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NETWORK

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Growing our Network: News from the International Land Conservation Network's Scoping Trip to India

May 10, 2023

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Visiting Jabarkhet Nature Reserve, Mussoorie, Uttarakhand

Over the course of two weeks this past March, International Land Conservation Network (ILCN) staff Chandni Navalkha and advisor Henry Tepper— also the Strategic Conservation lead at the Chilean land trust [Fundación Tierra Austral](#)— conducted the ILCN's first trip to India with the goal of expanding the network's partners and participants from the sub-continent and better understanding the context for private and civic land conservation in the country.

The scoping trip is part of an ongoing effort the ILCN is undertaking to grow its network in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Civic conservation organizations play an important but under-recognized and under-studied role in countries throughout these geographies. Private land conservation is not new in many

African or Latin American countries but is less well-known and practiced in South Asian countries like India. The ILCN recognized that its network in India—a megadiverse country and part of the High-Ambition Coalition for Nature and People that has [signed on](#) to the 30x30 target—was comparatively underdeveloped.

With this understanding, the ILCN team planned meetings with key conservation leaders, legal experts, organizations, and networks in India. Our pre-trip outreach was greatly informed by Brent Mitchell, senior vice president at the Quebec-Labrador Foundation; Marc Evans, board chair of Kentucky Natural Lands Trust, who joined the ILCN for much of the trip; and Belinda Wright, a renowned tiger conservationist who founded the Wildlife Protection Society of India. With their help, the ILCN team met with colleagues from across India who are undertaking remarkable private and civic land conservation efforts focused on wildlife conservation, landscape connectivity, and urban biodiversity.

In Kanha National Park, one of the largest tiger reserves in the country, the ILCN attended the fifth [Central Indian Landscape Symposium](#), convened by the [Network for Conserving Central India](#). The conference, Exploring the Duality and Dance of Peoples’ Livelihoods and Ecological Integrity, grounded participants in core questions, innovations, and explorations around approaches to conservation that advance India’s development agenda and grapple with key development issues.

With a better understanding of the context for conservation in the country, the ILCN team went on to visit with several individuals and organizations leading private land conservation efforts. The team met with a landowner in Rajasthan who—over the past two decades—acquired and restored an area adjoining Ranthambore National Park, India’s most famous wildlife sanctuary; a wildlife ecologist in Uttarakhand who has spent decades protecting a private forest on his land; and a conservation leader who is working to establish a private nature reserve at the foothills of the Himalayas.

Given only limited time, the ILCN team barely scratched the surface of dedicated, diverse initiatives that are underway throughout the country. The examples explored here are just a few that showcase how private and civic initiatives in India are working individually and in partnership across sectors to conserve land in a country with varying legal and institutional contexts across its 28 states and eight union territories.

To better understand these contexts, the ILCN team met with key law and policy experts, including the former head of India’s National Biodiversity Authority, Vinod Mathur; Ritwick Dutta, founder of the Legal Initiative for Forest and Environment in India; and Ruchi Pant, head of Natural Resource Management and Biodiversity at the United Nations Development Programme – India. A key takeaway from these conversations is India’s leadership and roadmap for identifying and recognizing Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures, which will [play a key role in its progress](#) towards the 30x30 target.

The ILCN is looking forward to continuing to strengthen its relationships with the dedicated individuals who took time to meet with its team, and to growing its connections with Indian practitioners. Look out for a detailed trip report, with further context for the practice and potential for private and civic land conservation in India, to be shared with the network in coming months.

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