

Caring for our co-inhabitants - on the campus and beyond!

Preface to the Special Issue on Biodiversity

There are several reasons why it gives me great pleasure to introduce the following ten excellent articles relating to biodiversity. First, they are the result of a seminar organized by the students of the Indian Institute of Science (more specifically, a student group called *Prasthutha*), students who were, and I hope continue to be, deeply concerned about the quality of life on our campus, quality of life defined in the broadest sense. Second, taken together, these articles convey at once, both the grandeur of our biodiversity and also the need to care for it. We at the Indian Institute of Science have the good fortune of inheriting a large, well-preserved, nearly natural habitat spanning about 180 hectares. It therefore becomes our duty (both for moral and practical reasons) to understand and care for this rich heritage. And that is precisely the message of the papers in this volume. Third, the *Journal of the Indian Institute of Science* has come forward to publish these articles, a gesture I find most appropriate and encouraging.

This volume opens with a moving, almost poetic, call by Rohini Balakrishnan, to listen to the voices of diversity. Rohini studies crickets and grasshoppers and while she was previously largely busy with sophisticated laboratory experiments, her move to IISc has transformed her into a field biologist—such is the call of our campus! The IISc campus has always been well known for its bird fauna, with over a hundred species having been recorded over the years. Indeed it is a favourite haunt of the Bird Watchers Club of Bangalore. Surendra Varma has spent many years and trained many young students in the use of statistical techniques for obtaining rigorous estimates of bird diversity. The second paper in this volume describes some of these efforts. The flora of our campus is no less impressive, with over 112 species of trees, 265 species of herbs and 45 species of grasses—we undoubtedly have one of the richest patches of plant diversity in Bangalore. In the third paper in this volume, Suresh and Bhat document the flora of the campus. These three articles along with a previously published paper on the ants of the campus (Rastogi, N., Nair, P., Kolatkar, M., William, H. and Gadagkar, R. Ant fauna of the Indian Institute of Science Campus - Survey and some preliminary observations, *Journal of the Indian Institute of Science*, 1997, 77, 133–140), are among the first attempts to scientifically document the flora and fauna of the campus. I hope these articles will help spawn more efforts of a similar kind.

The next four articles take us beyond the campus and provide useful information on mapping of forests based on their biodiversity to identify priority sites for conservation efforts (Shivaraj *et al.*), richness of the aquatic insect fauna in the streams of Western Ghats (Sivaramakrishnan *et al.*), human influence on tree communities in the Western Ghats (Achar *et al.*) and spatial patterns in the diversity of lichens on a country-wide scale (Negi).

Finally, the last three papers address more general issues. Ravikanth *et al.* discuss the conservation status of forests in India, Renee Borges discusses several conceptual issues concerning forest fragmentation and Sukumar discusses the relevance of climate and ecosystem change for conservation of biodiversity in India.

I take this opportunity to congratulate the student group *Prasthutha* for taking the initiative in organising the seminar at which most of these papers were presented and all the authors for contributing to this special issue of the *Journal of the Indian Institute of Science*. It is my fond hope that at least some of the readers of this volume will heed Rohini Balakrishnan's call to take walks on our campus and savour the voices of our co-inhabitants!

Centre for Ecological Sciences
Indian Institute of Science
Bangalore, 560012, India.
ragh@ces.iisc.ernet.in
<http://ces.iisc.ernet.in/hpg/ragh>

Raghavendra Gadagkar
Guest Editor