THE WHY AND HOW OF BENGALURU'S BIODIVERSITY

A project supported by a grant from Bengaluru Sustainability Forum, through their Small Grants Programme.
Covering critical issues of our cities, day after day, connecting the dots, contextualizing problems, identifying solutions – and sharing this knowledge with millions – has had an impact. We are grateful that the Bengaluru Sustainability Forum (BSF) saw value and meaning in this citizen-centric work that Oorvani Foundation does, and supported this collaborative project between Citizen Matters and Mongabay.

Starting from the early months of 2020-21, even as the pandemic situation became serious, we started the project to explore multiple aspects of Bengaluru’s biodiversity.

The project included publishing a series of stories on the topic for the general public, workshop for journalists, resource kits and events to engage young people.

**GRANT ACTIVITIES**

**Publications**

1. [Bengaluru’s lost crop varieties: How we are missing out on local, nutritious food](#)
2. [Body to protect Bengaluru’s biodiversity revived, but can it help?](#)
3. [Unchecked tree loss is wiping out the Slender Loris from Bengaluru](#)
4. [Bengaluru’s “other” water bodies shelter rich biodiversity, but are fast vanishing](#)
5. [Local residents suffer as Bengaluru lakes no longer offer food, livelihoods](#)
6. [Livelihoods dependent on Bengaluru lakes can be protected, here’s how](#)
7. [City of blinding lights: Artificial light disturbs nature’s processes in Bengaluru](#)
8. [Bengaluru’s yes to Hesaraghatta film-city means a no to the Lesser Florican](#)
9. [The secret life of solitary bees](#)
10. [Real estate developers face few hurdles in getting environment clearance](#)
11. [Superficial studies and low transparency make Env Clearance process pointless](#)
12. [Biodiversity loss from mega real estate projects: What is missing, what can be done?](#)

**Multimedia Stories (videos and photos)**

1. [The secret life of solitary bees](#) by Arati Kumar Rao

“...there is hope for our cities, and for solitary bees. Urbanisation per se does not mean lowered solitary bee biodiversity. In fact, urban sprawl, with a green corridor that leads in from the rural or natural landscape till the city center, could foster a high degree of biodiversity if urban planners and landscapers built cities with adequate food resources and ground- and cavity-nesting sites for pollinators in mind.”

Watch the video [here](#). Also, see all photographs published in the article.
2. Series on lakes, livelihoods, and biodiversity by Mohit M Rao

“Bengaluru’s loss of green spaces and water bodies has been the subject of reams of research and hours of debate. The loss of livelihoods associated with the city’s once-thriving biodiversity, however, seems confined to margins of memory. The city’s trees, parks, lakes and open spaces, after all, do not just have aesthetic or recreational values but also once offered livelihood benefits.”

Watch the video here. All photographs are available in the article.

A to Z guide of Bengaluru’s lakes

Urban spaces do not find much mention in conversations around biodiversity. But our cities are home to an abundance of biodiversity that we witness almost every day. Through a series of illustrations, we attempt to capture the complex layers of Bengaluru’s many lakes that are home to many beings great and small. They also highlight the harms and degradation that affect the lakes and surroundings adversely. Presenting the A-Z of Bengaluru’s lakes, with illustrations by Labonie Roy.

View and read the illustrated guide here.

Bengaluru Biodiversity Charche, a day-long event on all things biodiversity

Bengaluru Biodiversity Charche, organised on Saturday, September 18th, was a day-long celebration of the biodiversity of the garden city. It brought together thinkers, activists, journalists and students to explore questions surrounding urban biodiversity, threats faced by various species and how these issues could be brought to light.

The event is a culmination of the work Citizen Matters did on the topic over the past year, in collaboration with the environment and conservation magazine Mongabay-India, supported by grants from the Bengaluru Sustainability Forum.
Veteran environmental activist Bittu Sahgal delivered the keynote address at the event, to an audience of school students. Bittu is the founder of Sanctuary Nature Foundation, a non-profit conservation organisation that works on environmental policy, advocacy and habitat management. He spoke of the clock running out for older generations as they leave the environment in the care of the young. He urged youngsters to take active interest in the issues surrounding the environment, and to voice their concerns and push for change.

He was joined by Usha Ramaiah, who was the first Karnataka woman to scale a Himalayan peak, at the age of 22. She is a founder-member of the Karnataka Mountaineering Association. Usha shared the same concerns around the degradation of the environment, adding that little had been done to remedy the impacts. She also struck a note of hope, reiterating Bittu’s message that change is possible with committed youngsters sharing their vision for the future.

The full event report can be found here.

Bittu Sahgal & Usha Ramaiah speaking to an audience of school students during the Bengaluru Biodiversity Charche 2021.

Numbers: 60 on Zoom and 40 on Facebook Live.

Reporting on Bengaluru’s Biodiversity

1. From Rio to Bengaluru: Why should we report on urban biodiversity?

A Reporters’ Workshop was organised on Saturday, September 18, 2021, where Mongabay-India Managing Editor S. Gopikrishna Warrier discussed with India’s environment journalists and urban reporters, about why it is necessary for the media to talk about urban biodiversity and bring it back into the mainstream reporting.
Gopikrishna said that threats to urban biodiversity have accelerated in recent years due to the rapid growth of cities, the resultant concretisation of spaces, and the loss of water bodies and other ecosystems that sustained various flora and fauna.

The session shed light on why the reporting on biodiversity must not be limited to threats to endangered species or to prominent issues affecting small pockets in metros but bring to light the unique biodiversity every city and town has within its boundaries, which is often neglected in public discourse.

Watch the full video of the workshop [here](#).

Numbers: 158 registrations and 75 participants.

Views on YouTube: 155

2. Urban Biodiversity Manuals

At the session for journalists on why and how to report on urban biodiversity held during the Bengaluru Biodiversity Charche, on September 18, we released two urban biodiversity manuals:

- For journalists reporting on urban biodiversity
- For scientists communicating with journalists on the topic

These manuals have been shared with reporters who attended the session and are publicly available to download on the Citizen Matters site.

Watch the full video of the release [here](#).

3. Engaging young Bengalurueans with biodiversity

Interactive session between students and journalists

In this session, a panel of prominent environment journalists interacted with school students who had participated in the ‘Biodiversity in my Bengaluru backyard’ contest. Journalists Mohit Rao, Apekshita Varshney, Bhanu Sridharan and Deepa Mohan shared their experiences. The session was moderated by Vasanthi Hariprakash.

Watch the full video of the session [here](#).

4. Biodiversity in my Bengaluru Backyard

Citizen Matters organised a contest on “Biodiversity in my Bengaluru Backyard”, in partnership with Mongabay-India and ADDA. We invited students of grades 9-12 residing in Bengaluru to submit entries under the following two categories:

- Category 1: Report submission of 600-800 words with 1-3 photographs. Research, talk to experts and residents and refer to relevant studies and data related to the species you come across.

- Category 2: Instagram post (a series of photographs, videos, or graphics designed by you with a caption of (approximately 2,000 characters)
The observations were to be made in one’s garden, balcony, or a nearby nature spot – garden, park, lake, or any open space. Or even inside the house!

The five best entries receive prizes worth Rs 1000 in each category, sponsored by ADDA.

Numbers: 125 registrations and 65 submissions. 35 shortlisted and 5 best entries selected in each category.

The Jury

Mahinn Ali Khan
Brand & Communication Expert

Abi Tamim Vanak
Faculty at ATREE, Honorary Professor, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

Sangeetha Kadur
Wildlife artist

Vena Kapoor
Education and Public Engagement, Nature Conservation Foundation

The best entries

Category 1 – Article

1. Diya Agrawal, Grade 10, National Public School
2. Anirudh Gopinath, Grade 9, Legacy School Bangalore
3. Pranav Naresh, Grade 11, The Valley School
4. Rakshan Pandian, Grade 10, Inventre Academy
5. Tarini Kumar, Grade 11, The Valley School

Category 2 – Instagram

1. Rohan Jacob, Grade 11, Canadian International School
2. Shradha Suman, Grade 12, Silicon Valley PU College
3. Aarushi Mahesh, Grade 9, The International School of Bangalore
4. Surya Turaga, Grade 11, Inventre Academy
5. Anvita Trivedi, Grade 10, Prakriya Green Wisdom School

Watch the full video of the session here.
REFLECTION

Outcome and Impact

- Increased awareness about the importance of urban diversity of Bengaluru
- Positive engagement with young Bengalureans and increased awareness of surroundings
- Documentation serves as a resource for policy and action groups, activists and researchers

Some examples

1. In its bi-weekly email newsletter, Environment Justice Matters Vol 2. Issue 17, the Environment Support Group featured the three-part series written by Bhanu Sridharan.

   **A Flawed Environmental Clearance Process**

   [Image of buildings and sky]

   Mongabay India and Citizen Matters investigate how superficial the environmental clearance process is for medium and large scale real estate projects in Bengaluru.

2. Jhatkaa.org cites Bengaluru’s yes to Hesaraghatta film-city means a no to the Lesser Florican in its online petition Save the last remaining grassland of Bengaluru written to former Chief Minister of Karnataka, B. S. Yediyurappa and Karnataka State Wildlife Board asking to (a) Revoke the decision to build a film city in Hesaraghatta and (b) Declare Hesaraghatta as a conservation reserve project. This campaign was run across social media including Instagram.
3. Article on Hesaraghatta grasslands reaches the UN Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity. The article is tweeted by @UNBiodiversity.
Challenges and Lessons Learnt

- Due to the unprecedented health crisis, our original plan of ground reporting had to be reworked.
- Not enough awareness of Bengaluru’s biodiversity made the subject a difficult one for people to grasp.
- There is eagerness and receptivity among Bengalureans to learn about biodiversity and engage with environmental issues at the local level. So, we are hopeful that the work we have done so far has helped inform people about the city’s biodiversity.

Future Plans and Sustainability

- We hope to continue doing stories that uncover issues that rarely have been talked about.
- We were happy with the response from the participants of the contest. We’d like to explore working more with the young population in schools and colleges.
- We feel that it is worth making the *Bengaluru Biodiversity Charche* an annual event to bring people together on the topic.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

The table lists the expenses incurred as part of the project.

Payments cleared

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<th>Description</th>
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<td>Writers &amp; Contributors</td>
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<td>Event organisation</td>
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Total expenses = 5,15,000
Received from BSF = 4,00,000 (April 29, 2020)

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