

### Ghosts that guard the forest: nature conservation in the space between extinctions

04th December 2025 (Thu)  
4:30 – 6:30 pm (UTC+8)  
Rm 221, Chen Kou Bun Building, CUHK

Iconic animals like Hong Kong’s pink dolphin have long served as the public face of conservation, attracting money, attention, and political support in ways few other organisms can. In India, tiger reserves exemplify this dynamic. But what are the broader ecological impacts? Using the synthetic control method, we show that tiger-focused protection not only reduces carbon emissions from forest loss but also helps safeguard numerous species at risk of extinction. What happens when tigers go extinct? As species disappear locally, landscapes enter a liminal space. Gone from the landscape but alive in human imagination. A period I call a species’ conservation legacy. Using the 2013 tiger extinction in Laos as a case study, I test whether such legacies can still safeguard ecosystems. The results reveal both the power and fragility of conservation built around charismatic megafauna, challenging us to ask whether the “ghosts” of lost species can continue to protect the living world, and for how long.



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Rachakonda Sreekar is a nomadic conservation biologist who has lived and worked across the Asia Pacific, from the dry forests around Adelaide to cool Sakhalin woodlands of Tomakomai and through many remote landscapes in between. His career has been shaped by a personal commitment to finding practical solutions and sustainable financing to strengthen conservation where it matters most: in the places, and for the species, on the edge of disappearing. He is currently focused on preventing the extinction of the world’s rarest great ape, the Tapanuli orangutan, while also working to uncover the hidden lives of Australia’s most elusive and threatened birds.

