

# **AMRITA NEELAKANTAN**

**Date of Birth:** 28 April 1985

**Nationality:** Indian

**09/2013 – Present: Graduate student at the Department of Ecology, Evolution & Environmental Biology, Columbia University (New York, U.S.A.)**

## **PREVIOUS WORK EXPERIENCE:**

### **09/2009 – 09/2011 Bombay Natural History Society, India: Advocacy Officer**

- Role: Advocacy Officer for Important Bird Areas (IBAs) by Bombay Natural History Society as Birdlife International partner organization.
- Responsibilities:
  - Support and implement advocacy initiatives through the Indian Bird Conservation Network.
  - Part of team collating monitoring data across all 466 IBAs.
  - A liaison with Ministry of Environment and Forests, part of government committees to aid and comment of natural spaces management.
- Results:
  - Case work resulted in stopping a steel plant and residential villa-complex in violation of Environment Impacts Assessment (EIA) legislation adjoining two wildlife sanctuaries.
  - Provided scientific background to long term activists to call for a stop to unplanned dams without cumulative and downstream impact assessments – biodiversity inputs for various cases.

### **04/2008 – 07/2009 World Wide Fund for Nature - India: Project Officer**

- Role: Program Officer for Trade & Investment project in Climate Change & Energy division at World Wide Fund for Nature – India (WWF-India).
- Responsibilities:
  - Initial role as a conservation management trainee was fruitful in learning the extent and scope of the organization's work.
  - Reports and co-ordination in topic based teams.
- Results:
  - Set up Monitoring and Evaluation protocol for High Altitude Wetlands project with teams in five Indian states.
  - Helped organize and followed up on internal multi country pre Copenhagen COP 15 workshops.

### **04/2007 – 04/2008 Frontier (U.K.), Forest Project Madagascar: Research Officer**

- Role: Head of Frontier Madagascar Forest project. Northern Madagascar.
- Responsibilities:
  - Responsible for the planning, execution and quality of scientific research and reports.
  - In charge of all staff (14 – 31): research officers (2 – 6), research assistants (10 – 18), expedition trainees (1 – 5) and project trainees (1 -2) on wilderness project.
  - Assessor for – Advanced & Intermediate Diplomas in Tropical Habitat Conservation (BTECs).
  - Primary liaison personnel with communities and government bodies.
- Results:
  - Provided in-field scientific and BTEC assessors training to new staff and volunteers. Medical Officer on site. Successful severe tropical storm evacuation of personnel and equipment.
  - Set up conservation area with community guardians officially recognized by Malagasy government and an groundwork for critical wildlife habitat extension of Ankarana nature reserve.

## **FUNDED RESEARCH:**

**09/2006 – 12/2006**

**Funded Project: Paignton Zoo, KENYA**

- Project Leader - assessing camera trapping techniques for duiker population's census, especially critically endangered Ader's duiker (IUCN CR A4acd), in Arabuko-Sokoke forest.
- Project yielded the first ever photographs of Ader's Duiker in the wild. Camera trapping 2006 research report - <http://www.wwct.org.uk/conservation-research/coastal-east-africa/aders-duiker>
- After the success of camera trapping pilot, camera trapping studies have been encouraged and critical results are being generated along fragments of similar forest along the east Kenyan coast.
- The project was well publicized and provided a first reference point for more such studies – First Sight (Current Biology Vol17 No 5); International Conferences (EAZA Research Conference 2007, Society for Conservation Biology Port Elizabeth 2007).
- Organizations involved: Kenyan Wildlife Service, ARocha (Kenya) and Paignton Zoo. Research results feed into IUCN/SSC Antelope Specialist Group (ASG).

**07/2005 – 08/2005, 11/2004** **Paid Research Internship: Indian Institute of Science, INDIA**

- *Gymnogryllus* cricket song structure under Dr. Rohini Balakrishnan at Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science.
- Temporal analyses *Gymnogryllus* cricket song structure. Analyses show clear differences between song structure of two different morphs. Further research could prove that song structure can be used to discern taxonomic origins.

## **EDUCATION:**

**06/2008 – 01/2009: Diploma Environmental Law, WWF-India, INDIA.**

- Overall grade B+ (55% to under 65%), sponsored by WWF-India
- Term paper: A critical review of the inadequacies of Coastal Regulation Zones (1991) and Coastal Management Zones (2008) notifications by the Government of India.

**09/2005 – 09/2006: MSc Applied Ecology and Conservation, University of East Anglia, UK.**

- Overall first class. Credit Weighted Percentage = 66.80%
- Dissertation: Restoration of an Ecuadorian Cloud Forest and the recovery of native frog communities. Resulting publications by collaborators on two new species – one lizard (*Enyalioides*) and one frog (*Centrolenidae*).

**06/2002 – 06/2005: BSc Zoology Stella, Maris College, University of Madras, INDIA.**

- Overall First Class with Distinction. Credit weighted Average = 75.93%
- Major project: Breeding behaviour in Mugger crocodile in captivity. Madras Crocodile Bank Trust.

**Conferences:** Impacts of dams on threatened bird species in Arunachal Pradesh, India. (Society for Conservation Biology – Asia 2012); The Distribution and habitat requirements of the critically endangered Ader's duiker with Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, Kenya (as a co-author, Society for Conservation Biology – Port Elizabeth 2007)

**Awards:** Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited Scholarship for Higher Studies (Fall 2005); University of East Anglia International and Indian Student scholarships (Fall 2005).

**Professional Affiliations:** Indian Bird Conservation Network (IBCN) and Amphibian Network of South Asia as part of Amphibian Specialist Group IUCN (ANSA – ASG).

**Other interests:** Photography (<http://amster04.redbubble.com/>), SCUBA diving (advanced open water diver – PADI), travel.