

KIRAN PURANDARE

62/A, Prashant Bungalow, Next to Ravindra Mhatre Bridge,

Erandawane Gaonthan, Off Karve Road, Pune 411004.

Maharashtra, India.

Telephone: 91-20-2544031, Mobile: 9765818825

Email:pakshiweda@yahoo.co.in

Kiran Purandare ('Kika' to his innumerable fans) is a Kalyan (Thane District of Maharashtra) born Commerce Graduate (B.Com.) from the Savitribai Phule University of Pune. He has been a student, conservator, teacher and author in the field of environment and nature for more than three decades. His work mainly focuses on the study of birds and their environment, ecology of natural waterholes, creation of eco-friendly waterholes, and spreading awareness about various aspects of nature amongst people.

Almost since the age of sixteen, his feathered friends became an inseparable part of his life. The late Dr. Ramesh Bidwe was his guide and initial mentor who initiated him in to the study of birds. Today, Kiran Purandare is one of the prominent figures through which Pune's general populace gets to learn about preservation and conservation of nature.

Kiran Purandare has actively participated in over 500 educational programs related to nature and environment. He has served as the Education Officer of the Pune Division of the World Wide Fund for Nature-India, from 1986 to 1996. He represented the organization at the Jordanhill College of Education, Glasgow, Scotland and successfully completed their environment education course. He was a part of 'Save the Western Ghats movement' in the year 1994. He has been the guide and navigator of organizations like Nature Walk, Yuvashakti, Aasamant Benevolence Foundation, and more.

He has an exemplary command over his native Marathi language and has a number of books to his credit, which describe nature in his inimitable style. Books such as 'Kapshichi Diary', 'Muthevarcha Dhobi', 'Anganateel Pari' may be termed masterpieces of Marathi literature. His books 'Aabhalwatanche Pravasi' and 'Sakha Nagzira' have received the Government of Maharashtra Awards for the best literary works (non-fiction) in Marathi, in 1995 and 2007 respectively. Around 300 articles and write-ups authored by him have appeared in various publications and are well-known here.

He has been The Founder of organizations like 'Nisargvedh' and 'Ruturang' in the year 1996 and 1997 respectively, which created a platform for him to work independently. These organizations have tied the tight tassels of the lay public – both young and old – with nature through audiovisual presentations, talks, nature excursions and nature orientation camps conducted by Ruturang.

Kiran Purandare's enthusiasm is infectious and his mere presence is enough to enthrall tiny tots and adults alike. He is able to induce in everyone an insatiable curiosity about nature. He has gained mastery in bird identification. He is blessed with an almost magical ability that enables him to mimic calls of more than 70 Indian birds. This ensures that the birds whose calls he imitates so flawlessly are attracted to his hiding place in search of their competitor! Naturally he is able to observe them from very close.

He loves to interact with people and his treasure trove of knowledge is open to all. He has conducted over 500 talks, slide shows, and film shows in schools in and around Pune. He has designed nature-related projects for students of Aksharnandan school in Pune. His audio-visual presentations are extremely popular all over Maharashtra and draw large crowds. His influence has reached into lakhs of homes through his talks on All India Radio's Pune, Mumbai, Jalgaon, Nagpur, and Aurangabad stations. He writes for widely circulated newspapers like Sakal, Maharashtra Times, Lokasatta, Young Buzz (a supplement of Sakal Times) and many more.

Kiran Purandare is also interested in wildlife photography along with travelling. He likes to take photographs of insects, butterflies, amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals, and their natural habitats. He has a collection of around 5000 photographs and slides. His photographs have featured in the book 'Birds of Prey of the Indian Subcontinent' (authored by world-famous ornithologist Rishad Naorji). He has travelled widely across the Indian subcontinent and has visited many protected reserves and areas including Anaimalai, Mudumalai, Bandipur, Chakrata, Dandeli, Navegaon, Nagzira, Little Run of Kutch and many more and studied the flora and fauna there. His travelogues also describe his wildlife explorations in Kenya, Nepal, Scotland, and Thailand. He was fortunate enough to be with an avid bird watcher Paul Bradbeer from London. He has attended an international ornithology congress held in Thailand.

Kiran Purandare has been instrumental in starting a bird fest in Pune in close cooperation with Nature Walk, a charitable trust, and conceptualized various programs related to the avifauna of the Indian subcontinent. The bird fest is gaining momentum and has become extremely popular in other cities of the state too.

He has put in a massive amount of work in Navegaon Nagzira Tiger Reserve, earlier known as the Nagzira Wildlife Sanctuary. In addition to an in-depth study of the forest ecosystem he has earned the confidence and goodwill of the local people living in the vicinity of the reserve. His outreach programs include slide-illustrated talks, excursions organized for tribal students, restoration of bore wells, sports competitions, health check-ups, medical treatment, cleanliness drives, training for local guides, lectures and audio-visual presentations for local schools, colleges, and voluntary groups, rescue of snakes and injured birds, tree plantation drives, etc. He has played a vital role in imbuing love for nature amongst the people of Gondia and Bhandara districts of Maharashtra. He is probably the non-native person in the world who has spent more than 1300 days in Nagzira and its surroundings since 2001.

Kiran Purandare has been awarded the 'Shiwai' award by Sarvodaya Pratishtan and Pune Municipal Corporation for his contribution to the field of environmental education and nature conservation. The Rotary club of Pune Central also has appreciated his work with a memento. Recently the Environmental

Forum of India felicitated him by conferring the 'Vasundhara' award. Among the many other awards he has received, is the 'Vasundhara Mitra' awarded by Vasundhara International Film Festival, a Kirloskar and Club Vasundhara initiative. The government of Maharashtra has appointed him as the honorary wildlife warden for the district of Pune.

Kiran Purandare currently runs the eponymous Kika's Bird Club for bird enthusiasts.

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