

## 50 Years Of Swimming With The Tiger

Tata Power has always strived to be a conscious corporate in keeping with the long-standing tradition of the Tata Group. Preserving the environment, being humane towards our earth, promoting bio-diversity, and maintaining the ecological balance, have always been more than a passion for us. And in that regard it gives us great joy to announce we have completed 50 years of our project with the Mahseer - protecting and increasing the number of this Tiger of the Waters.

There is so much to talk about the Mahseer. (*Fifty years is anyway a long time!*) This is a grand fish that has a royal presence and impressive qualities. It belongs to a freshwater species that for many years has faced the threat of extinction in the wild.

At one time, this regal specimen used to thrive in the rapids of the Himalayan and Sahyadri ranges, besides other rivers and lakes across the country. But soon this Mighty Mahseer, was being hunted because of its commanding size and rich looks. It became the target of fishermen as well as fishing companies. Out of 15 species of Mahseer in India, five faced the dire threat of extinction.

That was when we at Tata Power decided to step in, exactly fifty years ago. Just in the nick of time. For a fish that was literally feeling out of water!

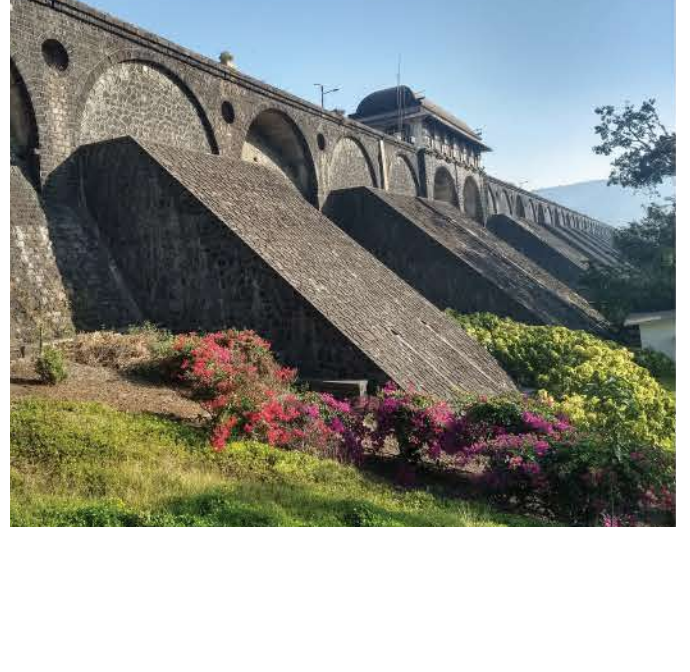
*And today, on World Environment Day we are happy to announce that the Blue-Finned Mahseer has been taken off the IUCN red list.*



## Making 'Act For Mahseer' As Crucial As Save The Tiger

There is quite a quaint story as to how Tata Power wholeheartedly got immersed in Mahseer conservation. Apparently, the locals living in the villages in rural Maharashtra would worship the Mahseer as a god-fish because it sports a barbule above its mouth that resembles a 'nathini' worn by a woman. These locals began noticing the dwindling of the Mahseer and then to their dismay, its absolute disappearance. Not knowing whom to turn to, they approached the Fisheries Department for help. The Department in turn enlisted Tata Power for support, since it had its plant in the area and was seen as a corporate that could make a difference.

And thus started Tata Power's saga with the Mahseer. Exactly half a century ago.



After carefully analysing and understanding the situation, a Mahseer Breeding Centre was set up in conjunction with the Central Institute of Fisheries Education near Tata Power's Walvan Dam project at Lonavala, Maharashtra. Concentrating especially on the Blue-Finned and the top-of-the-pops Golden Mahseer. For the last 50 years, the Centre has offered its unstinted support, ideas and innovation to increase the numbers of this precious species.

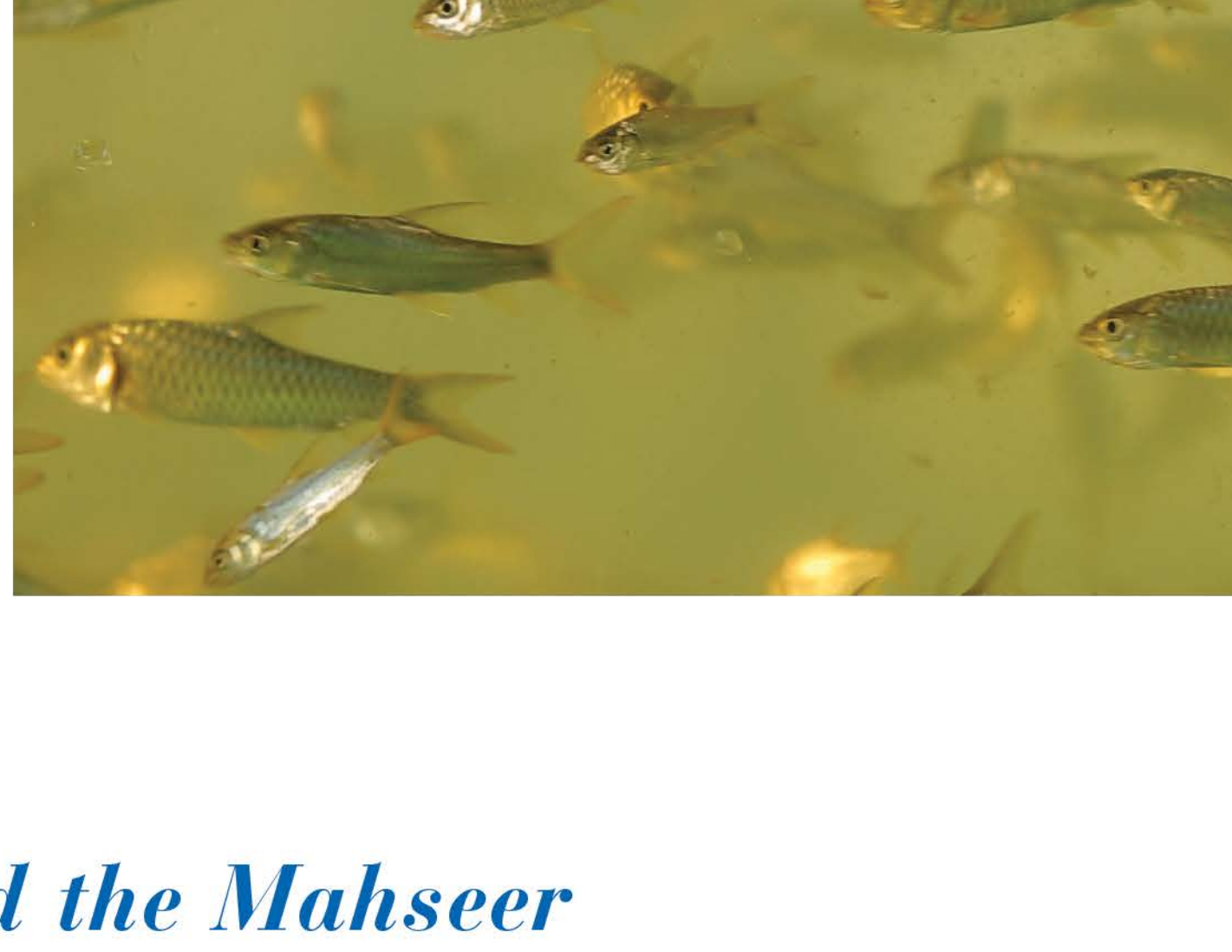
Today, besides reintroducing millions of baby Mahseer into rivers where they were once wiped out, Tata Power has initiated a slew of interesting programs to involve the general public. These include donating a hatchling or fingerling (*baby Mahseer*) for every Save The Mahseer pledge taken by people, conferring a 'Fish's Knight' title and other rewards on those who sensitize citizens on saving the Mahseer, engaging the general public with a micro-site, a travelogue, a gaming app etc. Our conservation initiatives include numerous donation drives, encouraging volunteering for habitat adoption and experiential visits to our Hatchery in Lonavala. All aimed at making the Act For Mahseer campaign as crucial as Save The Tiger.

## The Mahseer Is Our Ecological Future

This unique fish is very sensitive to dissolved oxygen levels, water temperature and sudden climatic changes. It just cannot bear pollution. It is thus an important indicator of freshwater.

Also, the current pandemic has taught us that by hunting animals and indiscriminate fishing, we are destroying entire habitats and eco-systems. Thus making it easier for diseases to spread from one animal or bird or fish to another, and then spill over onto humans.

It follows then, that conserving the Mahseer, increasing its numbers, and getting it off the IUCN red list is even more important today than ever before.



## How We Have Empowered the Mahseer

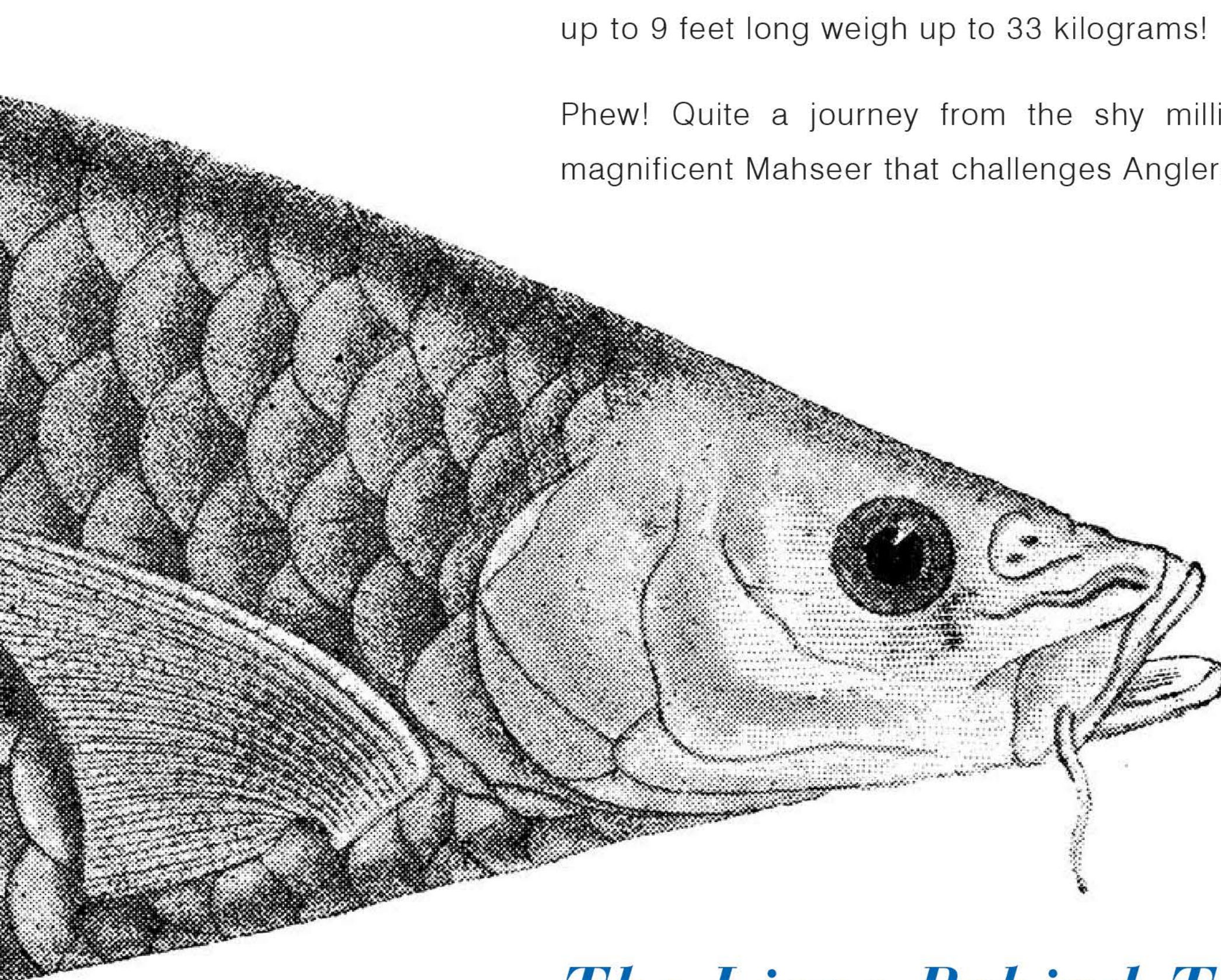
We have developed an ingenious method to breed 4-5 lakh of Mahseer hatchlings at a time at the Walvan Hatchery near Lonavala, by creating a huge lake while damming the Indrayani river. It is here that the Blue-Finned and Golden species of Mahseer congregate, attracted by the sound of the highly oxygenated water in the lake.



Only brooder fish (*that are used to spawn hatchlings*) are collected from here and introduced into ponds or lakes that have gushing water falling from heights to mimic the sounds of monsoon and waterfalls (*since this stimulates the brooder's reproductive process*).

Once the eggs are fertilised, (*over the last 50 years there have been 15 million of them*), the baby hatchlings emerge within 72-96 hours. And at the end of 4-6 months they are ready to be handed over to various fisheries departments across the country, who in turn introduce them into lakes and rivers in their states. This too is a very careful and well-coordinated effort between Tata Power and the Fisheries Departments and over the years has resulted in some 11.6 million hatchlings making their homes in waters all over India and growing into awe-inspiring specimens that can measure up to 9 feet long weigh up to 33 kilograms!

Phew! Quite a journey from the shy millimetre long hatchlings to the magnificent Mahseer that challenges Anglers from all over the world.

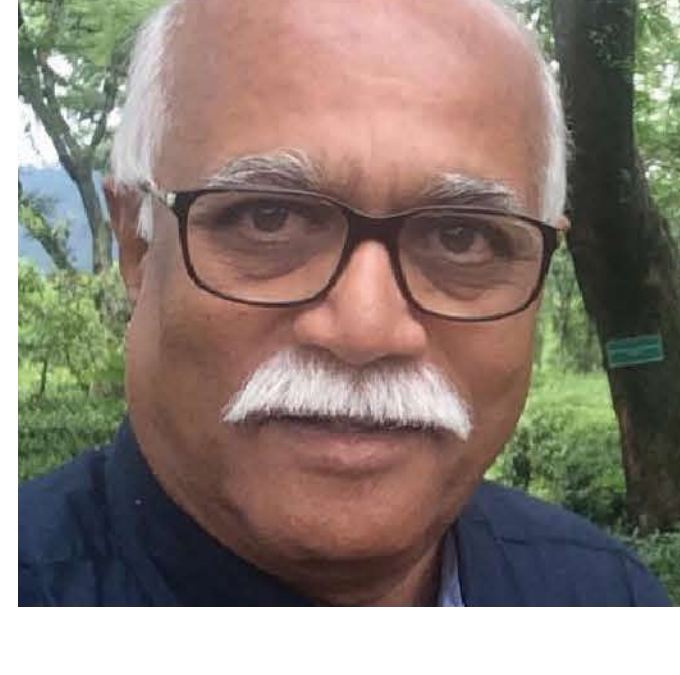


## The Lions Behind The Tigers Of The Water

Tata Power is proud to recount the efforts of these Mahseer champions who have gone about their work in an understated manner and without ever fishing for compliments.

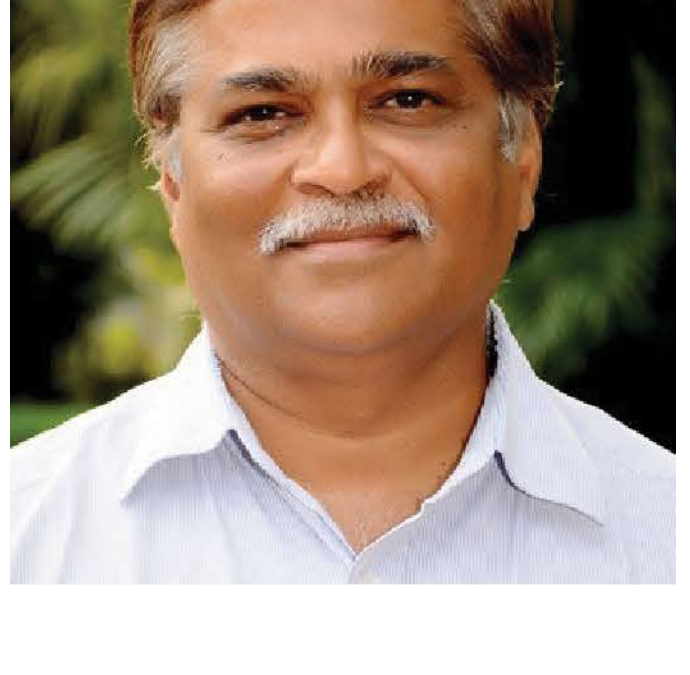
MR. S .N. OGALE

A Senior Scientist in the field of breeding and conservation of the Mahseer, He has been associated with Tata Power since 1971 and has achieved pioneering results in Captive breeding and cage culture. He was also a former consultant to the World Bank. As part of his scientific work he has also published a monograph on Mahseer.



MR. VIVEK VISHWASRAO

Has been associated with Tata Power since 1986 and is Head of Biodiversity. He has coauthored books on Wild Orchids of Northern Western Ghats and Birds of Lonavla and Khandala. He has also conducted Mahseer awareness programmes for School and college students and believes in protection of Natural Habitats.



## Making The Mahseer A Youth Icon

We have been conducting various activities for youngsters under our Club Nerji initiative. These include excursions that raise awareness about the gorgeous Mahseer. The idea is to encourage children to learn about an important aspect of their ecology, while also initiating the slightly older kids into enjoying the sport of fishing the Mahseer, and then letting it back into the water. Letting the fish go into the water also teaches them important lessons of life, of letting go, of not trying to possess more than is required, of maintaining a balance with nature, and making peace with it.

As part of their visits to the Walvan hatchery most children handle a live (*and in fact live-wire*) fish for the very first time. Some of them have been known to exclaim 'why do we eat such a beautiful fish?' When they realise that water pollution leads to a dwindling of the Mahseer, they start discussing ideas to keep the rivers pollution free. They easily fall in love with this interesting fish and quite a few of them want to visit their new-found friends again.



## 50 years, but the work is far from over

The Mahseer numbers have been growing by leaps and bounds with every passing year. Unlike typical corporate practice, success in this venture is measured by literally going into the red, so that the Mahseer goes off the IUCN endangered list! Now what do we mean by that?

Our success in this long 50 year saga with the Mahseer is best measured by the number of hatchlings we breed, (to be distributed all over the country). These have progressively started falling year on year instead of increasing. This means that the Mahseer population is growing organically. Rivers and lakes that were once bereft of the Mahseer are now teeming with them after hatchlings introduced from the Walvan hatchery have started breeding and increasing. Mahseer are also now being increasingly sighted at various points by avid Anglers. However the Golden Mahseer is still not off the red list and Tata Power will only believe its mission is accomplished when this is achieved.



## Let's All Swim With The Mahseer

All through this landmark 50th year, Tata Power will be conducting various programs, organising excursions, as well as creating media and educational tools to bring this fab-fish closer to the minds and hearts of India.

These will include conferences, dialogues and talks by various experts on the subject, getting Anglers to share unique experiences, offering fun facts to familiarise the general public about the Mahseer through various media channels, launching cool Mahseer merchandise and stationery, sensitising school students through workshops and interactive sessions at the Hatchery, creating a lively fish mnemonic that the youth can identify with, as well as tying up with other renowned wildlife and conservation organisations to increase scope of awareness.

We look forward to all of us in Tata Power as well as in the rest of the Group joining in with many of these activities as possible and making them a success in our energy and enthusiasm. Do spread the Mahseer story among friends, neighbours and groups.

Let's all do our best to raise genuine awareness and get the Mahseer off the IUCN red listing. Let our Tata spirit flow abundantly to move the whole country to **Act For Mahseer**.

