



Young Ecologists Talk and Interact (YETI)

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In 2008, inspired by faculty members and scientists, a group of students from Bangalore decided to create a unique opportunity for student researchers to meet and discuss their work with contemporaries. The Student's Meet on Ecology, Evolution and Conservation Science (SMEECS '08), drew participants from eight institutions in and around Bangalore resulting in discussions of a larger event, spanning the entire country. Subsequently, in September 2009, the conference, newly christened 'Young Ecologists Talk and Interact' (or YETI) was held at the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore.

YETI 2009

With the help of institutions across Bangalore and Mysore, the organisers put together an interesting mix of plenary talks and workshops. Dr. Raghavendra Gadagkar, Professor, Centre for Ecological Sciences, IISc, spoke about his work on paper wasps and also provided valuable inputs on making the transition from being students to doing independent research, Dr. Charudutt Mishra, Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF), discussed conservation efforts in the Trans Himalaya, Dr. Kavita Isvaran, CES, IISc, provided a framework on answering scientific queries and Dr. Geoff Hyde, NCBS, gave an engrossing talk on the importance of communicating science in layman's language. The plenaries were followed by student presentations ranging from behavioural and evolutionary ecology to conservation biology in human-dominated landscapes. Across three days, about 80 oral and poster presentations were made by the students on field and laboratory research. Intensive poster sessions and adequate breaks between sessions helped facilitate informal interaction between the participants. The event also included

non-technical presentations by researchers and naturalists.

Shashank Dalvi, Kaati Trust, Pune, transported the audience to Arunachal Pradesh with evocative images of the area's vibrant birdlife. Vardhan Patankar and Elrika D'Souza, NCF, showed 'Mermaids of the Indian Waters', a video presentation about their encounters with dugongs in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Gowri Shankar, Agumbe Rainforest Research Station, described the secret life of the king cobra. YETI also hosted the first Narendra Babu Memorial Lecture, an annual series to motivate young researchers and provide them with an opportunity to interact with invited speakers. The lecture on factoring science into tiger conservation efforts in India was delivered by eminent biologist and conservationist, Dr. Ullas Karanth.

The overwhelming response by students to YETI 2009 has been indicative of the success of the event. In keeping with YETI's

ideals of being an inclusive forum of learning, a formal post-conference online survey was conducted. Results from the survey suggested that 80 per cent of the students did not have any form of institutional support whatsoever to attend an event like YETI, yet a majority of the respondents wanted YETI to be an annual event, and also participate in organising it too! All these factors collectively strengthen the need for YETI as a forum in the future to bring more students together to showcase their work and facilitate mutual learning.

GOING BEYOND YETI 2009

Although YETI 2009 was organised and hosted mostly by students from Bangalore-based institutions, the organisers look forward to a more diverse team for 2010. YETI 2010 is tentatively scheduled for the first week of October at the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore. Visit the YETI website (www.meetyeti.in) for more details, or send an email to: meet.yeti@gmail.com for more details on how you can help and participate. 🐾



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