

## A gathering of ecologists\*

The Student Meet on Ecology, Evolution and Conservation Science was first (and last!) held in 2008. Considering its narrow focus it was shaped into the national-level 'Young Ecologists Talk and Interact' (YETI) conference to enable interactions across institutions. YETI was first held in 2009 and next, last year, in Bangalore. YETI 2010 saw a mix of young (and not-so-young!) ecologists and conservationists. The youngest participant was a class X girl, Angela Bhutia, who talked about the Clean Up project carried out in the Khangchendzonga National Park area by her team at the Government Secondary School, Sikkim.

The conference had workshops, discussions, poster and oral presentations by the students, and plenary talks by well-known conservationists/ecologists. Ravi Chellam (Wildlife Conservation Society-India Program) highlighted the key events that guided conservation in India and acknowledged the prominent contributors. Barry R. Noon (Colorado State University, USA) showcased the work on the Northern spotted owl in long-term study regions in Washington, Oregon and California, spread over the owl's geographical distribution area. Student presentations were from diverse subjects such as the role of bioindicators, effect of pollution, feeding ecology, land-use patterns, habitat fragmentation, and attitude of humans to wildlife.

The panel discussion, questioning the role of biologists in conservation and communication, drew challenging feedback from the audience, a part of which held the view that researchers must communicate. It was also noted that it is not necessary that biologists should work for conservation per se when working in the field or laboratory is an end in itself.

\*A report on 'Young Ecologists Talk and Interact (YETI) 2010' conference held at the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore during 5-7 October 2010.



Youngest ecologist, Angela Bhutia next to her poster (courtesy: Ashok K. Mallik, IISc).

The need of science in conservation was examined and a consensus that science does play a role in monitoring conservation efforts and in making advances in surveys was reached. The role of social sciences and sociologists was also stressed upon with examples of the Chipko and Narmada movements.

A working kit of skills and information, necessary for the prospective ecologist, was presented. This included talks on fund raising; data collection; role played by natural history collections in taxonomy and systematics, biogeography, observational studies and conservation; use of stable isotopes, especially in ecology; basic gear requirements for ecologists in the field ([www.tinyurl.com/fieldgear](http://www.tinyurl.com/fieldgear)); use of photography as a tool in describing new species, rediscovering a species, recording usual and unusual behaviour and documenting flight patterns; use of camera traps ([www.trailcampro.com](http://www.trailcampro.com)); and use of microscopy and videography.

Sound is used by animals to communicate in the night, around corners, through long distances, through vegetation, or simply when the visual signal is absent. In the workshop on bioacoustics, fundamentals of acoustics and the choice of

the recorders based on specific needs and the organism under study was explained. (For more information, see: <http://www.ibac.info/links.html>.) Ethical issues surrounding publishing were raised by Vidyanand Nanjundiah (Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bangalore), former editor of the *Journal of Biosciences*. He said that the reasons for scientific misconduct could be ignorance, competitiveness and poor surveillance and response mechanisms.

The YETI conference is unique as it is organized by the students for the students and continues to provide participants with information on job opportunities, grants and fellowships for work in conservation science through an online forum. The YETI website (<http://www.meetyeti.in/>) also has a plethora of information on funding agencies, institutions and journals in the field of ecology, and conservation science. YETI 2011 will be held in Guwahati; for follow up, see the website or write to [meet.yeti@gmail.com](mailto:meet.yeti@gmail.com).

**Richa Malhotra\*** and **Geethanjali Monto**, (*S. Ramaseshan Fellows*), Current Science Association, Bangalore, India.

\*e-mail: [rchmalhotra@gmail.com](mailto:rchmalhotra@gmail.com)