

NATIONAL

Bawa first Indian to receive Linnean Medal



STAFF REPORTER

KOCHI, MAY 28, 2018 21:50 IST

UPDATED: MAY 28, 2018 21:52 IST

The scientist is being recognised for his pioneering botanical research in the tropics

Indian botanist Kamaljit S. Bawa, president of Bengaluru-based non-profit Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE), received the prestigious Linnean Medal in **Botany** from the Linnean Society of London on May 24.

Dr. Bawa is the first Indian to win the award ever since it was first constituted in 1888. According to a press release by ATREE, the scientist is being recognised for his pioneering research on the

evolution of tropical plants, tropical deforestation, non-timber forest products and for decades of work on the biodiversity of forests in Central America, the Western Ghats and the Eastern Himalaya.

Noted contributions

Also cited were Dr. Bawa's efforts in establishing the open-access interdisciplinary journal *Conservation and Society* (which publishes peer-reviewed research exploring linkages between society, environment and development) in 2003, the online citizen-science repository 'India Biodiversity Portal' and ATREE (ranked second in Asia and 18th globally among the world's environment think tanks, which generates interdisciplinary knowledge to inform policy and practice to achieve environmental conservation and sustainable development).

"The Linnean Medal is a good recognition of our work on conservation and sustainability, and will serve as a fresh reminder that we need to redouble our efforts to fully document and study our planet's incredible plant wealth that is rapidly declining," said a press release quoting the scientist, who is also a Distinguished Professor of Biology at the University of Massachusetts, Boston.

The Linnean Medal is awarded to a biologist every year by the Linnean Society of London (the world's oldest active biological society founded in 1788 and named after famous Swedish biologist Carl Linnaeus who gave us one of the systems of naming plants and animals). According to the society's website, it is awarded "as an expression of the society's esteem and appreciation for service to science."

Incidentally, the first scientist to receive the Linnean Medal was Sir Joseph D. Hooker who compiled the monumental seven-volume *Flora of British India*, the first ever comprehensive account of India's plants. Other recipients include Alfred Wallace (popularly known as the 'father of biogeography') in 1892 and Ernst Mayr – famous evolutionary biologist who proposed the 'biological species concept', which is the most widely-accepted definition of a species – in 1977.

Printable version | May 29, 2018 9:26:53 AM | <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/botanist-kamaljit-s-bawa-first-indian-to-receive-linnean-medal/article24016859.ece>

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