

Teaching and research

Balaram¹ in his editorial has talked about the connection between teaching and research. He has mentioned how ‘many centrally supported research institutes, which often have only one or two disciplines, have been declared as “deemed” universities’. This is a new phenomenon and is getting enforced with period. I wonder how a scientist, who gets a Ph D degree in a very narrow topic awarded by such ‘deemed Universities’, without getting exposed to sufficient course work, can have enough knowledge to direct a team consisting of various subsets of dis-

ciplines. An argument is put forward that research institutes often hold periodical in-house seminars, which are educative. It may be reminded here that a seminar is not a substitute for class lecture. However, I am also conscious of the fact that all institutes of higher education are not to the mark. The challenge lies in improving them.

Another point worth mentioning is the lack of uniformity among various institutes of higher education. A competitive mediocrity is slowly permeating in many institutes. A uniform bare minimum

course requirement for a Ph D student must be there in all institutes. Mediocrity is not to be encouraged in the garb of autonomy.

1. Balaram, P., *Curr. Sci.*, 2009, **97**, 5–6.

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Relevance of school geography

Geography is introduced in school as one of the subjects or part of social studies; the others being history and civics. The dictionary¹ defines geography as the science of the earth’s surface, physical features, divisions, climate, products, populations, etc. A review of geography studied from III to X standard reveals that the scope of school geography is vast. So a student learns about the universe, solar system, planets, stars and satellites, and different features and aspects of his/her district, state and country. Geography is also concerned with the formation of the earth, its structure, physiographic studies and various processes operating on the earth, the atmosphere, hydrosphere introducing students to winds, rain, temperature, etc. In human geography a student learns about population, literacy and related factors. Geography also includes study of natural resources and their distribution, applications and formation.

Thus, indirectly the students are introduced to earth, atmospheric and planetary sciences right from their primary school. Unfortunately, geography gains

little popularity amongst the student fraternity.

Teaching geography by maintaining student interest is a crucial task. There are several reasons for this. One major reason is the status of this subject. A student is usually expected to concentrate more on mathematics and science due to which, geography unknowingly gets a lower priority.

The second reason is the scarcity of time. The scope of the topics in geography and the academic schedule is a big contrast. For example, geography in III standard covers the introduction of planets, climate, agriculture, natural resources and much more. To make this interesting for kids of that age requires more time than what the academic calendar gives. As a result, many interesting topics appear boring.

With due regards to the respective authorities, another reason is the teaching methodology (though it faces many constraints). Lessons like winds, agriculture or map reading if taught plainly obviously become boring. However, students do like geography when the teacher takes

the topics beyond the books. Though many schools are now coming up with innovative ways like projects, presentations, group activity, etc., the conditions still need to be improved.

Even at high school level students are unaware that there exist sciences like geology, climatology and oceanography, parts of which have already been taught as a part of school geography. These sciences can be pursued as careers with excellent job and research opportunities.

Geography can be a career option just like mathematics and science. There are software applications even in these sciences, which the students can take up at higher levels of education.

Geography needs to be made more interesting at school level and its connections to other fields clearly emphasized.

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Corrigendum: mammal persistence and abundance in tropical rainforest remnants in the southern Western Ghats, India

Regarding our article¹ published in *Current Science*, we would like to record the following clarifications and updated information in the published appendix 2 on the occurrence and abundance of mammal

species in five sites in rainforests of the Indira Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary (presently Anamalai Tiger Reserve) and four rainforest fragments on the Valparai Plateau.

Although the footnote to appendix 2 indicated that records marked as ‘p[^]’ are from Kumar *et al.*², the corresponding entries in the table were provided only in the ‘overall’ columns and not for indi-

Table 1. Corrected and updated entries (in bold) on occurrence of mammal species in rainforests within the Indira Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary and in fragments on the Valparai Plateau, Anamalai hills

| Species | Site | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | IGWLS | | | | | Overall | Private fragments | | | | Overall |
| | AG | AN | IYAK | KS | VBMS | | KO | PA | PU | TF | |
| Brown mongoose <i>Herpestes fuscus</i> | – | p[^] | p[*] | p[^] | p[^] | p[*] | – | – | p[^] | – | p[^] |
| Brown palm civet <i>Paradoxurus jerdoni</i> | p[*] | p[^] | p[^] | p[^] | p[^] | p[*] | p[^] | p[^] | p[^] | p[^] | p[^] |
| Otter species (unidentified) | – | – | – | p | p | p | – | – | – | – | – |
| Indian porcupine <i>Hystrix indica</i> | p | p[*] | p | p | p | p | p[*] | p[*] | p[*] | p | p |
| Leopard cat <i>Prionailurus bengalensis</i> | – | p[^] | – | p[^] | p[*] | p[*] | – | – | p[*] | – | p[*] |
| Nilgiri marten <i>Martes gwatkinsii</i> | – | p[^] | p[*] | – | – | p[*] | – | – | – | – | – |
| Small Indian civet <i>Viverricula indica</i> | – | p[^] | p[^] | p[^] | p[^] | p[^] | – | – | p[^] | – | p[^] |
| Stripe-necked mongoose <i>Herpestes vitticollis</i> | – | p[^] | p[^] | 2 | 1 | 3 | – | – | p[^] | – | p[^] |

Site codes: IGWLS, Indira Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary; AG, Anaigundi; AN, Andiparai; IYAK, Iyerpadi–Akkamalai Complex; KS, Karian Shola; VBMS, Varagaliar–Manamboli complex; KO, Korangumudi; PA, Pannimade; PU, Puthuthottam; TF, Tata Finley.

p, Species that were recorded through indirect evidence (e.g., tracks, calls) on transects.

p*, Species not recorded on transects but incidentally encountered in a site by the authors and/or other observers.

p[^], Species not recorded during the study¹ but reported from that site by Kumar *et al.*².

vidual sites. We now provide additional information, pertaining chiefly to the small carnivores, from the same source² in terms of occurrence of species in individual sites in Table 1.

We also wish to note that records marked by a p*, noted as species incidentally encountered in a site, while correct, include observations of the present authors corroborated by observations of other colleagues, students, and experienced local field assistants working in the area in most cases. In the case of two species, however, occurrence reported in the article was based exclusively on information from colleagues: Travancore flying squirrel *Petinomys fuscocapillus* in sites KS (by S. Ganesan), and in site TF (by R. Nandini), and Nilgiri marten *Martes gwatkinsii* in site AN (M. Ananda Kumar). We are grateful to these colleagues and others for sharing their occurrence information.

Appendix 2 in the article also lists the Eurasian otter (*Lutra lutra*). As field identification of otters without proper photographs is difficult, especially in conditions of poor visibility along forest streams, we are now of the opinion that this record is better treated as ‘otter species (unidentified)’ until confirmed by photographs. From other locations in the wider landscape, there are recent records of what are probably smooth-coated otter *Lutra perspicillata* (reservoirs, pers. obs.), and small-clawed otter *Aonyx cinereus*, the latter confirmed through camera-trap photographs (N. Prakash and K. Varma).

Finally, the Indian porcupine *Hystrix indica* was recorded recently from site PU as well (November 2008, road-kill, pers. obs.), thereby marking it as a species occurring in all the study fragments.

The corrections and updated entries are provided in Table 1; information on other

species in appendix 2 of the article remains correct to the best of our knowledge.

1. Sridhar, H., Raman, T. R. S. and Mudappa, D., *Curr. Sci.*, 2008, **94**, 748–757.
2. Kumar, A. *et al.*, Impact of rain forest fragmentation on small mammals and herpetofauna in the Western Ghats, south India. WII-USFWS collaborative project. Final report, Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun, 2002.

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Faculty recruitment in India

Sharma¹ has correctly stated that faculty members, whether in schools, colleges, or universities, must be capable and talented. They must also be interested in teaching and research. He also stated: ‘It has been amply written about and realized that the

way human resource (faculty) is recruited leaves much to be desired’.

I have wondered for long why do Indian institutions of higher education not recruit faculty members worldwide? Why must Indian students be condemned to being

educated only by Indian faculty members, in this age of globalized science and technology?

If we look at faculty members serving in the top institutions in USA, UK and other leading countries much admired