


We fellows at RHATC were all curious to know who is Neethi Mahesh and about her work in river ecosystem. The journey in wildlife conservation is more fascinating when you can follow your passion. Neethi Mahesh is one such person who was fascinated by rivers and followed her passion to conserve the habitat. Her wildlife journey started with tracking a King Cobra from Agumbe and by mapping all the headwaters of Sita Nadi. For many a wildlife conservationist, one of the favourite places would be Agumbe, and so is ours.

The radio telemetry work at ARRS (Agumbe Rainforest Research Station) on King Cobra led an opportunity to track a male, named M2 by exploring the evergreen forest inside a protected area where she first got interested in freshwater ecosystem. The streams and waterfalls in the habitat fascinated her to consider freshwater ecosystem in the long-term to understand and study the river system in future.

Neethi had an opportunity to study streams and river ecology where the project focused on mapping the headwaters of Sita Nadi. During the monsoon she looked at the small fishes, the flux of migratory fishes from the



*GUARDING THE RIVER CAUVERY IN COORG:
NEETHI'S LOVE FOR STREAMS AND PASSION
TO SAVE RIPARIAN HABITAT*



hill stream without knowing their taxonomy. Migration of fishes caught her attention and she wanted to know more about large fishes found downstream which migrated from the upstream of the river. Her first schooling of migration of mahseer was by the tribals from that region. Mahseer are good indicators of the healthy river ecosystem. Since this was inside the protected area the fishes are safe but as the stream flows down where there are destructive fishing practices and various threats such as dynamite fishing, poison fishing, pollution, and others.

The restoration, conservation, collaboration, and awareness of riparian habitats:

The conservation effort to protect the riparian habitats comes with a lot of challenges as the rivers are being highly polluted and there is less effort to save such habitats. The use of native flora is crucial for restoration of riverine habitats. Involving local communities matters in conserving the habitat in future. Neethi is working with the local Jenu Kuruba (honey-collector) tribals and their knowledge on local native species is tremendous in identifying indigenous riparian trees which is also well documented. The tribals help in restoring the riparian flora of the Cauvery River in Dubare Reserve Forest, Kodagu District, Karnataka.



more happy moment to cherish as it was our first team assignment from first batch of RHATC which had reached one of the main stakeholders which is the forest department which gives us hope in conservation and importance of science communication. We would like to thank Dr. Sanjay Molur and Dr. Rajeev Raghavan for all their support on the mahseer article.

The assessment on riparian habitat was carried out in the same region which involved conservation efforts in the field to collect seeds. The collected seeds are then stored in seed bank and later used in nursery through which she supplies saplings to the forest department and citizens groups for plantation drives. Neethi is presently working hard to save the riparian habitat of river Cauvery along with other stakeholders which is important in conservation.

In this new era of technology, Neethi has developed a River Watch app to monitor water quality along the river Cauvery. This work is ongoing in collaboration with government schools through training workshops for teachers and students on the use of water quality monitoring kits. The work on education and awareness to local school children will help install love to save the streams and her unwavering work on

bridging the knowledge gap with local communities and other stakeholders is amazing. A field guide of riparian flora and restoration methods has been published to aid plantation activities in the area.

Neethi being from garden and electronic city of India, Bengaluru, is passionate to save the king of the waters and her work on spatial ecology of Mahseer which is a pilot project will provide a baseline data for others to do more research. We Fellows were fascinated to know about her work on riparian habitat. We were all happy she used the Zoo's Print November edition cover page in her presentation, which is about Mahseer.

She also mentioned that the article had reached the DCF of Cauvery for discussing on hybridization of Mahseer, one

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