

The Durrell Syndrome by Anja Srimanthi, Education Officer and DESMAN graduate 2018



Life poses questions at every instance. How? What? Why? Where?

Do you get overwhelmed by all these questions flying around in your head? I was, when I came across an advert for the Durrell Endangered Species Management (DESMAN) 2018 course. The first question I asked myself was “How useful is the course for my current job?” That was followed by the whats and the whys. I currently work as the Education Officer of India's leading organisation in herpetofauna research, conservation and education – The Madras Crocodile Bank Trust/Centre for Herpetology in Chennai, India, where professional and personal development is valued equally.

I vividly remember reading Gerald Durrell books starting in the 8th grade. Since then, he has been and will always be one

of my idols who dedicated his life to a beautiful world. His simple style of writing his adventures captured my imagination and created a profound impression in my growing years. It always has been a dream to visit Jersey and have the opportunity to visually experience the Ark that Durrell set up. And there I was for 3 months, 2016 hours of my life! Life works in mysterious ways, and my vision turned into reality. I felt I was living a dream and was anxious that it might disappear soon when I chose to wake up.

I've always been interested in investigating human attitudes and behaviour towards wildlife. So, how did I end up choosing this discipline? To be honest, my career would have taken a different road, if Durrell and his adventures hadn't called out to me through his books! Humans are an integral part of this ecosystem and largely ignored in conservation planning. I firmly believe that we have enough ecologists in the world and we need more people in conservation. The emergence of Human Dimensions in Conservation as a discipline has provided me with a platform to examine the economic, social and ecological interactions between humans and landscapes (which we often tend to ignore). It has also put forth the complexities of human-wildlife interaction and the challenges of peaceful coexistence.

Getting accepted into DESMAN 2018, was an opportunity I did not want to miss, primarily because I was interested in gaining diverse skills to grow into a well-rounded individual. The course has provided a platform to put forth and discuss conservation challenges and optimism with friends made on the journey from one end of the world to another. The skills taught in this course has been intensive and extensive experience. These skills have facilitated my confidence, determination, and taught me to manage different situations more rationally. A new skill on a resume is useful for potential

employers, but a resume can only get you so far; it is your skills, understanding, and experience about the intricate socio-ecological systems that genuinely matter. The more, the better is the current scenario in conservation, since we seem to be losing species at an exponential rate.

“Where do I see myself in the future and how will my career span out?” is a tough question to answer. None of us are certain of how our future will pan out. But we can control our present actions, which are drivers for future growth. My passion for conservation focused on socio-economic measures and finding solutions that are sustainable economically and socially acceptable, is in its nascent career stage. Personally, I am aspiring towards a full-fledged career in conservation. This course is a milestone in my conservation journey, and I plan to achieve more in future. I want to remember the highs, the lows, and celebrate those moments by learning, working and living with passion for nature.