For immediate release:

**Day 1: ATREE@20 Conference on Conservation Science and Environmental Sustainability**

Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE) concluded Day-1 of the two day ATREE@20 international conference, marking 20 years of ATREE, on biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. Day 1 featured sessions on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services and Climate Change Mitigation and Development.

The programme was inaugurated with a talk about ATREE and its history, delivered by Prof Kamaljit S Bawa, President of ATREE. Prof. Bawa reminisced how an institution that was meant to stay small and humble has now grown to address a whole range of modern-day social and environmental issues. He said “Indian scientists are uniquely placed to play a role in demonstrating how to come out of the crisis of the environment”. Rohini Nilekani, Governing Board member, praised ATREE’s unique contributions to conservation and sustainability research. His Excellency Nils Ragnar Kamsvag, the Norwegian Ambassador to India, then released the book “Transcending Boundaries: Reflecting on Twenty Years of Action and Research at ATREE”, edited by Ankila Hiremath, Nitin Rai, and Ananda Siddhartha of ATREE.

The first key-note address, by Dame Georgina Mace, Professor, University College London, reflected on how nature could be valued in a human-dominated world.  Dr. Mace called for investment in natural capital to sustain the benefit streams humans derive from nature.

The second key-note address by Mr. Gunter Pauli, author of the “Blue Economy”, who has sometimes been called the “Steve Jobs of Sustainability”, described innovative business models that could shape the future of water, agriculture, food and energy to ensure access for all. Through a series of case studies, including one on the tea plantations of Kaziranga, Assam and another on how diapers could be made out of charcoal and coffee gram, Mr. Pauli made a powerful case for using human ingenuity to do much better.

The session on Biodiversity, Ecosystem Services and Society on Day 1 included four plenary speakers: Siddhartha Krishnan summarised ATREE’s contributions to conservation research, discourse, policy and practice over twenty years. Breena Holland, Associate Professor of Political Science at Lehigh University, asked what it means to create an “environmentally just society”.  Robert Pressey, from the ARC Centre for Excellence for Coral Reef Studies, stressed the need to bring science into conservation policy in a way that makes a difference. Arnold van Huis, Professor of Tropical Entomology at Wageningen University, described about the role of insects as food and feed and what an insect cookbook might look like!

This was followed by a panel discussion on “Conservation in the ‘Anthropocene’: What are the Prospects for Biocentric and Anthropocentric Conservation Policy and Practice?” Panelists included Dr. Nadarajah Shanmugaratnam, Professor Emeritus of Development Studies at the Norwegian University of Life Science (NMBU) as moderator, Dr. Breena Holland, Associate Professor at the Department of Political Science and the Environmental Initiative, Lehigh University, Dr. John Linnell, Senior Research Fellow, Norsk Institute for Naturforskning (NINA), Dr. M.D. Madhusudan, scientist in the Western Ghats Programme at the Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF), Dr. Jayashree Ratnam, Associate Director of the Wildlife Biology and Conservation Program at the National Centre for Biological Sciences, and Dr. Eivin Røskaft, Professor of Evolutionary Biology at the Department of Biology, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU).

The panelists reflected on the connotations (negative and positive) of the term Anthropocene and how equity, justice and power figure into conversations about how humans are changing the planet. They also discussed the role of the current consumption culture and how we might turn the conversation to “what it means to be a different kind of human?” as Dr. Linnell put it.

The Biodiversity, Ecosystem Services and Society session ended on a lively note with spirited **“Young Scholar Presentations**” by ATREE’s PhD scholars: Chandrima Home described the “canine conundrum” in the trans-Himalayan landscape: the impacts of free-ranging dogs on livestock. Madhuri Ramesh made the case for the need for turtle conservation to get “fuzzy” and why marine protected areas fail in highly human dominated areas with mobile species like turtles. Aniruddha Marathe’s study of ants in Eaglenest Wildlife Sanctuary in Arunachal Pradesh, argued that understanding biodiversity patterns “one small question at a time” can help preserve species. Barkha Subba assessed the possible impact of climate change on Himalayan frogs, taking into account their ability to migrate.

The day ended with a session on Climate Change, Mitigation and Development to mark ATREE’s foray into this area. Ulka Kelkar, Fellow at ATREE, described on going work on the transition to solar in the city of Ramanagara near Bangalore. Using data on clean cookstoves and household diets, Narasimha Rao from International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA) illustrated that win-wins in terms of both emissions reductions and human health are possible. Geir Heierstad, from the Norwegian Institute of Urban and Regional Research described some of the possibilities and concerns with the Indian Smart Cities Agenda. Finally, Radhika Khosla from the Centre for Policy Research described the links between energy and climate change focusing on the demand-side of Indian energy.

**Venue**: J.N Tata Auditorium, National Science Symposium Complex, Sir CV Raman Avenue, Near Indian Institute Of Science, Malleswaram 18th Cross, Kodandarampura, Bengaluru, Karnataka – 560012

**About the Conference**

The ATREE@20 conference marks 20 years of ATREE’s work in the areas of environmental conservation and sustainable development. The themes of the conference are Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services; Water, Land and Society; Forest Governance and Livelihoods; and Climate Change and Development.

By bringing together national and international academics with diverse expertise, the conference aims to call attention to current environmental challenges.

**About ATREE**Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE) focuses on research and education to engage and influence policy and practice in the conservation of nature, management of natural resources, and sustainable development. Established in 1996 as a non-profit organisation, ATREE works in the forests of Western Ghats, the ecosystems of Northeast Himalayas, grasslands of Kutch, wetlands of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, the expanding urban cities of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, and other parts of India.

ATREE focuses on biodiversity conservation, climate change, livelihoods, energy, and water using a unique multidisciplinary approach in its research and outreach activities, which have contributed significantly across local, state, and national stakeholders to meet current environmental and social challenges.

ATREE’s mission is to generate rigorous interdisciplinary knowledge for achieving environmental conservation and sustainable development in a socially just manner, enable the use of this knowledge by policy makers and society, and train the next generation of scholars and leaders.
[www.atree.org](http://www.atree.org/)

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