

the PSL is an integrative conservation effort, including knowledge-based adaptive (wildlife) management policies and actions, landscape approach, promotion of stronger measures for wildlife protection and law enforcement, better understanding and management of human-wildlife conflict and promotion of awareness and education for wildlife conservation.

In addition to the Snow Leopard, other species which are expected to benefit from this project are Asiatic Ibex, Tibetan Argali, Ladakh Urial, Chiru, Takin, Serow and Musk Deer.

The PSL was modelled at a national conference (held in Ladakh during early July 2006), which was the culmination point of a two-year series of state-level conferences organized in the above-mentioned five states<sup>3</sup>. The concept of the PSL is an outcome of the collaborative efforts of the Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF), the International Snow Leopard Trust (ISTL), the Ministry of Environment and Forests (Government of India), WII, the State Governments, the Snow Leopard Network, local communities and certain NGOs<sup>3</sup>.

1. <http://pib.nic.in/release/release.asp?relid=46855>, accessed on 22 January 2009.
2. <http://dSPACE.dial.pipex.com/agarman/snowlep.htm>, accessed on 23 January 2009.
3. <http://www.snowleopardnetwork.org/newsblog/?p=15>, accessed on 23 January 2009.

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## MEETING REPORT

### Vibrant palaeobotany\*

The conference on plant life through the ages was inaugurated by D. K. Pande (Exploration, Oil & Natural Gas Corporation Limited). N. C. Mehrotra (BSIP, Lucknow) welcomed the guests. A. K. Srivastava (BSIP) introduced the themes of the conference. One of the senior-most palaeobotanists of the country, R. N. Lakhanpal was also present. The conference was presided over by Ashok Sahni (Punjab University, Chandigarh). He delivered the presidential address on 'Indian raft: On collision course'. De-Yuan Hong (Beijing, China) was part of the Chinese delegation.

There were more than 140 research contributions from 160 delegates representing different colleges, universities, research institutions and industrial organizations, and UNESCO South Asia Office and US-India Educational Foundation, New Delhi. The contributions were organized under 15 themes, and there were eight oral and two poster sessions.

In view of the importance of palaeobotanical research in the exploration of fossil fuel, i.e. coal and oil, a special session on fossil fuel was organized, which was presided over by Robert Spicer (Open University, Keynes, UK). Representatives of the two big industrial organizations, Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited (ONGC) and Western Coalfields Limited (WCL) came together to present their views on the relevance of

palaeobotany in fossil-fuel. D. C. Garg (WCL) inaugurated the session and D. K. Bhowmik (Keshav Dev Malaviya Institute of Petroleum Exploration, ONGC) discussed the application of palynology in dating the oil-bearing strata. The keynote addresses delivered by the delegates of ONGC and WCL on the significance of palaeobotany in the exploration of coal bed methane and hydrocarbon potentiality in India illustrated that palaeobotany will play a dynamic role in fossil-fuel industry. Spicer discussed the significance of plant fossils in climatic interpretation and the need to protect the fossils in natural condition.

The conference dealt with the classic aspects of palaeobotany, i.e. morphology, taxonomy, origin, evolution, survival, extinction and continuation of plant characteristics through their extinct and extant representatives. The conference also discussed the antiquity of life, significance of coal-forming vegetation, coal characteristics, giant gymnosperms of Mesozoic, emergence and evolution of angiosperms, Quaternary vegetation and forest history, palynology and palynostratigraphy and different sedimentary basins of India, micropalaeontology and sea-level changes, and palaeoethnobotany and dendrochronology.

Themes were also aligned to include the modern and relevant topics of the competitive world of science like biotechnological advancement, insect-plant interactions, microbial association and factors responsible for the disturbance of present and past ecosystem dynamics.

Manju Banerjee (Calcutta University) presided over the valedictory session and

highlighted the immense potentiality of palaeobotany.

The conference organizers sought the reactions from palaeobotanists, experts of related disciplines, academicians and research-oriented industries on the relevance of palaeobotany in the modern context. Encouraging responses were received to make palaeobotany exciting in the modern world of science.

Contributions on different aspects of palaeobotany highlighted the vibrant and dynamic characters of palaeobotanical researches in tune with the modern disciplines of science.

The participation of ONGC and WCL signifies the role of palaeobotany in prognostication and hypothecation of coal bed methane in different coalfields and in understanding the hydrocarbon potentiality in the oil-bearing strata.

The records of well-preserved plant fossils with different morphotypes and relationship advocate the need to undertake field work and to discover plant fossils from new areas. The morphotaxonomical study of plant fossils is useful to understand the evolution, biostratigraphy and climatic interference of past and present floras. It was suggested to provide technical knowledge to protect and preserve the fossils and sites in different parts of the country. The suggestion to have university-institute interactive programmes for the dissemination of palaeobotanical knowledge at university and college levels was appreciated.

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\*A report on the Conference on Plant Life Through the Ages organized by the Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeobotany, Lucknow and the Palaeobotanical Society during 16-17 November 2008 at Lucknow.