

Be it fish ladders or butterfly trails, two girls give it back to nature

Winners of the Ramabai Joshi award, Ketaki Ghate and Manasi Karandikar, are into full-time ecological restoration

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AT a small check dam in Mohapada, near Nashik, shoals of fish jump their way upstream. They are helped by small steps built in the water. These passages, or fish ladders, have been constructed with a purpose—to allow fish migration from the dam to the source of the stream during monsoon.

While this is a done thing in the US and in European countries, Pune-based OIKOS consultancy is among the few organisations that have introduced it in India.

The consultancy is run by two

young girls, Ketaki Ghate and Manasi Karandikar, who have been working in natural resource management, biodiversity conservation and eco-tourism planning for four years now.

With clientele ranging from private landowners to corporates like CIPLA and farmers, they plan to make conservation everyone's business. "People think restoration and preservation is the sole responsibility of the government and environmentalists. We want to make the common man accountable for the conservation of natural resources too," says Karandikar.

For their innovative services, the girls were recently felicitated



Ketaki Ghate (left) and Manasi Kulkarni and the fish ladders (right). File photo

with the prestigious Ramabai Joshi Award.

OIKOS took root when Ghate and Karandikar completed their diploma from the Pune-based Ecological Society.

Karandikar had already worked with Wild, an NGO, and Ghate was interested in taking up environment restoration as a full-fledged career.

OIKOS offers its clientele services in natural resource management, ecological landscaping and eco-tourism planning. As



part of the first service, they do the ecological assessment of the land and bio-diversity present to judge the potential. After the survey, they suggest ways to enhance the productivity and self-sufficiency of land in terms of water and energy. "We also provide baseline data that helps in evaluating and forecasting impacts of the development being undertaken," says Ghate.

In a bid to save the environment, OIKOS has come up with the concept of ecological landscaping, whereby they use native plant species to beautify the place. "Alien plants like Subabul, nilgiri and gulmohar don't help our environmental condi-

tions. These exotic trees alter the natural composition of forests and disrupt the integrity of life on the site," explains Ghate. Instead, the Flame of the Forest, Indian coral tree and pipal are planted.

CIPLA is one of the corporates which has availed of their landscaping services. As part of the programme, members of OIKOS also trained the employees so that they could take care of the landscape later on.

The girls are getting appreciation for their eco-tourism planning. Instead of putting pressure on natural reserves and sanctuaries, they strive to develop degraded lands and convert them

into eco-friendly tourist attractions. Mayurvan Natural Park, near Pune, is one of the areas being developed by them. As part of this project the consultancy will be creating butterfly trails and interpreting wildlife through signages. "We will have signboards giving information about the life-cycle of butterflies and the variety found in the park," says Karandikar.

Sanctity of wildlife will be preserved at all costs in these projects and the tourists will not be allowed to go deep into the habitat. At present, the girls are working on actor Atul Kulkarni's property in Satara, that he is trying to convert into a forest.