

Sikkim University paid tribute to Dr. Ajith Kumar, renowned wildlife biologist

Dr. Ajith Kumar, India's foremost wildlife biologist and educator, sadly passed away on 1st March 2025 (at the age of 72) while guiding students at Pachmarhi, Satpura Tiger Reserve. In order to express deep sorrow and extend condolences as well as to pay tribute to Dr. Kumar's invaluable contributions to academia and wildlife conservation, Sikkim University organized a prayer meeting in his honour on 4th March 2025. The prayer session was attended by Prof. (Dr.) Jyoti Prakash Tamang, Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor, faculty members and scholars of the Department of Zoology, Sikkim University and fellows from Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE). The scientific community gathered reflected on his life, achievements, and the profound impact Dr. Ajith had on students, colleagues and wildlife conservation.

During the prayer meeting, Prof. Bhoj K. Acharya from Department of Zoology, who was closely associated with Dr. Ajith for the past 23 years, expressed deep sorrow over the loss of his mentor, guide and role model. He highlighted Dr. Kumar's unwavering dedication to research and his profound influence on conservation biology. Dr. Ajith Kumar was one of the foremost conservation biologists and was globally recognized for his pioneering research on primates, especially the Lion-tailed Macaque. After completing his PhD from Cambridge University, he joined the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) as a scientist, where he played a key role in establishing the institute. Later, he joined the Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON) in Coimbatore and worked there for several years. Additionally, Dr. Kumar was instrumental in establishing the Master's Program in Wildlife Biology and Conservation at the National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS) in Bangalore in 2004, where he served as the first Director until 2020. Through this program, he mentored and trained a new generation of conservation scientists, shaping the future of wildlife research in India.

While at SACON, he served as a principal investigator in the "Carrying Capacity Study of the Teesta River Basin in Sikkim," collaborating with Prof. Tamang, the current Vice Chancellor of Sikkim University. He also worked on several projects in the Himalayan region, mentoring numerous students from Sikkim. In 2018, he was an eminent speaker at the National Conference organized by the Department of Zoology, Sikkim University, and later served as an advisory committee member in the NMHS-funded collaborative project implemented by Sikkim University and ATREE from 2018 to 2021. Many attendees fondly recalled his role in

introducing them to wildlife biology and his continued guidance as a mentor until his last breath.

Dr. Kumar had a close association with the Vice-Chancellor since 2002, as both were part of the same multi-institutional research project. He paid a heartfelt tribute, acknowledging Dr. Kumar's exceptional career and the inspiration he provided to students and researchers. The Vice-Chancellor fondly recalled Dr. Kumar's generosity, mentorship, and passion for wildlife conservation, emphasizing the importance of carrying forward his legacy and ensuring that his work continues to influence future generations.

As a mark of respect, two minutes of silence was observed, allowing everyone present to reflect on Dr. Kumar's remarkable life and contributions. Later, Dr Sunita Pradhan from ATREE, and Dr. Basundhara Chettri and Kishor Sharma from Sikkim University also shared their experiences working with Dr. Ajith Kumar highlighting him as a distinguished scientist, an able educator as well as wonderful human being.

May the departed soul rest in eternal peace.

