

# Whispering Wilds

A Product of Exploring Nature Call of The Wild

Edition-4 (October 2023)

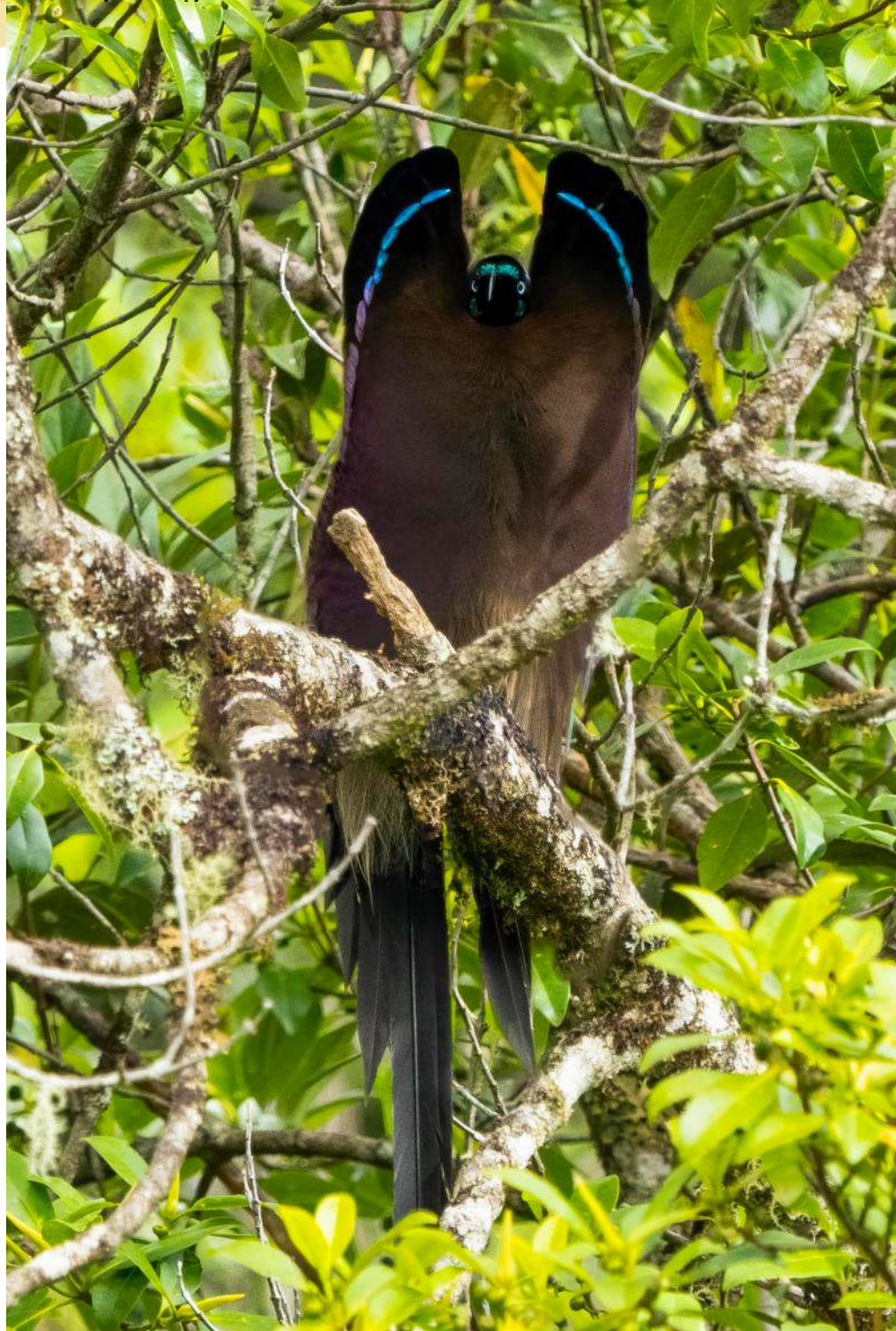


## Conservation

Buffer – A new name for  
Development  
Wildlife Rescue Centre,  
Wazirabad

## Featured Stories

The Avian World  
Wildlife Tales from the Trans-  
Himalayas & The Tiger  
Reserves



## Avian World

Quest for the Enigmatic Birds:  
A Thrilling Expedition through Papua New Guinea







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## With wild-hearted determination, as I sit at my desk,

I'm filled with gratitude and determination to continue our mission with "Whispering Wilds." This e-magazine is more than just a collection of words and images; it's a beacon of awareness and a call to action for our shared planet.

"Whispering Wilds" is a testament to the idea that we don't walk this Earth alone. We are but one thread in the intricate tapestry of life, woven together with millions of other species. It is our duty to understand this connection, to celebrate the beauty of nature, and to learn how to tread lightly upon this fragile planet.

Through the pages of this magazine, we strive to create awareness about the wonders of our natural world and inspire you to become stewards of this precious home we all share. We believe that knowledge is the key to responsible and sustainable interaction with nature, and that is why we feature stories of individuals and organizations who have made a positive impact on the environment. Their stories, we hope, will ignite a spark within you to act responsibly and contribute to the well-being of our planet.

The visual grandeur of "Whispering Wilds" is a testament to the sheer magnificence of nature. The pages are adorned with stunning photography and artwork, each image a reminder of the breathtaking diversity that surrounds us. We want you to be entranced by the beauty of the wild, to feel a deep connection with the world beyond your doorstep.



So, as you flip through the pages of "Whispering Wilds," remember that it's not just a magazine but a journey—a journey into the heart of our planet, a journey towards understanding, appreciation, and action. Let it be a reminder that our world is a shared responsibility, and together, we can protect its wonders for generations to come.

Chief Zoologist  
Dr. Mithilesh Dutta Dwivedi  
Whispering Wilds

Thank you for  
being a part of  
our community  
and for  
embracing the  
call of the wild.  
Together, we will  
make a  
difference.

# About Us



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## A Wildlife Consulting Company

Exploring Nature is a Community of like-minded people who loves to be in Nature amidst. Mother Nature has its own rhythm and we must tune up to it for a better tomorrow.

We envision a future where people have developed a deep connection with the natural world, understanding and appreciating its rhythms and cycles. Through our community, we strive to inspire a collective consciousness that values and safeguards the environment, ensuring a sustainable and harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature.

We envision a tomorrow where every action is guided by the principles of conservation, allowing future generations to inherit a thriving and pristine natural world.

Our Vision is to create a world where every individual cherishes the beauty of nature and recognizes the importance of protecting its novelty.

Our Mission is to inspire and educate individuals to cherish the beauty of nature and create mass awareness.

Our aspiration is for a future where every decision and action is driven by conservation principles.

Join us on this journey of exploration, understanding, and commitment. Together, we will harmonize with the rhythms of nature and ensure a better, more sustainable tomorrow for all...

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[illegible]

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## **Wildlife Rescue Centre in Delhi: A story of passion and dedication!**

Ever since I heard about the Oscar and BAFTA-nominated documentary “All that Breathes” by Shaunak Sen on the story of two brothers and their passion for saving injured kites and other birds, I have wanted to meet them. The opportunity came to me recently, on May 17, 2023.



### *Kites at the rescue centre, Wazirabad*



The narrow, filthy, crowded roads of Wazirabad, on the outskirts of Delhi, will unnerve any driver but my friend Rajendra's dexterity in avoiding hurtling cycles or stubborn slow rickshaws, made me feel that I am in good hands!

The warm welcome by Nadeem Shahzad and Mohammad Saud in their tiny office helped me forget the oppressive Delhi heat of mid-May. But it took me some time to get accustomed to the smell of birds that were kept in the adjoining room, attended by Salik Rahman and other young staff.

As I had corresponded with the brothers earlier, and they knew about my work on birds so introductions were kept brief and we went straight to the interview.

Later, they found many more injured kites but both tried to ignore them; however a lingering sense of grief made them more resolute to do something. At their age, schooling and education was their first priority but injured birds, and people's apathy and cruelty, kept on hurting them deeply!

Supported by parents and relatives for the noble work that they did, the brothers started bringing in more birds, however, there was an urgent need for professional help.

Why not learn the basics of bird treatment, thought the brothers. They got trained in bird treatment by vets in India and abroad. Today they can treat the birds themselves, involving vets only in difficult cases. Unlike other youngsters who enjoy movies, computer games, and loitering around with friends at this age, Nadeem's and Saud's happiness was from tending to an injured bird, and to see a recovered bird fly back to where it belongs: the sky, to breathe in the fresh air and fly with its companions!

In the beginning, it was all passion and hard work. In 2010, the brothers started a trust named 'Wildlife Rescue' and got it registered. In 2017, the Forest Department gave official permission to the Trust, though during these years, the brothers kept the officials in the loop.

Between the period 2003-2010, the brothers treated and saved 485 birds, the majority of them flying away to the skies thereafter.

Once the Bird Rescue Centre was established in August 2010, and news went around all over Delhi, a large number of injured birds were brought to the Centre by people. Nadeem told me that from 2010 until May 2023, 27,835 birds have been rescued. The day I visited the centre, 21 injured birds were brought, out of which seven were sent by the Forest Department!

### **A little background:**

In 1994, two young boys found an injured kite, so they took it to the Bird Hospital near Jama Masjid but the Jains running this centre refused to take the bird as it is a raptor (non-vegetarian). Dejected, the young brothers did not know what to do, so they left the injured kite where they had found it. They were overcome with sadness when they came back home.

**There are two major peak periods when hundreds of birds are injured or fall exhausted:**

the paper kite (patang) flying season, and just after the breeding of Black Kites (April-May) when the naïve fledglings are injured by manja (thread) of kites, or they become dehydrated due to summer heat.

## Last year, for example, 1200 dehydrated kites were rescued.



**"Two simple boys of a middle-class family turning their house into a bird rescue centre with passion and enthusiasm."**

Fortunately, with water, food and rest, most of them gained the strength to fly back.

The problem with kite flying is far more severe! Nadeem told me that more than 10,000 birds of all types get injured due to the sharp thread of the kites. Some birds are so badly injured that they have to be put to sleep. Every such case is reported to the Forest Department.

For a long time, the Rescue Centre was located within the brothers' house, but now they have rented a house adjoining their house where an office and a dim-lit rescue room is on the ground floor, but most of the birds that have recovered the trauma of injury are kept in large cages on the terrace, with enough light and an opening where the birds can fly out.

I was told by Nadeem that the annual expenditure of food, veterinary care, medicines, and staff salary comes to nearly Rs. 20 lakhs which is raised through donations alone. Not an easy task for sure for two amateurs with only passion as their strength!

However, the Wildlife Rescue Centre is now run by staff trained in emergency aid, with specialized avian veterinary care. In 2022, a total of 3,385 birds of 39 species were treated and most of them released. The maximum was black kite (2872), followed by blue rock pigeon (206), black-eared kite (95)

and so on. Interestingly, or rather sadly, 63 barn owls and 33 shikra were also brought, proving the threats these raptors face in our increasingly urban environment.

While talking to the brothers and excited young staff members, my mind drifted to the huge, so-called wildlife rescue centre, euphemism for a private zoo and a playground for rich people, that has recently come up in 250 acres in Gujarat.

The irony struck me!

On the one hand are two simple boys of a middle-class family turning their house into a bird rescue centre with passion and enthusiasm, against all odds, while on the other hand, we have one of the richest men of India creating the world's largest rescue centre into a mini zoo, using their money and political power!

It is unfair that rules are conveniently modified by political masters to bring exotic animals to this so-called rescue centre! If it is a rescue centre, then what is the need for exotic animals such as the African Lion, African elephant, Pygmy Hippo, Gorilla, Zebra, Giraffe, Cheetah of Africa to be kept here? Not to talk of Jaguar from South America, lemurs from Madagascar, Orangutan and Malayan Tapir of southeast Asia! If you add Komodo Dragon, the "rescue centre" becomes even more attractive!





*Kites at the rescue centre,  
Wazirabad*



*Kites at the rescue centre,  
Wazirabad*

### **Invariably, the question pops up in my mind as to why animals shouldn't be 'rescued' in their own country and rehabilitated in their native land?**

The main purpose of rescuing an animal is to treat it with care and release it back to its natural habitat when it is capable of surviving on its own.

In their small office, Saud showed me his meticulously maintained database of every bird that they have treated and rehabilitated in the last 20 years. When I saw file after file, I offered them that I can assist them in writing research papers. Their work is reported in prestigious papers/magazines like The New York Times, Audubon, Al-Jazeera, Animal Planet Ambassador. Their work should not only be publicized in social media, but also come in good journals as it can help, in the long term, to know the impact of the changing scenario.

Who knows that with a decline in kite flying hobby, the cases of injured black kites will also decline? Or with better waste management in the future, there will be less food for black kites in Delhi and they will disperse to rural areas where they belong, and hence there will be less injury cases.



*Nadeem and  
Saud checking  
the records, 17  
May 2023*



*Salik,  
Nadeem  
and  
Saud  
in their  
kite cage*



Bittu Sahgal,  
famous  
conservationist  
once put it,  
you have to have fire  
in the belly  
and passion  
in the mind.

**Sohail Madan, former in-charge of BNHS Conservation Education Centre (CEC) at Asola Sanctuary, who has seen the work of Nadeem and Saud for more than 10 years, says “I feel they are doing cutting edge work in the field of bird surgeries and rehabilitation.**

**T**here can be multiple scenarios that can impact the population of kites and other birds in the future. Any published scientific data on these trends is always useful for future researchers.

Most importantly, they work with species which are usually shunned by other rescue centres, especially in Delhi. The service they provide for the birds and the city is invaluable! He further adds, “The brothers also are very gentle souls with a deep love for their work and great support from their family to undertake what they do every day.”

As my great friend, Bittu Sahgal, famous conservationist once put it, you have to have fire in the belly and passion in the mind. Maintaining a rescue centre, with 200-300 injured birds, each with its unique requirements, is not a 9 to 5 job. Like all mothers know, a child needs 24 hour attention. If you have 300 ‘children’, just think of the multiplier effect it can have!





Sarbajit Nandy, Kolkata



### The Britishers had desired a monopoly over their colonial forests.

The total control over access to the forests helped them in exploiting the resources and the animals for their gaming pursuits.

## Buffer – A new name for Development



**Author:**  
**Anirudh Chaoji,**  
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**Chief Naturalist,**  
**Tadoba Andhari Tiger**  
**Reserve**

As a result, the local communities were strictly kept away from their forests. The same forests, which for thousands of years, had provided subsistence to the forest dwellers in Asia, Africa and America. With the arrival of the British colonies, the picture had completely changed.

Unfortunately, even post-independence, the agenda to keep the people away from their forests continued. To the British rulers, these forests were looked upon as an impediment to development. Poor access roads and a lack of infrastructure, inadequate communication systems and little or no medical and educational facilities were the 'benefits' to those staying around forests.

At the same time, through the establishment of newer Sanctuaries, National Parks and later the Tiger Reserves, extensive efforts were made to protect wildlife. Despite these, the wildlife numbers showed a steady decline. Tiger numbers plummeted to just over 1400!!! Antagonism between the Forest Department and the communities grew across the country. There was an urgent need to review the conservation of our forests. Tadoba was no different. Its Buffer had over a hundred thousand human beings in over 80 villages. This had the potential to break or make all the conservation plans. Around 2012-13, almost as a revolution, the Management at the Tadoba, chose to take a new route to conservation.

Thus started the process of improving relationships between the Forest Department and the local communities.

Soon in discussion with locals, interventions were prioritised into the Buffer village micro-plans as a part of the Village Eco Development Committees (VEDCs). Access to safe drinking water, building individual toilets and also providing every home with a LPG connection became the norm. A path-breaking move however, came in the form of a mechanism for revenue generation for the locals through non-extractive occupations.

Eco tourism was the starting point. It took a couple of years for the buzz to spread around that animals do not differentiate between Core and Buffer forests. (Can you explain the difference between core and buffer forests) Tourists started thronging the Buffer gates to get just as good an experience as the Core. What became more evident soon was that the local youngsters who took to guiding and driving safari vehicles developed a strong sense of ownership over these forests. Soon activities like sand mining, illegal hunting of animals reduced and even cattle grazing and forest fires substantially came down in tourism areas. Many short-sighted individuals may still question these 'developments'.

However, the real referees in this game are not the sceptics. Instead, the people from beyond the Buffer, who have been constantly watching the 'process' from its very inception. In a move that would surprise even the biggest critics of the Forest Department, many of these 'outside' villages have approached the State Government with a request to be included into the Buffer area. Sounds Unbelievable? This is the new Buffer!!!





# FROM **MAXIMUM FIELD OF VIEW** TO MAXIMUM **MAGNIFICATION**. **VICTORY HARPIA**

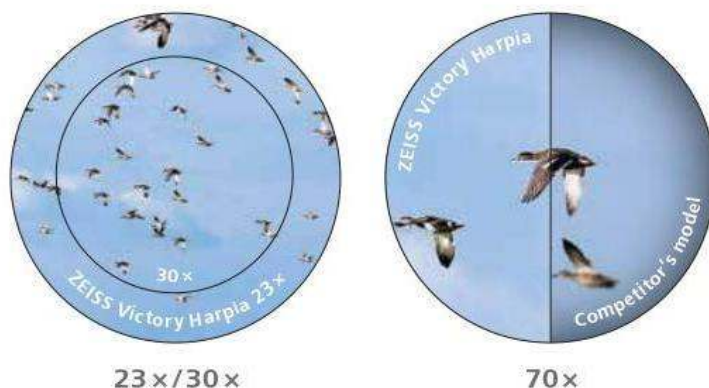
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Field of view comparison of a spotting scope at 30 × minimum magnification (small circle) with the field of view of the Harpia at 23 × minimum magnification (large circle).



# Quest for the Enigmatic Birds

## A Thrilling Expedition through Papua New Guinea

A

### Prelude of Anticipation:

In the heart of the South Pacific, a hidden realm of untamed beauty awaited, and so did the elusive Birds of Paradise. Armed with binoculars, cameras, big lenses and dreams in our hearts, we set out on our quest for Papua New Guinea and all it has to offer, a land of biodiversity and mystery, where the dance of birds and humans was set to unfold.



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Senior  
Instrument  
Technician,  
Qatar Energy,  
Originally from  
Vaikyom  
Kottayam,  
Kerala

*Mt. Hagen*



### The Skies of Challenge:

Our journey started with flight cancellations that hinted at the trials ahead! The crew was stranded in Singapore and uncertainty prevailed. Luckily we had an opportunity to board the flight the next day provided that one too wasn't cancelled. We prayed with fingers crossed. With limited time available, we strolled through the streets of Singapore visiting the Merlion park, the museum, the Singapore Flyer and The Jewel Changi, and I must say that all this was a real feast to the eyes! Finally we got on the flight to Port Moresby the next day. The flight landed in Port Moresby, a city caught between tradition and progress. We were swept into a whirlwind of activity, boarding short flights that would take us deep into the heart of nature's sanctuary.













*Flamboyant display of  
Brown Sicklebill*



*Portrait of  
Long Tailed  
Astrapia Male*

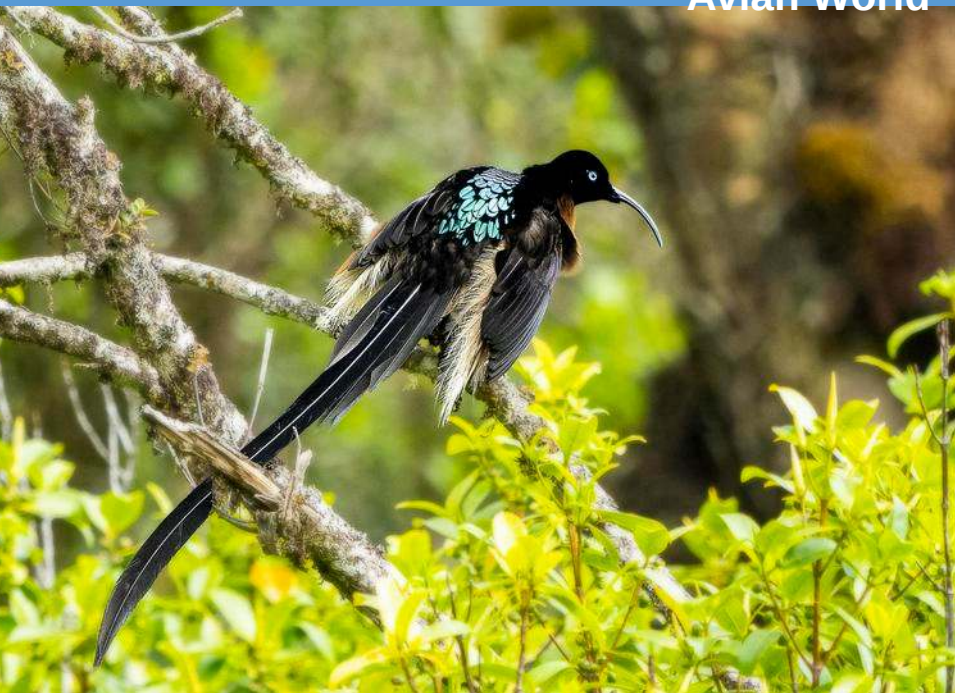


*Brown  
Sicklebill  
female*

*Bird Photographers in  
Enga, Mt. Hagen*







*Blue Bird of Paradise on the right and Brown Sicklebill on the left.*

Our next stop, Mount Hagen embraced us with relentless rainfall, a symphony that echoed nature's fierce resilience. Undeterred, we sought refuge at Kumul Lodge, a haven amidst the storm. Kim, the owner and tour operator, welcomed us warmly to Kumul. Seeing her managing the staff and the drivers we understood how strong and capable the women of Papua are. Within minutes we were in the cottage. After some refreshments we set out for the adventure. Armed with determination, we ventured into the rain-soaked wilderness, battling through thickets and trails

## The Rainforest's Rhapsody

interspersed with streams. After much effort, the Blue Bird of Paradise and its brethren emerged, fleeting yet magnificent. The only setback was we could see them from a distance. Nevertheless, the sighting of the Long tailed Astrapia left us all in awe!

The next day proved to be the best. One of the Brown Sicklebill BOP decided to give a feast to our eyes and our gear with his flamboyant display. Assisted with his "machine gun" sound call he displayed his best self which was one of the best sightings we ever had in our lives.

After a few days of trying our luck and enjoying the great hospitality of Kim and her staff from Kumul Lodge, we embarked on our next step to Kiunga.



### Long Tailed Astrapia Male

Fluttering his almost 2 metres long tail, it came as if coming straight from paradise. All of us were spellbound, almost forgetting to shoot with the cameras and just watching it as if in a dream. That was the best sighting even though we lost Blue Bird and Lesser BOP's due to the weather and bad luck.









*House in  
Kiunga*

## Samuel's Symphony

Samuel, our guide, was waiting for us in Kiunga. Amidst the avian tapestry, Samuel emerged as a revelation. From mechanic to guide, there was little he could not do! He unravelled the secrets of both birds and man. With borrowed books and knowledge passed down by his ancestry, Samuel forged a legacy that would resonate for decades to come. He is the only person in all Kiunga who can take one to view the Flame Bowerbird, the most awaited part of the trip!





## Flames in the Rain

Kiunga, a gateway to the Flame Bowerbird's secret realm, beckoned to us with heavy rain. Undaunted, we plunged into the wilderness, chasing fleeting glimpses and embracing riverside birdwatching. Day one ended in a suspenseful anticlimax, but the dawn of the second day revealed the Flame Bowerbird's intricate bower. We were overcome with emotion as we captured this enigma, a triumph accompanied by an ache to see with our own eyes its elusive mate.

## Pursuit of Royalty

The King Bird of Paradise and the Twelve-wired Bird of Paradise awaited our presence. Battling against weather and time, we unravelled the secrets of Papua's dense jungles. The King's elusive mate remained a ghostly whisper, while the Twelve-wired danced in the distance, teasing with its elegance. Alongside, an ensemble of Pink-breasted Fruit Doves, Crowned Pigeons, and others coloured the wilderness with splendour.

## Echoes of Magnificence

Next, we went to Tabubil, which is a realm of mining, and ironically also home to the Magnificent Bird of Paradise. Both Male and female species unveiled themselves, dancing before our lenses. The magnificence was an echo, a reminder of the delicate balance nature maintained amidst human intervention.



*Ok Tedi River, Tabubil*



*Reggiana Display:  
A Contest of Two Miahtv*







*Varirata National Park*



*View from Varirata National  
Park*

## Dance of the Breathtaking

Next, we were at Varirata National Park, a realm of flight delays and logistical puzzles. Amidst its guarded beauty, the Raggiana Bird of Paradise unveiled its flamboyant dance. Loud and peculiar calls made by a number of males both adults and juveniles for the mating dance kept the scene alive. Watching it before our eyes was surreal. Cameras fired as if a battalion were doing a firing test! From the Black-capped Lorikeet to Paradise Kingfisher to the Shining Monarch, Papua's avian treasure trove shone in its dazzling diversity.



*Raggiana Display:  
Female Inspection  
and Evaluation*









*Reggiana Display:  
A Contest of Two Mighty Males*

*Reggiana Display*



*Reggiana Display*



*Reggiana Display:  
Female Inspection and  
Evaluation*





*Yellow Billed Kingfisher  
with catch*

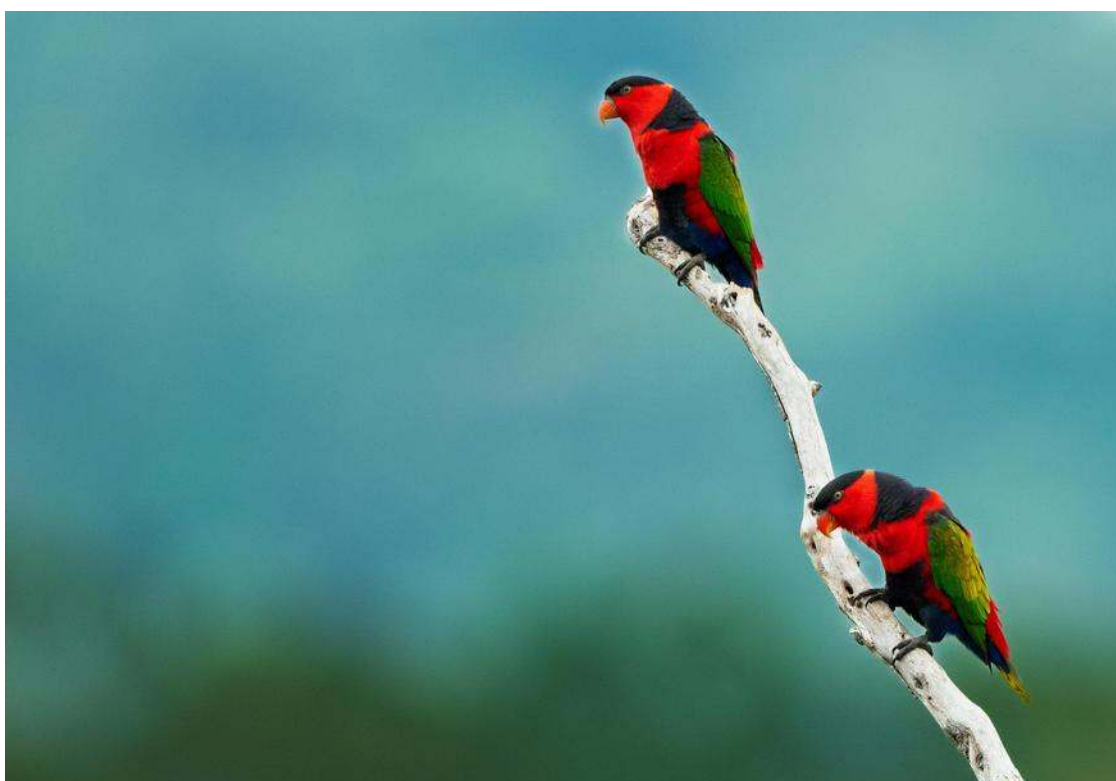
*Black-capped lory*



*Shining  
Monarch*



*Brown-  
headed  
Paradise  
Kingfisher*











*Papuan Lorikeet*



*Eceletus Parrot*

## The Heart's Echo

The expedition's crescendo had revealed the avian realm's splendour, a juxtaposition of persistence and fragility. Our lenses captured more than mere images; they painted a portrait of survival amidst challenges. A sense of awe mingled with a bittersweet reality, a dance that resonated with nature's delicate harmonies.

### Echoes of Preservation

Amidst the kaleidoscope of Papua New Guinea's striking facets lay a clash of cultures and worlds. From bartering to the ominous shadow of deforestation, these lands held tales of preservation in the face of ignorance. As life's rhythms intertwined with survival, the enigma deepened, leaving a mark on those who dared to explore.



*Brehm's Tiger  
Parrot Male*









*Melidectes*



*Greater Black Coucal*



*Forest Bittern*

## Echoes Across Time



*The silky owl butterfly*



*Sulphur-crested cockatoo*

Our adventure had cast a spell, weaving a narrative of resilience, preservation, and unyielding beauty.

The dance of Birds of Paradise echoed through dense forests, etching memories in our minds. Papua New Guinea's heart revealed itself, a testament to the struggles that underscore its breathtaking allure.

Our Quest for the Enigmatic Birds captured more than the pursuit of avian wonders; it encapsulated the essence of a land that danced on the edge of change.

Through rain and challenges, triumph and defeat, we came to understand the intricate tapestry that is Papua New Guinea—a realm where nature's symphony harmonises with humanity's pursuit, leaving an indelible mark on those who dared to venture into its heart.



# GITZO

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Adventure

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### A Birdwatcher's Paradise for Studying Bird Behavior"

"Missing out on Mangalajodi means missing out on a bird wonderland."

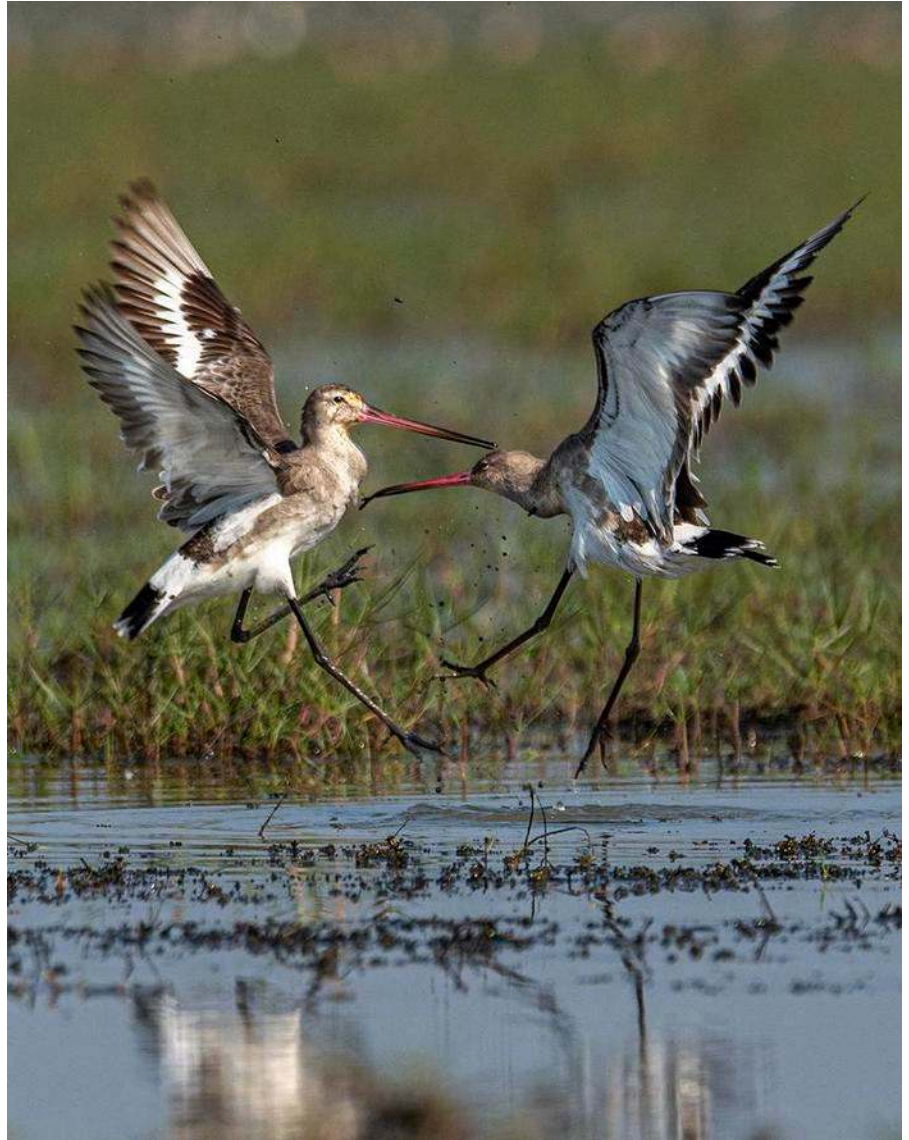
## What to do in Mangalajodi Wetlands?



The main attraction of Mangalajodi Wetlands is birdwatching. You can take a boat ride on the wetland with a trained guide from the village, who will help you spot and identify various birds. You can also walk along the trails and watchtowers around the wetland to get a closer view of the birds and their habitats. Some of the common birds that you can see here are the Purple Moorhen, Purple Heron, Black-Tailed Godwit, Ruddy Shelduck, Northern Pintail, Whiskered Tern, Pied Kingfisher, Black-winged Stilt and many more. If you are lucky, you might also spot some rare and endangered species like the Baer's pochard, the Greater Spotted Eagle, Pallas's Fish Eagle and the Black-Necked Stork.

Apart from birdwatching, you can also enjoy other activities like cycling, fishing, photography and cultural interactions with the villagers. Through mingling with the local people, you can learn about their traditional practices, folk arts and crafts, festivals and rituals. You can also visit some of the nearby attractions like Chilika Lake, Nalabana Bird Sanctuary, Kalijai Temple and Rambha Bay.

Mangalajodi Wetlands are a must-visit destination for anyone who loves nature and wildlife. They offer a unique opportunity to witness the beauty and diversity of wetland birds and to appreciate the efforts of the local community in conserving them.



**So pack your binoculars and camera and head to Mangalajodi Wetlands for an unforgettable experience!**

#### Godwit Fight

Godwit Fights are usually related to competition for resources or territory rather than physical combat.





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Kolkata*

## **Mangalajodi Wetlands: A Birdwatcher's Paradise**

If you are a nature lover and a birdwatcher, you should not miss visiting Mangalajodi Wetlands, a freshwater swamp at the north-eastern edge of Chilika Lake in Odisha. Mangalajodi is home to more than 300 species of birds, including migratory ones that flock here from as far as Siberia and Central Asia during winter. You can witness a spectacular sight of thousands of birds flying, feeding, nesting and roosting in the marshes, reedbeds and shallow waters of this wetland ecosystem.





*Brahmini Kite having Lunch*



*Brahmini Kite with Snake*



*Egret with fish catch*

## Mangalajodi a success story of community-based conservation

Mangalajodi is not only a biodiversity hotspot but also a success story of community-based conservation efforts. The villagers of Mangalajodi, who were once poachers and hunters of birds, have now

become their protectors and guides. They have formed a cooperative society called Mangalajodi Ecotourism Trust, which manages the tourism activities and provides livelihood opportunities to the local people.

They also work with various NGOs and government agencies to monitor and safeguard the wetland and its avifauna.



*Stilt with fish catch*



*Purple Heron with Frog*





*Whiskered Tern diving and catching its Prey.*



*Purple Heron with its catch.*

## Where to stay in Mangalajodi Wetlands?

There are several options for accommodation in and around Mangalajodi Wetlands. You can stay at the eco-friendly cottages run by the Mangalajodi Ecotourism Trust, which offer basic amenities and delicious local cuisine. You can also opt for homestays with the villagers, who will welcome you with warm hospitality and share their stories and knowledge about the wetland and its birds. If you prefer more comfort and luxury, you can stay at some of the resorts and hotels near Chilika Lake, which are about 30-40 km away from Mangalajodi.



*Intermediate Egret with Frog*



The Grey Heron is a large wading bird belonging to the heron family, Ardeidae. It is widely distributed across Europe, Asia, and parts of Africa.

*Grey Heron with a frog  
in flight*



*Purpule Heron with a Frog*







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Author:  
Angshuman  
Mitra,  
Manager,  
Accenture,  
Kolkata

## Oriental Pratincole: Broken Wing Display

The "Oriental Pratincole", also known as the "Grasshopper-Bird" or Swallow-Plover, is a wader in the pratincole family, Glareolidae. When these birds are in breeding mode, they become very sensitive and have strong protector instincts. In this period, they actively distract other species by a strange technique called 'Broken Wing Display'. This is a unique strategy the bird adopts to protect its nesting site. It is common to see them pretending to be injured when all of a sudden, they fly away from an injured position, when approached! The 'broken wing' could be either one wing or both wings, with the bird often lying down on the sand or field, pretending all the while!



*A Birding  
Adventure in  
Rongtong*



## Discovering the Enchanting Collared Falconet:

When I first laid eyes on the Collared Falconet, a small but captivating bird of prey, on social media, I was instantly drawn to its unique charm. Little did I know that a raptor could be so petite and enchanting.

M

This monsoon season, an opportunity to explore the avian wonders of Rongtong, nestled in the Himalayan foothills, was orchestrated by one of my dear birding companions. On our wishlist were the Collared Falconet, along with the elusive BlackBaza, Jerdon's Baza, and a symphony of Cuckoos.

I owe a heartfelt thanks to my friend Debasish, whose meticulous planning and dedication made this trip to the hills possible. From arranging tickets to hand-picking our guides, Debasish's unwavering commitment ensured that our avian adventure became a reality.

Accompanied by the seasoned birding guides, Kunal and Sanjok, we set out on our quest to discover the Collared Falconet and other avian treasures. Seasoned birders are well aware that there is a certain bend on the outskirts of Rongtong, where these Falconets congregate in groups, making it a prime location for sightings.

During our birding expedition, we were fortunate enough to witness one of nature's most intimate and intriguing spectacles – the Collared Falconet's mating rituals. It became evident that melodrama is not exclusive to the human world, as these feathered romantics put on a show that rivaled a scene from a heartwarming romantic movie.

As we observed their mating rituals, it was a spectacle of finesse and precision. The male Collared Falconet would display impressive aerobatics to court his potential mate. Their synchronized aerial displays, flips, and twirls are a sight to behold. These intricate courtship maneuvers are a testament to the beauty of nature's dance, rivaling any grand gesture in the human world.

The trip to Rongtong not only allowed us to witness the enchanting Collared Falconet but also introduced us to the diverse avian life of the region.

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Among our other sightings were the Black Baza, a striking bird of prey, and the Jerdon's Baza, known for its distinctive appearance and behavior. The melodious calls of various cuckoo species added a harmonious soundtrack to our birding journey.

In conclusion, the Collared Falconet is not just a remarkable bird but a symbol of the wonders that await those who venture into the world of birding. This adventure to Rongtong was a testament to the captivating beauty of nature and the joy of discovering its hidden treasures. It's a reminder that even in the animal kingdom, love and courtship take center stage, and sometimes, they put on a show that could rival the most enchanting of human dramas.

My heartfelt gratitude goes out to Debasish, Kunal, and Sanjok for making this unforgettable birding journey possible. And as we depart from the hills of Rongtong, our hearts are filled with the enduring memory of the Collared Falconet's mesmerizing courtship display and the unique experiences that birding in the Himalayan foothills has to offer.





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As the World famous wildlife photographer Dhritiman Mukherjee mentioned in his YouTube video,

that if he had managed to capture even a few images of brown bears on his very first trip, those would have been priceless!

# The “Abominable Snowman”: “Aman ka paigam” or human interference to nature?

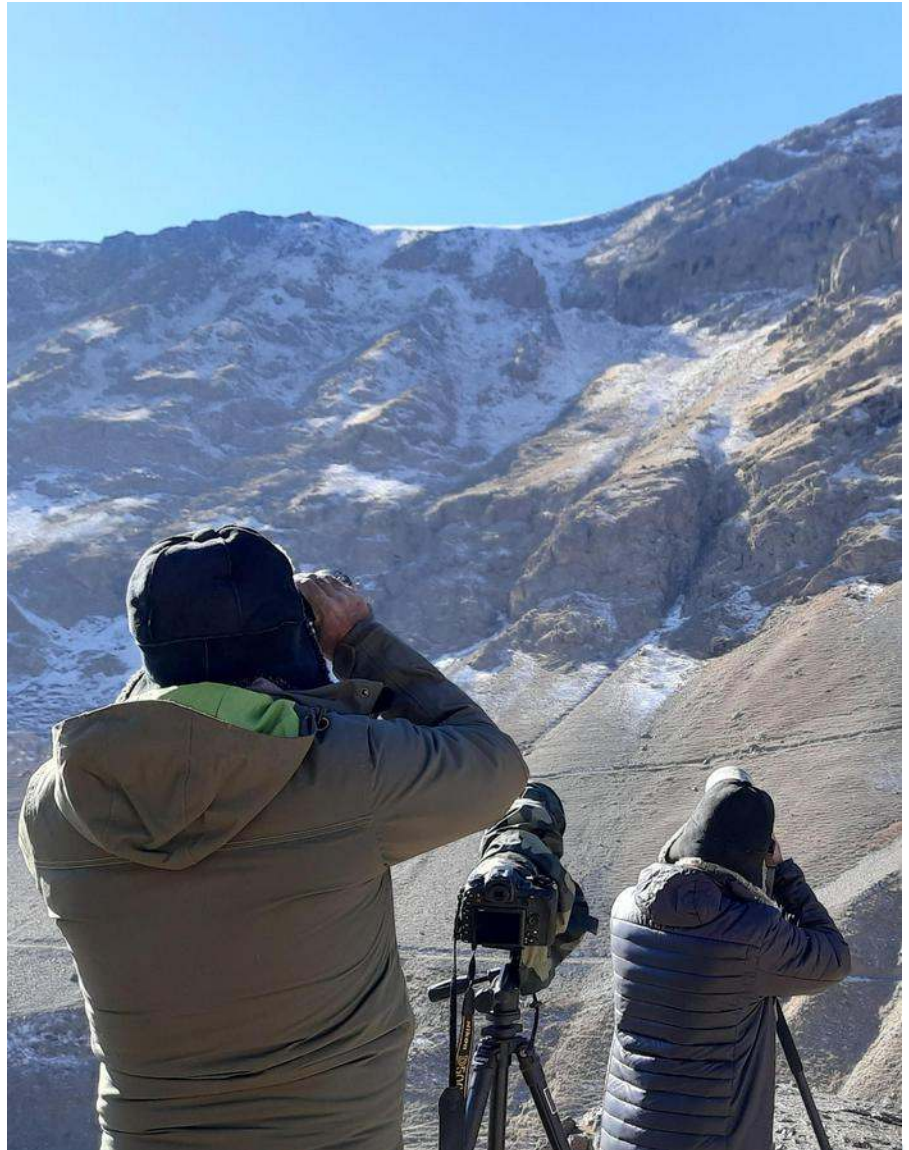


But as he was disappointed on most of his trips, he realized the power of this intent. Of course he did not consider those trips as pointless, rather they were enriching in their own way. In hindsight, these trips helped educate him a lot more about the behaviour, habitats, feeding habits of bears and their interaction with local forest dwellers who are dependent upon collection and gathering at their habitats.

Himalayan brown bears eluded Dhritiman several times, but the situation is different now in the villages of Drass located near the International border of India and Pakistan occupied Kashmir, which is politically known as LOC (Line of Control).

Brown bears, known as Dren-mo (in Kargil) or Eeash (in Drass) in Ladakhi, of this region are not just considered as ecologically important; they are perceived as politically significant as well. Drass was a tehsil or sub-district of Kargil in Jammu and Kashmir state of India until Article 370 was in effect there. Article 370 of the Indian constitution gave special status to Jammu and Kashmir, which has been the subject of a dispute between India, Pakistan and China since 1947.

This article conferred on the state the power to have a separate constitution, a state flag, and autonomy of internal administration.



**Brown bears, known as Dren-mo (in Kargil) or Eeash (in Drass) in Ladakhi, of this region are not just considered as ecologically important; they are perceived as politically significant as well.**

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### On 5th August 2019,

the Government of India issued a Presidential Order revoking Article 370,

making all the provisions of the Indian constitution applicable to Jammu and Kashmir and enacting the division of the state of Jammu and Kashmir into two union territories to be called Union Territory (UT) of Jammu and Kashmir and Union Territory of Ladakh.

Since then Drass is part of Ladakh and the Himalayan brown bear has since become a major object of interest for tourists visiting here.



On the very first evening,  
our driver spotted an adult  
female and her cub  
climbing a snow-capped  
mountain

After spending 48 hours of mandatory acclimatization in Leh (the second district of Ladakh besides Kargil), I along with fellow explorer Abhijit Sudhindra, exploration lead Debasish Banerjee of Wild Wonderers Expeditions and local guide Bahow Ud Din, headed towards Drass on 22nd of October 2022. The 48 hours of acclimatization before travelling to any high altitude areas was a newly introduced advisory of the newly formed UT's tourism department to tourists and visitors travelling to Ladakh by road or air.

Unlike Dhritiman's initial disappointments with respect to brown bear explorations, Abhijit and I were more fortunate in terms of bear sightings. On the very first evening, our driver spotted an adult female and her cub climbing a snow-capped mountain ridgeline when dusk was setting in at the Holiyal village of Drass. My fellow explorers were busy scanning the mountains of Mushkoh valley, the last village of India before LOC and potentially another bear movement zone. After receiving a call from Mumtaz, our driver, they also hurried back and together we celebrated our first sighting of the abominable snowman of the Trans Himalayas.

We stayed in Drass for 4 days; and by a stroke of luck, we managed to see around 17 brown bears including adult male, female and a few small as well as sub-adult cubs.

But if you just go by this number and think it was like one of my former trips to Bandhavgarh in the summer of 2022, where I spotted 23 tigers in five days, then you are far from reality!

The bear sightings usually happened in the early mornings, as it is during the early hours of the day that the bears generally move back to the high ridge of mountains after their night - long search for food - in local villages and army bases. Therefore, we had to be present at the potential bear movement spots at as early as 5 o'clock in the morning, when it was still dark.

Standing equipped with all our photography gear, dressed in our winter gear, on a windy morning at the foothills or meadows of Western Himalayan high altitude villages, when temperature of early winter morning used to vary between -40 to -80 C, was an experience in itself which cannot be compared by any with going for a gypsy safari in early morning or afternoon in Central Indian forests.

The terrain of the Trans Himalayan brown bear exploration is treacherous, inhospitable, with jagged peaks above 15000 feet (around 4500 meters). On many occasions, bears were spotted, through binoculars of Bahow Ud Din, our guide, who sneaked up close through a different route while we were waiting or hiding behind boulders.





Sometimes we distinctly saw them walking along the edge of a canal that flows between mountains and villages, and in a split second we lost sight of them as they disappeared behind the curve of a mountain ridge. In order to get any reasonable shot of those bears we had to run between boulders scattered across the meadows; and sometimes we had to trek along the steep mountainous path.

This was not an easy feat for us who live at sea level altitudes! Walking on mountain slopes where the air is thin due to low oxygen level was exhausting, to say the least!

As far as photography is concerned, that is challenging too! In this terrain, you need to learn to appreciate brown bear habitat shots against the muted colours of titanic jagged Trans Himalayan Mountains, contrasted by the turquoise blue rivers that snake through its valleys, and the alpine forests that add just the right amount of pop.

However, had it not been for the Kargil war, even this would not have been possible!

The Indian and Pakistani armies guard the LOC from either end. However, because of extreme cold weather, inhospitable living conditions and heavy snowfall, it was the norm for the India and Pakistan army to vacate some of its forward posts during winters and re-occupy them in the summers.



### During 1998-99, allegedly, Pakistani army

breached this truce and intruded 10-12 km across LOC and occupied winter vacated posts of Indian army in

Mushkoh valley, Marpola Ridgeline in Drass, Kaksar area of Kargil and Batalik, Chorbatla and Turtuk sectors spread over a frontage of approximately 150 km.

Apparently, the aim of the Pakistani army was to sever the road link between Kashmir and Ladakh. This entire region of Drass including Mushkoh valley (the last village of Indian Territory), which is close to LOC and where the most fierce battle between two armies had happened, is the potential brown bear movement area. When Pakistani intrusion came into notice by the Indian army, they responded to the challenge promptly with speed and ferocity by mobilising close to 30,000 troops.



Our local guide Bahow Ud Din, who belongs to the Indo-Aryan Brokpa tribe of Ladakh region, was three years old when the 1999 Kargil war happened. He is the youngest among six brothers and his entire family had to evacuate their village in Drass and move to Srinagar during the war. Eight years after the war when he returned to his village Holiyal, Drass had changed. More importantly, the wildlife of Drass had changed!

According to Bahow Ud Din and other local villagers, during the Kargil war, the deployed Naga and Gurkha regiments killed birds and herbivores like chukar partridge, pika, Himalayan marmot and even ibex for supply of meat. Even local villagers were involved in hunting wildlife for meat. However, the Indian army, irrespective of any regiments posted at Drass, were empathetic to brown bears. In fact, feeding brown bears was a favourite sport for Army personnel.

Feeding wildlife might make them friendly towards humans but also alter their natural behaviour. Therefore, petting of brown bears by the Indian army gradually transformed them into vermin for local villagers. Brown bears of Drass became frequent visitors to army base camps and adjacent villagers to scavenge on food wastes. Omnivorous predators gradually started converting into opportunistic semi-scavengers.

Gradually that had led to human-wildlife conflict in villages of Drass.

A Ladakhi researcher, named Niazul Hassan Khan, studying the Himalayan brown bear population in India, in his article "The Brown Bears Of Kargil", published on 13th November 2020, in online edition of Nature in Focus, has mentioned, "It was May 2019, in the Drass valley, when a sub-adult female brown bear had ventured into a human settlement, and she was mercilessly pelted with stones. While attempting to flee, the bear slipped off the hill and fell into the piercing cold water of the Drass River. The carcass of the bear was found almost 10 km downstream by the Kargil wildlife department officials, who had struggled in the frigid river water for hours to retrieve the >100 kg leviathan. A necropsy revealed that the bear's stomach and gut were loaded with human-based subsidies like rice (70%) and other vegetative items (30%)."

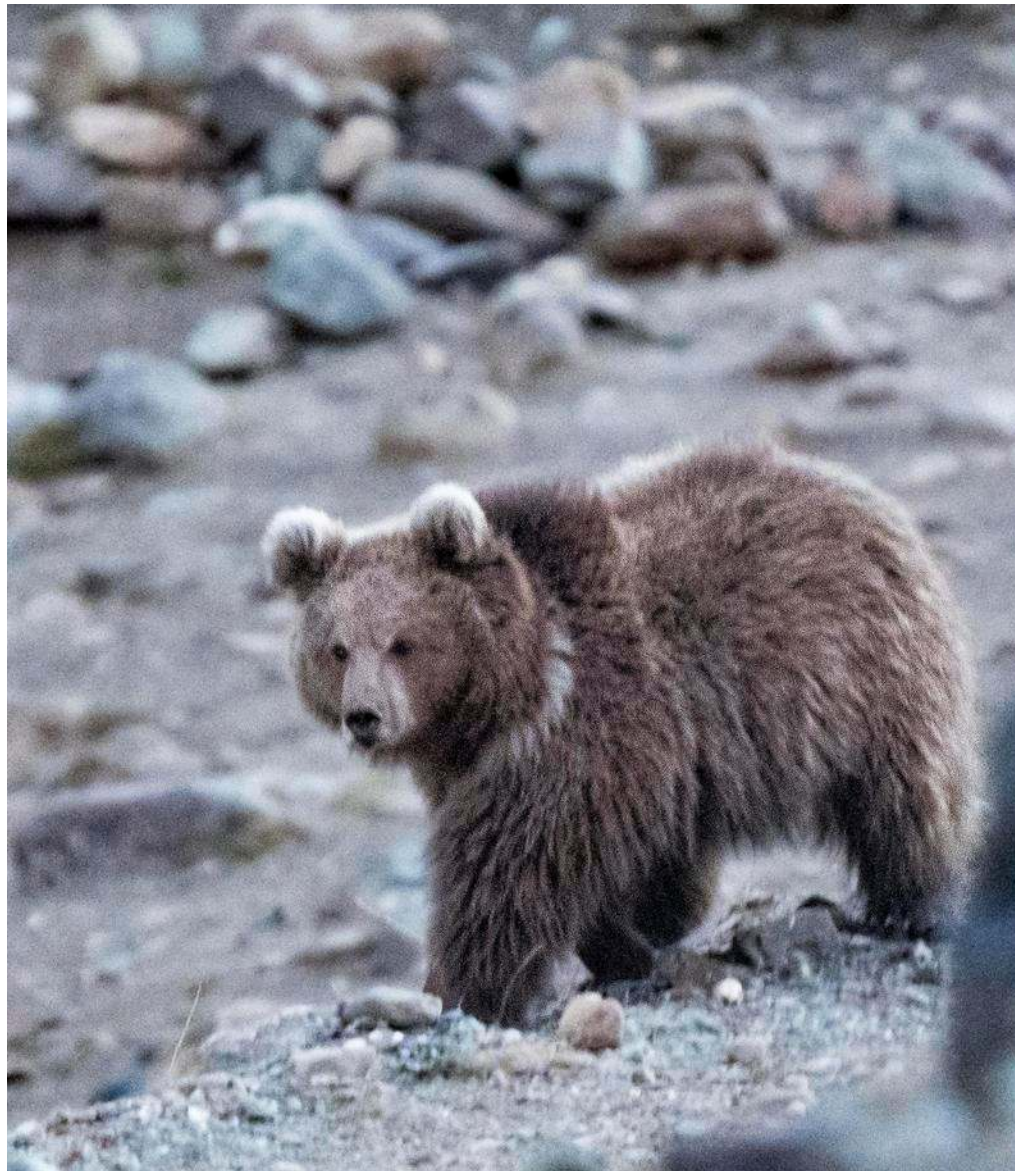
Our local cook for this expedition Khadim was also a Forest department guard under the Drass range of Kargil Wildlife Division. On the first day of our stay at around 11:30 PM, he got a call from the local village about bear intrusion and he had to visit the village to provide a resolution.

Brown bears now frequent villages of Drass in darkness. Barking of village dogs in Drass is the "alarm call" equivalent of Bengal Tigers in

Feeding wildlife might make them friendly towards humans but also alter their natural behaviour.



tiger reserves. If you hear relentless barking of dogs from a nearby village, then the next day early morning before dawn that village and surrounding mountains/meadows should be your potential brown bear photography destination! If that village was adjacent to any army base camp, the probability of sighting would be even higher. This theory actually worked for us on many occasions.



Our closest encounter with the animals was on the meadow adjacent to a village next to Kargil Battle School (locally known as KBS). KBS is the camp, which provides pre-induction training to Indian soldiers deployed in the high altitude posts along the LOC.

One night one of our hosts in Drass, Mohd Salim told us that his wife had heard continuous dog barking from the village near KBS. Salim's house was also in that village. Based on Salim's Intel, we reached there early in the morning and kept waiting until the break of dawn.

**W**e were in for a pleasant surprise when suddenly we saw an adult female and her three cubs emerging out of the villages and slowly walking along the canal through the village. However, the moment they noticed us; they started running and climbed the mountain to escape.

One evening during our scanning in Mushkoh valley, a few kilometres away from LOC, we found two army personnel approaching us. When they met us and knew about our purpose of being there, they too started taking an interest in sighting the brown bear.

One of them was Subedar Suresh Kumar, In-charge of Grenadier section, who had completed his 30 years of service and was awaiting retirement by end of December 2022. He told us pointing towards a hilltop, "Behind this hilltop is Pakistan and everyday around 9 PM bears come down to our base camp from there. In the evenings, they come to India from Pakistan and then in the mornings they go back. We witness this cross border bear movement every day."



**Based on an article published in Mongabay on 1st May 2014,**

written by Sandhya Sekar, the Himalayan brown bear is found in three major mountain ranges,

# Hindu Kush, Karakoram and the Western Himalaya, and four inter-mountain highlands.



**Deosai National Park in northern Pakistan supports one of the densest populations of Himalayan brown bears.**

Sekar mentioned in that article, that Pakistani scientist Muhammad Ali Nawaz of the Quaid-i-Azam University/Snow Leopard Trust worked with researchers from the Norwegian University of Life Sciences and University of Lyon, to carry out a study to determine which habitat was most preferred by the bear. It was found that Deosai National Park in northern Pakistan supports one of the densest populations of Himalayan brown bears.

Reduction of natural prey of brown bears, like marmot, in post-war Drass, feeding by army deployed there and opportunity to scavenge on food waste thrown by villagers are increasing the potential of bear-human conflict. Regular sightings of the brown bear is also an attraction to tourists.

Our guide, Bahow Ud Din told us that once he lost hundred thousand Indian rupees as bears destroyed his livestock but now ironically, he is earning almost thrice the amount as a brown bear tourism guide! He has founded his own wildlife tourism company named WildLife and Nature Trails.

Deosai National Park in northern Pakistan supports one of the densest populations of Himalayan brown bears.

Because of their success, the local administration is also taking a lot of interest in promoting brown bear tourism in Drass. On our last evening at Drass, we were invited to a dinner with local administrative staff of Drass. Station House Officer (SHO) and Additional SHO of Drass Police Station, Block Development Chairman (BDC) of Drass, and Managing Director of local Ladakhi news channel – Drass Online were among the important guests. The excitement about brown bear tourism in Drass was a prominent topic of discussion in that gathering. My fellow traveller Abhijit and I as wildlife enthusiasts were getting special attention that evening!

Enthusiastic eco-tour organizers and local administrators even decided to construct a few bear hides in potential bear movement areas, in order to ensure the best possibility of sighting and shooting. In the first instance, it may sound similar to whatever is happening in Thattekad or Coorg or in other spheres of wildlife tourism, but I must agree the viability of eco-tourism is dependent on higher probability of sightings.

That certainly does not mean the forest should be turned into a “Disneyland” like some of the popular Central India tiger tourism destinations. However, a realistic possibility (however less it may be) of sighting elusive animals would always bring back wildlife enthusiasts to their habitats.



### I witnessed the existence of such a possibility in Drass.

Despite human-brown bear conflict, the animal is gaining popularity among the people of Drass.

Local house owners are converting their places into home-stay facilities for eco-tourists, unemployed youths are starting taxi services, new restaurants are coming up, and local grocery stores are selling more products to incoming tourists.

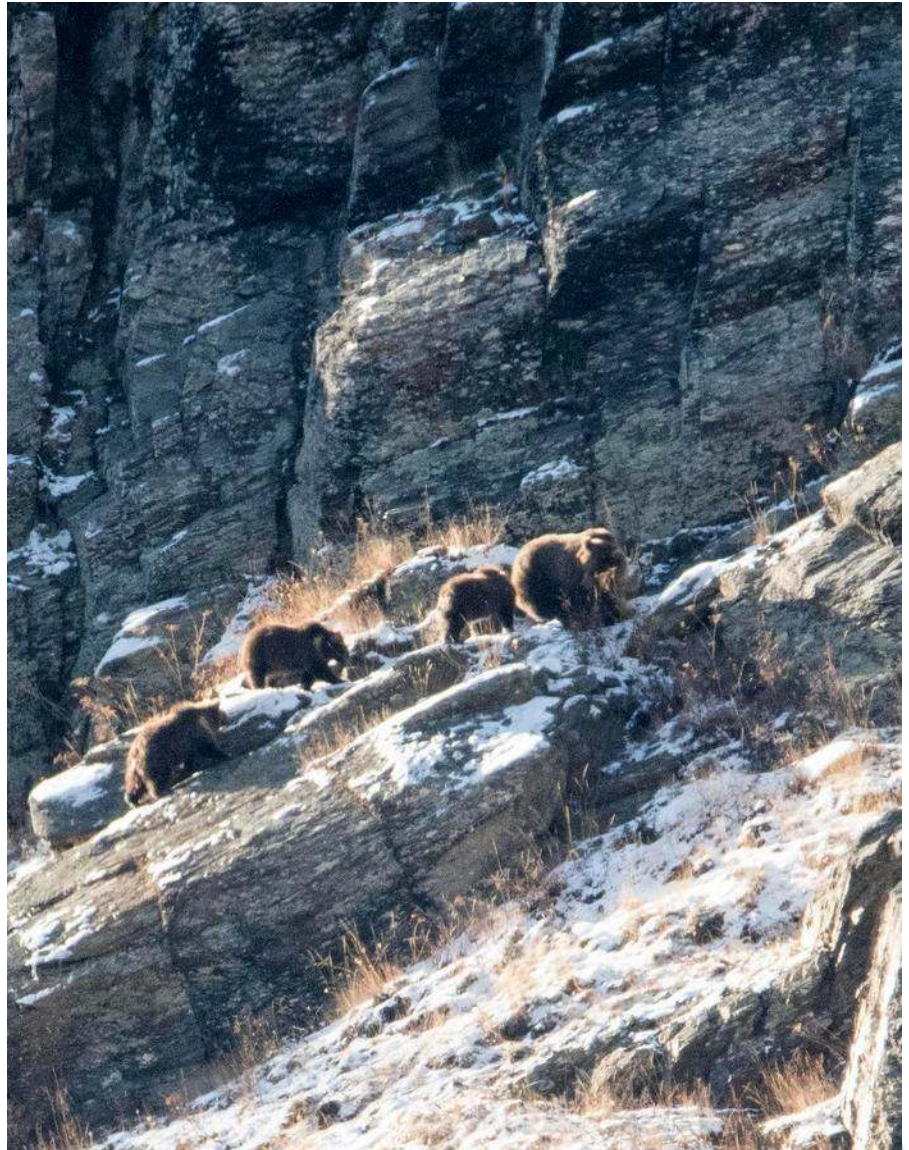
Not just the local economy, there is another emotional aspect associated with the brown bear of Drass which often gets unnoticed. The SHO of Drass during that dinner party once mentioned, "Brown bear roams between India and Pakistan, whereas we humans cannot cross the LOC. Now bears should be our messengers for peace."



SHO has his relatives in Pakistan. Sadly, many people of Drass were forced to leave relatives behind on the other side of the International border. During our stay in Drass, on 23rd October, coincidentally there was an India Pakistan Cricket match. It had a nail biting finish, and understandably, the people of Drass were divided on the outcome of the match.

They are emotionally attached towards the other side of LOC as their kin is there, but they are genuinely loyal towards this side of LOC. Their respect and love for the Indian army is undisputed. The Indian army has done and still doing a lot of development work in this otherwise forgotten land of Trans Himalayan India. They developed roads, schools, hospitals, self-help groups for women and created employment opportunities for local youths within the Army.

Our Guide Bahow Ud Din's four brothers were soldiers in the Indian army. He himself works for road construction activities for the Indian army during off-season for tourism. Local army personnel and villagers recognized local's support during the 1999 Kargil war. Subedar Kumar told us how villagers used to move with the Indian army along the difficult terrain of Drass, in order to show them the path through mountains.



**Bahow Ud Din once said,  
"If 10% of local villagers  
of Drass had taken the  
Pakistani side, India  
would have never won  
this war."**

It resonated in my head as "If 10% of local villagers of Drass had taken the Pakistani side, we would have never seen Himalayan brown bears."





When we were leaving on the morning of 26th October, we again met BDC of Drass at the junction of Drass Town. He waved his hand towards us and said, “Brown bear is Aman ki Paigam for Drass, and we all should work together for conservation of this animal.”

During our conversation that evening at Mushkoh valley, within a few kilometres from LOC, Subedar Suresh Kumar said, “When there is no war, Indian and Pakistani rangers from both sides have a good time exchanging pleasantries with each other. Indian soldiers share Bollywood songs with their Pakistani counterparts. No soldiers of any country want to break out in war!”

Subedar told us, in last couple of weeks, every day at around 9 PM, from his hilltop watchtower, he sees a huge male Himalayan brown bear comes from Pakistan's Deosai to India's Mushkoh Valley in search for human made food, and before the dawn break it goes back again to its favourite habitat in Deosai.





Now readers decide whether Himalayan brown bear, the abominable snowman, known as Dren-mo in Ladakhi is the “Aman ki Paigam (Message of Peace)” or a victim of human interference to nature.

Nevertheless, I realized one thing distinctly, Himalayan brown bears, of this region are not just ecologically important species. Their conservation has political significance as well!



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*Author:*  
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## Encounter between Leopard and Golden Jackal

This was our 2nd Jungle safari in the Morning on the 25th April 2023 from Sillari Gate, Pench National Park, Sitapur, Maharashtra. Nothing significant happened till then, as far as wildlife was concerned, except that we witnessed some birding and a snake kill by the Crested Serpent Eagle.

We were on the verge of finishing our safari ride, and exiting the Jungle territory, when suddenly we saw a leopard walking ahead of us on a road quite far. Since his back was in our direction, he could not see us. We slowed down our vehicle and gently followed him. After some distance, the leopard climbed up a small hill. We thought he might enter the jungle and disappear. So, without looking at him we crossed the place and from a considerable distance we looked behind to spot him.



*Crested Serpent Eagle  
with snake kill on a tree*



*To our surprise, he was sitting  
right at the corner of a small  
hill, near the road.*







*Attacking Stance*



*Golden Jackal taking a stroll without knowing the Leopard's presence*

I captured him from my camera to the best of my capacity for almost 10 minutes, and suddenly he changed his stride and assumed the predator position!

We saw where he was looking and found that a Golden Jackal was approaching towards him oblivious of the Leopard's presence ahead. At that moment our vehicle was exactly in between both of them i.e. Leopard and Golden Jackal. We were not in a position to move.

We were stand still. However, without being bothered by our presence, the Jackal started moving towards the leopard's direction, and the Leopard was fully prepared to attack him.

Since our vehicle was at the corner/ site of Leopard, he crossed us by taking a bigger turn and that increased the distance between Leopard (uphill) and Jackal down. However, in a hurry the Leopard attacked (Jumped) on the jackal and missed his prey completely. The jackal ran away safely, and the Leopard walked over, utterly disappointed!

We had mixed feelings of relief and disappointment as we were, in a way, instrumental in what had occurred. Our presence was beneficial for the Jackal since his life was saved and for the Leopard it was the most unfortunate since he missed his target/meal!



*This was, all in all, an unnerving yet gratifying experience!*



# SFL30 New Launch

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*Author:  
Upayan  
Chatterjee,  
Researcher,  
TCS Research,  
Kolkata*

The curtain of fog lifts,  
the dawn breaks and  
as I desperately try to  
fight the chilly winter air  
bombarding me in the  
open Gypsy, I can't  
help but think of how  
wars of all sorts have  
been fought at  
Ranthambore.



## The Pillars of War - Ranthambore

**N**estled between the Aravali and Vindhya Mountains of Rajasthan, in Western India, Ranthambore, derives its name from the local dialect for “pillars of war” and the sky-high ramparts of a crumbling 8th Century Fort, bears testimony. Ranthambore is as much a land of fables and legendary persona, as it is a land of pristine wilderness. The place holds stories of extraordinary personalities who have ruled the fort and also of the striped predators, roaming the rolling landscape of lakes and grasslands, surrounding the fortress. The forest lands, over the years have had their own set of legends as is evident from stories of the famous

tigress, Machli, whose valiant act of fighting off a mugger crocodile has been told and retold countless times and continue to linger in the magical air of the place. Here, in Ranthambore, wildlife and history walk hand in hand and it hasn't always been a very happy co-existence! Relics and hunting diaries of Maharajahs shed a very different light over this place, as they are full of accounts of uncontrolled exploitation of the natural treasure that this place holds. Trophy hunting for the magnificent antlers of the Sambar Stags or slaying tigers for sport – man and animal have evidently been at war





until 1957, when Ranthambore was finally declared a sanctuary for wildlife.

The days of rampant killing and human interference were brought to an official closure when Ranthambore finally became a “National Park” in 1981 after seven long years of ecological study under the “Project Tiger”. And yet, so many wars are still being fought – some that help maintain the natural balance and some others, which can potentially disrupt the proceedings. The ancient war between the predator and prey is present at large, and the thriving herds of spotted deers, sambars and Chinkaras point at a healthy ecosystem as of now. The Malik Talav, the Rajbagh Lake, the rainwater reservoirs and the thriving energy of life all around hardly conveys the immense struggle that goes on in the background and to the one riding the gypsies through

the muddy tracts, the wars conceal themselves as beautifully as the tiger hides in the grasslands. Yet, there are hints, subtle pointers to the battle being fought within and beyond the blurry margins of the park!

The female Nilgai, an endemic antelope species, stood against the foggy backdrop, right opposite to the ploughed lands of human habitation, fenced by barbed wires, pointing at where Ranthambore continues to fight a tremendous war. Of the 1400 Square kilometers, sources reveal that perhaps less than 700 square kilometers are truly wild, while the remaining portions have been encroached upon in some way or the other. With animals and humans in such close contact, conflicts are unavoidable and so is retaliation. The Khandar Village locality, right at the heart of tiger habitat has over the years faced the wrath of the mighty predator, especially

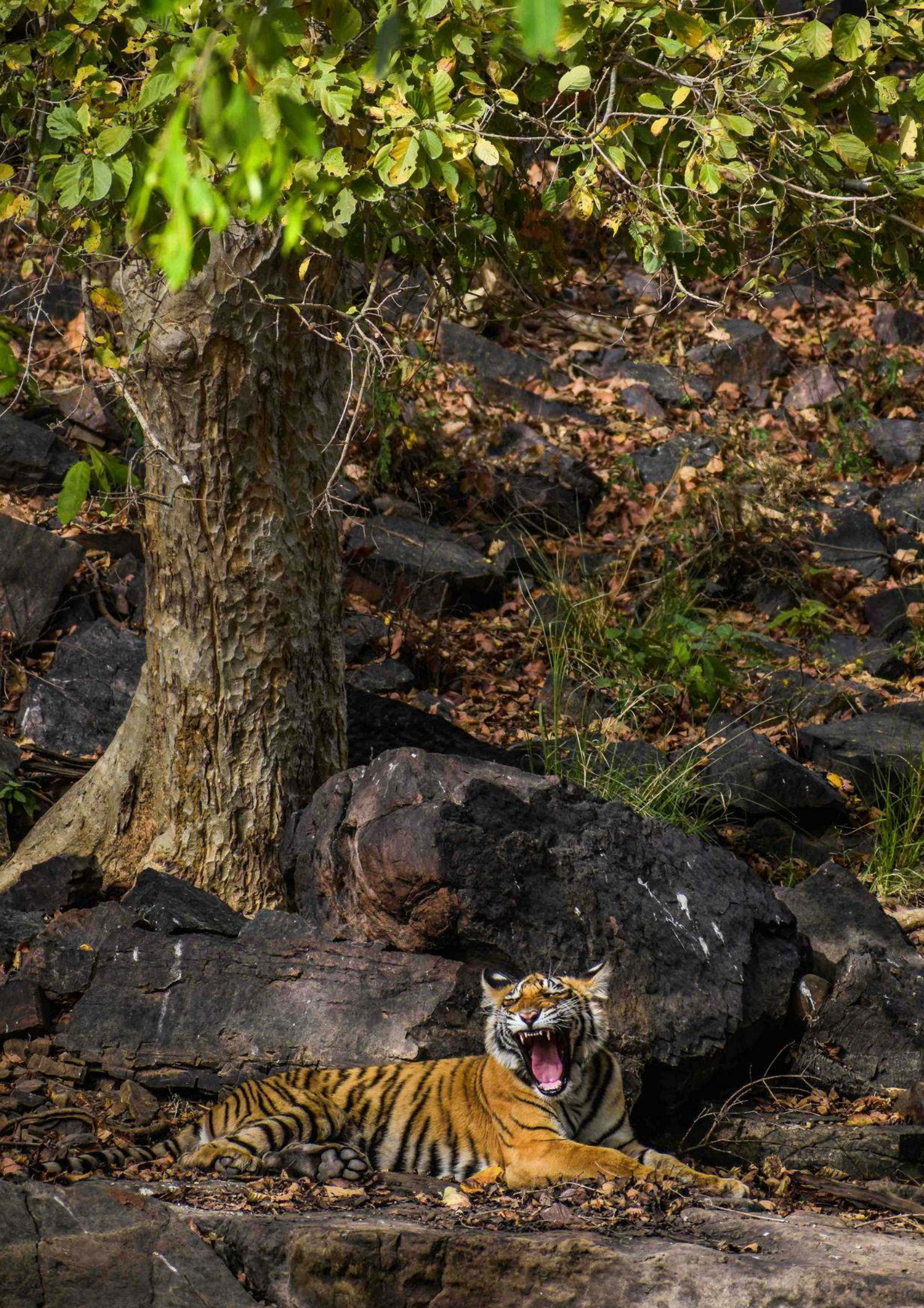
during the monsoons when hunting in the jungles becomes extremely difficult. Yet, surprisingly, years of directed effort has successfully inculcated amongst people, a sense of compassion!

### More than 70 tigers

**Area: 1400 Sqkms**

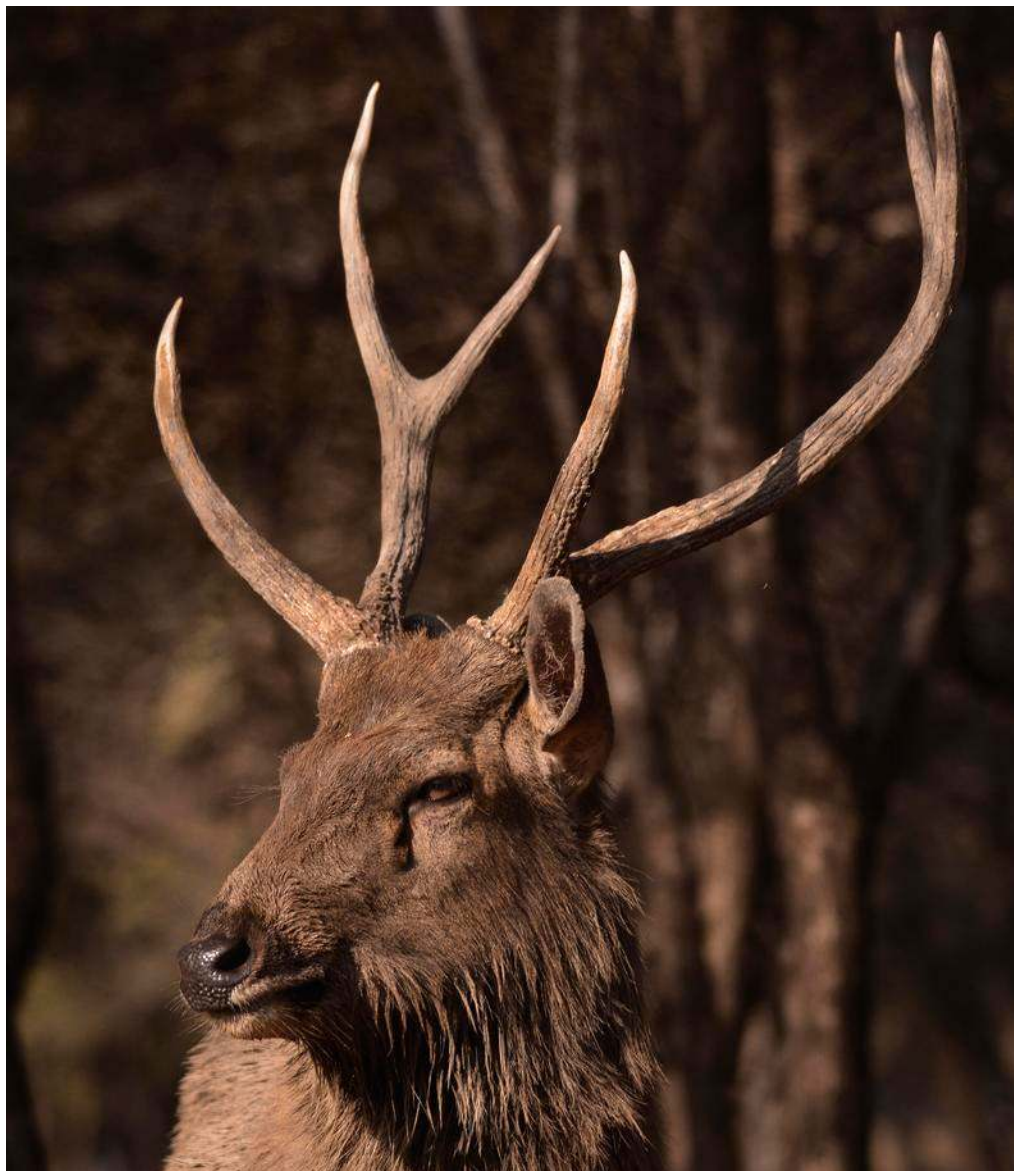
The 1400 Square Kilometers of semi-deciduous vegetation in Ranthambore is home to more than 70 tigers, including the males, females and their cubs. The tiger numbers have shot up in recent years, which have brought about a plethora of new avenues to explore.







*Sambar deer  
male with  
antlers*



"The tigers bring us livelihood, Sir", was what our chauffeur had to say as he drove us to his hometown of Sawai Madhopur (entry point to Ranthambore National Park) from Jaipur airport, while talking of how income drastically falls over the monsoon months, when the park remains closed for tourists. "A cow dies, it is replaced by the Government. A tiger dies, where do we get another one?"

Was a simple question he posed but with no concrete answer. With just over 2800 wild tigers remaining in India, it is a huge task at hand to conserve them and the recent census showing a rise in their population, signals at success. But what often escapes notice is that in the near future, the numbers might just overshoot what a habitat can support. While the deer and antelope population at Ranthambore ensure that prey base is secured as of now, the continuous diminishing of forest covers is what poses a major threat today.

Vulture populations dwindling from kidney failure after eating cows treated with diclofenac (officially banned in 2006), carnivores developing serious disorders after preying upon diseased cattle wandering by the forest boundaries and poisoning of kills as a means of human retaliation come with the dangerously close interaction of the two worlds.

The bird's eye view of the forest shows how a chunk of wilderness has been wiped right off the heart of the national park to make way for a parking lot for pilgrims to visit a temple right beside the Rajbagh Lake, which is considered to be one of the key tiger habitats inside the

park. Shrinking habitat and a dangerously high population density has led to an increased rate of conflicts between the fiercely territorial males – the death of beloved Veeru(T-109), a two and a half year old tiger, following a territorial fight with the more experienced male, Fateh (T-42), with more than 50 serious wounds inflicted over the course of the battle goes on to tell how big the threat is. Ranthambore has boasted of extraordinary tigers like Genghis, who single-handedly changed the perception of a tiger's capabilities by showing extra-ordinary prowess in using the waters of the deep lakes as his favorite hunting ground, a



*Arrowhead aka  
T-84 The world  
famous tigress*



legendary male whose progeny continue to carry his legacy. And yet, isolation at the Western Part of India and lack of connecting corridors has now raised the serious threats associated with a limited gene pool. As the numbers continue to soar and yet, genetic diversity diminishes following tremendous inbreeding, the tigers now face the threat of being seriously affected by epidemics. The problems are aplenty but solutions limited, as has been pointed out by conservationists. Perhaps it is an unthinkable proposition to maintain secure tiger corridors, where the very forests aren't secure in the first place.

The relocation efforts have had their share of challenges, and serious questions were raised when a relocated male from Ranthambore was poisoned to death at the neighboring Sariska Tiger Reserve, which had previously witnessed a local extinction of the striped predators in the region. Further probe showed that the killing was not a case of retaliation but a planned act of poaching, which exposed the lack of proper vigilance and the

loopholes which continue to threaten our prized wilderness.

The forest lands of Ranthambore are amongst the most beautiful places that I have ever seen or witnessed and it's amazing how the entire township realizes that the forest is their lifeline. An entire community, living on the back of a thriving tourism industry, are in no way oblivious of how important the forest lands are – as is evident from the local shops and railway stations, which are scattered with subtle hints pointing at how the wild and the tiger are integral to the society in Sawai Madhopur. And yet, surprisingly, we fail to act and think beyond our own immediate needs.

I remain immensely grateful for all that Ranthambore has allowed me to witness – the grey langur family caring for the young, the antlers of the deer melting into the dry branches of the semi-deciduous vegetation, the prowling tiger, the majestic sambar stags, the mesmerizing landscapes and a world far from the urban cacophony, while also providing an insight into how negative too much of human interference can prove to be. It is

perhaps time to call for serious actions and reclaiming the wild lands, letting the jungle take over and the vegetation to grow over the human footprints in the sacred lands of unrestrained freedom.

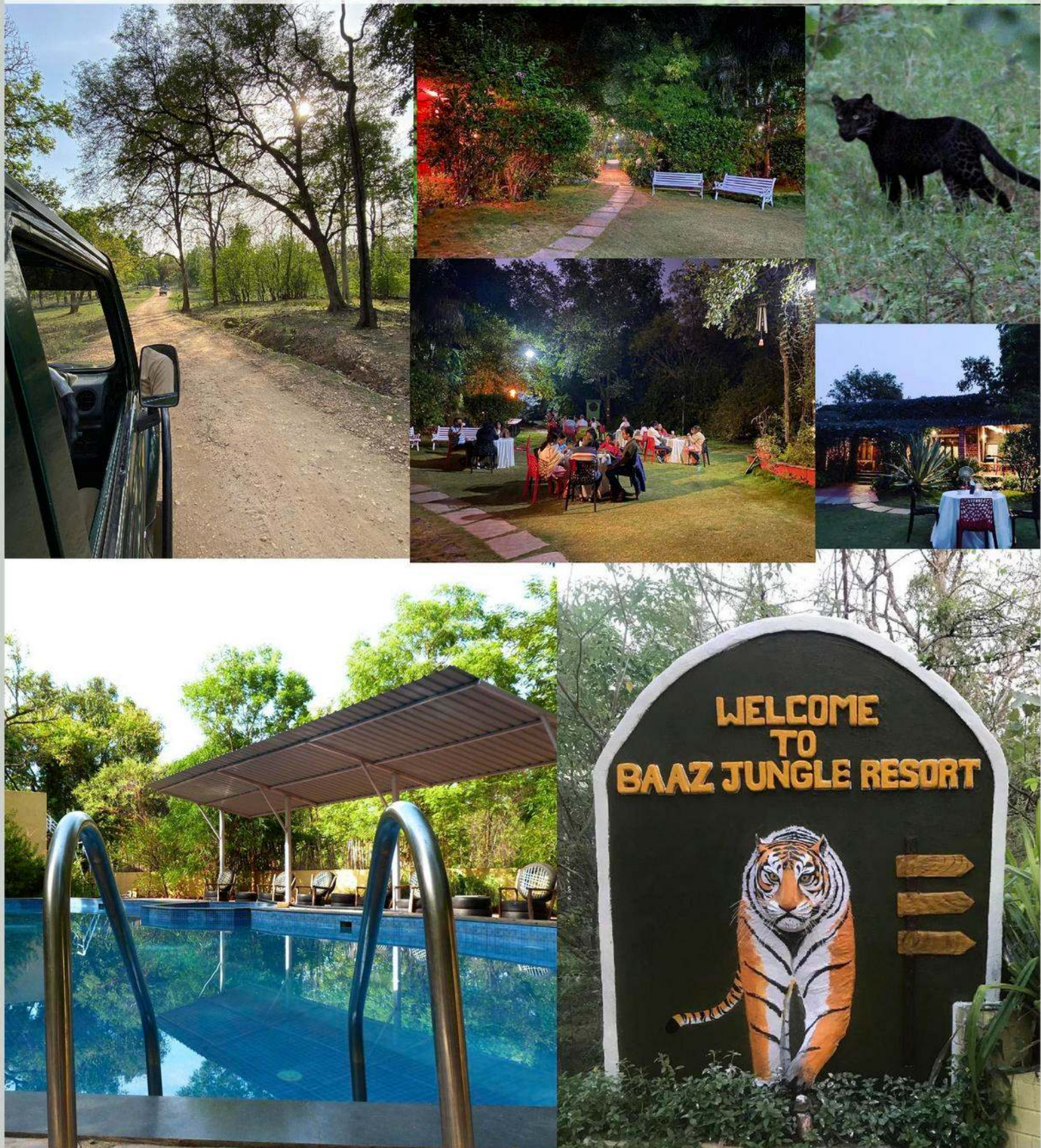
While the vegetation and the lakes hold good till now, nobody can say for sure what the future holds. The lack of serious efforts in maintaining a database for the herds of herbivores, has led to only approximate studies of how well they are doing. Growing reports of the Sambars coming out of the parks for the want of food doesn't look too promising and it was, in retrospect, heartbreaking to witness a majestic Sambar stag, the largest deer species in India, foraging for food in the backyard of our camp. A lot needs to be seen and observed before a solution to such a sensitive issue might be addressed but it is now globally understood that humans are fast outgrowing the needs of other species and a general change in mindset amongst the masses is perhaps the first foot forward.

The forest lands of Ranthambore are amongst the most beautiful places that I have ever seen or witnessed and it's amazing how the entire township realizes that the forest is their lifeline.





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- **Patience:** Wildlife photography requires patience. Be prepared to spend long hours waiting for the right moment to capture a shot. Patience often leads to more natural and interesting behaviors being captured on camera.

< Planning and Preparation >



*The workshop drew participants from classes 6-10 and filled them with a burning curiosity for the natural world and a passion for capturing its essence.*

On the 22nd of August, 2023, the Multipurpose Hall of DAV School Sector 6 in Bokaro Steel City came alive with a spirit of exploration as over 550 students gathered for an enlightening wildlife photography workshop that turned out to be much more!

The event, organized under the agenda of Nature Education, saw the convergence of young eager minds seeking to unravel the mysteries of capturing the wild through the lens.

**Exploring Nature launched Introduction to Nature & Wildlife Photography Workshop and Wildlife as a Career for Students...**

**"This innovative and immersive program is poised to have a lasting impact on both the students and teachers of DAV Public School, Sector 6, Bokaro Steel City, as well as the field of wildlife education at large."**

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And Wildlife as a Career**

**For**

**DAV Public School,  
Sector-6, Bokaro Steel City, Jharkhand**

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On Tuesday,  
22<sup>nd</sup> August 2023,  
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Mentored by,  
**Mukul Mukherjee**  
(Wildlife Consultant & Wildlife Photographer)  
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## Workshop

### DAV Public School Sector 6

The talk was conducted by Mukul Mukherjee, a Wildlife Conservationist, Wildlife photographer and Naturalist who ensured that the workshop left a lasting impression on one and all.



## "Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better."

Mukul's journey from a former Engineer and MBA Graduate to a dedicated advocate of nature and its preservation has been nothing short of inspirational! His transformation into a skilled Naturalist, along with his impeccable photography skills, has earned him a well-deserved reputation in this field.

The workshop was not just about photography; it was an immersion into the world of wildlife and its conservation. The students were exposed to a blend of technical expertise and ethical considerations. Mukherjee didn't merely teach the art of capturing wildlife through a camera; he guided the participants on ways to be responsible by showing respect to the subject and its habitat while doing so.

One of the highlights of Mukherjee's presentation was his emphasis on the significance of proper attire for wildlife photographers. The art of camouflaging with the natural surroundings is essential to capture candid moments without disturbing the harmony of the ecosystem!

The talk also shared examples of Safety precautions that must be taken, as Mukherjee ensured that the budding photographers understood the importance of maintaining a safe distance from potentially dangerous subjects.



over 550 students gathered  
for an Enlightening  
Wildlife Photography Workshop

But it wasn't just about the art of camouflage and safety. Mukherjee delved into the technicalities of wildlife photography with finesse. He decoded the enigma of lenses, shedding light on the differences between DX and FX lenses, and he introduced the students to an array of photographic instruments like torch headlamps, binoculars, and gimbals that are indispensable for capturing those perfect shots. Mukherjee's own impressive portfolio of wildlife photographs was showcased, serving as a wellspring of inspiration for the young enthusiasts.



The school's Principal, Shri. Brijmohan Lal Das, extended his gratitude to Mukul Mukherjee for gracing the institution with his presence.



### Mentored by Mukul Mukherjee

Resource Person of WWF Assam  
State Office  
Wildlife Consultant to Palamau  
Tiger Reserve  
Founder of Exploring Nature  
ZEISS Brand Influencer  
Nikon Brand Influencer  
(Professional Services Member)

Honoured EFIP (Excellence of  
Federation of Indian Photography)  
Life member of Federation of Indian  
Photography  
Member of Photography Society of  
America



## Workshop



*Zoom Burst*



*Human V/s Wild Composition*



*Multiple Exposure Image*

Moreover, the workshop wasn't confined to camera gear alone. Mukherjee unveiled the magic of CPL filters, explaining their role in manipulating light and enhancing colours in photography! The workshop drew participants from classes 6-10 and filled them with a burning curiosity for the natural world and a passion for capturing its essence. Encouraging the students to explore diverse career avenues, Principal Das reiterated the importance of experiential learning in shaping their outlook towards the world.

In the grand tapestry of experiential learning, Mukul Mukherjee's visit stands as a vibrant thread that weaves together education, conservation, and art.

His words and images have ignited a spark in the hearts of these young learners, urging them to explore the realms of wildlife photography and beyond.

As the event concluded, the students carried with them not just theoretical knowledge, but a profound respect for the wild and a determination to tell its stories through the power of their lenses.



*Students and Wildlife share an interconnected Relationship in the study of Natural Sciences*



*"Forest fires, nature's fiery force of transformation."*

*"The Oath," captured at Manas National Park, tells its own unique story.*



समर्पण एवं  
उत्साह से भरे

6

वर्ष

हिन्दी मासिक समाचार पत्र

स्टूडियो  
न्यूज



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## Exploring Nature Awards

"Exploring Nature Awards" was introduced in September 2021 to raise awareness about the rich diversity within the floral and faunal world, encompassing creatures of all sizes. The objective is to reach a broader audience and educate them about the vast and intricate animal kingdom, highlighting that every living being, whether large or small, plays a significant role in our ecosystem. These awards serve as a platform to celebrate and recognize contributions made in the field of exploring and preserving the natural world, ultimately fostering a deeper appreciation for our planet's biodiversity.

We regularly conduct month-long campaigns where we showcase the best photograph of the day. This ongoing initiative allows us to highlight outstanding photography capturing the beauty of nature. At the end of each month monthly winners are declared. We celebrate and showcase the exceptional talents of our Top Artists of the Month. We also extend our appreciation to those who actively contribute to our forum as Top Contributors.

Their creative work is prominently featured in our magazine, "Whispering Wilds," which enjoys a broad readership of over 50,000 people worldwide. This not only honors their artistic achievements but also allows their work to reach a global audience, spreading the beauty and wonder of the natural world to a wide and diverse community.



**Judge**  
**Mrs. Grace Marian**



**Admin**  
**Mr. Bappa Debnath**



**Scan To Participate**





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# Exploring Nature Awards

## Top Contributors

### September



**Samar Jana**



**R Pradeep Kumar**



**Syamala Rupakula**

### August



**Arun Tyagi**



**Mukund Kumar**



**Raj Pise**

### July



**R Pradeep Kumar**



**Atul Chaphekar**



**Samar Jana**



# Exploring Nature Awards

## September



**Winner**

Jenisha Aggarwal





# Exploring Nature Awards

## September



### 1st Runner Up

Kevin Dooley,  
Albuquerque, New Mexico



### 2nd Runner Up

Utsav Shaw





# Exploring Nature Awards

## August



**Winner**

Subhrendu Bhattacharyya





# Exploring Nature Awards

## August



**1st Runner Up**  
Kapil Bhattacharya



**2nd Runner Up**  
Samrat Banerjee





# Exploring Nature Awards July



**Winner**

Manoj Kumar Nath





# Exploring Nature Awards

## July



**1st Runner Up**  
Tirason Maurice Tira



**2nd Runner Up**  
Neeraj Monani










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