All human societies are faced with the urgent task of reviving healthy ecosystems. This apprenticeship offers the opportunity to learn and start acting concretely about it in three locations in South India.
You will be guided by a team of experts who have dedicated decades to regenerating natural ecosystems in South India. Their conservation, restoration and community work involves close interactions with natural and human communities, and understands that human wellbeing is inseparable from that of the natural environment. The course therefore takes a bio-geographical-horticultural-community oriented approach to ecological health.

The focus of the course is on developing a close relationship with nature and a sense of care for the infinitely complex living world. Neither of these can be learnt from books. The course is about lifestyles and livelihoods and about gardening back the natural world. It promotes an understanding of the exploitative practices that have brought us to the edge of global collapse, and the skills to collaborate with others to nourish a sane approach to living on this planet.

We invite you to learn from each other in the field, as well as from neighbouring communities and from us. The apprenticeship includes direct, personal contact and first-hand learning with the natural world; practical work on the land to hone useful skills; the study of relevant subjects such as ecology, natural history, anthropology and political economy; sharing one’s learning with others; exploring one’s personal interests and capacities.
I. THE FOREST WAY, TIRUVANNAMALAI (AUGUST-OCTOBER)

Understanding life in Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest (plants, trees, birds, insects, ...)

- Working on tree nursery skills (seed collection, germination, sapling maintenance, planting out)
- Working on the vegetable garden and farm on the school campus
- Learning basic life skills like stitching, rope making, knots, building with mud
- Case study of legal action for environmental protection
- Different perspectives on education
- Local food economy: case study of on-campus store

II. GURUKULA BOTANICAL SANCTUARY (NOVEMBER-JANUARY)

Understanding life in Medium Elevation Evergreen Rain Forest; riparian ecology, forest recovery on GBS protected lands, nature surveys (plants, birds, insects; amphibians, reptiles and mammals, ...)

- Exploring different ecological knowledge systems (modern natural history, traditional and indigenous, uncovering one's own)
- Conservation through rainforest gardening, learning the different life forms in the forest (epiphytes, annuals, trees, climbers, shrubs etc).
- Horticulture, organic gardening, food forests, rice cultivation
- Basic plant and soil science
- Community based conservation (caring for a river, rewilding tea and other plantations, monitoring toxic practices and stopping them, forging ecological governance through dialogue and partnerships)
- The politics of land use, environmental and social justice
- Self and nature
- The problem of civilization (through an Indian lens)

III. UPSTREAM ECOSYSTEM THE NILGIRIS (FEBRUARY-APRIL)

Understanding life in High-Elevation Shola-Grassland ecologies (plants, mammals, hydrology, indigenous people, climate change impacts, ...)

- Restoration of high elevation montane shola (focus on grasses)
- Working on grassland nursery skills (propagation, seed collection, planting out, de-weeding, maintenance etc...)
- Removing light invasion of exotic invasive species on existing grassland tracts
- Learning the impacts of climate change on ecosystems
- Understanding landscape level pressures, such as urbanization and industrial farming on fragile habitats
- Interaction with local school children in combined nature activities
- Learning from the Toda community
As a first step, we need to meet the creatures of a natural community directly and “personally”, learn about their interactions and the important processes they go through. In particular we need to open our senses to soil and plants, as they are the fundamental organisms that we work with. We will get to know the many animals that live in these habitats too. Working with people is an important aspect of the course, and in life. There are other tasks as well that have to be undertaken to build and maintain the organisation we form part of, whether big or small, formal or informal. For instance, planning and implementing meetings, writing progress reports, fundraising, drawing up and maintaining a budget, building relationships with government departments and other groups, basic legal skills, etcetera.

Education is an integral part of our work. We shall complement our learning about the natural world with exploring meaningful education, with this apprenticeship providing a case for study.

If you would like to join, write to us at ecologicalnurturance@gmail.com to receive an application form from us or leave a message on this Facebook page: Econurturance