

RISING STARS OF CONSERVATION

From the smallest insects to the largest mammals, we profile ten of India's most promising scholars working on interesting research projects in their chosen fields of specialisation.

TEXT: RIDHIMA SOLANKI





Gaurav Vashistha

DESIGNATION: Doctoral Student, Department of Environmental studies, University of Delhi.

INTERESTS: Reptiles

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INSPIRATION FOR RESEARCH: Gaurav's fascination for wildlife goes way back to his childhood when he used to wrap a sand boa (Domuhi - one with two mouths) around his neck and pose like Lord Shiva. He's not sure when exactly his innocent game partner inspired him towards conservation at large!



Gaurav is currently studying Gharials at the Gharial National Chambal Sanctuary and Katarniaghat Wildlife sanctuary. He is investigating genetic diversity of the small populations of Gharial that are isolated to small patches and are not directly interacting, hence keeping the gene flow limited by collecting samples from hatched egg shells (a non-invasive sampling method) during the hatching season in May/June each year. His idea is to look upon the intra- and inter-population diversity in different Gharial populations in two different riverine ecosystems. Since the gene flow is restricted, he plans to assess the present gene pool of populations and proffer solutions and structure to conservation efforts. According to Gaurav, most conservation initiatives on Gharials today do not include genetics whereas molecular tools are being widely used in conserving threatened species. Hence his study will shed light on an entirely different aspect in Gharial conservation. He also undertakes community awareness program along with the research work.

Gaurav's field work was a daunting task because of Elephant (Katarniaghat) and Mugger Crocodiles, which made accessing the nesting islands very difficult. The high iron content of water was also a big challenge for a researcher working in these regions. The storage of samples is difficult due to non-availability of required boxes as well as melting of ice due to high temperature of the region.

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