

Management service with a difference!

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PUNE: With a view to contribute to nature conservation, Oikos, a city-based consultancy firm has been giving assistance in the field of natural resource management, bio-diversity conservation, ecological landscaping and eco-tourism planning for the past four years. Ketaki Ghate and Manasi Karandikar from Oikos were recently accorded the Ramabai Joshi award by the Maharashtra Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Agriculture (MCCIA), for a first-of-its-kind service offered in Ecological Management.

The firm has completed various projects in eco-development, wildlife habitat restoration and eco-tourism destination development, working with the corporate sector, landowners and entrepreneurs to make energy conservation everybody's business. Speaking to *The Herald*, Ketaki said Oikos provides services in ecological management, landscaping and eco-tourism planning. "We provide ways to improve nature's conditions wherever possible - be it backyards, open plots, mountain slopes, wetlands or lakes. Every part of the landscape is a functioning unit of some eco-system."

"After a diploma in 'Sustainable Development of Natural Resources & Conservation', we



Ketaki Ghate and Manasi Karandikar

wanted to work full time in this field, but also had to earn our bread and butter. There were people who worked as volunteers for energy conservation. But then substantial work doesn't happen unless there's a payment. So we started the consultancy as an independent practice in response to an increasing demand for objective ecological expertise with knowledge of the planning process." Ketaki shared.

She said certain ecological restoration techniques can improve and maintain the bio-diversity of any area. They can develop healthy functioning ecosystems. Oikos provides consul-

tancy for management of open areas and natural ecosystems such as grasslands, vegetation patches, wetlands, coasts, hill slopes, etc. It also provides service in developing eco-tourism sites like nature parks, forest gardens, butterfly parks, nature trails, preparing signage, leaflets, books, field guides and maps.

"Existing tourist sites are getting destroyed due to a huge influx of tourists. It is necessary to develop new tourist destinations to lessen this pressure and also to restore degraded land. Nowadays people prefer to use exotic plants in the process of beautifying their land space."

She emphatically states that such plants threaten the natural composition of forest; they restrict, prey on or compete with native plants and disrupt the integrity of site. "Unchecked growth of such trees spoils the natural look of the area whereas native trees easily suit in the frame and start healthy processes. They provide shelter and food for animals and birds, butterflies and other wildlife by providing diverse habitats and food sources." She added.

Having completed a variety of projects, Ketaki and Manasi are now working on farmhouse project in Satara. They are generating a good response and a healthy business and of course, contributing to the cause of conserving nature.