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Parveen Shaikh Wins 2026 Whitley Award

Published On: 02-05-2026



Why in News??

Scientist Parveen Shaikh has received the 2026 Whitley Award for her work in protecting the endangered Indian skimmer along Indian rivers, especially the Chambal and Ganga-Yamuna basin.

About Whitley Award:

Award given by Whitley Fund for Nature (UK)

Also called "Green Oscars"

Recognises grassroots conservation work

Focus: protecting endangered species + habitats

Indian Skimmer – Key Facts:

Scientific conservation focus: Indian skimmer

Found mainly in India (more than 90% of global population)

Total population: ~3,000 birds

Identifying feature: bright orange beak

Behavior: flies low and skims water to catch fish

Breeding sites: sandbanks and river islands

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Threats: river changes, predators, human disturbance

Conservation Work by Parveen Shaikh:

Works with Bombay Natural History Society

Started project: “Guardians of the Skimmer” (Chambal River)

Impact So Far (Chambal River):

Population increased: 400 (2017) ? 1000 (2025)

Nest survival improved: 14% ? 27%

Community participation increased significantly

Community Model:

Local villagers act as “bird guardians”

They:

Monitor nests

Identify safe sandbars

Prevent human disturbance

People now call them “our birds” ? sense of ownership

Expansion Plan (Prayagraj):

Work will now expand to Prayagraj where Ganga and Yamuna meet.

Key Challenges:

Heavy boat traffic

Fishing activity

Religious activities on riverbanks

Urban pollution

Planned Actions:

New local guardians appointment

Predator-proof fencing

GPS-based nest monitoring

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Other Indian Winner:

Barkha Subba (India)

Works on protecting Himalayan salamander

Focus on wetland conservation in Darjeeling Himalaya

Final Takeaway:

Parveen Shaikh's work shows that community participation + scientific monitoring can successfully increase endangered bird populations, making river ecosystems more sustainable.