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LOST! AMPHIBIANS OF INDIA: New Campaign Launched Through Partnership with University of Delhi

NEW DELHI, Nov. 2, 2010 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- The University of Delhi along with Global Wildlife Conservation, the Natural History Museum (London), the IUCN/SSC Amphibian Specialist Group, the Wildlife Conservation Society, and Conservation International announced today an exciting new partnership to search for long lost amphibian species in India. The details of the new campaign, called **LOST! AMPHIBIANS of INDIA (LAI)**, was revealed to the world through the Internet (www.lostspeciesindia.org) with a series of educational videos, social media postings, and the release of a declaration of global support to follow asking individuals to sign on to the mission to find and protect these threatened and near-extinct species.

"Now is the time to act and show our support for these species of India before they shift from lost to extinct," said Conservation International's President, Dr. Russell Mittermeier.

On November 2, 2010, the Minister of Environment, Shri. Jairam Ramesh, and other top officials from India's environmental agencies will meet with LAI partners to plan the actions necessary for India's most imperiled amphibians. This meeting and subsequent actions have already received funding from Indian government agencies, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, and others. However, greater investment will be critical to the creation of a network of new protected areas.

India has more lost amphibian species, 48 in total, than any other country in the world. Most of these species have not been seen by scientists for decades, with some missing for over 150 years. The majority of these species are known only by a single preserved specimen in a jar at either the Natural History Museum in London or the Zoological Survey of India. Worse yet, at least 17 lost species exist in name only, having been lost over the past century.

LOST! AMPHIBIANS of INDIA aims to change this by organizing top teams of researchers from India and around the world to explore India's remaining wilderness areas, in order to relocate existing populations of these amphibians and assess their conservation requirements. Many of the sites are remote and present the hazards of rugged terrain and monsoon rains. However if the effort to find them is not made now, their habitats may be lost before appropriate conservation actions can be

implemented. Only 1.5% of the original forests remain in the Western Ghats and several species are already thought to be extinct; many other parts of the country have even worse habitat loss.

"Amphibians are popularly known as environmental barometers. They indicate the state of environmental health. Hence any information about their conservation is extremely vital not only from an amphibian research point of view but also from the perspective of overall nature conservation," explains Delhi University Associate Professor Dr S. D. Biju, who is organizing the **LAI** project.

In preparation for finding species in need of swift conservation action, **LOST! AMPHIBIANS of INDIA** is simultaneously initiating discussions to develop the Western Ghats Network of Protected Areas for Threatened Amphibians (WNPATA; www.wnpata.org). Protecting the amphibian habitats of India will also benefit communities who depend on forests for the provision of freshwater, erosion control, and sources of livelihood. The **LOST! AMPHIBIANS of INDIA** campaign is therefore not only a last chance to save some of the planet's most endangered wildlife, but it will also focus attention on remote, rural communities in India and how they depend on the integrity of the environment for its provision of natural resources.

Saving lost amphibians will impact more than just the species that are the targets of exploration, but also entire unique ecosystems and the people that depend on them. **But to save them, first we have to find them. The quest has begun.**

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The **University of Delhi** is a premier university of India and is known for its high standards in teaching and research. The Vice President of India is the University's Chancellor. The Systematics Lab is a unit of the Department of Environmental Biology and contributes to conservation of amphibians through discovery and documentation of species.

Global Wildlife Conservation improves life on Earth by advancing both academic and applied approaches to conservation research, action, and education. Along with its numerous strategic worldwide partners, GWC is pursuing a common goal: to save plants and animals from extinction and better understand and maintain the natural world and its biological diversity.

The mission of the **Natural History Museum (London)** is to maintain and develop its collections and use them to promote the discovery, understanding, responsible use and enjoyment of the natural world.

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