



# Sacred Sites Research Newsletter

OCTOBER 2012



## Note from the Editors

Dear friends and colleagues,

I would like to begin by thanking everyone for the great feedback that followed the first issue of SSIREN. We have received a number of really positive emails and it is clear that SSIREN has already developed a wide, and still growing, audience. We are grateful to you all and hope to be able to count on your continued support. I would also like to take this opportunity to encourage you to keep up with your contributions for feature articles and the 'news', 'events', 'publications' and 'opportunities' sections. Please, do not hesitate to forward onto us anything you think is relevant.

In this issue, we are continuing with our introductory theme for the newsletter featuring a contribution from KRPAVIS, a NGO based in India, which demonstrates the practical application of sacred site research and how implementation work is being done on the ground.

I hope you will enjoy this new issue of SSIREN, and find it of help for your own work on sacred natural sites.

Emma Shephard-Walwyn

## FOCUS



View of Oran woodland at Kala Sikara village

### Feature

#### KRPAVIS: Working with communities to protect Rajasthan's sacred Orans

Krishi Avam Parishitiki Vikas Sansthan (KRPAVIS), the "organization for the development of ecology and agriculture/livestock", has been at the forefront of conservation and regeneration work of sacred woodlands in Rajasthan, known as *Orans*, for two decades. *Orans* were originally managed by local community institutions called *Thain*. These institutions, however, have lost influence, and therefore local management has weakened at

these sites. KRPAVIS is now working to re-establish community interest in protecting the *Orans*. Throughout the years, KRPAVIS has worked in over 300 *Orans* across Rajasthan, and campaigned for 'the betterment of ecological, agricultural and livestock practices' with the goal to ensure sustainable livelihoods for the local pastoral communities.

KRPAVIS operates at three distinct levels, including in its approach to the conservation of *Orans*:

1. At the **national level**, KRPAVIS politically promotes the plight of *Orans* in India's civil society. It frequently petitions the government, and makes appeals to international actors in the name of environmental preservation and poverty alleviation. These efforts have resulted in the Forest Department of Rajasthan acknowledging the existence and importance of *Orans* in 2010.

2. At the **community level**, KRPAVIS is engaged in several outreach initiatives to inform the pastoral communities of Rajasthan about the assistance available for the protection and restoration of *Oran* biodiversity. KRPAVIS strongly emphasizes a people-led development process, and has stayed true to this ethos in its approach to *Oran* management, which requires direct involvement of the communities that would be the eventual beneficiaries of the projects. KRPAVIS, therefore, works to engage the stakeholder communities and to instill within them a conscientious outlook towards their environment, as well as equip them with the necessary knowledge to productively channel their efforts.

Another vital element of KRPAVIS' work is institution-building. In this context, KRPAVIS works to promote inclusive institutions to engage the communities, and modify existing ones such as the *Samiti* or *Panchayat* councils. These modifications aim to incorporate an attitude of concern for the conservation and restoration of *Orans* within the councils, as well as a desire to culturally revive them amongst the populace. These *Panchayati Raj*, or village-level councils are able to regulate the usage of *Orans*, and to enforce any required punitive measures, for they remain sensitive to local contexts and thus cater to the needs and wants of local people in such a way that no external entity can.

KRPAVIS also provides an opportunity for people to act for the cause of *Orans*, and supplies essential instruction to prepare them to become consultants and advisors in other districts and states of India.

3. At the **grassroots level**, KRPAVIS has over 300 volunteers, who work in the villages to disseminate information, conduct training, and provide assistance on ecological issues such as biodiversity conservation, causes and effects of global warming, water management, plant nurseries, and planting and irrigation methods. Since its founding, the organization has been protecting trees and sowing grass seeds in the *Orans*, as well as raising saplings in nurseries and then transplanting them into *Orans* and other community-conserved areas. This has contributed to saving endemic and endangered species of trees, thus bringing about greater livelihood security for the rural poor, who depend on such trees for livestock feed, traditional medicine, marketable commodities and, to a lesser extent, timber. KRPAVIS also takes into account the changing nature of pastoralism in these areas, and the recent shift towards preference of water buffalo and goats as livestock over cattle, working to ensure that the flora in the *Orans* is better able to meet the needs of the new livestock.



KRPAVIS research team collecting information on ethnoveterinary herbs

Part of the work done by KRPAVIS is focused on water conservation within the *Orans* and surrounding areas. This is imperative due to the serious reliance of local people on the water sources found in *Orans*, both for their livestock and themselves. This maintenance is realised through the use of water harvesting structures and checks for soil erosion.

KRPAVIS discovered, through adaptive management approaches and by visiting community conservation projects in other areas, that ecological conservation of the *Orans* was not possible unless the needs of the local communities were also met. The organisation therefore began working towards people-led development processes that meet the needs of the local people and, at the same time, achieve biodiversity conservation goals in the *Orans*.

KRPAVIS works as an example to other organisations promoting sacred site conservation. Its experience with the *Orans* highlights the importance of including the local community in conservation management plans, working with and learning from other organisations conducting community conservation projects, and delivering conservation that not only protects biodiversity and cultural heritage, but also meets the material needs of the local community.

For more information on KRPAVIS and its work, please visit: [www.krapavis.netne.net](http://www.krapavis.netne.net).

## Publications:

Aman Singh, 2010. Communities Manage Orans for Protecting Their Livelihoods. In "Sustaining Participation and scaling up Farmer Empowerment". Eds. T M Radha, TM; Tafur, JC; Mertineit, A; Yap, E. (MISEREOR). Pg 52-55.

## NEWS

### New project Mapping the Sacred presented in Oxford

The project *Mapping the sacred* was presented at the *Second Biodiversity Institute Symposium: Biodiversity Technologies*, held in Oxford on September 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>. *Mapping the sacred* is a new knowledge-sharing exercise aimed at creating a comprehensive map of sacred sites worldwide. The project website, to be launched in the coming weeks, will feature an interactive map where users will be able to add sacred sites and information relevant to the sites. The project is spearheaded by Dr. Shonil Bhagwat, Ashley Massey and Prof. Kathy Willis from the Biodiversity Institute of the University of Oxford, and will be useable by individuals worldwide. For further info and to be updated on the website launch, feel free to contact Ms. Ashley Massey ([ashley.massey@ouce.ox.ac.uk](mailto:ashley.massey@ouce.ox.ac.uk)).

## OPPORTUNITIES

October 10

### 50<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation: Call for papers on religion, culture, sacred sites and sacred species

Dr. Shonil Bhagwat (Oxford University) and Emma Shephard-Walwyn (University of Kent), are putting together a symposium for the 50<sup>th</sup> ATBC meeting in San José, Costa Rica, 23<sup>rd</sup> - 27<sup>th</sup> June 2013 (website [here](http://www.atbc.org)). If you would like to present a talk, please contact Emma at: [es307@kent.ac.uk](mailto:es307@kent.ac.uk).

October 15

### 26<sup>th</sup> International Congress for Conservation Biology: Call for papers on religion, culture, sacred sites and sacred species

Dr. Shonil Bhagwat (Oxford University) and Emma Shephard-Walwyn (University of Kent), are putting together a symposium for the 26<sup>th</sup> SCB conference in Baltimore, Maryland, 21<sup>st</sup> - 25<sup>th</sup> July 2013 (website [here](http://www.scb.org)). If you would like to present a talk, please contact Emma at: [es307@kent.ac.uk](mailto:es307@kent.ac.uk).

October 15

### 7<sup>th</sup> Conference of the European Society for Environmental History: Call for papers

The 7<sup>th</sup> ESEH conference will be held in Munich, 20<sup>th</sup> - 24<sup>th</sup> August 2013, and will have 'Circulating Natures: Water-Food-Energy' as its theme. If you would like to present a talk, submit an abstract on the [conference website](http://www.eseh.org).

October 31

### 26<sup>th</sup> International Congress for Conservation Biology: Call for proposals

Individuals or groups are invited to submit proposals for symposia, workshops, focus groups and short courses for the 2013 ICCB (website [here](http://www.iccb.org)).

## PUBLICATIONS

Ambros, B. R., 2012, Bones of Contention: Animals and Religion in Contemporary Japan. Hawaii University Press

Endres, D., 2012, Sacred land or national sacrifice zone: the role of values in the Yucca mountain participation process. Environmental Communication (6:3), Pg 328-345

Parrotta J. R. and Trospers, R. L., 2012, Traditional Forest-Related Knowledge: Sustaining Communities, Ecosystems and Biocultural Diversity [World Forests Series, Vol. 12]. Springer

Sahu, S. C, Dhal, N. K., Lal, B. and Mohanty, R. C., 2012, Differences in tree species diversity and soil nutrient status in a tropical sacred forest ecosystems on Niyamgiri hill range, Eastern Ghats, India. Journal of Mountain Science (9:4), Pg: 492-500

## ISSUE 1(2) AT A GLANCE:

### FEATURE

KRPAVIS: Working with communities to protect Rajasthan Orans

### NEWS

Mapping the Sacred project launched in Oxford

### UPCOMING EVENTS

October 1-19. Hyderabad, India  
11<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity

November 3-5. Rochester, NY, USA  
16<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the International Association for Environmental Philosophy

November 15-19. Chicago, Illinois, USA  
Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion

### ON THE BOOKSHELF

List of relevant publications issued in the last three months

### OPPORTUNITIES

October 10. Call for papers  
50<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Association for Tropical Biology and Conservation

October 15. Call for papers  
26<sup>th</sup> International Congress for Conservation Biology

October 15. Call for papers  
7<sup>th</sup> Conference of the European Society for Environmental History

October 31. Call for proposals  
26<sup>th</sup> International Congress for Conservation Biology

## ABOUT SSIREN



The Sacred Site Research Newsletter (SSIREN) was conceived at the symposium "Conserving nature at sacred sites", held at the University of Zurich on the 25th October 2011, as a means to inform and aggregate the community of researchers working on sacred natural sites. It is aimed not merely at scholars but also practitioners and policy-makers coping with specific issues, as well as anyone with a general interest in the interaction between people and nature.

SSIREN is an acronym from the title Sacred Sites Research Newsletter, but as a creature a Siren is also a convincing symbol of the connection between beliefs, culture and nature, which is characteristic of sacred natural sites.

The Newsletter is issued quarterly and is literally "made" by its members: everyone is warmly encouraged to submit news, events, opportunities, and recent relevant publications, or to introduce their work in a feature article. Relevant contributions from all academic disciplines, as well as NGO practitioners and other institutions, are warmly welcome.

## CONTACTS

For inquiries about the newsletter, to submit an article, or to contribute in any other way, please contact the editors:

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## FRIENDS



SANASI - World Database on Sacred Natural Sites



ARC - The Alliance of Religions and Conservation



ISSRNC - The International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture

## EVENTS

### 11<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity October 1-19. Hyderabad, India

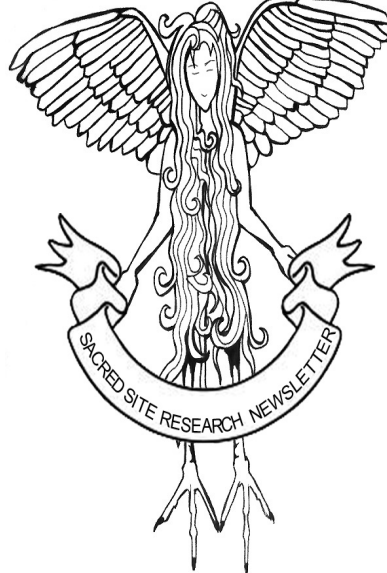
Info and details at the [conference website](http://www.biodiv.org).

### 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the International Association of Environmental Philosophy November 3-5. Rochester, NY, USA

Info and details at the [conference website](http://www.iaep.org).

### Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion November 15-19. Chicago, Illinois, USA

Info and details at the [conference website](http://www.aar.org).



You receive this newsletter because you have previously participated in initiatives on sacred natural sites.

Tired of it? Please **contact the Editors**. Think it's fantastic and would like to involve a colleague or a friend? **Contact the Editors** all the same.