

Table 2. Geographical distribution of Kalinga awardees

No. of awardees (n = 65)	No. of countries	Country
1	12	A.R. Egypt, Armenia, Austria, Bangladesh, Czech Republic, Finland, Ghana, Nigeria, Philippines, Romania, Russia and Vietnam
2	4	Canada, F.R. Germany, Italy and Pakistan
3	1	Mexico
4	2	USSR and Venezuela
5	2	Brazil and India
6	1	France
8	1	USA
10	1	UK
Total	24	

developed countries in the Kalinga Prize list (9 of 10 are from developed countries: France (2), UK (4), USA (2) and Germany (1)). It can be concluded that the increased number of awardees, of late, from the developing countries seem to reflect the increased support to sci-

ence, generation of new knowledge and dissemination of scientific information.

Also, realizing the importance of public understanding of science, countries like China, which does not figure in the coveted list of Kalinga awardees (Table 2), has rightly proposed to double its

number of science communicators to four million by 2020 (ref. 5).

1. Jain, N. C., *Curr. Sci.*, 1993, **65**, 441–442.
2. Jain, N. C., *Curr. Sci.*, 1993, **66**, 618–620.
3. Kalinga Foundation Trust, <http://www.kalingafoundationtrust.com/website/kalinga-prize-for-the-popularization-of-science.htm>
4. UNESCO Kalinga Prize for the Popularization of Science; <http://www.unesco.org/science/psd/prizes/kalinga/kalinga2005.shtml>
5. Jie, D., China to double science communicators by 2020; <http://www.scidev.net/en/news/china-to-double-science-communicators-by-2020-1.html>

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Pulicat – threatened lake of the year 2010

Wetlands are important repositories of biodiversity; one such ecosystem is a lake. Along the east coast of India, three large lakes are situated, viz. the Pulicat Lake, the Kolleru Lake and the Chilika Lake – each of them is unique and rich in biodiversity. The Pulicat Lake is the second largest lake (720 sq km)¹ and the entire area is vast with brackish to saline water and extensive mud flats. The lake has three openings (Durgarajupatnam, Rayadurg and Pazhaverkadu) from the sea which play a vital role in its flora and fauna.



Nesting of Asian Openbilled storks

The history of the Pulicat has immense heritage value right from the 6th century² and its importance for waterbirds is widely recognized^{3,4}. It is identified as a potential Important Bird Area⁵ and as one of the coastal flyways used by a number of pelagic and coastal migrants, linking Point Calimere in Tamil Nadu with Chilika in Orissa⁶. The Pulicat Lake attracts large concentrations of waterbirds, significant among them being the Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber*, Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis*, Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala* and Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*. Apart from these large waterbirds, the Pulicat also draws several species of ducks, teals, gulls, terns and waders.

Sadly, due to increasing human population and hunger for land over the years, the need and care for this lake is drastically diminishing. Despite its ecological, economic, social and cultural importance, the Pulicat Lake is under serious pressure. The major threat is siltation and sandbar formation at the mouth of the lagoon which endangers the complete ecological balance of the area. The rivers Swarnamuki and Kalangi bring in enor-

mous quantities of water loaded with silt during the monsoon which drain into the Pulicat Lake. This phenomenon regularly occurs year after year and has turned the lake into extensive mudflats. Due to this, a large part of the lake becomes unproductive for fisheries and is available for shorter periods for the waterbirds' usage. The fast spreading *Prosopis juliflora* is another menace in the reserved forests of the islands in the lake; it is drastically replacing the unique vegetation of the southern tropical dry evergreen forest.

The Global Nature Fund has also declared the Pulicat Lake as threatened lake of the year 2010. There is an urgent need to conserve this waterlogged wealth before it fritters away. Evolving a technically sound and comprehensive approach with people's participation to preserve this natural treasure is essential. Habitat loss and alterations should be assessed as soon as possible after natural disasters and management strategies such as removal of silt deposition, opening of closed river mouths, prevention of soil erosion and maintenance of fresh-water discharge should be adopted to restore the habitat to its natural shape. 'Early

detection and rapid response' of habitat loss and alterations could prevent the loss of biodiversity.

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4. Kannan, V., Manakadan, R., Rao, P., Mohapatra, K. K., Sivakumar, S. and Santharam, V., *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.*, 2008, **105**, 162–180.
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6. Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C. and Inskipp, T., *Pocket Guide to the Birds of the Indian*

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Need for conservation of common sand boa (*Eryx conicus*) (Schneider 1801)

The common sand boa (*Eryx conicus*) species was found during a reptile survey in the riparian area of Ousteri Lake. The total area of lake spreads over 390 ha and its eastern portion stretches around 3 km, with a variety of natural vegetation as well as faunal diversity. The common sand boa is brilliant-coloured with short, thick body, keeled scales, rough tail and prominent, blotched pattern and average length of 35 cm. The overall colour of the common sand boa varies from yellowish-white to dark brown, with irregular spots of reddish brown to black forming an uneven chain down the back. They are short snakes with a rough tail and a square nose (Figure 1).

The riparian habitat and its associated diverse species represent an important

component in ecosystem management¹. The common sand boa is being threatened due to loss of habitat, fragmentation, hunting, trade in local and commercial markets, and human interference². These snakes have been listed under IUCN category as lower risk near threatened, but may become an endangered species³.

In spite of the flourishing pet trade, rumours that the snake is in demand for cancer research in Western countries has fuelled rampant trafficking (www.greenosai.org/.../34-sand-boa-facts-and-myths.html). Since the forests are well protected, the trappers and smugglers are targeting the farmlands where they are commonly found. The sand boas have been categorized under Schedule IV of

the Wildlife Protection Act. In India, capturing and involvement in any kind of trade of these reptiles is punishable under this Act (<http://www.greenosai.org/environment/diversity/34-sand-boa-facts-and-myths.html> downloaded on 2 November 2010). Preserving the reptiles of the Ousteri Lake area should be treated as a critical conservation goal. Habitat loss, illegal encroachment of agriculture, and poaching are the biggest threats to the common sand boas in the Ousteri Lake area. This study emphasizes that there is an urgent need to protect and conserve as well as create awareness among local people about common sand boas in and around Ousteri Lake.



Figure 1. Common sand boa (*Eryx conicus*).

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