Q&A with SESYNC Postdoc Varsha Vijay

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Get to know one of SESYNC's newest postdocs, Varsha Vijay!

**Name:** Varsha Vijay  
**Ph.D.:** Environmental Sciences  
**Hometown:** Cedar Rapids, Iowa  
**SESYNC Project:** The Effectiveness of Protected Areas in Meeting Ecological and Socio-economic Goals of Conservation

**How would you describe your primary field of study?** Conservation Biology

**What are the broad questions you are interested in studying?**

How can we plan protected areas to protect threatened and rare species and habitats, climate resilient landscapes, and ecosystem services for human societies?

**What inspired you to choose this field of study?**

As we continue to lose species around the globe, it is increasingly urgent that we develop strategies for protection and conservation action. I believe that, by using flexible quantitative approaches and qualitative insights from practitioners and stakeholders, we can find win-win scenarios for humans and nature.

**Can you briefly describe your proposed SESYNC postdoctoral project?**

At SESYNC, I will develop a framework of quantitative, spatially-explicit ecological and socio-economic
global metrics to represent conservation goals for terrestrial protected areas. Using this framework, I will examine the effectiveness of current protected areas in meeting these goals and understand the covariation between goals. The outputs of this analysis will be used to identify important areas for further protection, because they meet underserved goals or contain a unique combination of characteristics. I will also work with partners, The Nature Conservancy and Saving Species, to understand the goals met by conservation purchases made by non-governmental organizations and how including cost affects our analyses. Finally, I will look at how strategic plans and goal setting relates to conservation purchases.

**Why is SESYNC the right place to undertake this research?**

Effective conservation is inherently about developing a greater understanding of socio-environmental systems. SESYNC offers opportunities to better understand these systems not just through the considerable data science resources and expertise found at the Center, but also through collaborations with social scientists facilitated by the dynamic work environment. I hope to effectively leverage this opportunity to produce truly actionable research.

**What are you reading right now?**

I am reading The Amazon Várzea: The Decade Past and the Decade Ahead and Right of Passage: Elephant Corridors of India. I also recently finished the book Evicted by Matthew Desmond, which was such a thought provoking look into income inequality and housing instability in the United States.

**Audience:**
- Researcher [1]
- Educator [2]
- Cyberinfrastructure [3]

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