PASSIONATE
PEOPLE
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PROJECTS

Annual Report 2014

The Mohamed bin Zayed SPECIES CONSERVATION FUND
The Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund provides financial support to species conservation projects worldwide.

In 2014 the Fund supported 185 projects in 70 different countries with more than $1.5m.

Since inception the Fund has distributed more than $12m to over 1,200 projects across the globe.
The Fund has helped unearth some amazing tales the world over. From tracking down an elusive cat in the wild and snow-capped mountains of the Himalayas, to securing the future of a sea bird in the Caribbean and recording the first sightings for decades of a rare dragonfly in the aridity of the Arabian Peninsula. Though the landscapes may be many miles apart and of widely differing complexity, the tales share many characteristics—resolve, resilience, innovation and curiosity.
The lush forest and wetlands along India’s vast Godavari River basin in Andhra Pradesh host several endangered and threatened species that are key to its unique ecosystem, yet little exploration of its rich biodiversity has been carried out because of political instability. For local conservation biologist Ashwin Naidu the situation was untenable.

“On India’s east coast, only a few intact Fishing cat populations are known to exist, and these are subject to heavy habitat loss, persecution and poaching by humans,” explained Ashwin. “Moreover, drainage from human settlements that lead into the freshwater are essentially polluting Fishing cat habitat.”

Ashwin launched a systematic camera-trap survey to document the occurrence and activity patterns of Fishing cats in the river basin and mangrove forests. The resulting data was used to GIS map potential Fishing cat habitats and document the human threats to the area.

Ashwin then used the data to build trust among local people. First he trained frontline forest staff and talented conservation-oriented ‘animal trackers’ at the local forest department. Then he educated locals and school children in nearby towns on the need for Fishing cat habitat conservation.

“Local communities here possess an innate conservation philosophy, and I wanted to work with them to harness that towards measurable conservation action.”

There were challenges, including a shortage of finance to cover boat travel costs and obtaining permits for camera-based surveys inside protected areas. These were overcome by sourcing additional finance from donors encouraged by the Fund’s initial support.

Backed by a Fund grant, Ashwin began his campaign with a focus on the Endangered Fishing cat (Prionailurus viverrinus) which lives within wetland areas and feeds on freshwater fish. The Fishing cat’s future here looked bleak as the mangrove forests are increasingly threatened by unsustainable development and human impact.

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The camera trapping and GIS mapping yielded evidence of Fishing cats in over 20 locations including the southernmost records of the species in India. A volunteer base of 20 local people now work on Fishing cat conservation and the team provides the local forest department with substantial data and maps, and a banner has been produced in the local language to campaign for dedicated Fishing cat protected areas. Education programmes are conducted in schools, and for people living near Fishing cat territories.

And Ashwin’s project team has grown with the newcomers learning how to set up, and monitor wildlife cameras outside protected areas.
www.speciesconservation.org