactful nature experiences

## The Naturalist School (TNS)

The Naturalist School is a Social Enterprise offering certified and accredited courses to educate and build capacity among nature guides, interpreters, educators and naturalists. Our training programs focus on developing skills for employability and entrepreneurship, addressing the emerging need for formal study programs in wildlife and nature interpretation.

Through our partnerships with government agencies, conservation organisations and local communities, we aim to promote sustainable ecotourism practices, support conservation efforts and empower local communities through our courses, workshops, Nature Walks and Talks across India. Our research initiatives provide valuable insights into the ecotourism industry, informing our programming and contributing to the body of knowledge on conservation and sustainability.

Our dedicated team, passionate volunteers and generous partners have helped us make significant strides in our mission this year.

## Our Programs

We conduct capacity-building programs through a range of short- and long-term courses in nature interpretation and entrepreneurship. Some of these courses are designed to prepare participants for government certification as Nature Guides or Naturalists through formal assessments.

# Capacity Building

- Certified Nature Guide Course
- Community Nature Guide Course
- Nature Appreciation/ Eco-tourism - Forest Officials
- Youth Camps
- Nature Educators' Course

# Citizen Engagement

Through curated biodiversity experiences, nature interpretation and engaging talks and events, we strive to reconnect individuals with the natural world—whether they live in remote regions or urban centres. Our aim is to foster awareness, appreciation and action.

- Biodiversity Walks
- Talks
- Workshops
- Webinars

# SDG Global Goals

Our goals are aligned to the UN Sustainable Development Goals to build a greener, fairer and better world for everyone on the planet.



## PROGRAMME FOCUS AREA

India is home to an extraordinary range of biodiversity, much of it still undocumented or poorly understood. Protecting what we do not know is nearly impossible—this makes biodiversity documentation a foundational step in conservation. From endemic plants to lesser-known pollinators and disappearing bird habitats, each record contributes to a larger understanding of our ecosystems.

Over the years, numerous efforts by scientists, local communities, citizen naturalists and educational institutions have helped create regional species checklists, photographic records, habitat maps and open-access platforms like the India Biodiversity Portal and iNaturalist. The Naturalist School builds on this legacy by training learners in ecological observation, species documentation and interpretation, ensuring that every walk in the wild becomes a contribution to conservation.

## AREAS IMPACTING IN SOCIETY

### EDUCATION



Capacity  
Building



Citizen Engagement  
& Awareness

### LIVELIHOOD



Alternative  
Career Path



Healthy Lifestyle

### CONSERVATION



Biodiversity  
Documentation  
& Monitoring



Stewardship of  
Natural Habitats



# Programs

This year, The Naturalist School continued to deepen its footprint across varied ecosystems by conducting multiple field-based training programs for nature guides and eco-interpreters. Two batches each, of the Certified Naturalist program (CNAT) and the Certified Nature Guide (CNG) program were conducted, equipping participants with core ecological knowledge, interpretation skills, and field-based training. Additionally, a batch of the Citizen Naturalist program (CitiNAT) course was held to support a growing network of urban naturalists who engage with biodiversity in city spaces.



# Certified Naturalist Course (CNAT-1)

*Batch 1: Bangalore as a Beginning*

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## Bannerghatta Nature Camp, Bangalore May 2024

In May 2024, The Naturalist School marked a quiet but significant milestone, the launch of India's first Certified Naturalist Course. Held at Bannerghatta Jungle Lodges Resort, on the forest's edge yet within city reach, the course brought together eight participants from different walks of life, united by one goal: to make sense of the natural world and to share that understanding with others.

This was more than just the start of a new training module. It was the result of three years of steady groundwork, drafting curriculum, aligning with government systems, meeting forest officers and shaping a course that could hold both rigour and accessibility. The team at The Naturalist School, supported by volunteers and advisors across the country, had worked toward this moment with quiet determination. For many involved, this wasn't just a professional milestone, it was a long-awaited validation that nature guiding could be recognised as a legitimate, skilled profession.



“ Excited to share that we are finally launching India's first Certified Naturalist Course! This opens the door to a brand-new career opportunity in the ecotourism space. The last three years have been a roller-coaster ride, but with a rock-solid volunteer team and immense trust from our community, we have reached a significant milestone. ”

*Priya Venkatesh*

Priya, Co-founder, The Naturalist School



## The Certified Naturalist Course was created with that vision in mind:

to provide structured learning for those who wish to turn their interest in nature into a livelihood. The training combined scientific foundations, ecological observation and interpretive storytelling, helping participants understand not just what to say on a trail, but how to guide others into noticing, questioning and connecting with the natural world.

Participants spent their days immersed in field practice and theory, learning how to identify birds and plants, read landscapes and develop ethical, engaging ways to talk about conservation. From morning walks to reflection circles, the learning was experiential and the conversations often extended well beyond the curriculum.

The launch also symbolised something larger, that a clear, assessable and certifiable pathway now existed for aspiring nature educators and ecotourism professionals. One that values knowledge, communication and care for the land.

This cohort, small but committed, now carries forward the intention of the course: not just to guide, but to guide well. And as more such courses take shape across India, it's clear that a new kind of learning ecosystem is emerging. One rooted in curiosity, clarity and thoughtful, organic leadership.



Link to youtube

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In wildness is  
the preservation  
of the world.

– Henry David  
Thoreau

# Roots & Realisations- 1



Awareness



Community & Collaboration



Experience & Educate

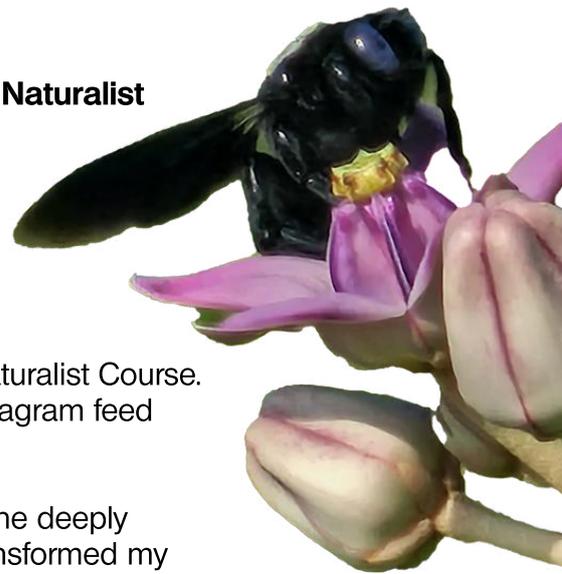
# Roots & Realisations



**Medha Hebbar**

**Naturalist**  
Windermere Estate, Munnar

**Certified Naturalist**



I got connected to The Naturalist School through the Certified Naturalist Course. I came across a pop-up notification about this course on my Instagram feed while I was looking for a wildlife-related program.

This collaboration with TNS has been the best for me. As someone deeply passionate about birdwatching and photography, this course transformed my passion into a profession. The course and Team TNS focus on overall skill development. One incident I would like to share happened during the last few months of my professional life. Sometimes, we get guests who don't speak English and can't understand what we are saying.

A similar situation occurred when a couple came for birdwatching, but they didn't know English. The entire one-hour birdwatching session was conducted through sign language, using the Merlin app to navigate and show bird photos. By the end of the session, they started spotting birds on their own. That was a great outcome of this course and a testament to the TNS team's impact. I can't compare TNS with other organisations, but I can say that TNS has the best team—one that focuses on every individual participant.

I would definitely recommend TNS to anyone interested in wildlife and looking to build a career in this field. This team doesn't just conduct a course; they do justice to it while also guiding us in our career choices. The time I spent during the course was truly memorable and the learnings were invaluable



# Certified Naturalist Course (CNAT-2)

*Batch 2: Bridging Tradition and Science in Nagaland*

**Khonoma, Nagaland**  
**August – November 2024**

In the hills of Nagaland, where forests breathe through centuries of community care, seven individuals from Khonoma, India's first Green Village, took a step that was both personal and collective. With the support of the Nagaland Directorate of Employment, Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, they enrolled in a 750-hour Certified Naturalist program facilitated by The Naturalist School.

The course was intensive and immersive. Participants trained in field ecology, wildlife interpretation, nature storytelling and responsible ecotourism, all while walking the same landscapes they had grown up in. But what they gained was more than just a set of skills. For many, it was a shift in identity: from being someone who knew the forest to someone who could help others see it.

**Nature Guiding could be recognised as a legitimate, skilled profession.**

Neikedolie Hiekha, one of the program's first graduates, the journey was deeply rooted in the desire to preserve and share the ecological wisdom of his people. He brought to the training a lived understanding of Khonoma's long-standing conservation ethos and left with a structured way to translate that knowledge into guided walks, stories and advocacy. Today, Neikedolie is not only leading tours, but also mentoring young guides and building a community-based model of ecotourism that benefits both people and the land.



“ This course gave me the confidence to share the magic of Khonoma with the world. Every tour I lead is a step towards conservation ”

*Neikedolie Hiekha*

**Neikedolie Hiekha, Certified Naturalist**



Throughout the training, participants engaged in field-based observation, safety protocol drills, species documentation and visitor engagement strategies. The goal was not just to learn about the forest, but to learn how to speak for it, clearly, ethically and with context. They practised hosting nature walks, responding to tourist questions, managing expectations and weaving in both scientific facts and cultural stories.

Since graduation, these Certified Naturalists have become active leaders in their village's evolving ecotourism landscape. They guide visitors with confidence, help younger community members see value in nature-based work and contribute to Khonoma's reputation as a model for community-led conservation.

Their work demonstrates the importance of training local youth, those who already know the terrain, the weather, the seasonal rhythms and supporting them with the tools to become professional guides, educators and advocates.

With the success of two training batches in Khonoma, The Naturalist School is expanding its vision. The goal is to build similar programs across India especially in regions where biodiversity and traditional knowledge already coexist. By combining deep local relationships with structured pedagogy, these programs can seed a new generation of nature guides who are not just informed, but rooted, respected and equipped to lead.





**In the end, we will conserve only what we love; we will love only what we understand; and we will understand only what we are taught.**

**– George B. Schaller**



# Roots & Realisations- 2

# Roots & Realisations



In the forested hill village of Khonoma, Nagaland, Vivo grew up surrounded by medicinal plants and ancestral knowledge—yet never saw them as special. Forests were for foraging, snakes were to be avoided and caterpillars were pests.

That changed when his elder brother told him about the Skill Development initiative by the Government of Nagaland. Fresh from a master's in Tenyidie literature, Vivo joined Batch 2 of the Certified Nature Guide program at The Naturalist School in Bannerghatta, Karnataka—his first time outside the Northeast.

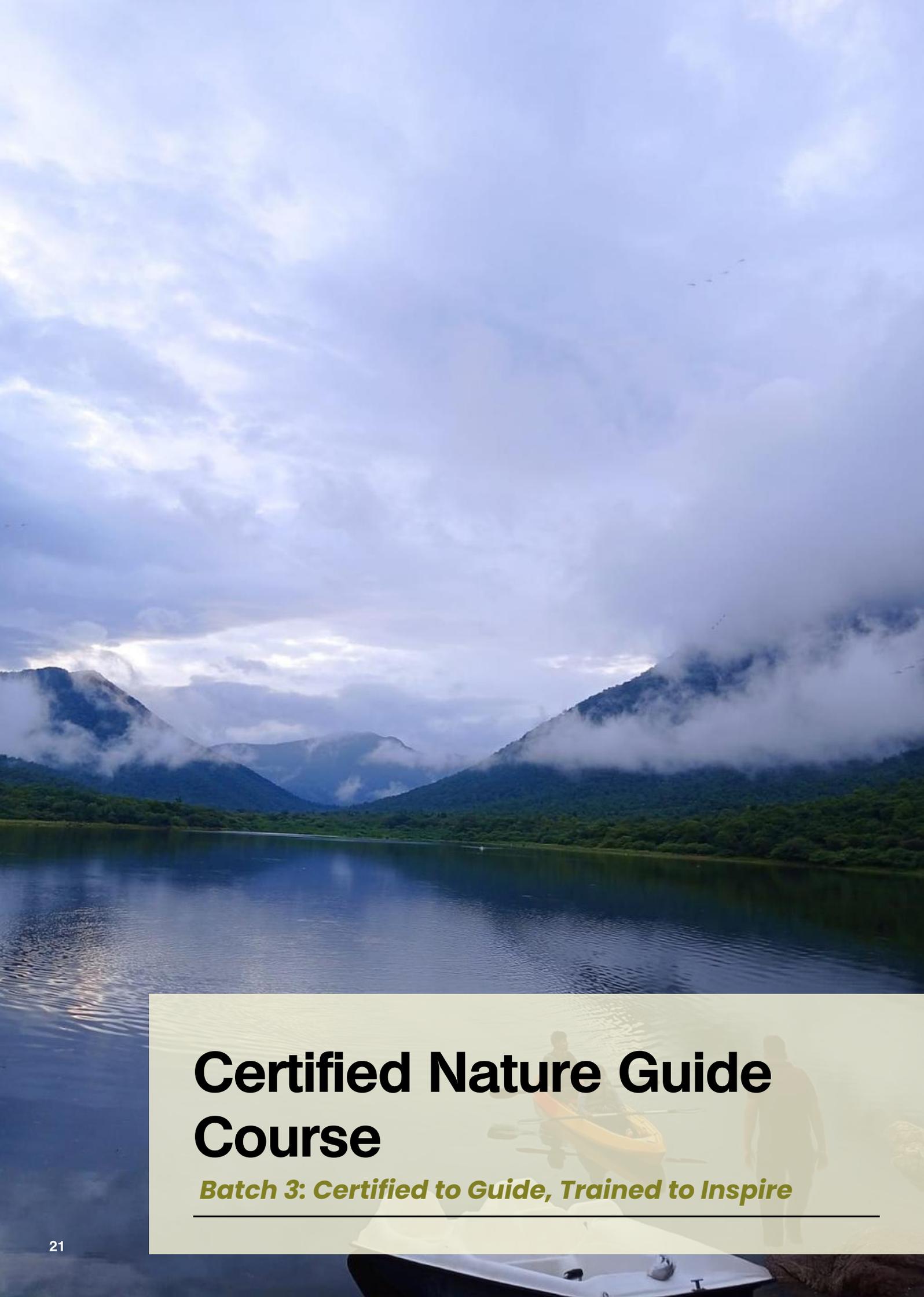
“I started thinking, people here pay to see trees and clean air. And I come from a village full of that.”

Through the course, every class and walk opened his eyes. A butterfly photo on his phone, just another click, turned out to be the rare Blutanglory—pointed out by Priya, TNS founder and mentor. That moment shifted something.

The boy who once stamped on ants now couldn't harm a single insect. “What does this creature do for my village?” he began to ask. His uncle, a forest officer, reminded him: his knowledge, rooted in home and now trained, was powerful.

Vivo returned not just with a certificate, but a story. He birds, tends to plantations, photographs species and is learning scientific names to bridge indigenous knowledge with the world. The real change? “We don't believe unless we see it,” he says. “And now I've seen it.” Vivo is building his house in Khonoma, dreaming of a PhD in his language and guiding in the Northeast.

A storyteller of the land. A son of Khonoma, finally seeing home for all it holds.



# **Certified Nature Guide Course**

***Batch 3: Certified to Guide, Trained to Inspire***

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 **Bannerghatta Nature Camp, Bangalore**  
**November – December 2024**



“ *I never imagined that guiding could be this layered. It's not just about naming species, it's about helping someone see why they matter* ”

**shared one participant.**

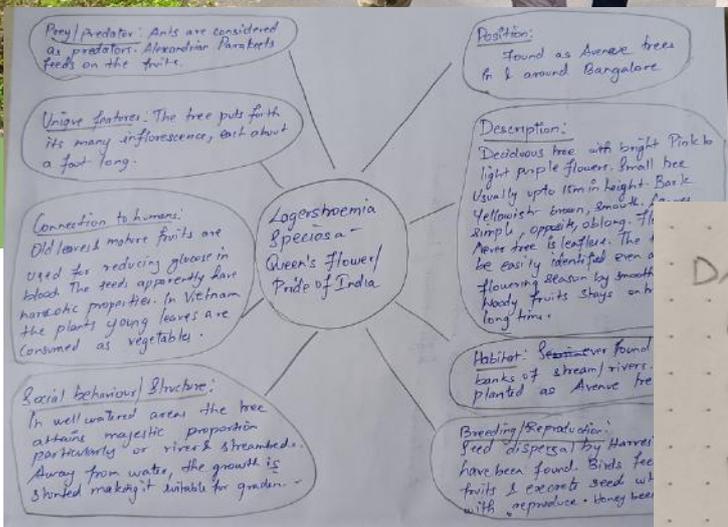
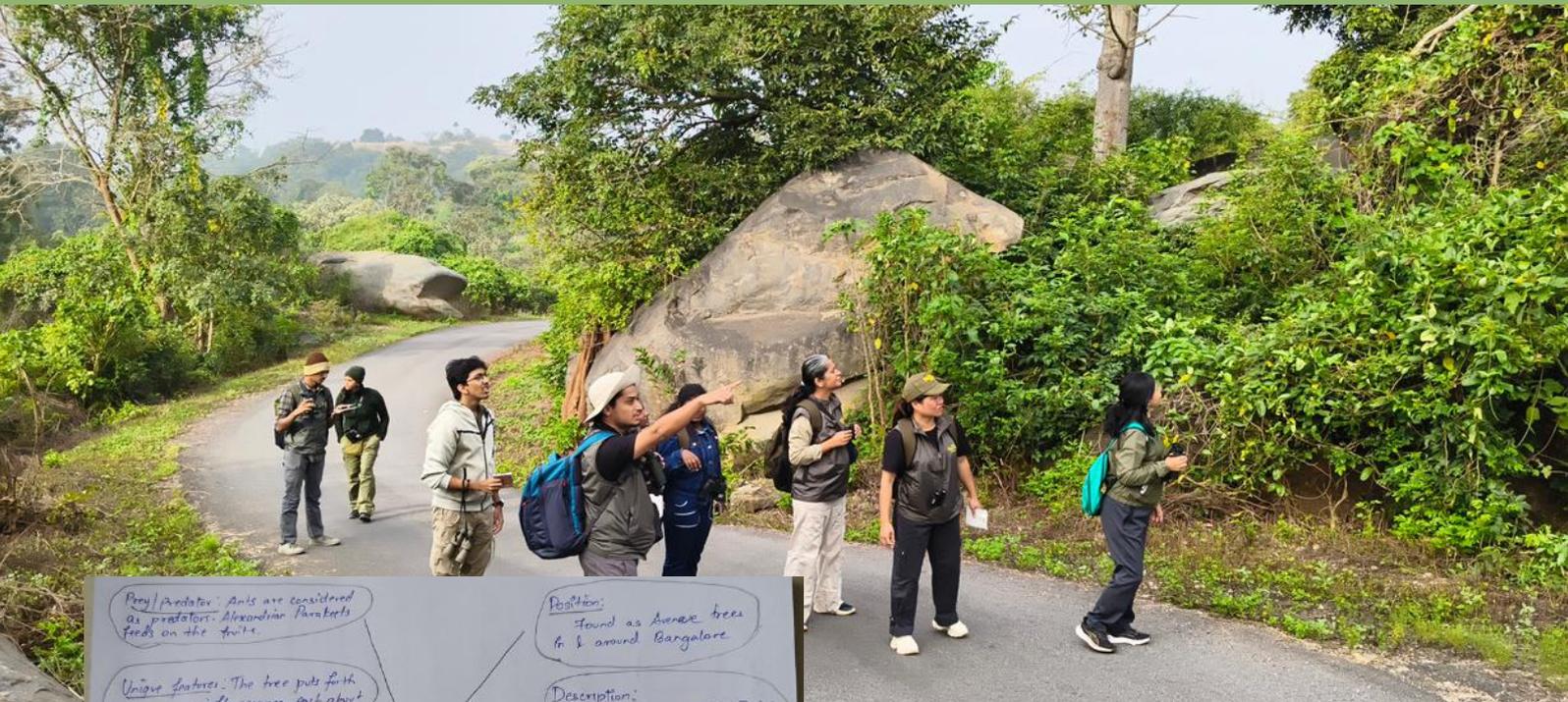
The Certified Nature Guide Course was not designed to be just another training module, it was envisioned as a stepping stone toward a new generation of nature guides, individuals equipped not only with knowledge, but with the confidence and clarity to lead, interpret and inspire.

At its core, the course offers a professionally structured pathway into ecotourism, blending scientific learning with storytelling, field training with reflection and mentorship with real-world application. Over the past year, it has helped learners transform their curiosity about the natural world into a livelihood built on purpose and care.

Participants trained with some of the most respected minds in India's conservation and ecotourism space, Priya Venkatesh, Karthikeyan S, Bittu Sahgal, Pranay Laland Sanjai Mohan, who guided them through the art and ethics of wildlife interpretation. From identifying birds and trees to understanding conservation policy, learners engaged in a curriculum that emphasised both precision and presence.

But what truly set this course apart was its commitment to experiential learning. Whether navigating trails at Windmere Estate or leading safaris through Jungle Lodges & Resorts, participants were immersed in the daily realities of guiding. These field components became practice grounds, where theory met terrain and storytelling became a tool for transformation. Through feedback, it became clear that the impact went deeper than content. Participants spoke of learning to read a forest with new eyes, to communicate with authenticity and to engage guests not just as tourists, but as potential allies in conservation.

With an average satisfaction score of 9.83 out of 10, the course has emerged as a reliable launchpad for careers in nature education, ecotourism and wildlife interpretation. Several graduates have gone on to guide professionally, join conservation organisations, or lead their own nature-based initiatives.



DAY 2:

BIRD 1: A DEEP GIU GIU GIU GIU

BIRD 2: GIURU GIURU GIURU

BIRD 3: THRIIP THRIIP THRIIP THRIIP

BIRD 4: TWE TWE TWE TWE TWE



# Testimonial

## Abeno Ovung: Certified Nature Guide

When Abeno Ovung first stepped into the world of nature guiding, she never imagined how transformative the journey would be. Coming from Nagaland, she had a deep connection with the forests but lacked formal training. Today, after completing the Certified Nature Guide Course, she stands at the forefront of sustainable tourism, blending traditional wisdom with modern guiding techniques.

**Abeno Ovung, shared-**

*"Before this training, I admired nature from a distance. Now, I share its wonders with visitors, shaping their experiences and their role in conservation."*

Abeno is now leading guided tours in her home state, helping visitors develop a deeper appreciation for Nagaland's unique biodiversity. By incorporating storytelling techniques learned in the course, she captivates her audience and encourages sustainable tourism practices. She hopes to train future nature guides in her region, ensuring that more people can benefit from ethical and responsible tourism.

*Abeno Ovung*

**Abeno Ovung**

**Certified Nature Guide, Nagaland, India**



Batch(3) of Certified Nature Guide









# Citizen Naturalist Course (CitiNAT)

*Awakening the Urban Naturalist*

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Hybrid (Online + Residential, 6 weekends)

Batch 2: January – February 2025



In cities where concrete often overshadows green, it's easy to overlook the small signs of life that still persist, the birds nesting above traffic lights, the trees lining busy lanes, or the silent pollinators flitting between roadside blooms. The Citizen Naturalist Course, developed by The Naturalist School, was designed to change that, to help individuals reconnect with the biodiversity around them and learn how to become everyday stewards of nature.

The course invited participants to explore their surroundings not as passive residents, but as curious observers and active contributors to conservation.

With guidance from leading ecologists and practitioners, including Dr. Seshadri K S, Ritesh Sarothiya (MP Forest Department), Kedar Bhide and Radha Prathi, learners were introduced to the fundamentals of urban ecology, citizen science, biodiversity documentation and environmental communication.

One participant, Latha Krishna, joined the course with a background in architecture and interior design. What began as a personal interest quickly became a professional turning point. Through sessions on species identification, ecological storytelling and green urban design, she began to reimagine her role, not just as someone who shapes built spaces, but as someone who could embed nature into them.



“ I used to pass by trees without noticing them. Now, I see an entire ecosystem thriving in each branch and I want to share that wonder with others ”

— Latha Krishna

Citizen Naturalist Graduate

Since completing the course, Latha has led guided urban nature walks, introduced eco-literacy sessions in local schools and is now developing an initiative to integrate biodiversity thinking into urban design and education. Her story is one among many of individuals who, through the course, found new meaning in everyday observations and began translating them into action.

The strength of the Citizen Naturalist Course lies in its accessibility. It shows that conservation doesn't begin in remote forests, it begins in our streets, balconies, schoolyards and parks. It empowers citizens not only to see the life around them but to speak for it through data, dialogue and shared community experience.





# Collaborations





## **Learning to Guide, Growing to Lead (Women in Eco-tourism)**

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## Kohima, Nagaland & Shillong & Sohra, Meghalaya October & November 2024

### Partner : National Commission for Women (NCW)

The National Commission for Women (NCW) is dedicated to empowering women across India by facilitating opportunities for skill development, entrepreneurship and leadership. In partnership with The Naturalist School, NCW initiated two Nature Guide Training programs in Nagaland and Meghalaya, equipping women with the skills and knowledge needed to engage in sustainable ecotourism. These programs were designed to uplift local communities by integrating women into nature-based tourism, fostering financial independence and strengthening regional conservation efforts.

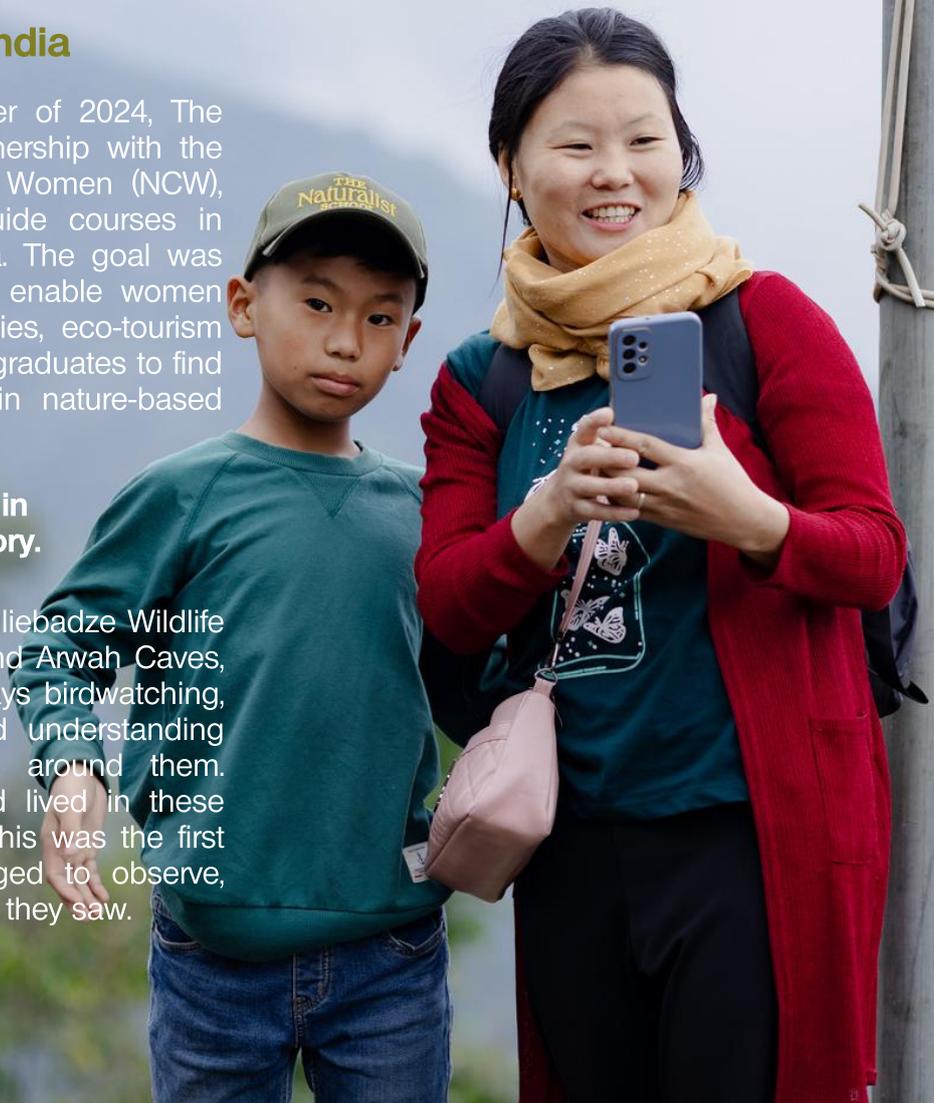


### Rooted Voices: Women Guides in India

In October and November of 2024, The Naturalist School, in partnership with the National Commission for Women (NCW), launched two Nature Guide courses in Nagaland and Meghalaya. The goal was simple but significant: to enable women from homestay communities, eco-tourism entrepreneurs and young graduates to find a place for themselves in nature-based livelihoods.

#### The training was rooted in practice rather than theory.

Across landscapes like Puliebadze Wildlife Sanctuary, Ward's Lake and Arwah Caves, participants spent their days birdwatching, recording biodiversity and understanding the delicate ecosystems around them. Many of the women had lived in these places all their lives, yet this was the first time they were encouraged to observe, name and document what they saw.



Alongside fieldwork, the training introduced the basics of forest ecology, sustainable tourism models and indigenous conservation practices. Sessions on guest engagement, low-impact tourism and plastic waste reduction were designed to help homestay owners think about hospitality not just as business, but as a way of sharing the values of their place with visitors.

**One participant from Kohima shared,**

*“I never imagined I could lead nature walks or talk about birds with confidence. This training gave me the knowledge, the voice and the courage to do so.”*

Her words echo the sentiment of many who, by the end of the program, not only knew how to identify birds and plants using field guides and mobile apps like Merlin and iNaturalist, but could also guide others through those same forests with a sense of clarity and purpose.

This wasn't just about technical training. It was about shifting perspectives. Women who once stayed behind the scenes, cooking meals or hosting tourists in their homes, began to take on more visible roles as guides, interpreters and community educators. For some, this opened up income opportunities. For others, it became a way to connect more deeply with their land and share that connection with visitors.

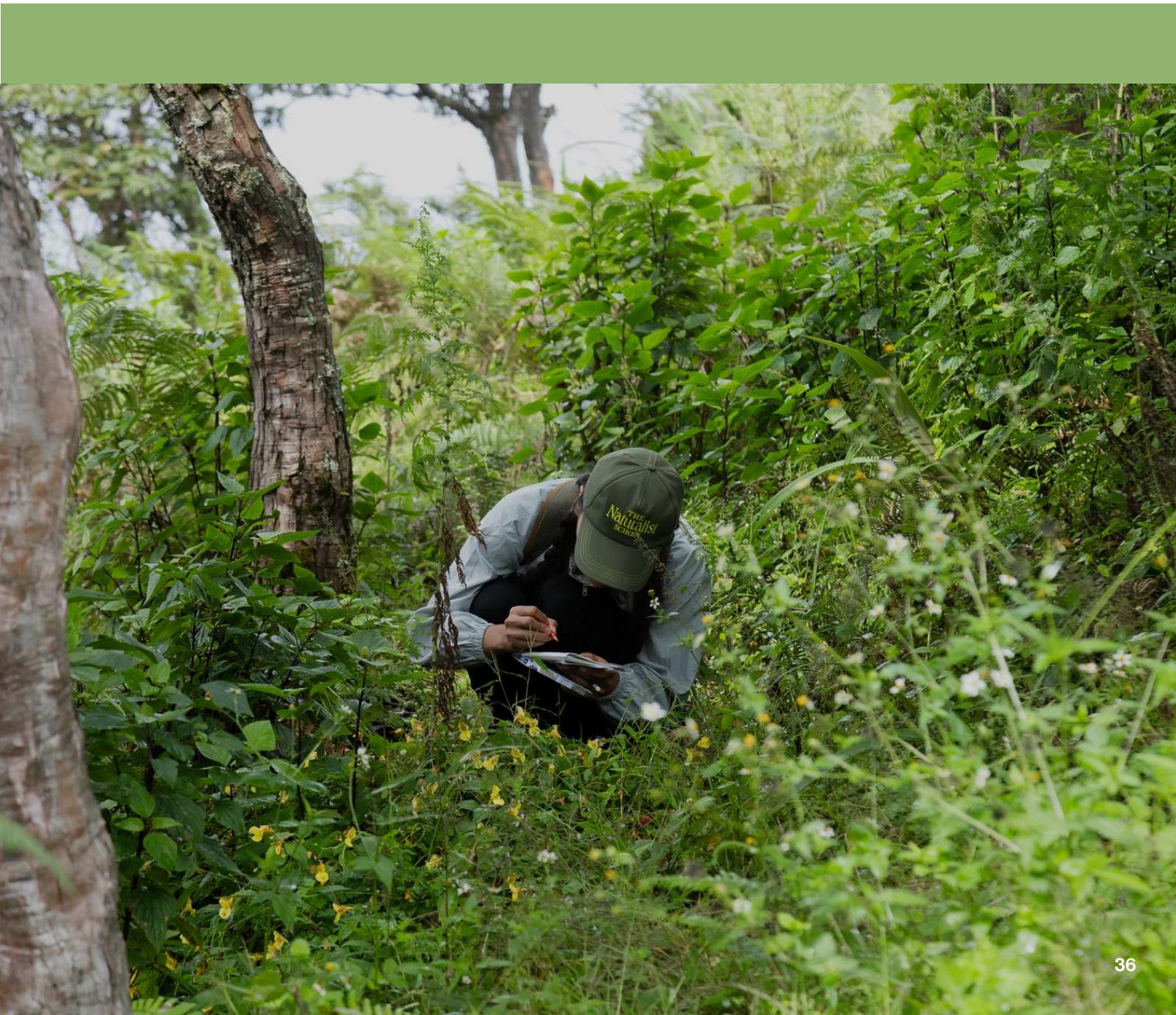


The results were encouraging. More than 90% of participants reported increased confidence in guiding and managing eco-tourism activities. A majority of homestay owners expressed plans to integrate guided nature walks and biodiversity storytelling into their services. In just a few weeks, participants collectively documented over 50 species in citizen science platforms, an effort that contributes directly to local biodiversity databases.

Perhaps most importantly, nearly two-thirds of participants said they now see ecotourism as a viable livelihood. Some have already begun offering guided walks and nature-based experiences in their villages.

For the long run, The Naturalist School and NCW are working together to expand this program to other northeastern states. Plans are underway to build mentorship networks that can support women eco-guides as they begin to lead tours, train others and navigate new economic pathways. Collaborations with state tourism and forest departments are also being explored to formalise employment opportunities and create more structured support for women entering this space.

This initiative is a reminder that conservation and empowerment often go hand in hand. When women are given the tools, space and confidence to lead; the impact ripples outwards: into communities, ecosystems and futures.



# Testimonial

## A Journey of Collaboration: Khonoma's Partnership with The Naturalist School

Our journey with The Naturalist School (TNS) began with a shared vision—fostering environmental education and sustainability in our community. Based in Khonoma, we had long sought meaningful ways to deepen our understanding of nature while engaging our people in conservation efforts. When we first learned about TNS and its impactful programs, we knew we had found an ideal partner. Their hands-on, immersive approach to learning aligned perfectly with our values, making this collaboration a natural fit.

The decision to work with TNS was driven by a desire to equip our community members with the tools and knowledge needed to address pressing environmental challenges. The opportunity to take part in TNS's Certified Naturalist Course was transformative for our team. Seven members from Khonoma participated, gaining in-depth training on biodiversity, conservation and sustainable practices. Upon their return, they became catalysts for change, sharing their learning and inspiring others in the community to embrace conservation efforts.

Over time, our partnership with TNS has grown stronger, evolving beyond a single course into a long-term engagement. The knowledge and insights provided by TNS have not only empowered our participants but have also helped refine our conservation programs.

The feedback from our members has been overwhelmingly positive—they speak of TNS not just as an educational institution but as a mentor that nurtures both personal and professional growth.

One of the most remarkable outcomes of this collaboration is the shift in mindset within our community. The participants of the TNS program have taken on leadership roles, conducting workshops for youth and community members and fostering discussions on sustainability. While the long-term environmental impact is still unfolding, the enthusiasm and proactive approach of our members signal a promising future. The ripple effect of this education is evident, as more individuals are now eager to engage in conservation activities.

What sets TNS apart is its holistic approach to education. Their team does not merely teach concepts; they create immersive learning experiences that forge a deep connection with nature. Their tailored programs ensure that each participant gains relevant, practical knowledge that can be applied in real-world scenarios. The dedication and expertise of the TNS educators make their courses both engaging and impactful, leaving a lasting impression on all who take part. Without hesitation, we highly recommend TNS to any organization, community, or individual seeking a meaningful and transformative environmental education experience. Their ability to inspire action, nurture passion and provide practical knowledge makes them a truly invaluable partner. TNS does not just educate; they empower and we are proud to be part of their extended community.

We extend our deepest gratitude to The Naturalist School for their dedication and commitment to environmental education. Your work has made a lasting impact on our community and we look forward to strengthening our partnership in the years to come. To all TNS stakeholders, your contributions are invaluable and together, we can build a future where nature and communities thrive in harmony.

*Neikedolie Heikha*

**Neikedolie Heikha**  
**Member**  
**Khonoma Nature Conservation**  
**and Tragopan Sanctuary (KNCTS)**





## Those Who Walk With the Forest

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## **Partner : Uttar Pradesh Ecotourism Development Board & Forest Department**

In 2024, The Naturalist School, in partnership with the Uttar Pradesh Ecotourism Development Board and the State Forest Department, launched a series of Nature Guide Upskilling programs across three iconic sites: Pilibhit Tiger Reserve, Dudhwa National Park and Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary. These intensive, hands-on programs were designed to strengthen the skills of both new and experienced guides, with a focus on ecological understanding, interpretive storytelling, responsible tourism and visitor safety.

### **Interpreters of the Wild: Building Ecotourism Capacity in Uttar Pradesh**

Uttar Pradesh, home to the Bengal tiger, swamp deer and the intricate ecosystems of the Terai region, is one of India's most biodiverse landscapes. But the experience of this wilderness depends not only on the wildlife it shelters, it depends on the people who bring the forest alive for visitors. Forest guides, often deeply rooted in these landscapes, play a vital role in shaping how nature is seen, understood and valued.

Across five training cohorts, over 140 participants took part in a transformative learning journey.

Each program was rooted in field-based engagement – from dawn birding sessions and wildlife tracking to real-time safari simulations and first-aid response training. Guides spent time observing forest patterns, tracking species and learning how to translate ecological complexity into accessible, engaging narratives for visitors.

Field modules included bird identification, animal behaviour, wetland ecology and the role of forest corridors in maintaining biodiversity. The training emphasised a shift from simply naming species to understanding ecological relationships.



Participants recorded over 75 species across locations and contributed to regional citizen science efforts.

Equally important was the training in storytelling and guest engagement. Through workshops and live practice sessions, guides were encouraged to move beyond factual narration and build interpretive stories, weaving together scientific insight, local folklore and personal experience. For many, this changed the way they viewed their role as guides.

*“Before this training, I saw the forest in parts- animals, trees, birds. Now, I see how it all fits together. Every sound, every movement is part of a larger story. And I’ve learned how to share that with others.”*

– Participant, Dudhwa Tiger Reserve

The program also covered crucial aspects of visitor safety, including wilderness first aid, snakebite response, dehydration management and handling wildlife encounters. Every participant engaged in hands-on emergency simulations to strengthen their preparedness in remote areas.

*“We used to think a safari was only successful if guests saw a tiger. Now, I know how to guide with confidence, even when there’s no tiger in sight – because the forest itself is always telling a story.”*

Nature Guide, Pilibhit

*“Earlier, I could name the birds. Now, I understand their calls, their behaviour, even their long journeys across the skies. It’s a different kind of knowing.”*

– Participant, Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary



## The Outcomes :

- 92% of participants reported a significant boost in confidence while interacting with guests
- 85% developed stronger communication and storytelling skills
- Every participant completed first-aid training modules
- 75+ species were documented across the programs

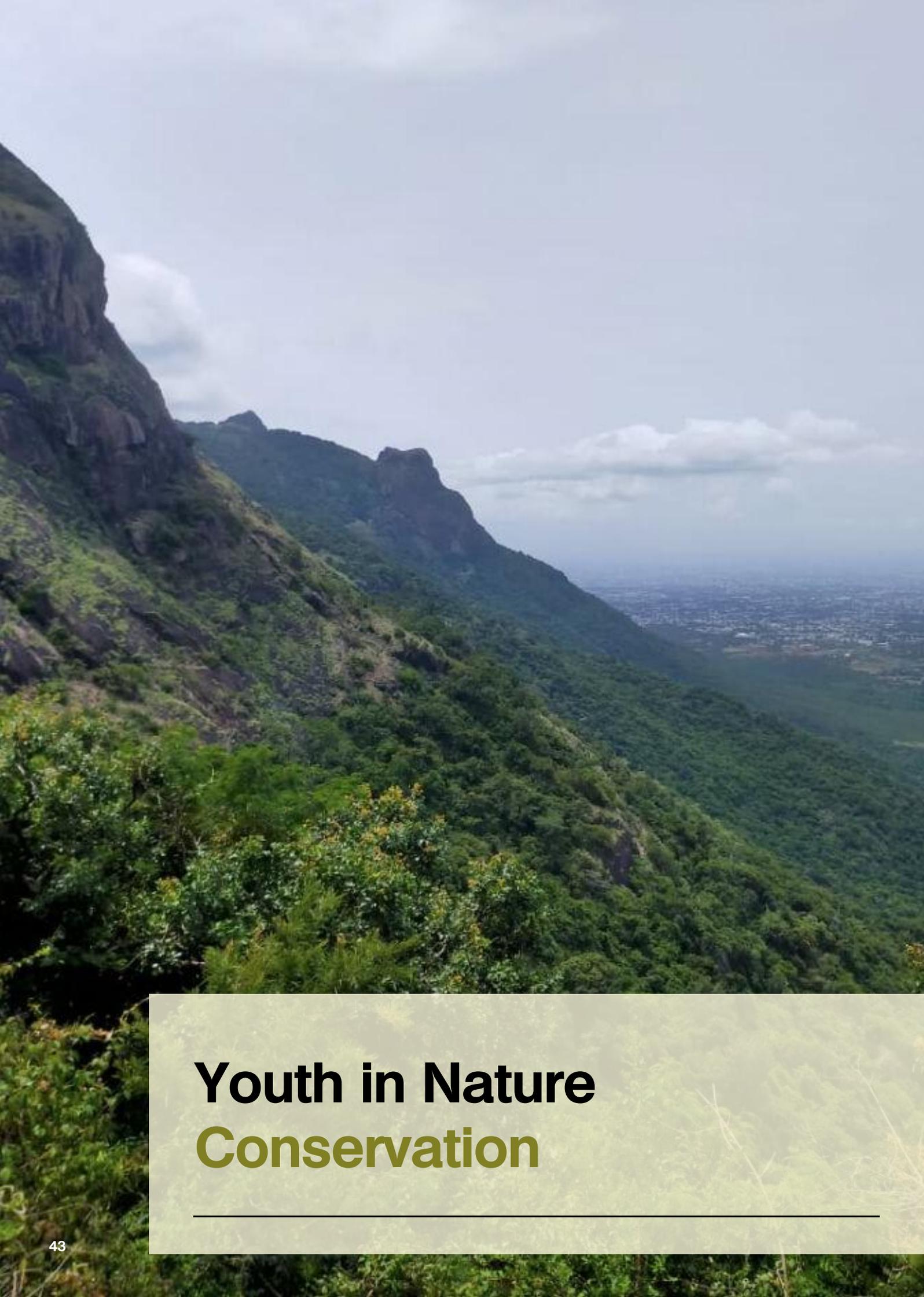
For many of these guides, this was more than just training. It was a shift in identity – from informants to interpreters, from passive observers to active custodians of the landscape.

With eco-tourism growing rapidly across protected areas, The Naturalist School and the UP Forest Department recognise the urgency of developing a skilled, professional guiding workforce. These programs not only improve the quality of visitor experiences but also ensure that tourism becomes a tool for conservation and community well-being.

Looking ahead, the partnership will continue to build on this foundation, expanding the training model to more forest sites, initiating a mentorship network for ongoing guide development and integrating tools like iNaturalist and Merlin for deeper ecological learning and digital engagement.

Each trained guide becomes a new storyteller of the forest, not just showing tourists where to look, but teaching them what to see and why it matters.





# Youth in Nature Conservation

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## Chinnavedampatti Lake, Perur Lake, Nilgiris Biosphere Park (Coimbatore)

July 29 – August 5, 2024

### Partner : Kumaraguru College of Liberal Arts and Science (KCLAS)

KCLAS, a leading institution in multidisciplinary education and community engagement, fosters a culture of experiential learning. With a strong focus on sustainability and ecological awareness, KCLAS prepares students to understand, engage with and contribute to global conservation efforts.



*As part of Liberal Edge Week 2024, KCLAS partnered with The Naturalist School to introduce a one-of-a-kind Naturalist Training Program, immersing students in biodiversity exploration, field ecology and conservation education.*

### Learning by the Lake: A Field-Based Program

Over the course of one week, 20 undergraduate students stepped away from their classrooms and into the landscapes that surround their city- lakes, biosphere parks and forest edges to engage in experiential learning rooted in observation, storytelling and conservation action.

The training combined foundational knowledge in biodiversity and ecosystems with direct field immersion. At Chinnavedampatti and Perur Lakes, students practiced birdwatching and behavioural observation, identifying over 50 species and documenting them as part of an ongoing citizen science initiative. These sessions helped students link what they had learned about avian ecology to real-time insights on habitat health, water quality and species interactions.

Midway through the program, students visited Nilgiris Biosphere Park, where they shifted their attention to flora. Guided walks and ecosystem mapping exercises introduced them to native plant species, their ecological roles and the broader themes of forest conservation and climate resilience.



A final component of the training involved hands-on conservation work, specifically, planting saplings around Chinnavedampatti Lake as part of a local reforestation initiative. The physical act of restoring a landscape allowed students to reflect on their place within ecological systems, not only as observers but as contributors.

*“Watching the lake come alive with birds and knowing we had a hand in protecting that space is something I’ll carry with me long after this program.”*

– Student Participant, KCLAS Program

### By the end of the week:

- 85% of students reported an increased awareness of local biodiversity.
- 95% gained confidence in species identification and field-based engagement
- 70% expressed interest in pursuing environmental careers or volunteer work

In total, students recorded 50+ bird species and planted 30 native saplings, small but significant contributions to local conservation efforts.



This collaboration marked a shared step toward embedding environmental education into formal learning spaces.

For The Naturalist School, it was an opportunity to demonstrate that immersive, field-based pedagogy can be scaled within academic institutions. For KCLAS, it was a pilot that confirmed the value of interdisciplinary, place-based education.

Following the success of this initiative, both institutions are now exploring ways to extend the program, including deeper engagements with local communities, long-term biodiversity monitoring and additional field offerings for students across disciplines.



# Meri Beat, Mera Abhimaan Initiative



## Partner : Last Wilderness Foundation (LWF)

The Last Wilderness Foundation (LWF) is a dedicated non-governmental organization committed to wildlife conservation in Central India. Through transformative initiatives like 'Meri Beat, Mera Abhimaan' (MBMA) and 'Meri Range, Mera Abhimaan' (MRMA), LWF focuses on mitigating human-wildlife conflict, upskilling frontline conservationists and fostering harmonious coexistence between local communities and wildlife.



## From Beat to Range: Strengthening Forest Guardianship on the Ground

Across the forest landscapes of Madhya Pradesh, frontline staff- beat guards, rangers and forest watchers, play a vital role in protecting biodiversity. Yet, their work often takes place in isolation, balancing the demands of patrols, community interactions and quick decision-making in dynamic environments. Recognising the need to support these staff with more than just technical training, the Meri Beat, Mera Abhimaan (MBMA) program was developed to strengthen the interpersonal and leadership skills of those who are the first line of defence in India's conservation network.

The program was designed to build pride and responsibility among forest personnel, not only for the land they protect, but for the people and communities they engage with every day.

By focusing on communication, conflict resolution, teamwork and confidence-building, MBMA set out to equip beat guards with the tools they need to lead with clarity, empathy and a stronger sense of purpose.

In collaboration with the Living with Forests (LWF) initiative, The Naturalist School was invited to design and deliver a series of interactive training sessions that approached conservation from a human perspective. The workshops brought together forest staff from across regions, many of whom were participating in a behavioural training program for the first time.



Through carefully crafted activities, the training explored the interpersonal side of conservation work. Participants practiced how to map and present their patrol beats, lead effective community meetings and manage the complexities of their daily responsibilities. Exercises like "Passing the Ring" focused on communication and coordination, while "Group Juggle" highlighted the need to stay focused under pressure, a challenge beat guards are all too familiar with.

A simulation called "Jungle Migration" placed participants in the role of migratory birds navigating fragmented habitats, helping them experience firsthand how ecological challenges are connected to human decisions on the ground. Another session, "Inside Out", focused on attention, awareness and the ability to remain grounded during high-stress situations.

Throughout the program, participants shared stories of on-ground challenges from negotiating grazing boundaries with villagers to managing tense human-wildlife encounters. Roleplays and dialogue-building exercises gave them space to reflect on these experiences and learn practical tools to respond with confidence and clarity.

*"Earlier, I just followed the routine- patrol, report, repeat. Now I understand how I can engage better with people, build trust and be more effective in my work."*

**-Beat Guard, Kuno National Park**

By the end of the program, many participants expressed a shift, not just in skills, but in mindset. They spoke of renewed motivation, improved problem-solving and greater confidence in representing their range during meetings or community interactions.

Forest staff reported stronger team coordination, better communication within their units and a greater sense of ownership over their beat areas. For many, it was the first time their role had been framed not just as a protector of forests, but as a facilitator of dialogue between people and nature.





## **Conservation Begins Here** **(A Landmark Collaboration)**

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**Kali Tiger Reserve, Joida, Karnataka**  
**27th January – 5th February 2025**  
**120 hours (10 days) of immersive learning**

### **Partner : Centre for Wildlife Studies (CWS)**

In collaboration with the Centre for Wildlife Studies (CWS), The Naturalist School launched a 10-day Nature Guide Training Program in the Kali Tiger Reserve. The goal was to do something both simple and profound: to recognise the depth of traditional ecological knowledge held by these youth and pair it with formal skills that could lead to sustainable, conservation-based livelihoods.



### **Bridging Knowledge with knowledge: Tribal Youth Step Into Conservation**

In the dense forests of the Western Ghats, where hornbills call from the canopy and the scent of damp earth lingers in the air, a quiet shift began to unfold. At the heart of this transformation were young members of the tribal communities of Joida and Dandeli-communities that have lived alongside these forests for generations.

For many participants, this was the first time their understanding of the forest, shaped by years of lived experience, was reflected back to them as valuable. The training brought structure and support to their instinctive awareness.

Over the course of ten days, participants walked trails, identified birds, mapped species interactions and learned how to speak to others about the living systems around them.

They were trained not only to see but to interpret, to transform what they observed into engaging, meaningful experiences for visitors. Through sessions on storytelling, wildlife interpretation and communication, each participant developed the confidence to guide, educate and advocate for their landscape. They practiced public speaking, led mock walks and even crafted their own narratives using both scientific knowledge and community lore.



CENTRE FOR  
WILDLIFE STUDIES





# Leadership on the Trail

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**CRD Campus, Bangalore & Uttarakhand  
(Raithal Campus & Benog Tibba Trek)**  
November 2024 – February 2025

## **Partner : Indiahikes – India’s Largest Trekking Organization Certified Nature Guide Course**

Indiahikes has long redefined what it means to trek in India. For thousands of people every year, a trek with Indiahikes isn't just about reaching a summit, it's about learning to notice, to reflect and to connect with the natural world more deeply. With a shared commitment to responsible tourism and environmental stewardship, The Naturalist School partnered with Indiahikes to strengthen the one role that carries this philosophy forward on every trail: the Trek Leader.

# **INDIAHIKES®**

India's Largest & Safest Trekking Organisation

## **Where Every Step Counts: A Training Program with Indiahikes**

In 2024–25, The Naturalist School designed and delivered a two-phase Train-the-Trainer program for Indiahikes Trek Leaders. The objective was simple yet far-reaching: to embed ecological literacy, interpretation and nature storytelling into the everyday trekking experience. By equipping Trek Leaders with tools to guide through a naturalist's lens, the training is now shaping the journeys of thousands of trekkers across India.

## **Training in Two Landscapes**

The first phase took place in Bangalore and Uttarakhand, where nearly 70 Trek Leaders were introduced to core concepts in nature interpretation and ecological facilitation. Nature walks were used as laboratories for observation, guest engagement and guiding etiquette. Activities like spider diagramming helped participants connect 40+ elements in the landscape, from lichens to altitude changes into cohesive stories. For many, it was a shift in perspective: to go beyond logistics and safety and begin seeing the forest as a teacher.

Nature journaling became a central part of the experience. What began as a reluctant activity for some quickly turned into a tool for reflection and observation, one that Trek Leaders now integrate regularly into their group activities. In follow-up sessions, many described how their trekkers began noticing changes in weather, flowering cycles, or bird calls that they would have otherwise walked past.

A storytelling component brought ecological concepts to life through skits and games. Leaders developed short interpretive narratives using flashcards, roleplay and collective theatre, making topics like pollination, forest succession, or predator-prey dynamics engaging and memorable for all age groups.

In the second phase, held at the Benog Tibba trail in February 2025, Trek Leaders deepened their practice. Advanced birding sessions, led by experts Sanjay Sodhi and Suniti, explored birds not just as species to identify, but as entry points into larger ecological systems. Participants also examined landscapes through a geological lens, uncovering stories about fossil fuels and ancient Earth processes that shape the terrain trekkers walk on.

The training wasn't just about external knowledge. Leaders were introduced to personality profiling tools like the True Colours model, helping them understand group dynamics and their own facilitation styles. These tools are now regularly used on treks to build trust and improve the group experience.

### What began as a leadership training has turned into a ripple effect across trails. Today:

- 100% of participating Trek Leaders actively use nature interpretation during treks
- 85% facilitate journaling sessions or creative observation practices
- Thousands of trekkers across India hike routes now experience guided storytelling as part of their journey

#### As one Trek Leader reflected:

*"I've led treks for years, but this training changed how I connect people to nature. Now, my trekkers leave with more than memories, they leave with new questions, new respect."*

# Testimonial

## Trek Leaders : A Transformational Training

We first heard about the Naturalist School through one of their Instagram posts. It spoke about a certified course on becoming a naturalist and it immediately caught our attention. We thought it would be an opportunity for our trek leaders to add naturalist skills to their outdoor skills, so we reached out.

What we were looking for was a structured certification program with clear outcomes. We wanted our trek leaders to gain tangible skills and the TNS certification seemed like the perfect fit.

Now, with about 60 of our team members close to becoming certified Nature Guides, we've seen a real transformation. Their knowledge and understanding of nature have deepened quite a bit. Every trek now has a naturalist element built into it. The stories our trek leaders weave are fascinating for our trekkers. Our trekkers are connecting to nature like never before.

Having a well-defined curriculum and clear benchmarks has made a big difference. It gave our trek leaders something to work towards and a standard to meet. The best part? The learning was enjoyable and very practical.

I want to thank Ms. Priya Venkatesh here. She was an expert facilitator, someone we could follow and learn from. She constantly adapted the program to suit our needs. We loved her dedication. She constantly kept motivating our trek leaders to take the training forward, something we rarely see in other facilitators. She always kept the bigger picture in mind.

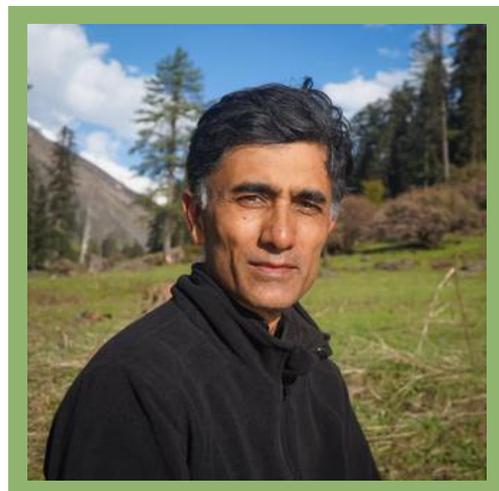
TNS has been an ideal partner for us. Your commitment to delivering quality training and focus on real outcomes have been remarkable.

We look forward to continuing this journey with you.

*Arjun Majumdar*

**Arjun Majumdar**

**Founder, CEO, Indiahikes**





## **Interpreting Nature:** **Understanding the Wild**

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## Partner : World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)

WWF-India is one of the country's leading conservation organisations, working to build a future where people and nature thrive together. With a strong focus on biodiversity, education, and community-based conservation, WWF-India supported this program by contributing its expertise in nature interpretation and environmental awareness.



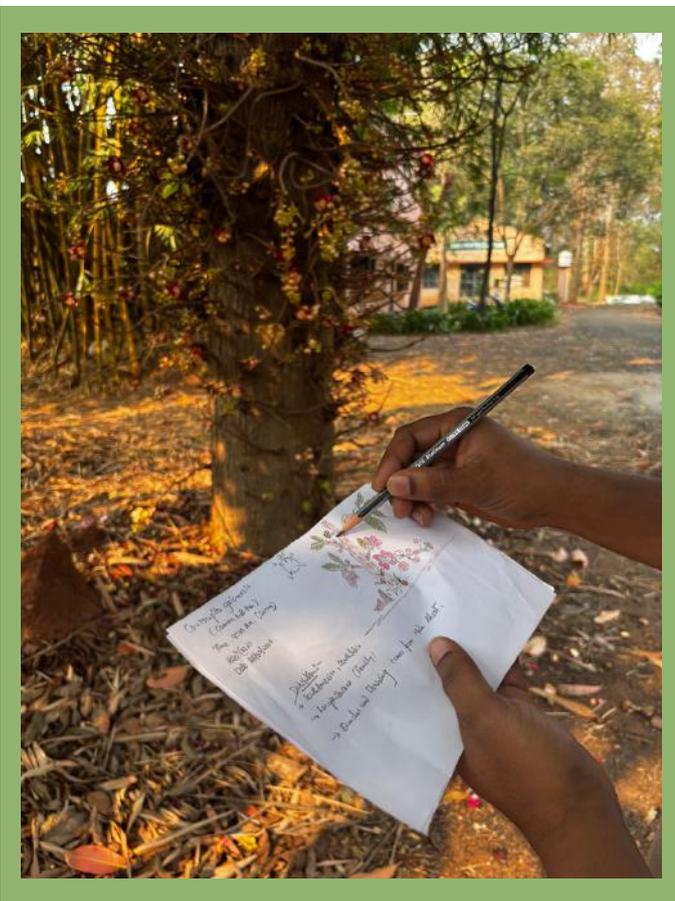
The two-day Nature Guide Training Program was conceptualised and conducted for the frontline staff of the Andhra Pradesh Forest Department and Protection Watchers. The training aimed to equip participants with essential skills and knowledge in biodiversity, nature interpretation, and conservation awareness. The program was conducted in collaboration with WWF and attended by approximately 60 participants.

## Objectives of the Training

- To enhance the knowledge of frontline staff regarding biodiversity and conservation.
- To introduce nature journaling as a tool for documentation and learning.
- To develop bird identification and birdwatching skills.
- To provide an understanding of challenges faced by birds and wildlife.
- To familiarise participants with mSTRIPES for effective forest and wildlife monitoring.
- To foster teamwork and collaboration among participants.

The training program concluded with remarks by the Director of the Andhra Pradesh Forest Staff Academy (APFSA), who appreciated the efforts of the trainers and participants. Feedback from participants highlighted the effectiveness of the hands-on approach and the relevance of the topics covered.

The program was successfully executed in collaboration with WWF, reinforcing the commitment to capacity building among frontline forest staff.



## Recommendations for Future Trainings

- Extend the training duration to include more field-based activities.
- Provide follow-up sessions to reinforce learning.
- Develop training manuals for reference.
- Include modules on human-wildlife conflict resolution and advanced tracking techniques.

## Acknowledgments

The Naturalist School and WWF extend their gratitude to the AP Forest Department for their support in organising this program. Special thanks to the trainers and participants for their enthusiastic involvement in making the training a success.



# Letter of Appreciation

**B.VIJAYA KUMAR, I.F.S.,  
CONSERVATOR OF FORESTS  
& DIRECTOR**



**A.P. State Forest Academy,  
Government of Andhra Pradesh  
RAJAMAHENDRAVARAM-533106**

Dear Ms. Priya

We express our heartfelt appreciation for the invaluable contributions you made to the two-day workshop on "Amateur Naturalist Programme" and "MSTrIPES" conducted at our Academy on 26-27th March 2025.

Your technical and practical sessions were truly enlightening, and your expertise in the field of natural history and wildlife conservation was evident throughout the workshop. Your enthusiasm and passion for sharing knowledge were contagious, and our trainees were deeply inspired by your interactions.

Ms. Priya, your expertise in natural history interpretation and your work with The Naturalist School added a unique dimension to the workshop, and your sessions were thoroughly enjoyed by our trainees.

We are grateful for the time and effort you invested in making this workshop a success. Your contributions have enriched our trainees' understanding of amateur naturalism and MSTrIPES, and we are confident that they will apply their newfound knowledge in their future endeavors.

Please accept our sincere appreciation for your support and expertise.

Thank you.

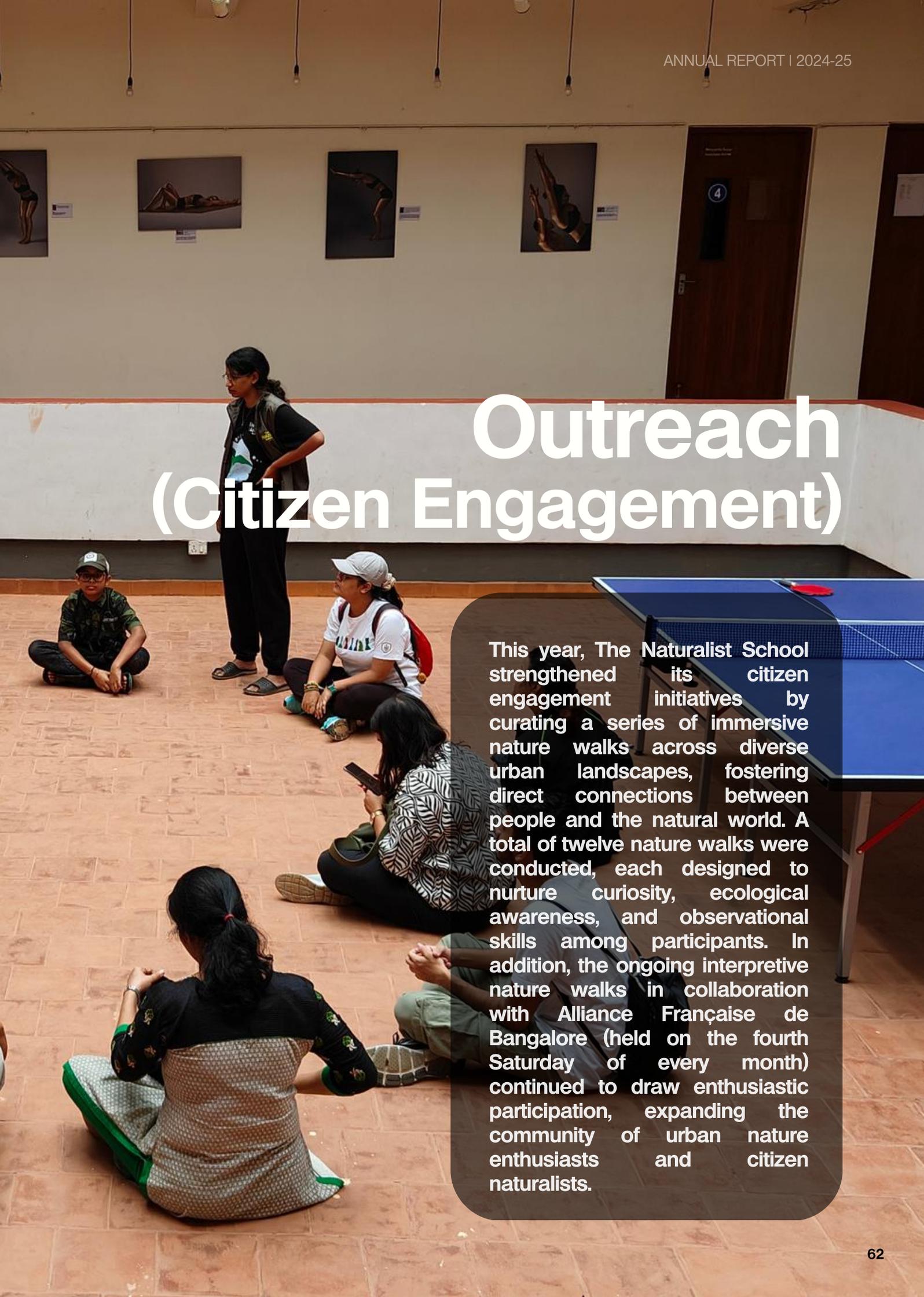
Yours Sincerely,

  
(B. VIJAYA KUMAR, I.F.S.,)

To,  
Ms. Priya  
The Naturalist School  
BANGALORE.

Lalacheruvu PO., Rajamahendravaram, Andhra Pradesh, India. 533 106.  
Mobile No.9492729460, Land line: 0883 – 2447344 (off)  
e-mail: apfa.rjy@gmail.com Website: www.apsfarjy.com



A group of people are gathered in a room with a tiled floor. One person stands and speaks to a group of four people sitting on the floor. The room has framed pictures on the wall and a ping pong table in the background.

# Outreach (Citizen Engagement)

This year, The Naturalist School strengthened its citizen engagement initiatives by curating a series of immersive nature walks across diverse urban landscapes, fostering direct connections between people and the natural world. A total of twelve nature walks were conducted, each designed to nurture curiosity, ecological awareness, and observational skills among participants. In addition, the ongoing interpretive nature walks in collaboration with Alliance Française de Bangalore (held on the fourth Saturday of every month) continued to draw enthusiastic participation, expanding the community of urban nature enthusiasts and citizen naturalists.



# Walking with **Intention**

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**Partners : IIM Bangalore, Rotary India ,  
Alliance Française de Bangalore,  
Ramaiah University of Applied Sciences,  
Titan Company Ltd.**

Conducted in collaboration with institutions like IIM Bangalore, Alliance Française, Rotary, Titan and Ramaiah University, these curated walks have become an entry point into deeper ecological learning. What begins as a quiet walk through a campus or a lakeside trail often becomes something more: a conversation, a discovery and for many, a shift in how they see nature and themselves within it.



**Nature Walks for Ecological Thinking  
(Where Learning Begins with a Step)**

In 2024–25, The Naturalist School designed and delivered a two-phase Train-the-Trainer program for Indiahikes Trek Leaders. The objective was simple yet far-reaching: to embed ecological literacy, interpretation and nature storytelling into the everyday trekking experience. By equipping Trek Leaders with tools to guide through a naturalist's lens, the training is now shaping the journeys of thousands of trekkers across India.

Each walk is designed to go beyond information-sharing. Through a blend of observation, storytelling and guided reflection, participants are invited to experience nature not just as a backdrop, but as an active, dynamic system. They learn to identify birds by call, notice leaf arrangements and pollinators, or hear how a forest holds cultural memory and scientific insight at the same time.





One of the things that sets these walks apart is the way they make learning feel personal. At IIM Bangalore, for instance, faculty and students reflected on how a morning walk changed their perspective on leadership and systems thinking. At Titan and Alliance Francaise, participants shared how the experience sparked childhood memories or prompted quiet reflection. For some, this was their first structured interaction with the natural world in years.

These walks are not isolated events. Many participants, especially those from academic and corporate spaces, have gone on to enroll in The Naturalist School's longer-term courses. Some now regularly engage in citizen science, nature journaling, or community greening initiatives. For others, the experience planted a seed that will take shape in different ways: in how they teach, how they lead, or how they choose to live

More than just a nature outing, these walks have emerged as a space for community. They bring together people from different backgrounds and professions, all connected by a shared curiosity. Conversations often continue long after the walk ends, through WhatsApp groups, reading lists, or future program registrations.

For our partners, these walks offer a meaningful way to integrate ecological thinking into their institutional cultures. Universities have used them to enrich interdisciplinary coursework; corporate teams have used them to support leadership retreats and reflective strategy sessions. They're also increasingly seen as a way to build emotional connection to sustainability goals, which can often feel abstract or distant.



As interest continues to grow, The Naturalist School is working to expand this offering into new geographies and formats from campus-based walks to community-led trails, from in-person sessions to digital extensions. The aim is simple: to keep making space for people to step outside, slow down and see the natural world and their place in it, with new eyes.



# Gallery





**Strengthening Conservation Education**



Comparison :- The Pugmark of a Male Tiger and a Tigress



- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>(i) <u>Overall Shape</u> :-<br/>The pugmark of a male tiger tends to be more circular and fits within a square.</p> <p>(ii) <u>Toe Shape</u> :-<br/>The toes of a male tiger are typically rounder and blunt.</p> <p>(iii) <u>Size</u> :- The pugmarks of a male tiger are generally larger than those of females.</p> <p>(iv) <u>Spacing</u> :- The spacing between the toes of a male tiger is generally wider.</p> | <p>(i) <u>Overall Shape</u> :-<br/>The pugmark of a tigress tends to be more oval and fits within a rectangle.</p> <p>(ii) <u>Toe Shape</u> :-<br/>The toes of a tigress are typically elongated and pointed.</p> <p>(iii) <u>Size</u> :- The pugmarks of a tigress are smaller than those of a male.</p> <p>(iv) <u>Spacing</u> :- The spacing between the toes of a tigress is generally narrower.</p> |
|--|--|





encouraging grassroots participation





# People



# CORE TEAM



**Priya Venkatesh**  
FOUNDER DIRECTOR



**Dr. Neharika Vohra**  
DIRECTOR



**Prakruthi Subramanya**  
PROGRAMME DIRECTOR



**Goda Krishna**  
ADMIN MANAGER



**Suhas Saya**  
PROGRAMME MANAGER



**Manjula Nayadu**  
PROGRAMME MANAGER

# ADVISORY TEAM



*Mentor & Advisor*

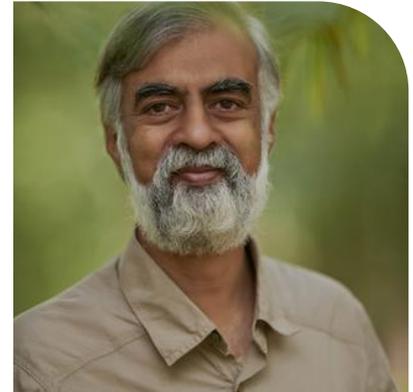
## **Sanjai Mohan IFS HOFF (Rtd)**

Shri. Sanjai Mohan IFS is ex-Head of Forest Force, Karnataka. He has managed various positions in the Forest Department throughout his tenure including being the Chief Wildlife Warden of the State. Among other positions, he has worked as CEO of Karnataka Ecotourism Development Board and MD of Jungle Lodges and Resorts. He has initiated projects for conservation of smaller wildlife (canids), Great Indian Bustard, Floricans, endemic Mahseer and established the states first Vulture breeding centre.

*Chief Naturalist JLR & Technical Advisor*

## **Karthikeyan Srinivasan**

Karthikeyan has been educating and creating awareness among the young and old on various aspects of natural history through nature camps, talks and nature-based activities for over 40 years. He began as an Education Officer, Karnataka State Office with WWF-India for 14 years and currently serves as the Chief Naturalist, Jungle Lodges & Resorts Ltd. since 2006. He also serves concurrently as the Chief Trainer KEDB, Karnataka State. . He has been conferred the Carl Zeiss Award for Conservation in 2013.



*Academic Advisor*

## **Prof. Dr. N. Nandini**

Dr. Nandini a professor and the chairperson of Dept. of Environmental Science, Bangalore University (Retd.). She has a teaching and research experience spanning 30 years. In 2008, As an active member of the Biodiversity Management Committee (BMC), Dr. Nandini has documented Bengaluru's biodiversity for its first People's Biodiversity Register (PBR). 11 years after the PBR submission, she has been again invited on the new board constituted by the BBMP in 2021.



*Academic Advisor*

## **Dr. Bitapi Sinha**

Dr. Bitapi Sinha as faculty in the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) has been involved in nature interpretation, conservation education and wildlife tourism since 1993. Her interests include low-cost planning and development of interpretive facilities, understanding the attitudes of tourists and benefit of wildlife tourism to the community living around the protected areas. She has developed nature interpretive facilities in India and Bangladesh along with training guides for visitor management in protected areas.





*Leadership Coach & Technical advisor*

## **Vinay Sirsi**

A leader with a unique blend of experiences, from serving as a pilot with the IAF, a mountaineer, an outdoor educator, risk management consultant and a serial entrepreneur. With a Masters in Outdoor Education Vinay is a Certified Professional Facilitator & Coach. His outdoor resume as a Mountaineering Field Instructor (NOLS), Wilderness Medicine Faculty (WMI) has allowed him to work with teams in diverse environments from the silicon valley to Ivy league business schools. He has served on the boards of several industry bodies including the AEE, ATOAI & WEA that work across hospitality, tourism & skill development sectors. He brings to TNS a laser-like focus on strategy & scale.

*Advisor*

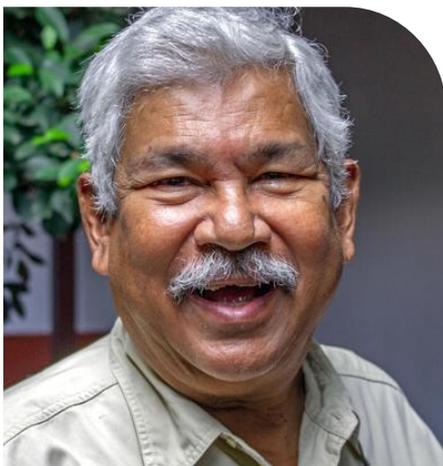
## **Gayatri Raghwa**

Gayatri Raghwa joined UNEP in early 2019 as UNEP's sole environmental education consultant based in India. She launched the Tide Turners Challenge in India and focuses on higher education work. As of mid-2021 Gayatri is in the process of setting up the India Green University Network. She has ensured the dissemination of Earth School (where India is second to the USA in terms of participation) and supported UNEP initiatives such as the Little Book of Green Nudges and the Race to Zero. A teacher by training, with 22 years of experience at college and school levels in India, Gayatri also spent 15 years raising the profile of environmental education in the UAE.



*Advisor*

## **Sandeep Chakrabarti**



In the late 1970s, Sandeep became a passionate trekker, exploring the Himalayas through numerous planned and rugged expeditions. Professionally, Sandeep advanced rapidly through leadership roles at prestigious companies including Nerolac, Singer, the Oberoi Hotels, Stan Chart and AT&T, where he eventually retired early as Vice President of Marketing. He founded "Outrigger," an adventure tourism initiative that introduced many enthusiasts to the joys of camping, angling and other outdoor activities along the Cauvery River. His work there was instrumental in advancing conservation and research efforts to protect the iconic Mahseer fish and its habitat within the Cauvery basin.

# OUR SUPPORT TEAM



**Suchi Govindarajan**



**Lavanya Raju**



**Chandra Sekhar Bandi**



**Poornima Kannan**



**Chandrashekar Koira**



**Ram Dayal Vaishnav**



**Anupama Mohan**



**Kamakshi Murthy**



**Anukriti Sharma**

## Government Associations

ANNUAL REPORT | 2024-25



## Industry Partners



## Knowledge Partners



## Support





# our partners

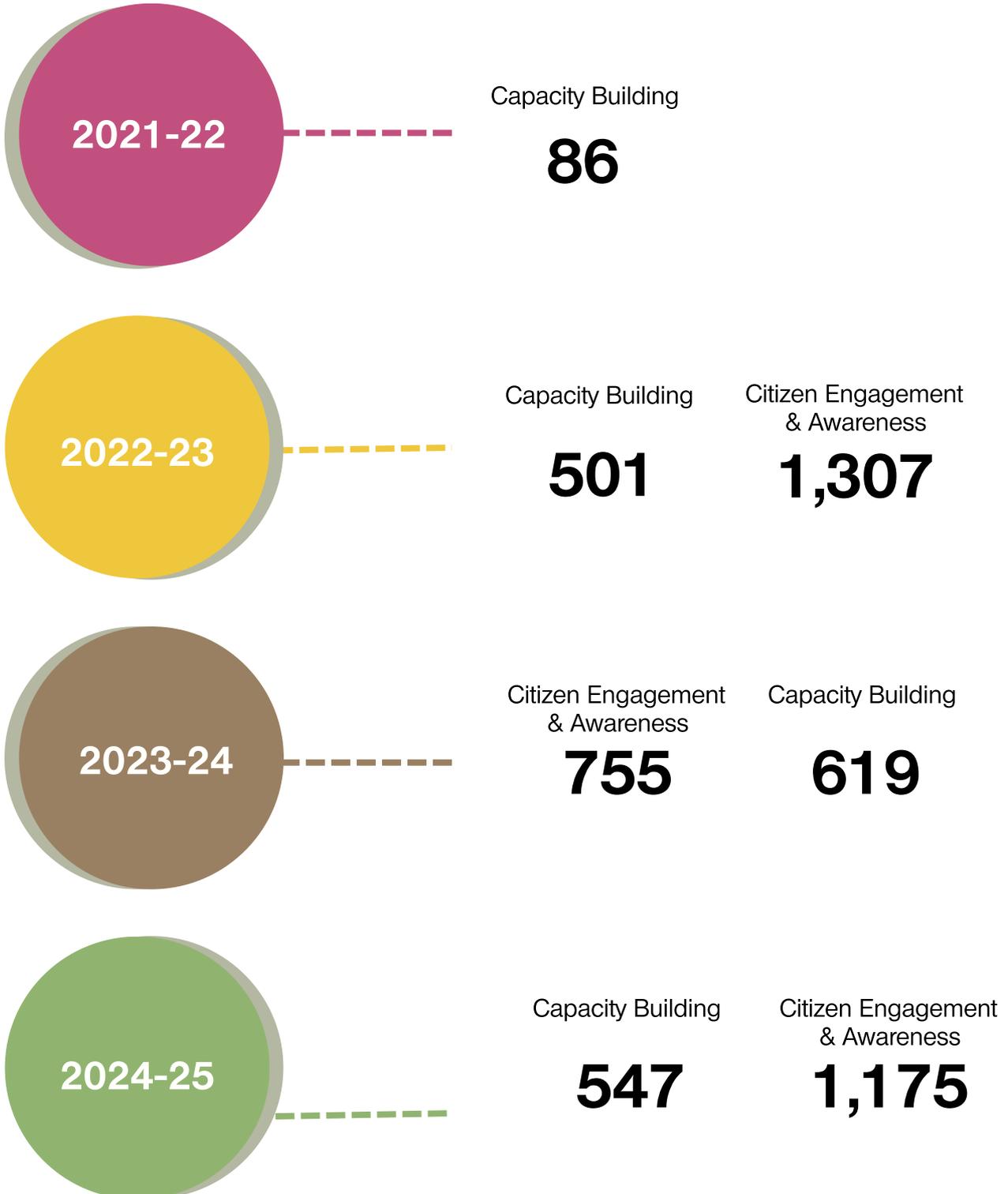
A close-up photograph of a person's hands. The left hand holds a black magnifying glass, focusing its lens on a small, spherical, brown, spiky object held in the right hand. The background is a blurred natural setting. A semi-transparent olive-green banner is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the text 'Impact Report' in white.

# Impact Report

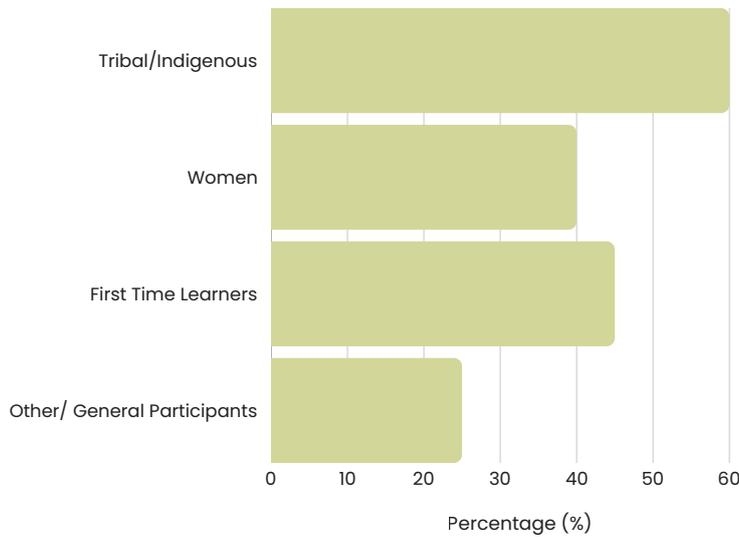
# IMPACT SO FAR (2021-2025)

**2021-2025  
lives touched:**

**4990**

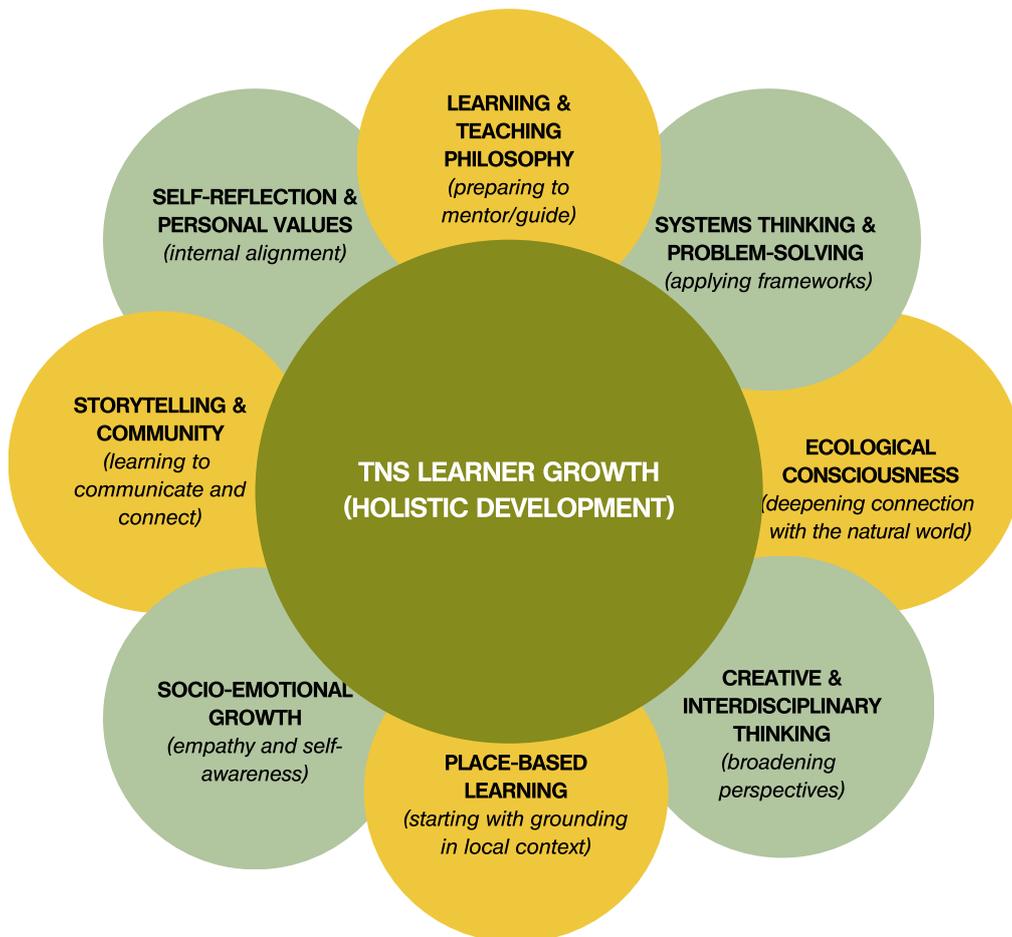


# Demographic Breakdown

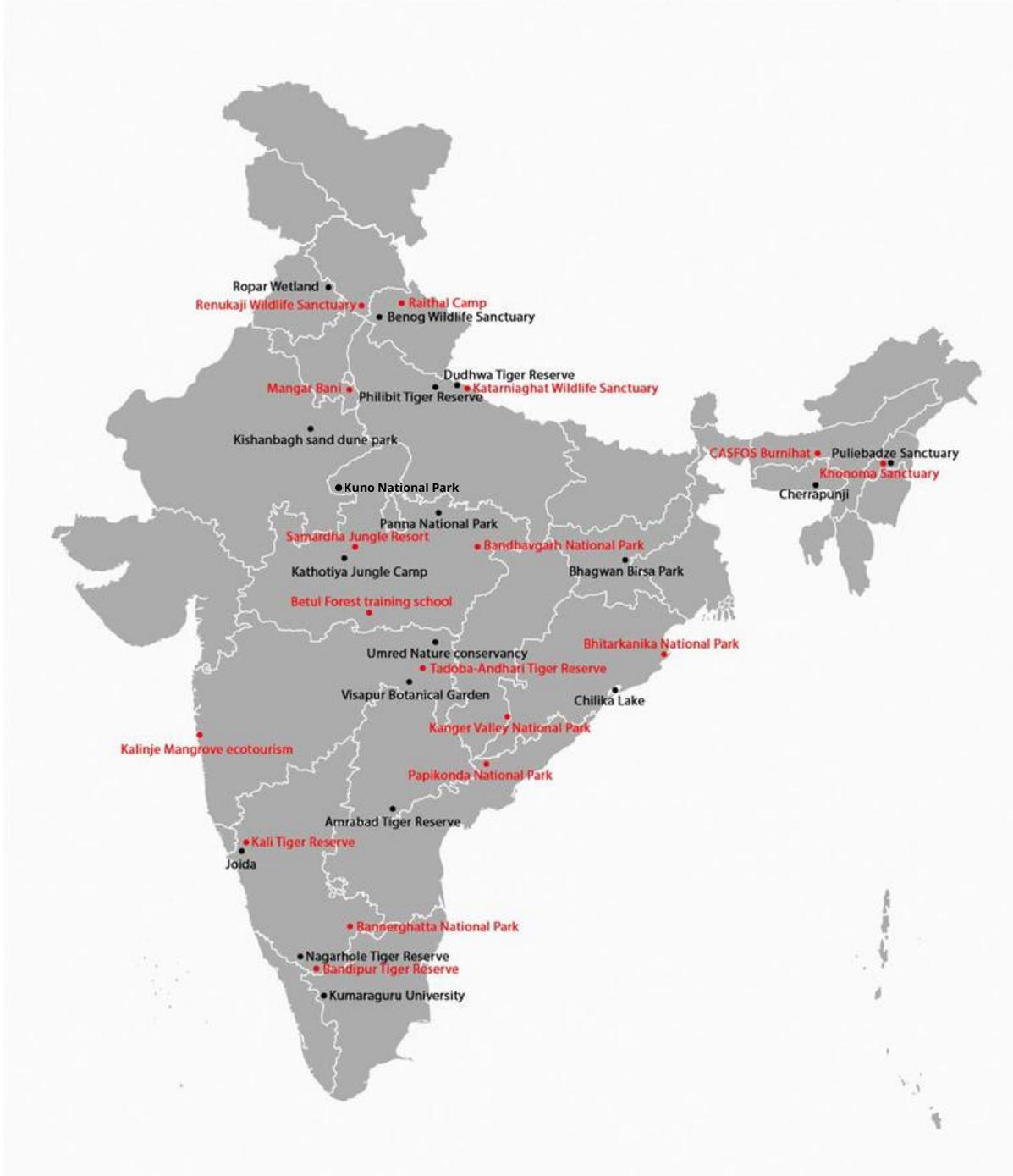


*(These segments may have some overlap in reality, but this visualization presents each category independently for clarity)*

# Dimensions of Growth through The Naturalist School’s Learning Journey



# OUR WORK SO FAR



**National  
Parks**



**Tiger  
Reserves**



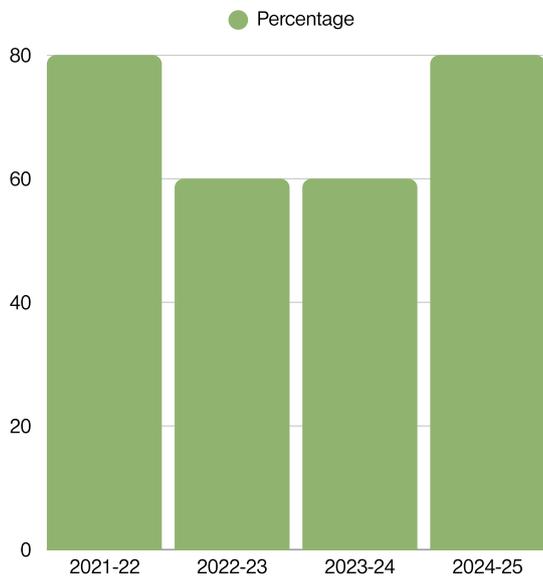
**Wildlife  
Sanctuaries**



**Schools &  
Universities**

# Employment & Livelihood Outcomes

Here is a year-wise breakdown of employment outcomes:



On average, 70% of our program participants have gone on to secure meaningful employment or livelihood opportunities in nature education, eco-tourism, or related fields.

These outcomes reflect the growing relevance and impact of our programs in equipping individuals with the skills and mindset needed for alternative, sustainability-focused careers.

## Chandrapur District, Maharashtra

At Shradhaye Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee Botanical Garden, Visapur

Local youth: 17 women + 3 men

Age: 21 – 45 years

Nature Interpretation course (9 months)

Employed since Sept 2023



Average Salary (per head)

11,018  
INR

Economy (per month)

1,32,221  
INR

Community Economy (18 months)

44,07,375  
INR

## Gwalior Chambal region, Madhya Pradesh

### Kuno National Park

20 Village Youth

Age: 21 – 45 years

Eco Guide Course (1 week)

Employed since One year



Average Salary  
(per head)

23,270  
INR

Economy  
(per month)

2,09,438  
INR

Community  
Economy  
(18 months)

37,69,884  
INR

## Kandamar, Chhattisgarh

### Kanger Valley National Park

20 local women

Age: 21 – 45 years

Eco Guide Course (1 week)

Employed since Two years



Average Salary  
(per head)

20,714  
INR

Economy  
(per month)

5,13,459  
INR

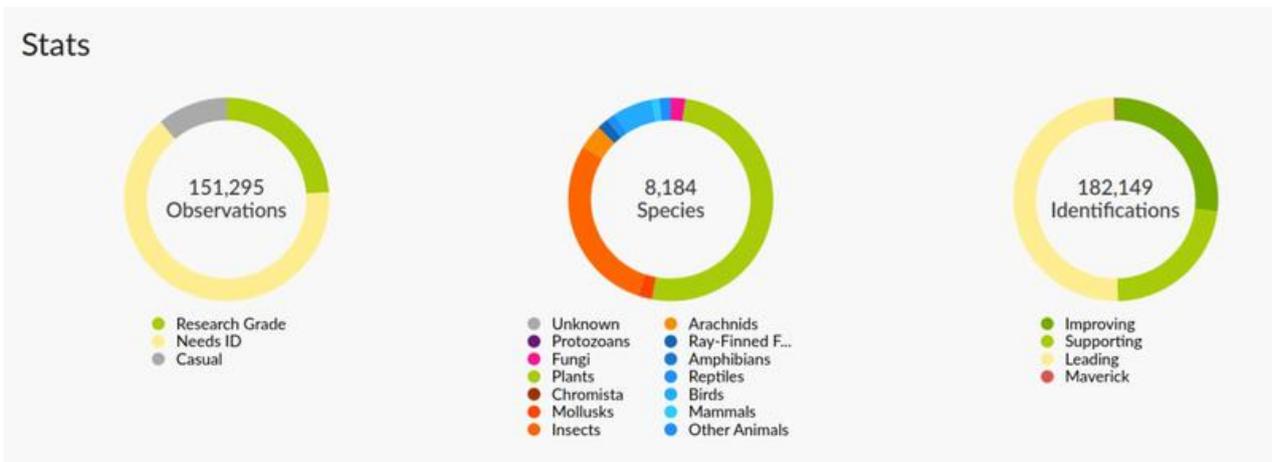
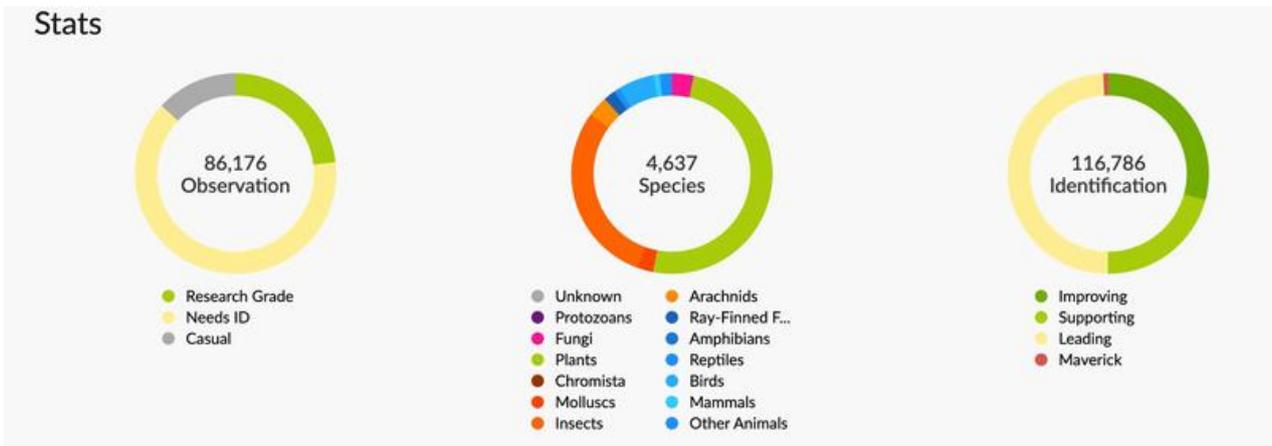
Community  
Economy  
(2 years)

1,23,20,287  
INR

# CITY NATURE CHALLENGE (CNC)

Since 2023, The Naturalist School has been instrumental in anchoring and scaling the City Nature Challenge across India. What began with localised efforts has grown into a nationwide movement, thanks to TNS's leadership in outreach, training and volunteer mobilisation.

The school has built systems for citizen participation in biodiversity documentation across over 30 cities. It also played a key role in aligning institutions and partners to strengthen the CNC ecosystem. TNS's early groundwork has positioned India as a vibrant contributor to this global urban biodiversity initiative.



# Print Media



## About 30 Indian cities to compete in a global City Nature Challenge

**UDBHAVI BALAKRISHNA**  
BENGALURU, DHNS

Over 30 Indian cities will compete in a global City Nature Challenge to become the city with the most recorded observations of nature.

From April 28 to May 1, participants from nearly 30 cities across India, including Bengaluru, Mumbai, Hyderabad, and Delhi, will join nearly 480 cities from across the world in a friendly competition to explore urban biodiversity and create a resource bank in the process.

The Naturalist School, the Bombay Natural History Society, and World Wide Fund for Nature-India have partnered to lead the event in Indian cities.

Priya Venkatesh, founder of The Naturalist School, said that, from April 28 to May 1, participants across cities will record observations in nature, and from May 2 to May 7, experts will identify what was recorded.

“The idea is to encourage more people to click pictures of nature that goes beyond just trees and birds. Anything in nature with any evidence of life is something that can be documented,” she said.

To participate in the challenge, one needs to download the iNaturalist application on their phones, click pictures of any elements of nature around them, and upload them onto the application. “Bengaluru participants can register for free on an Eventbrite link here so they can attend bioblitz events held at various locations to collaboratively record observations,” she added.

Photographs must be clicked, dated and geotagged between the four days of the challenge, although one can continue to upload the images until May 7.

“Using the application requires some training, which is provided to registered volunteers by The Naturalist School virtually and in-person in Bengaluru, Delhi and Mumbai. These volunteers can then go on to assist participants in using the application to upload their observations,” said Priya.

She added that over 60 volunteers have already registered and have undergone training in Bengaluru.

Once verified, these observations can be accessed by researchers and conservationists from across the world to further conservation efforts.

**Deccan Herald**  
**February 2023**

# Program Benefits

## For The Participants

**Place-Based Learning**

Understand and connect with their own ecosystems and cultures

**Career Pathways & Certification**

Access to jobs in ecotourism, interpretation, conservation education

Government-aligned certification improves employability.

Boosts confidence, communication and leadership

**Personal Empowerment**

Validates indigenous and local knowledge as part of formal learning

Teaches resilience, teamwork, nature-connectedness and reflective thinking.

**Life Skills & Wellness**

## For clients/funders/donors

**Measurable, Visible Impact**

Tangible outcomes like jobs created, ecotourism revenue, conservation stories

**Alignment with Sustainability Goals**

Can be tracked and reported through metrics and visual storytelling

Directly supports biodiversity, livelihood and education (SDGs 4, 13, 15)

**Community-Level Systems Change**

Supports systemic transformation through local leadership and knowledge revival.

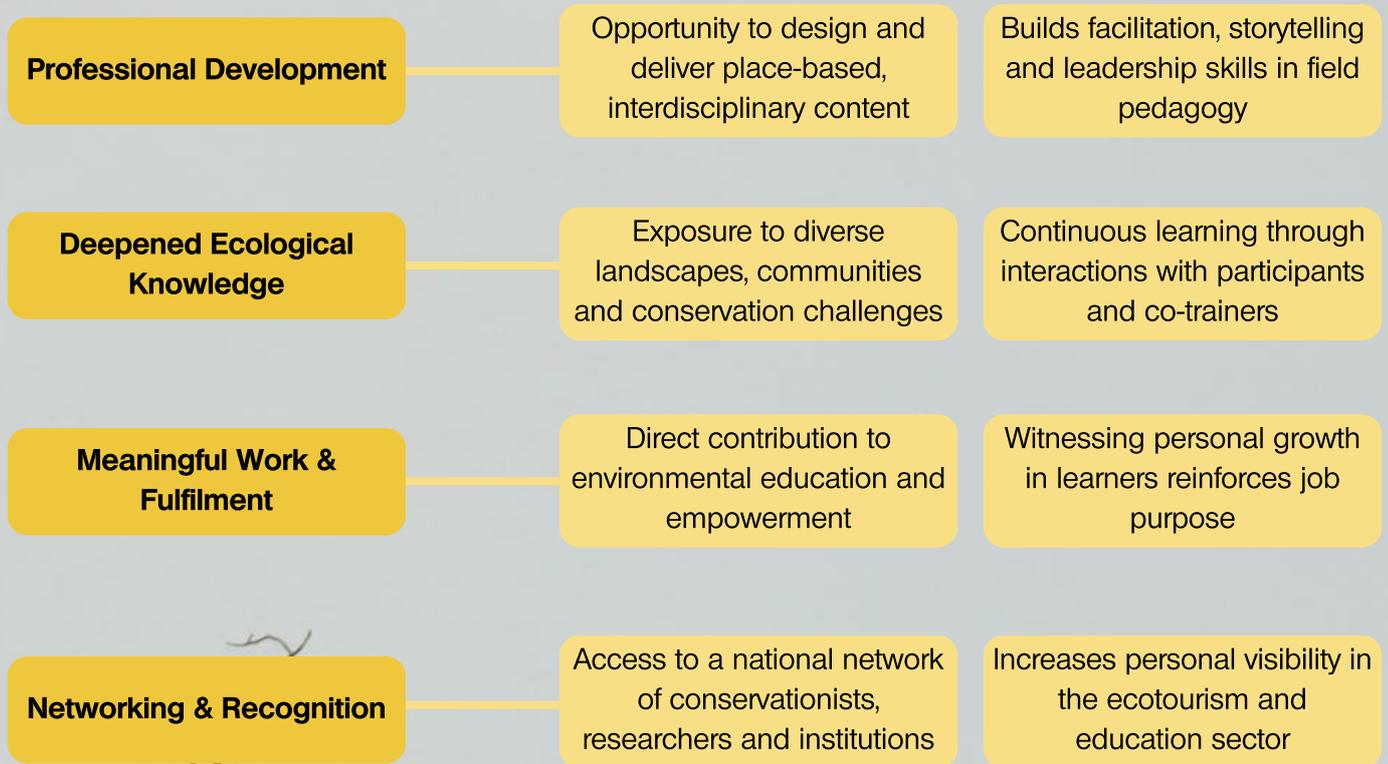
**Scalable, Replicable Model**

programs can be scaled across states, with flexibility for demographic/landscape.

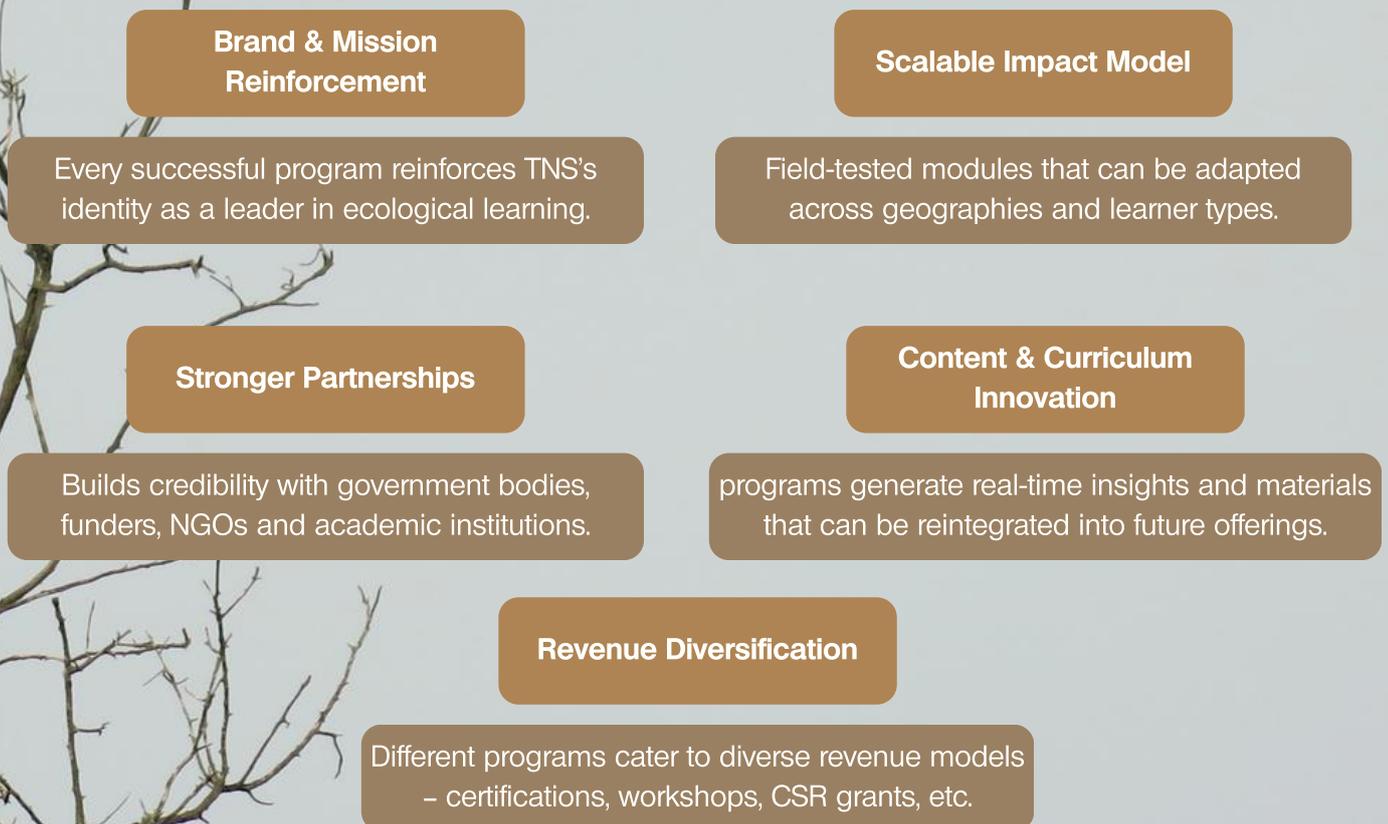
**Story-Driven Brand Equity**

Funders benefit from authentic, field-rooted narratives they can showcase

## For Trainers / Employees (Facilitators, Mentors, Field Experts)



## For The Organisation (TNS Itself)



# Testimonials



The Naturalist School offers an incredible space to slow down, observe, and truly connect with nature. I completed their Citizen Naturalist Course in 2023 and it was a deeply enriching experience. The sessions were beautifully designed—blending ecology, field-based learning, reflection, and community building. I truly enjoyed Nature Journaling and the Bird watching sessions. The facilitators are not just knowledgeable, but deeply passionate which is very rare. This course has changed the way I walk through a forest, observe a tree, or listen to birdsong. Whether you're an educator, nature lover, or simply curious, this is a course that will stay with you long after it ends. Highly recommended!

**Mukur Ganguly**

Attending the Naturalist Training at The Naturalist School, Benog Tibba, has been a truly eye-opening experience. The program offers deep insights into the natural world and equips you with the knowledge, skills, and tools needed to become an expert nature guide. Beyond just training, it emphasizes the importance of conservation, ethics, and awareness - key values to bring into every nature walk.

I highly recommend the Nature Guide course to anyone looking to connect more deeply with nature and discover more about themselves along the way.

Thank you, The Naturalist School.

**Akshay Pawaskar**

Naturalist school is the best place to explore the nuances of nature. I have done my Citizen Naturalist Course in 2023 and learnt about different aspects of nature including native flora and fauna, ecological systems etc. The Highlight of the course was a field trip where we get to learn and witness about all the behavior of living creatures and their coexistence. The courses provided by naturalist school is not only for Biologists or environmentalists but also for people who appreciate nature.

Highly recommended!

**Shalini S**

I recently went through the naturalist training with The Naturalist school, the entire training was divided into two parts of 5 days of each. Firstly it made each one of us to fall in love with the nature. Gave us different lens to see the natural world around us along with the tools to learn and explore by ourselves.

The training left a huge impact on how we see nature, and the love to protect and also make people fall in love with the nature. The facilitators designed this program to make the most.

**Shravan Ragi**

I did the Citizen Naturalist course a couple of years ago, and it was a transformative experience. I now look at the world around me very differently. The folks at TNS are extremely committed, knowledgeable and enthusiastic, and I continue to randomly badger TNS for help with ids, or to chat about events etc. So grateful to have made their acquaintance and done this course.

**Shreya Rao**

# Best Wishes

I am delighted that the third batch of 'certified nature guides' is graduating today from The Naturalist School, a unique institution imparting necessary knowledge and skills to interested men and women in nature guiding.

India is a country with an unparalleled natural wealth, but not many can appreciate it. The students graduating today will fill this gap by making the people appreciate the intricate beauty of nature through their interpretation abilities. I wish the graduates a very enjoyable and successful career.

**- Dhananjai Mojan, IFS, PCCF & HOFF**  
Principal Chief Conservator of Forests,  
Head of Forest Force, Uttarakhand

Congratulations to all of you for successfully completing this unique course. I'm sorry that i'm unable to make it today due to some urgent work. You guys are going to be torchbearers of nature conservation and play a key role in help protecting this beautiful planet of ours. Nature has to be conserved at any cost and we should ensure that not even one god made species should get extinct. My best wishes to you all for a responsible and exciting career ahead. Special thanks to Priya and her wonderful team for all their hardwork. God bless you all!

**- Sanjai Mohan , IFS, PCCF & HOFF (Retd.) - KARNATAKA**

Very pleased to know of the Graduating of another batch of Nature Guides. Humans have yet to learn much more of the functioning of nature in which human influences plays a vital role whether it be in building up or in breaking down the system.

This is where the necessity of understanding nature and interpreting them to the common people in the form of Nature Guides has become so important. Good wishes and hope for future collaborative efforts are conveyed through this message to all.

Best wishes

**Mr. Supongnuksi, IFS**  
Chief Conservator of Forest & Member Secretary  
Nagaland State Biodiversity Board



We , every living being including all human beings are ' nature'. Our nature is nature's property. Preserving nature is therefore Our GOD given responsibility.

You graduates are the privileged few who have now discovered how precious is our new role in whatever career we pursue. You are the advocates and change makers by spreading the wisdom of nature to those around you, every day, uncover the grandeur and beauty that we are missing to experience. Nature is waiting for you to become their guardians. This certificate is the VISA and the authorization to act with courage and creativity and spread the little wonders of wilderness and natural habitats and what people can learn from. Wishing each one of you to speak and act with courage about the wonders you will discover in your coming days.

Good luck.

### **Vasu**

Today is a celebration of your hard work and commitment to understanding and protecting our natural world. As you step into your role as Certified Nature Guides, remember that you have the power to make a difference.

May your passion for nature ignite the hearts of others and inspire a new generation of environmental stewards. Though I can't be there in person, I'm sending my warmest congratulations!

**- Srinivasa Reddy, IFS**

Today should be a memorable day in your lives and I am sure you will cherish this day for many years. Understanding Nature and The Web of Life is a life long journey: please do enjoy it. It will change your perspective of how we should take care of our only Home. Planet Earth.

My best wishes will always be with you. The Natural World I inherited is today being passed on to you, the new generation. Treasure it.

**Sandeep Chakrabarti, The Mahseer Man**





## Message

Dear Participants,

~~I wish I could be there in your midst,~~  
I wish I could have been personally present in your midst but since I can't I have asked Priya to convey my ~~to~~ heartiest congratulations to all of you on completion of this training.

I have been witness to the hard work of several people that has gone into making this training a reality. But as they say, it is not only the destination but also the journey to the destination that teach us important lessons.

I can say with confidence that for Priya ~~this~~ and her team it is sheer tenacity and quiet determination that ~~has~~ saw them through times when ~~to~~ others would have given up.

It is with great pleasure that I congratulate all of you once again for having successfully completed this carefully curated program on the little known wonders of nature.

My best wishes.

# Acknowledgements

Our heartfelt gratitude to all our partners, collaborators, and supporters who have strengthened The Naturalist School's journey through their trust and commitment.

We extend special thanks to our donors – TVS, KSDL, Prestine and Orchid Laminates – whose support has made our programs and initiatives possible.

We are also deeply thankful to Mr. Sandeep Chakrabarti for his generous individual contribution.

To our core team, advisors, volunteers, and extended community – your dedication continues to shape and nurture the spirit of this movement.



# Future Vision

At The Naturalist School, our vision is to nurture a society where every citizen carries within them a strong Naturalist Quotient—an instinctive awareness, appreciation, and responsibility towards the natural world. We believe that nature is not just to be visited, but to be understood, felt, and protected.

In the years ahead, we will strengthen our efforts to empower nature guides and naturalists to be changemakers—professionals who inspire curiosity, build connections, and spark transformation with every guest they encounter. Through training, research, and immersive experiences, we will cultivate interpreters of the natural world who bring stories of ecology, culture, and conservation alive.

Our vision is to create a ripple effect: every naturalist touching the lives of individuals, every individual carrying forward the values of stewardship, and together, shaping a more sensitive and sustainable relationship with nature. By expanding our reach and deepening our impact, The Naturalist School will continue to be a catalyst for a world where humans and the natural world thrive in harmony.



THE  
**Naturalist**  
SCHOOL

**“We believe in the  
ripple effect of every  
trained naturalist.”**

*Be Part of the Movement  
Support our mission by enrolling,  
donating, or volunteering today!*

**The Naturalist School**

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