Abstract

Western Ghats, one of the eight hottest hotspots of global biological diversity, harbors exceptionally high freshwater fish diversity and endemism. Approximately, 320 species of freshwater fishes are known from the Western Ghats of which 60% are endemic to the region and one-third are threatened under various IUCN Red List categories. Getting attention and priority is the primary step for effective species conservation. Species that are perceived as ‘beautiful’ receive more attention than ‘less attractive’ species. Most endemic and threatened fishes of the Western Ghats are not attractive, thereby receiving less or no attention. Here, we expose the beauty of some of the attractive and ‘eye catching’ fishes of Western Ghats to highlight the importance and value of threatened species, that co-occur with them. The present study is an alternative approach of conservation, primarily directed to the designing method inspired from pattern and colouration of fish scales. We use some of the brightly coloured attractive fishes of Western Ghats as a model organism to conserve co-occurring endemic and threatened fishes. Live colouration and scale patterns were used to create digital designs for use in products such as dresses, photo frames, postcards, book covers, mugs, earrings, bracelets, key chains etc. This study is an innovative approach to conserve freshwater fishes of Western Ghats by focusing on species aesthetics. There is an urgent need to raise the attention of people towards less attractive and charismatic species to better appreciate and protect the species that critically support the functional diversity of an ecosystem.