

LaCONES-CCMB brings international experts on wildlife conservation together



The Laboratory for Conservation of Endangered Species (LaCONES) is CSIR-Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB)'s dedicated lab for wildlife research and conservation in India. Their latest international e-conference from 3rd to 5th November, 2020 on 'Recent Advances and Status of Wildlife Forensics' brought together nearly 700 wildlife biologists, veterinarians, scientists, students and conservationists from across the world. The conference was inaugurated by Director-General, CSIR, Dr Shekhar Mande and Director, CCMB, Dr Rakesh Mishra, and was also addressed by Shri Prakash Javadekar, Union Minister, Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change. CCMB scientists, Drs Ajay Gaur and Anuradha Reddy were convenors of this conference.

The objectives of the conference were to discuss global status of wildlife crime, molecular technologies available to tackle the same, and their applications for law enforcement. The participants were addressed by world renowned wildlife experts. These included leaders from various government and non-government organizations in wildlife conservation and sustainable development such as TRAFFIC International, USA, TRACE Wildlife Forensic Network, UK, Wildlife Crime Control Bureau, India, Global Tiger Forum and Lawyers' Initiative for Forest and Environment. They shared their views on legal applications of wildlife DNA forensics and law enforcement. A panel discussion was also conducted on possible measures to counter tiger poaching and illegal trade in India.

Dr Mishra said, "CCMB is known for its worthwhile contributions in animal forensics using cutting-edge DNA-based technology. We are also expanding our efforts in plant forensics. Both together will be very helpful in a tighter quality control, build effective regulations, and boost our bioeconomy." Dr Mande commended LaCONES for their long-standing efforts in developing tools in wildlife forensics and underlined the need for various stakeholders to come together for conservation.

Shri Javadekar concluded the conference with his thoughts on the increased need for wildlife forensics as India undertakes several major conservation efforts for big cats to marine life.

But he also alluded to an increasing threat from wildlife criminals to these protected species. He said, "To nab these criminals in their buds, we need to present irrefutable evidences in the court of law, which can come from forensic sciences".