

CHANGING COVERAGE

An Assessment of the FEJI-ATREE Fellowships 2013-2017



By Sweta Daga for FEJI



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*FEJl would like to thank Ms. Nilekani
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These fellowships not just serve to give journalists field insights, but are important because they equip journalists to incorporate background environmental knowledge into their daily reporting in all beats, ranging from sports to economics. Given our current crisis of environmental pollution, this knowledge is now essential.

*- Keya Acharya,
President*

These partnerships, between researchers and journalists are important. We want journalists to grow, and we want researchers to be able to better communicate about their findings. It needs to be a collective effort.

*- Dr. Jagdish Krishnaswamy,
Senior Fellow and Programme Lead,
Center for Biodiversity and Conservation*

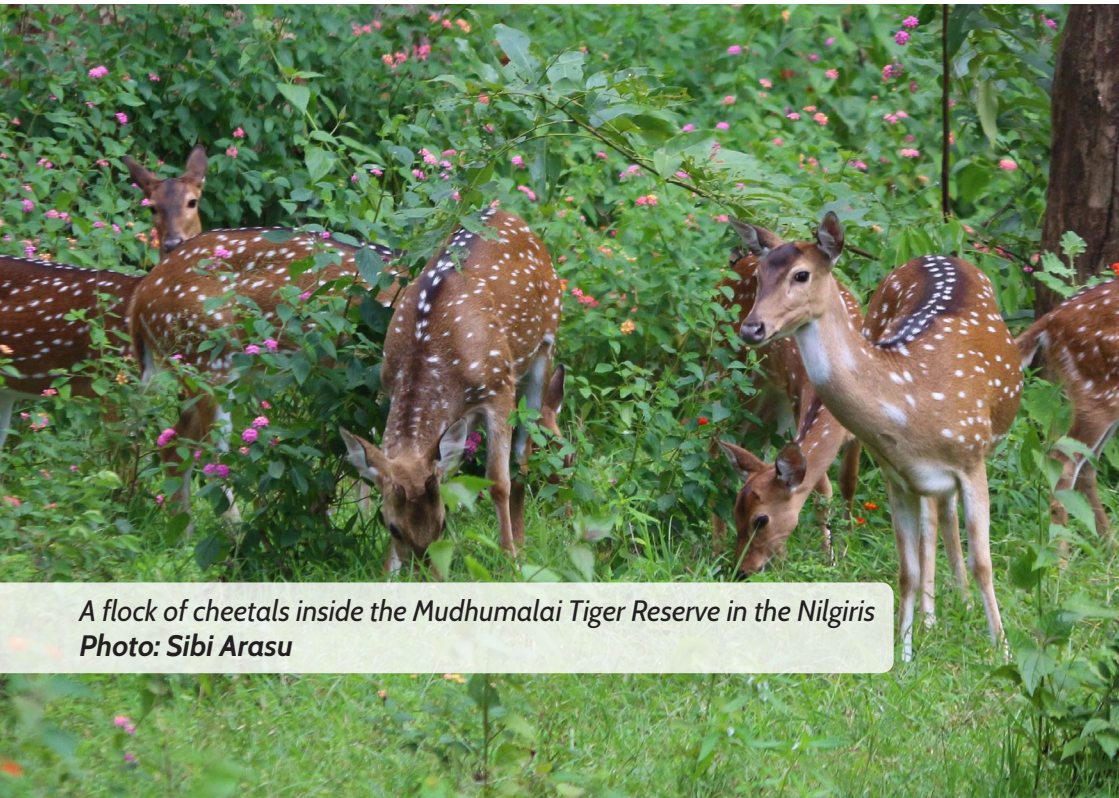
Background

The Forum for Environmental Journalists in India and Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment have partnered to implement three years of journalism fellowships in India.

In today's political climate, with many conservative governments denying the existence of climate change, it is imperative that more journalists are empowered with access to information in order to write important stories, spread awareness, and preserve facts about environmental and ecological issues. Although journalism has always been prominent in India, with increased corporate control of media houses and paid news, Indian media has struggled to cover substantive environmental news over the last few years. Mainstream media companies have reduced the number of reporters who focus on topics like science and ecology, and condensed stories on natural resource struggles that are happening all over the country.

In addition, many journalists are not getting the time or training they need to understand the technical or scientific aspects of climate change. In a 2011 study by Associate Professor of Science Communication, Arul Aram, where he interviewed 25 journalists across four major English dailies and two major English news channels, who are covering climate change, he found that journalists felt that the topic of climate change is too abstract and not connected to daily reality. The study also discovered that journalists feel that scientists use too many jargon in their explanations, making it difficult to report on the impact of their studies.

Over the last three years, FEJI has tried to bridge this divide between the scientific community and journalists in order to bring the public the news it needs to make informed decisions about their political vote or economic spending.



*A flock of cheetals inside the Mudhumalai Tiger Reserve in the Nilgiris
Photo: Sibi Arasu*

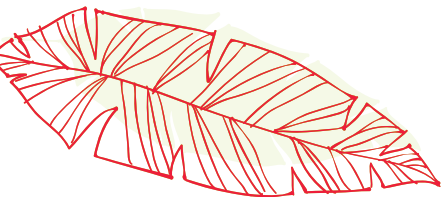
About FEJI

Registered in 2012 the Forum of Environmental Journalists in India (FEJI) is a registered public, charitable Trust based in Bangalore with a network of approximately six hundred working journalists countrywide and affiliations with prominent media persons and organizations in South Asia. With a past history of active work in the field of journalism and media training, FEJI's Trustees and Executive Committee run FEJI's operations and are working journalists.

FEJI aims to train, motivate, support, and sensitize journalists toward environment and development reporting. It also hopes to disseminate environmental news more widely for public interest. Toward this, FEJI wants to create environmental media courses, train faculty, and develop relevant materials. In addition FEJI wants to become a representative centre for journalistic excellence and source of relevant information, for both national and international audiences.

Most media is written in English, but this fellowship gives regional languages a chance to flourish, and regional-language journalists a chance to travel and expand their own work. FEJI is helping to facilitate the process where journalists, scientists and audiences are able to better understand each other. The journalists get access to first-hand research, readers get access to stories of substance and scientists are able to get their research disseminated.

*- Atul Deulgaonkar,
Joint Secretary*



About ATREE

Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE) is a research institution in the areas of biodiversity conservation and sustainable development. The focus is on applied science through research, education and action that influence policy and practice on conservation of nature, management of natural resources, and sustainable development.

ATREE's mission is to generate rigorous interdisciplinary knowledge for achieving environmental conservation and sustainable development in a socially just manner, to enable the use of this knowledge by policy makers and society, and to train the next generation of scholars and leaders. ATREE envisions a society committed to environmental conservation and sustainable and socially just development, in which ATREE plays the role of a model knowledge-generating organization for catalyzing the transition to such a society.



Professor R Ganesan of ATREE who has been working on permanent monitoring of trees in the Western Ghats for the last two decades and counting
Photo: Sibi Arasu

About the FEJI-ATREE Fellowships



FEJI approached ATREE in late 2013 with a proposal inviting ATREE to be part of a new fellowship programme on environmental reporting. The objective of this three-month media fellowship by FEJI was to address the gap in comprehensive, informed reporting on environmental issues in India; also identifying key issues on which good environmental reporting could have long term impacts. ATREE's role was to offer knowledge and access to researchers and ongoing research communities in selected topics that the journalists had expressed an interest in. Topics ranged from biodiversity conservation, to endangered species, and natural resources. The journalists could accompany researchers, talk to communities, and meet policy makers. The mandate for the journalists was to deliver media pieces on issues researched.



FEJI Fellows listening to ATREE experts
Photo: Sweta Daga

Impact of Fellowships

Over the course of three years, the FEJI-ATREE fellowships have made significant inroads to increase deeper coverage of environmental and ecological issues. The fellows represent a diverse range of publications, from major print publications like The Times of India and Deccan Chronicle, to papers in multiple languages like Rajasthan Patrikha, Hindustan, Kairali TV, All India Radio in Hindi/Marathi and in online publications.

At an individual level, this type of fellowship has certainly helped the journalist's career. These Fellowships provided an opportunity to focus on one topic, developing skills and contacts in one "beat." Several Fellows have continued to work on similar topics, or have applied and integrated their knowledge with other topics, making for better coverage.

Fieldwork is another reason these fellowships were vital. Fellows were able to gain on the ground experience in many situations, thus being able to be exposed to topics outside major metros that largely go unreported.

At a more strategic level, these fellowships developed the potential to build strong coalitions of journalists who have expertise in areas that are often ignored by mainstream media. Not only did this provide the public more nuanced news, but also it gave journalists more credibility to make their case for in-depth articles with editors and publishers.

The Fellowships have provided large publications with award-winning articles that were diverse and offered their readers with stories that many newsrooms don't have the resources to pursue. With more journalists who are working on similar topics, there is also an exchange of ideas, and healthy debate, which can lead to innovations in within the sector.



The reach of these stories was significant. Over the **last three years**, FEJI's Fellows have been published in some of India's leading multi-media publications like **The Times of India** with over **2 crore readers**, **Rajasthan Patrika** with over **25 lakh readers** everyday, and over **8,000 hits** on just one single Fellowship story on **The Wire**, one of the leading online websites.

In the **past two months**, since the Fellowship articles have come up, FEJI has seen an increase of new visitors to the website, **70% of the readers** have come to FEJI for the first time.

This year (2016-2017), two news features on **The News Minute**, got about **15,000 page views**.



An exhibit from the herbarium inside ATREE's premises
Photo: Sibi Arasu



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These fellowships are so important for journalists who are interested in writing pieces of substance but are constrained by finances. FEJI promotes a balanced view of environmental journalism.

- S. Gopikrishna Warriar,
Secretary

Themes of Fellowships

We have taken the opportunity to cover a wide range of topics, usually under reported in the traditional media. Over the course of three years, the fellows have shown the connections between natural ecosystems and climate change, livelihoods, urban environments, and impact on biodiversity.

Many Fellows continue to write on their themes, showing their publications that readers do want access to these stories. In the first year, The Mint had agreed to do a ten-part series on lesser charismatic species, while Atul Kumar of Hindustan had at least two more stories on his chosen theme. In 2017, K. Rajendran is now in the process of compiling his material from field visits and research into a book, to be published later in 2017.

All Fellows learnt enough to be able to inject biodiversity and conservation, especially related to their fellowship themes, into their daily work.



The partnership with FEJI has increased ATREE's visibility over the past few years. People have started contacting me based on the articles written by the fellows. We need journalists to spend even more time with us, to really understand the nuance and implications of the research, and this fellowship is a step in that direction.

*- Dr. Priyadarsanan Dharma Rajan,
Senior Fellow*

The Specific Themes Were:

2013-2014

Biodiversity issues relating to -

- Less charismatic faunal species
- Wetlands in India
- Groundwater issues

2015

- Forest canopies: the last biotic frontier
- Restoring destroyed ecosystems/ habitat
- Migratory birds and their fate in a developing India
- Water and wastewater in Indian cities

2016 - 2017

- Biodiversity
- Community and Livelihoods
- Natural Resource Management, such conservation issues
- Environmental Issues
- Wildlife

Journalists have travelled in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Bangalore Rural districts, Western Ghats, and the Sikkim/Darjeeling Himalayas for their field work.



The Fellows and their respective publishers are listed below, along with reach numbers. These numbers have been given officially by each publication.

FEJI's Fellows

2014

● **ANANDA BANERJEE**
Live Mint, New Delhi.
OVER 200,000 daily,
countrywide

● **ATUL KUMAR**
Hindustan, New
Delhi. Reach:
2,399,086 Daily,

● **AMIT UPADHYE**
Deccan Chronicle,
Bangalore, Reach: 1.45
million copies everyday

It is generally not easy to quantify dissemination of a journalist's articles, or a particular story, but it is clear from the above statistics that dissemination of topics and stories through these Fellowships have been very wide and varied in reach.

2015

● **RADHESHYAM JADAV**
Times of India, Reach:
2,731,334 Copies Daily

● **PANKAJ SEKHSARIA**
The Hindu Business Line,
Reach: 12,00,000 Copies
daily

● Web /Online Media:
PADMAPARNA GHOSH
Scroll.in; Reach: 80 Lakh
readers daily

● TV/Radio:
SAILESH MALODE
All India Radio; Reach:
99% of people in India

2016

● **K. RAJENDRAN**

Kairali TV, Thiruvananthapuram; Reach:
Approx 40 Lakh viewers daily for their
24-hour news channel and for Kairali TV.

Kairali TV has a *global viewership* with
audiences in Africa, Americas including
USA, Asia including China. It has the
third largest viewership after Asia Net
and Manorama TV.

● **ATHAR PARVAIZ BHAT**

Kashmir Life, Trust.org, Reuters
Alter Net; Reach: *Global*

● **SIBI ARASU**

Hindu Business Line, Reach: 12
Lakhs copies daily

*The Hindu Sunday Magazine,
Reach: 15.5 Lakhs copies daily

*News Minute, Reach: (For two
stories online): 15,000 page views,
with an average spend time of 5
minutes per story, which is very good

*First Post, Reach: 10 Lakh readers on
the website per day; 35 Lakh views on
social media per day

*Scroll, Reach: 80 Lakh readers daily
online

● **SKAND VIVEK DHAR**

Rajasthan Patrika, Reach: 26.7 Lakhs Daily

The Future Need

As a society, we are a product of the information that we consume which largely shapes our decisions. As the field of journalism continues to change, in-depth environmental journalism opportunities are rare, and so people are not able to easily access stories that might influence daily actions. With more access to in-depth news, people are sensitized to their environments.

As former editor of The Hindu, N. Ram, says

“Higher levels of manipulation of news, analysis, and comment to suit the owners’ financial and political interests...;the growing willingness within newspapers to tailor the editorial product to subserve advertising and marketing goals set by owners and senior management personnel; hyper-commercialization...;...rogue practices like paid news (Press Council of India 2010) and bribe-taking for favourable coverage – these are deeply worrying tendencies.”

(N Ram’s The Changing Role of the News Media in Contemporary India.)



It is even more important in today’s context to have a strong public press. Partnerships between journalists and scientific communities with focused outcomes are supporting the broader dissemination of quality media. FEJI is the only organisation of its kind dealing with professional, working journalists from around the country on the focused theme of environment and development, run mainly on a virtual networking basis. The hope is to grow the work of FEJI with increased trainings, fellowship opportunities, and further support for journalists who want to do more in-depth reporting.



*Rooftop Solar PV installed by Beedi trader Sayyed Safatullah in Karnataka’s Chanpattana.
Photo: Skand Vivek Dhar*

FEJI fellows help to translate science to public policy. There is a dearth of science entering public policy in India. With these articles, we are slowly starting to get that information into the hands of the public.

*- Veena Srinivasan,
Fellow*

Moving Ahead

Moving ahead, it would be beneficial to include other research partners to provide a broader content base to the journalists. This will increase the diversity and range of stories.

For reportage and coverage to be of high quality, FEJI has learnt that Fellows need to take a sabbatical from daily work. For this sabbatical to work, it is also apparent that the stipend amount should be somewhat higher than the applicant's monthly salary, and that a stipulated amount of this bursary would be dispensed for travel. Similarly, 'higher-end' fellowships, involving research that could influence policy and strategic thinking, would need senior journalists, a sabbatical and a higher bursary.

The last learning to note is that FEJI will need a social media/web designer to maintain our online presence. Social media is now the main way people share and get information so it will be important to track not only numbers, but also comments and reshares. We will also encourage our Fellows to document

their online and social media numbers, as it is difficult to get those numbers retroactively.

Lastly, these fellowships show a successful example of two communities coming together to strengthen expertise within, and support each other externally as well. If more cross learning can happen between seemingly disparate groups, the bridges that are built will provide the means to more fruitful, productive conversations that lead into creative decision making. For example, the scientists learned a great deal about how to communicate with journalists, and further, lay people from such an intense interaction with the journalists. In addition, journalists were able to understand nuance in fields that they wouldn't have access to. Also, from this brief period, it can be established that readers are interested in in-depth news about science, ecology, and the environment, but mainstream news outlets find it difficult to take risks in publishing pieces that might not sell newspapers. With a fellowship, the paper does not have to take the initial financial risk, but will see how readers respond, and then increase the number of stories on that beat.



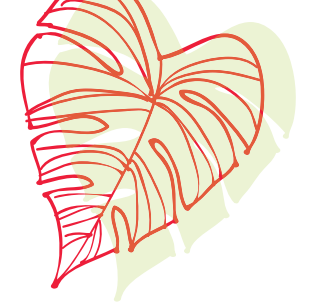
FEJI Fellow, Athar Parvaiz talking to an activist of Lepcha community, Gyatso Lepcha, in Dzongu (North Sikkim)
Photo: Athar Parvaiz Bhat

The FEJI fellowship was a big encouragement to carry forward good environmental journalism and hopefully develop a long-lasting network among other like-minded journalists.

Fellowships such as this are necessary in Indian media today, not only for their financial support but for the recognition of the importance of such stories which is bound to encourage production of good reporting on the environment in India today.

- Sibi Arasu





FELLOWSPEAK



The fellowship offered me an opportunity to have an intimate look at biodiversity, working closely with the scientists at ATREE. It catalyzed me to pursue my Masters in biodiversity and conservation at Trinity College in Dublin.

- **Padmaparna Ghosh**

During my Fellowship in 2015 I produced, as the head of All India Radio, Nashik, a 30-minute documentary of six episodes titled, "New Focus on Ecology", which was well-received. The documentary was broadcast to an overall audience of approximately 107 million over 23 AIR stations, including Nashik.

- **Shailesh Malode**

I feel that such fellowships are much needed because they help develop a reporter for the long run.

- **Ananda Banerjee**

(won three awards for his stories published on Fellowship field visits)

This fellowship allowed me access to scientists who had otherwise not been available and to research a fascinating dimension of a tiger reserve.

- **Pankaj Sekhsaria**



Stories Published: 2013-2014

1. **Wolves of the Wasteland**, by Ananda Banerjee
2. **The Dhole Remains an Enigma even as it struggles for survival**, by Ananda Banerjee, Live Mint
3. **A Shy Killer**, by Ananda Banerjee, Down to Earth
4. <http://www.livemint.com/Politics/vAr7Jap9KbVsPeYQUpd47H/Zones-of-contention--A-survey-of-human-animal-conflict-acro.html>
5. **Will ban on finning save the shark?** By Ananda Banerjee, Live Mint
6. **Photo Essay: SMS for Elephants**, by Ananda Banerjee, Live Mint
- 7-11. **Five stories in Hindi** by Fellow Atul Kumar, written for indiawaterportal.org (read them on www.feji.org.in)
12. **Kerala throttling its Golden Goose**, by Keya Acharya, Inter Press Service
13. **No Magic Wand in Vembanad**, by Keya Acharya, The Hindu
14. **Puttenahalli Lake to be declared Bird Reserve**. By Amit Upadhye. Deccan Chronicle, Bangalore. 01.04.2014 (read story on www.feji.org.in)
15. **Yettinahole: Locals kept in dark**. By Amit Upadhye. Deccan Chronicle, Bangalore. 13.03.2014 (read story on www.feji.org.in)
16. **Lack of Vision stalls high-profile water projects**. By Amit Upadhye. Deccan Chronicle, Bangalore. 21.03.2014 (read story on www.feji.org.in)
17. **Slush-filled water bodies choke Lotus**. By Amit Upadhye. Deccan Chronicle, Bangalore. 13.07.2014.
18. **City's feet of clay: Lotuses vanish from Lakes**. By Amit Upadhye. Deccan Chronicle, Bangalore. 13.07.2014

Stories Published: 2015-2016

1. **'State of water pipelines a health risk'. Experts Urge Civic Bodies To Repair Leaks, Install Online Chlorine Monitoring Devices**. By Radheshyam Jadhav. July 06, 2015 : The Times of India (Pune)
2. **'Smarter city needs better ecosystem'**. By Radheshyam Jadhav. July 16, 2015: The Times of India (Pune)
3. **'HEALTH HAZARD - Agri wastewater enters food cycle'**. By Radheshyam Jadhav. Aug 03 2015 : The Times of India (Pune)
4. **'The secret life of bugs'**. By Padmaparna Ghosh. Live Mint, New Delhi. 18 August, 2015.
5. **'Why it's batty to paint the walls of Tamil Nadu's stone temples'**. By Padmaparna Ghosh. Scroll.in. August 12, 2015 (read it on www.feji.org.in)
6. **'Reality boom in serene outskirts'**. By Radheshyam Jadhav. Aug 12 2015 : The Times of India (Pune)
7. **'This sanctuary for blackbucks in Tamil Nadu has been taken over by dogs and cows'**. By Padmaparna Ghosh. Scroll.in. August 15, 2015. (read it on www.feji.org.in)
8. **'What a temple can do to a forest'**. By Pankaj Sekhsaria. Hindu BusinessLine. August 11, 2015.
9. **'Insects can contribute to food security'**. By Radheshyam Jadhav. Times of India, Pune. August 9, 2015.
10. **'Joint efforts required for restoration of degraded lands'**. By Radheshyam Jadhav. Times of India, Pune. August 13, 2015.
11. **'Democratic conservation of biodiversity is must'**. By Radheshyam Jadhav. Times of India, Pune. Aug 17, 2015, 05.38 PM IST
12. **'Sewage treatment in Bengaluru inefficient: ATREE'**. By Radheshyam Jadhav. Times of India, Pune. Aug 16, 2015, 11.06 PM IST
13. **Arkavathy River not drying because of declining rainfall or blockages'**. By Radheshyam Jadhav. Times of India, Pune. Aug 16, 2015, 11.04 PM IST

Stories Published: 2015-2016

14. **'Why fathers should take lessons from this frog'**. By Padmaparna Ghosh. Scroll.in. August 12, 2015. (read it on www.feji.org.in)
15. **'Vembanad lake is showing us the future of conservation in India'**. By Padmaparna Ghosh. Scroll.in. September 11, 2015.
16. **'What India's ancient sacred sites can teach us about forests'**. By Padmaparna Ghosh. Scroll.in. September 21, 2015.
- 18-22. **Shailesh. All India Radio Series.**
23. **'Tamirabani in pictures'**. By Pankaj Sekshsaria. The Hindu. October 17, 2015.
24. **'Tamirabani's journey'**. By Pankaj Sekshsaria. The Hindu. October 17, 2015.
25. **'Citizens for the City - Citizens chip in to save lakes; Centre to make it mass model'**. By Radheshyam Jadhav. Jun 30, 2015 : The Times of India (Pune).

Stories Published: 2016-2017

1. **K. Rajendran: Climate change impacts on Soliga tribe in Biligiriraga hills and their coffee plantation** (this clip was broadcast on People TV, the news channel of Kairali TV on 19.12.2016)
2. **K. Rajendran. Kairali TV. Water scarcity Attapadi Irula's toilets turn to be goat houses.**
3. **Chronic water scarcity has turned Kulapadi's toilets into goat sheds.** K. Rajendran. 06.01.2017 (Print)
4. **The man who listens to trees: Meet the botanist who helped Karnataka's Soligas secure their livelihood.** Sibi Arasu, The News Minute, January 17, 2017.
5. **Skand Vivek. Waste Mgt. Catch News.** 24 Jan 2017 (Print)
 - 5a. **Skand Vivek. Kahn River : city rises and river shrinks.** Catch News. 31st January, 2017.
 - 5b. **Skand Vivek.** Story 5a in the English version of CatchNews.

6. **K. Rajendran. Kanni tribe against Acacia.** 26th Jan, 2017. Kairali TV. (watch it on www.feji.org.in)
7. **Athar Parvaiz Bhat. Locals step up protests against large Sikkim dam.** Thirdpole. 25.01.2017
 - 7a. **Reproduced at :** <http://indiaclimatedialogue.net/2017/01/25/locals-step-protests-large-sikkim-dam/>
 - 7b. <http://www.northeasttoday.in/sikkim-locals-fight-to-save-their-community-and-environment-from-hydropower-projects/>
 - 7c) <https://scroll.in/article/827635/locals-in-sikkim-are-fighting-to-save-their-community-and-the-environment-from-hydropower-projects>
8. **Athar Parvaiz Bhat. Tourist Spot or Time Bomb.** Rediff.com
9. **Athar Parvaiz Bhat.** <http://news.trust.org/item/20170201091035-tzvad/>
10. <http://www.ipsnews.net/2017/02/how-a-spring-revival-scheme-in-indias-sikkim-is-defeating-droughts/>
11. **Sibi Arasu: This Professor thinks future dinners will include insect recipes.** The Wire. 05/02/2017.
12. **K. Rajendran. Article is in Malayalam.** This is a photo feature published in Kairalionline, the online edition of Kairali TV. Story is about the biodiversity of BR hills, peculiarities of Soliga tribes , the great work being done by ATREE especially with regard to Forest Right Act and climate change.
13. **Skand Vivek: "Not rain, drain water harvesting is the need of the day for growing cities"**
14. **K.Rajendran. Atree's Clam Conservation Project at Vembanad lake paves new hope for clam workers.**
15. **Athar Parvaiz Bhat.** <http://www.ipsnews.net/2017/02/improved-cookstoves-boost-health-and-forest-cover-in-the-himalayas/>
16. **Athar Parvaiz Bhat.** <http://www.northeasttoday.in/when-wild-animals-treat-themselves-in-farmers-farms/>
17. **K. Rajendran. Tribal women corner the market on India's heat-hardy black goats.**

Stories Published: 2016-2017

18. **K. Rajendran. 'A tree's fish sanctuaries expedite fish conservation'**
20.02.2017; 21.02.2017. Kairali TV.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmZ9WuK2Olc>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmZ9WuK2Olc&authuser=0>
19. **K. Rajendran. 24.02.2017. Kairali TV. 'Western Ghats conservation possible only if invertebrates are conserved, says ATREE'**
20. **Sibi Arasu. The Hindu Business Line. 24.02.2017. 'Living it up on the wild side'. Photo Essay.**
21. **Skand Vivek Dhar. Rajasthan Patrika, New Delhi. 8.03.2017**
This story is about how severely modified water flow conditions due to the Bansagar Dam have impacted breeding of gharial and Indian Skimmer. In this story, the author has also examined the fight of states over water.
22. **Sibi Arasu: www.scroll.in . Invasive plant species are taking over forests, driving human-animal conflict. 20.03.2017**
23. **K Rajendran. ATREE's Anti-Plastic Campaign at Lake Vembanadu. Kairali News. 10.03.2017**
24. **Wayanadan tribes are going back to tuber cultivation to combat climate change. Kairali News.**

Other stories produced during field travels (with content not directly linked with ATREE):
25. **Sibi Arasu. The Hindu. Centaurs, archers and modern vandals. 12.03.2017**
26. **Athar Parvaiz Bhat: <http://news.trust.org/item/20170206090845-rgnnd/>**
27. **Athar Parvaiz Bhat. <http://news.trust.org/item/20170213100542-0oda9/>**
28. **Athar Parvaiz Bhat. <https://thewire.in/99889/darjeeling-demonetisaion-rti-wages/>**

Online Platforms

The articles have also been broadcast on FEJI's social media platforms on Twitter, Facebook, FEJI website, Google Plus and on LinkedIn, links as under:



<http://feji.org.in/MediaFellowshipStories.aspx>



<https://twitter.com/THEFEJI>



<https://www.facebook.com/pages/FEJI/283829075107536>



<https://www.linkedin.com/in/forumfeji/>

