

Sanctuary

A S I A

VOL. XXXVII, NO. 11, NOVEMBER 2017

₹ 100



Be a Pet,
ADOPT!

Meet All
GORE

Scales &
TAILS

Wizards
OF OZ

The
**SWAMP
DEER**

*The
Sanctuary
Wildlife*

**PHOTOGRAPHY
AWARDS 2017**

CUB KIDS

Nature Watch

The strikingly-beautiful *Indrella ampulla* is an air-breathing land snail found only in the Western Ghats of India.



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NOVEMBER
2017

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The barasingha or swamp deer is the state animal of Madhya Pradesh.

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The Wizards of O3!

Australia is not only a country, but also a continent. The land down under, cut-off from the rest of the world has an abundance of unique species of native animals, birds, reptiles, insects and plants. **TEXT BY PRIYA PATHIYAN**

THE WADDLERS

I saw hundreds of Little Penguins in their natural habitat at Phillip Island, just two hours away by car from the city of Melbourne. Through the day, they dive deep into the ocean to feed on fish. At sunset, you can see them waddling back to land, where they scurry into small but neat burrows! They look like children, coming home from school in navy blue and white uniforms. There is a viewing platform for tourists to watch them without causing any disturbance. My excellent guide, Ricardo Alves-Ferreira, explained how despite there being so many penguins and burrows, the birds never get lost. They know exactly how to reach their homes, without a GPS or even an address!

THE HOPPERS

Say Australia, and you automatically think of kangaroos, right? Kangaroos

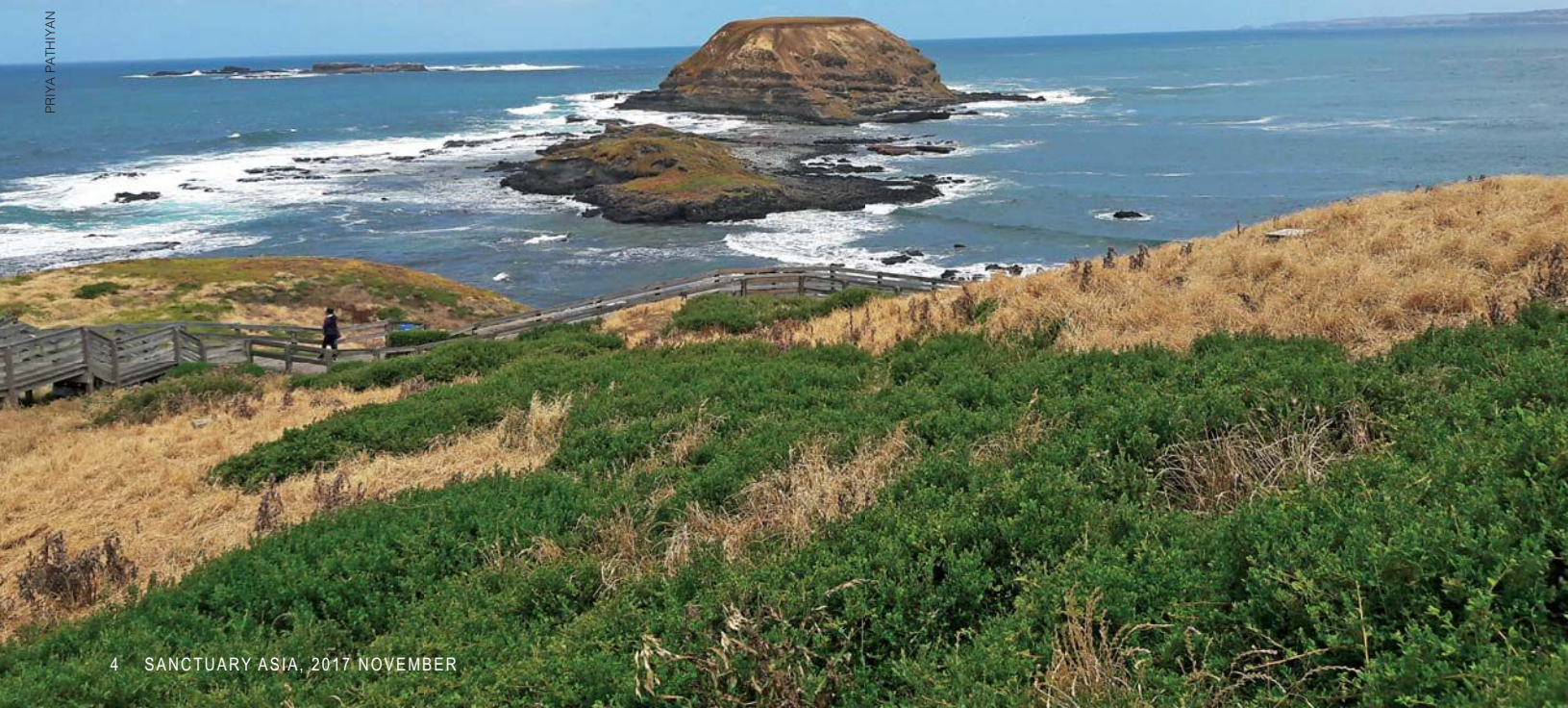
belong to the mammalian group known as 'marsupials'. A marsupial mother has a pouch near her belly, in which she carries and feeds milk to her baby. The baby funnily enough is called a 'joey'. Australia has more than 140 species of marsupials including koalas, wallabies, wombats, possums, platypus, wallaroos, potoroos, bandicoots, quolls and Tasmanian devils.

I went for a stroll in the Little River Reserve of the You Yangs with Janine Duffy, a wonderful lady who runs Echidna Walkabout Tours and heads the Koala Clancy Foundation.

Hiding quietly in the bush*, we kept our eyes peeled for kangaroos. Following Janine, I even duck-walked quite a distance so that we could see them from under the branches. We didn't want to scare them away.

THE CLIMBERS

It was less tiring to find the koalas as all I had to do was walk around the area they are usually spotted in. When I saw the big teddy bear-like creatures sleeping up in the gum trees* (that's what the Australians call eucalyptus trees), I just felt like cuddling with them! But, of course, I did not, as they are shy, wild animals who don't like to be disturbed. Besides, as Janine told me, they may look soft like stuffed toys, but they are 100 per cent muscle! Luckily, they are not too fierce... they only wake up to eat the gum leaves and then go right back to sleep. Janine explained how the males have scent glands on their chest with which they mark their territory on the tree trunks they hug. Just like humans can be identified by each of their unique fingerprints, the koalas can



be recognised by their one-of-a-kind individual noses!

Janine also got me to do something to help the koalas, whose habitat is fast being destroyed because of climate change. She pointed out huge clumps of boneseed, a weed which does not allow the koala's favourite gum trees to flourish, and handed me a pair of gloves. Within 30 minutes of pulling, I had cleared quite a sizeable area of the pesky weeds.

THE FLYERS

Above us the pink-and-grey Galahs (Rose-breasted Cockatoos) flapped happily and the blue-and-white kookaburras (terrestrial tree kingfishers) laughed in the tall trees. Colourful lorikeets zoomed about quite fearlessly. I didn't even need my binoculars to spot them, although Janine teased me, "Don't be a Galah; use them!"

THE NIGHT-CRAWLERS

On my way back from seeing the penguins, I caught a glimpse of a tiny, furry creature sitting by the side of the road. Ricardo identified it as a possum. Seeing how still it sat in the shadows, I realised there's a good reason why the phrase 'playing possum' became popular. These animals stay very quiet and literally act like they are dead when faced with danger. But they are also the reason most of the trees in the Victoria region of Australia have plastic covers on their trunks. It's to stop the tree-living possums from eating up all the new shoots in sight or building their nests (called dreys) in the branches.

On Churchill Island, close to Phillip Island, I met researcher Dr. Duncan Sutherland, who is working to save the eastern barred



Kangaroo



Echidna

bandicoots. These are also marsupials, but they are hard to see as they are tiny and only come out from their hiding places at night. Their numbers in the world had gone down to less than a 100, with zero in the wild, thanks to their habitat being taken over by humans. They were also hunted relentlessly by the invasive, feral cats and foxes. But with people studying them and their habits so carefully, there's still hope for these endearing creatures.

In October last year, Dr. Duncan and his team released 20 of them onto the island and now seven of their babies have made it and joined the grown-ups in their journey of survival!

THE SWIMMERS

If you've never seen a picture of a duck-billed platypus, one of the only two egg-laying mammals (the other is echidna or the spiny anteater), you really should. One of the funniest-looking mammals you can imagine, this marsupial lives mostly in water and hasn't changed for more than a million years! I went on a 'Paddle with the Platypus' with Otway Eco Tours owner Bruce Jackson on Lake Elizabeth. I got several glimpses of these lightning-quick creatures while gliding in a canoe on this peaceful lake up in the mountains. Bruce pointed out the openings of the platypus burrows and tunnels where the land met the water on the sides of the lake.

THE BITERS

While the creature with the world's hardest bite is the Tasmanian devil, also from Australia, I happened to meet the rare tiger quoll, which comes second in the jaw-strength race according to Shayne Neal. He and his wife Lizzie Corke own the Great



Little Penguin



Koala

Ocean Eco Lodge at Cape Otway, and work to protect koalas, gum trees and the adorable-looking tiger quolls. Shayne says there are only about five of them in the wild in the surrounding region (there are a few more in other areas) and must be protected.

THE RUNNERS

Emu, tall and flightless, is the largest bird in Australia and the second largest after the Ostrich. Emus are also very curious, as I found out on my visit to the Tower Hill Wildlife Reserve near Warrnambool. This national park created around an inactive volcanic crater has many easy walking trails. While I was exploring one of them on my own, a friendly Emu decided to give me company for the entire trek. I won't say I was scared, but I definitely didn't want to get close enough to take a selfie together!

THE DIGGERS

Sometimes, you find wildlife even when you aren't looking for it! We were driving towards the Great Ocean Road when I suddenly spotted a little spiny thing scurrying across the road. It looked like an anteater and Maree Martin, who was showing me around the Victoria region, said it was an echidna! The mother lays her egg into the pouch and the baby, called a puggle, breaks out of the egg and lives in the pouch until it is old enough to move out. Like the platypus, it too has electrosensors* to help keep it safe. Seeing one of these marvellous creatures by chance was the highlight of my visit to Victoria, Australia. 🦘



Priya Pathiyan is a senior lifestyle journalist, who is happiest when communing with nature. Tigers are her favourite animals, but all the other creatures great and small inspire her too!

* See glossary on page 23

The Inbox

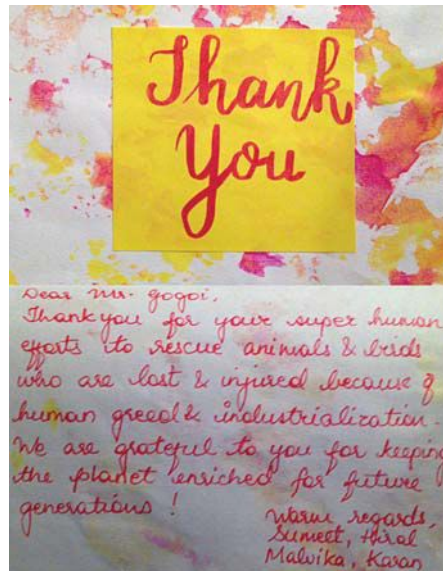
We love hearing from you! Here are some of your letters and e-mails.

Take Action

In the last issue of Cub, we featured the work of wildlife defender Manoj Gogoi who has been working tirelessly to protect wild animals in Kaziranga National Park in Assam. Cub readers wrote to him to express their admiration and support. Here are two letters from Cub readers.

Dear Uncle Manoj Gogoi,
I read about you in *Sanctuary Asia* magazine. And I felt so impressed that you are so selfless and that you care about wildlife more than your own life. I wish and pray that your work reaches out to many wild animals in need. Your work is very inspiring.

Aditya Sharma,
Bengaluru



Sumeet, Hiral, Karan and Malvika Mehta,
Mumbai

Hands-on Learning

The teachers, students of Grade 1 and parents of the J. B. Petit High School for Girls, Fort, Mumbai organised a two-day exhibition titled 'Monsoon Melody' on August 10 and 11, 2017. Over 100 innovative exhibits themed around 'Reduce, Reuse, Recycle' in a monsoon setting were displayed in the auditorium of the school.

The interactive exhibition and discussions drew more than 1,200 visitors from other

schools in Mumbai. The students learnt about the true essence of the monsoons and a variety of creatures and their habitats. They created unique working models made out of waste materials such as old tyres, dry fruit shells, bottles, newspaper, boxes, cracked CD Roms, toilet paper rolls, apple/egg cartons, and gunny bags to depict rainwater harvesting, a 3D model of the water cycle, and lifecycles of



the butterfly and frog. The waste products had been collected over three months by the children. Life-size models of beetles, peacocks, mushrooms and other species such as snails and slugs were displayed in their respective habitats. Earthworm and snail aquariums were used by the students to discuss and demonstrate habitats and vermicomposting. The children used aids such as puppets, scale models, cloud experiments, and display boards to explain the concepts.

Beyond the obvious hands-on-learning opportunity, this event helped foster team work and boosted the confidence of the children. These creative young minds have now learnt and taught adults about the importance of rainwater harvesting, recycling waste, vermicomposting and facts about monsoon creatures.

Purvi Shroff,
Mumbai



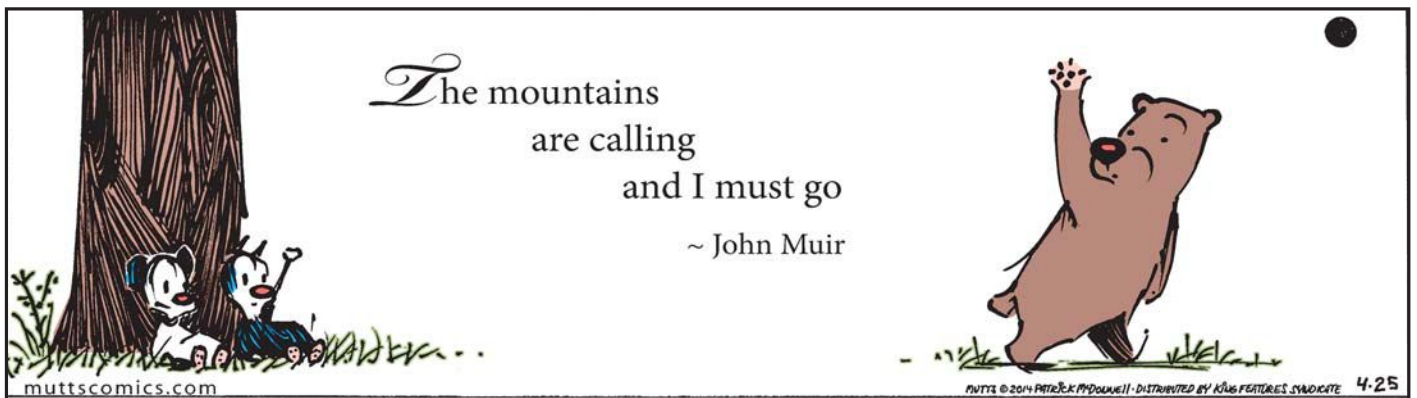
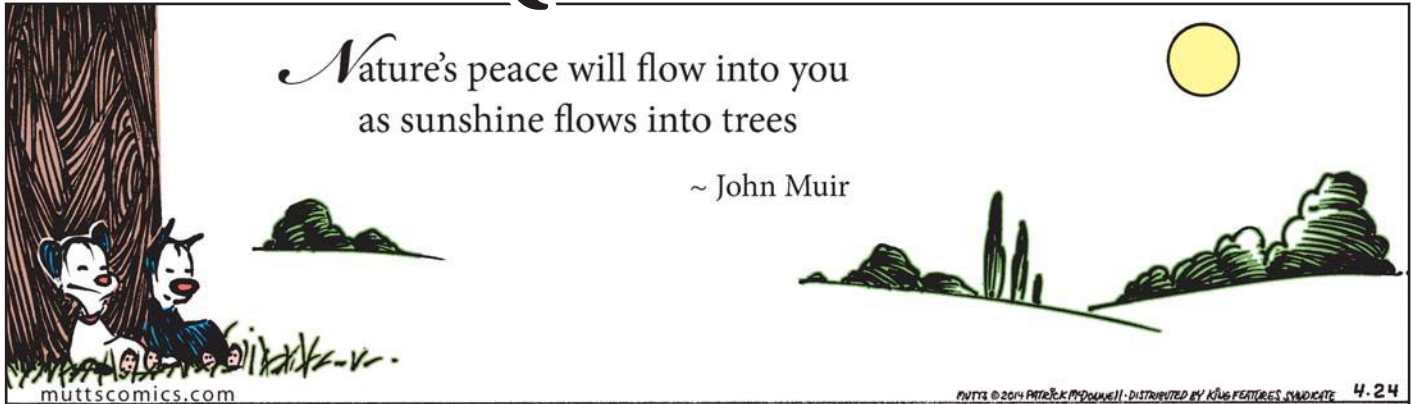
Write to us!

Send your questions, thoughts, ideas, opinions, articles and poems to lakshmy@sanctuaryasia.com or mail them to 145/146, Pragati Industrial Estate, N. M. Joshi Marg, Lower Parel, Mumbai - 400 011.

Mutts

By Patrick McDonnell

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Since 1994, MUTTS has dealt with themes ranging from animal protection, love and kindness to art and artists, highlighting many of the important issues that the world faces, including wildlife and environmental conservation. For more MUTTS, please visit www.muttscomics.com

My Wildlife Encounter

WHO Tamaghna Sengupta, 29

WHERE Buxa Tiger Reserve, West Bengal

WHEN July 29, 2017

SPECIES Tricarinate hill turtle

CHAIN OF EVENTS My friends and I spent an evening in the Buxa Tiger Reserve hoping to photograph elephants that can usually be spotted along the tall, grassy banks of the Dima river during the rainy season. A portion of that river passes through the outskirts of the reserve where we waited for the elephants to emerge. One of my friends, Kunal Chakraborty, spotted a small creature moving along the shallow riverbed. A really attractive turtle! We were unable to identify the species but took some photographs before it crossed the stream and disappeared out of sight. On returning home, I informed my friend Vivek Sarkar, who helped me identify the species as the tricarinat hill turtle. I learnt that this entirely terrestrial turtle has been rarely photographed even within Protected Areas in India.



A tricarinat hill turtle in the Buxa Tiger Reserve, West Bengal.

TAMAGHNA SENGUPTA

KIDS FOR TIGERS

Wildlife Week Celebration



SATHISHA SATYASWPA 2017

Kids for Tigers organised an all India essay and poetry writing competition to celebrate National Wildlife Week (October 1-October 7). We present some of the best entries on the following pages.

OUR EARTH IS BEAUTIFUL

The planet Earth, which is the most beautiful place in this universe and supports life for the varied beings, is god's most beautiful creation. The Earth has many stunning geographical features, from high mountains to hot deserts, fertile river valleys and numerous rivers. And most important of all Mother Nature who provides everything we require. But did we even once think about this Mother Nature when we polluted her water, air and land? No, we didn't! We just became more and more greedy and took everything she gave us. Never even once did we look back and consider what the Earth is facing. Now is the time to care and enhance our planet! Come together and stand united so that all of us can protect our alluring planet by raising our voices against all types of pollution, and standing with teams who are fighting climate change. We all should use the three R's – Reduce, Reuse and Recycle.

We can also go green by making some minute changes in our daily routine such as paying attention to how we use water, using compost and more. We can use bicycles instead of using cars for nearby places or we can walk. And as we all know this attractive Earth has so much more to give us but if we destroy it, what will we gain? Going green is easier than we think. And if all humans come together, stand united; forget all castes, religion and country and take an oath to stop pollution and climate change, we can gain what we want. Let many hands come together to make the work lighter. Now is the time we enhance this earth, now is the time we have a non polluted earth, Now is the time we living beings lead a happy life without any illness. Now is the time we revive this earth, now is the time we humans come together.

By Aanya Baldia,
Gopi Birla Memorial School

NATURE TRAIL

The sun rose from behind the mountains,
And kissed the mountain peak.
The clouds lay on her bosom,
And the sky glowed pink, just like rosy cheeks.

We embraced this day with hope and joy,
For we had nothing to fear.
We were going on a nature's trail,
And only Mother Nature's voice we would hear.

As we ran across the garden,
To reach the garden door,
We saw another world before us,
A tiny world, galore.

For at the bottom of my garden,
Sat a speckled frog, so green,
And near the pond lay a spotted toad,
Calm and serene.

Amidst all the chaos,
A hedgehog scuttled by.
And somewhere in the background,
We could hear a parrot cry.

While a few creepy-crawlies,
Crawled beneath the log.
'Meaow-meaow' screeched the cat.
And 'woof-woof' barked the dog.

The caterpillars are still snoozing,
Waiting for the time to come,
When they will turn into beautiful butterflies
But for now they look so sleepy, so lonesome.

'Chick-chick' screamed the chickens,
Making their way to the coop,
While some nearby bees cheerfully hummed,
And started to play loop-the-loop.

As I stared at the little world,
I realised something queer.
Why had I never noticed this world before,
Even though it was so near.

Gaia looked up at me,
Her face broke into a smile.
She said, "Because you were busy, my girl,
Staring at file after file."

Nature is everywhere around us,
We only need to take time and stare.
Look at the flowers, the birds, the animals,
Or peep into a lion's lair.

You too, can go and see what I saw,
You too, will share the same tale,
That day I realised that I only need to explore my garden,
For it too was a part of nature's trail.

Humans take the telescope,
To search for beauty in the stars.
But they forget the fact that there are wonders in their
gardens too,
They needn't look so far.

Vaishnavi Asawale,
Gopi Birla Memorial School



AJIT KUMAR HOTA/SWPA 2017



DHEERAJ NANDA/SWPA 2017



YOGENDRA JOSHI/SWPA 2017



SULAKSHA OBEYSEKERA/SWPA 2017

SCALES & TAILS

I was really excited and looking forward to the workshop on reptiles and amphibians at Nature's Nest in Mollem, Goa, between June 24 and 26, 2017. It was my opportunity to meet renowned herpetologist Varad Giri. Text and photographs by Vikram Eric D'Silva

The workshop had been initiated by Pankaj Lad, who is well-known for recording bird sounds. Also at the workshop were Ramesh Zharmekar, a local at Nature's Nest with extensive knowledge about the herpetofauna of the region; Niranjana Sant, a passionate wildlife photographer; his daughter who is pursuing her graduate studies in Marine Conservation in the U.S.A.; Benhail Antao, a young snake and crocodile conservationist and Sangamitra, who helps with animal rescues.

NATURE'S BOUNTY

After breakfast and an introductory session, we set off on a nature trail near Nature's Nest. Almost immediately, we spotted a monitor lizard on top of a coconut tree. We also saw a female forest *Calotes* and later a garden lizard. Giri explained how all lizards in the family Agamidae have spikes on their neck but the spikes vary according to species. The male *Calotes*, he added, has an organ at the base of its tail making it look fatter than that of the female.

In the afternoon we enjoyed an informative session on amphibian identification. However, the day was by no means over. At 5:30 p.m., we set off for Tambdi Surla, where we were to release a rescued baby python. As darkness took over, the whole forest filled with frog calls. Giri helped us identify them based on the calls – Bombay bush frog, cricket frog *Fejervarya sp.*, and *Ramanella*. It was not long before we saw a Malabar pit viper that was possibly waiting for its first meal of the night, a sleeping green vine snake and a Prashad's gecko.

We were quite lucky that night to witness the mating and the laying of eggs of the night frog *Nyctibatrachus*. We found a male

on a leaf and a female on the stalk of the same plant. It was a 30-minute long wait before the female accepted the male's endeavours. After 10 minutes, the male dropped off into the water below and almost immediately, the female laid eggs. We watched wide-eyed as the male frog almost became food for a checkered keelback in the water. Luckily for the frog, he managed to hop away and escape. As we headed back, we had more sightings including that of a magnificent adult hump-nosed pit viper, a common Indian toad, a baby python, a Bombay caecilian and a burrowing frog. What an amazing herp-spotting day it had been!

IN SEARCH OF THE SAW-SCALED VIPER

The plan for the next day was to scour the plateau areas to search for the saw-scaled viper, one of India's 'Big Four' highly-venomous snakes. On the way to the plateau, we saw a caecilian roadkill that had possibly been hit the previous night. At the plateau, we found two different species of cricket frogs, which we differentiated on the basis of their limbs, body shape and belly. The frogs of the genus *Fejervarya* are smaller in size and have two distinct lines on their bellies. The other cricket frog was a burrowing frog bigger in size, had two black stripes on its belly and had many tubercles (growths) on its skin. Ramesh was the first one to find a baby saw-scaled viper under a rock. Our intrusion caused it to get agitated and rub its scales together to make a saw-like sound. Not wanting to disturb it, we placed the rock back gently and moved on. We also saw scorpions, purple crabs and some colourful beetles. Another exciting find was a *Hemidactylus*



Hemidactylus gecko

gecko, also under a rock. It had a dorsoventrally* flattened body and granular scales with tubercles on its body. It had very well-developed lamellae on its digits, which showed that it was a very good climber. Lamellae are thin plate-like structures below the digits of geckos, which give them a better grip to climb rocks and trees. We also saw a skink, which had a rounded, flexible body with shiny, overlapping scales that showed that it was possibly a burrower. Ahead we saw five more saw-scaled vipers of which one was a juvenile.

A FROG-FILLED DAY

That afternoon, back at the centre, Giri conducted a session on snakes and lizards. We learnt about scalation, snake identification and the characteristics of different families of lizards. A late evening walk at around 7.30 p.m., uncovered a Bombay bush frog, an *Indirana* species, a large bull frog and a Prashad's gecko on a tree. An Indian toad revealed itself along a stream where we heard the calls of the Bombay and Amboli bush frogs, a burrowing frog and the Malabar gliding frog. Post dinner, we decided to return to the rocky plateau for a night trail. A huge chorus of cricket frogs welcomed us. The highlights of the night were seven Malabar gliding frogs, ornate narrow-mouthed frogs *Microhyla* sp., skittering frogs and common Indian tree frogs. We observed two common Indian tree frogs mating and the amplexus* of a cricket frog. This is basically the position when the male holds on to the female during mating.



Fegervarya sp. frog



Saw-scaled viper

SO MUCH MORE TO LEARN!

The next morning, we returned to Tambdi Surla for a trail that led to a waterfall. We first saw a skink eating a moth on a twig mound. A beautiful, multi-coloured spike spider then attracted our attention. Giri found a blind snake under a rock. He told us that it was possible that it could be a new species as it looked different from what was usually found in Goa. It was hard to contain my excitement at that! A blind snake is small and worm-like with scales that even cover its eyes. We also saw a pair of common mormon butterflies mating. As we approached the stream, we saw a big, bright green vine snake. It lay on the leaf litter on the ground. We then moved toward the waterfall with pools of water around the rocks. We also saw a Hitler bug, a hawk moth and a pair of grasshoppers mating. What a morning full of rich sightings!

This workshop taught me a lot of things that I did not know before about herpetofauna and I realised that there is so much left to explore and learn. It was an honour meeting with Giri as he is not only knowledgeable but also makes herping so much fun and exciting. He encouraged me to begin documenting the snakes of Goa on a regular basis and I hope to do justice to this initiative. 🐾



Eleven-year-old Vikram, studies at Sunshine Worldwide School, Goa. He loves wildlife, particularly reptiles and amphibians.

ADVT.

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* See glossary on page 23



Snow leopard spotted in Arunachal

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), India, has found photographic evidence of the highly-elusive snow leopard in the northeastern state of Arunachal Pradesh.

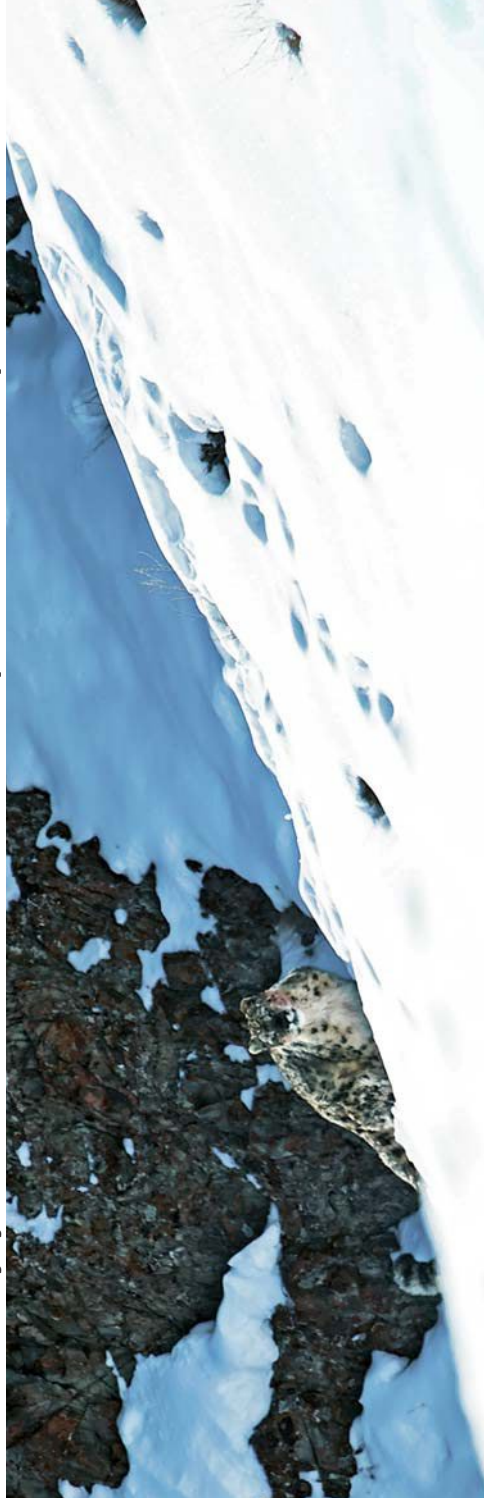
The species was captured on a camera trap, set up as a part of a state-wide survey, carried out by WWF in collaboration with the Forest Department of Arunachal Pradesh. The camera was

set up at Thembang, a community conserved area (a region protected by local communities).

According to the WWF, only a small percentage of snow leopard habitat falls in the Dibang Biosphere Reserve and the Namdapha National Park in Arunachal Pradesh. Therefore, this snow leopard sighting confirms the presence of these beautiful

This snow leopard sighting confirms the presence of these beautiful cats beyond Protected Areas!

A state-wide survey by the World Wide Fund for Nature revealed the presence of the snow leopard in Arunachal Pradesh.



Hope for Great Barrier Reef?

AUSTRALIA Researchers are rejoicing as one of the worst bleached areas of the Great Barrier Reef in Australia has shown fresh signs of life. Researchers found tiny sacs of white eggs in bleached coral reefs between Townsville and Cairns during a coral reef survey in September 2017. The researchers from the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) say the discovery was quite unexpected as previous studies show a two to three year delay in reproduction in corals after severe bleaching. Coral bleaching is a global phenomenon caused by a rise in ocean temperatures, brought about by climate change.

While the news of coral eggs is certainly promising, the eggs have to be fertilised in order to develop into coral larvae. The fertilisation of the tiny eggs happens during the annual spawning* event, which is due on the full moon of December 5, 2017.

Dear *Cub Kids*,

As human population expanded, many of us moved out of our forest homes and into farming communities. But even then, nature was all around us.

However, more recently, as big cities cropped up, we moved further and further away from where all life began, and the absence of nature became – without us even realising it – a gaping hole in the heart.

Today many studies show the ill-effects of ‘nature deficit disorder’ in urban humans.

Those who don’t spend enough time outdoors are often afflicted with sadness, obesity and vision problems. Perhaps one of the reasons humans like to keep cats and dogs in city apartments is to

feel a little more connected to the rest of life on Earth... a little less alone in the universe.

But did you know that there is a growing movement of people who believe that we need to rethink our relationship with animals? Instead of ‘pets’ – a name that suggests that they are our ‘amusements’, we are encouraged to think of them as our ‘companions’.

If we can do this, we will not be comfortable going out to ‘buy’ a new friend – definitely not one that has been stolen from its parents in the wild! Turn to page 25 to learn how you can make a difference to animals – wild and domestic – by boycotting the pet trade and adopting an animal from your local shelter instead.

Your friend,

Tara



‘Bird-eating’ plants discovered!

Two new species of ‘bird catcher’ trees belonging to the genus *Pisonia*, were recently discovered by scientists in Puerto Rico. The hooked, sticky fruits of *Pisonia* trees latch on to creatures that brush past it. Usually the sticky fruit is nothing more than an annoyance to the bird, but every once in a while, a fledgling* may not be able to shake the fruit off of its body. In such instances, the fledgling gets trapped by the sticky seeds of the fruit. Unable to free its wings, the fledgling falls to the ground and its decaying body is then used as nourishment by the roots of the *Pisonia* trees.

The researchers have named the two new species *Pisonia hornae* and *Pisonia roqueae*

after Frances W. Horne and Ana Roquéde Duprey, two women who spent several decades trying to document plants of Puerto Rico.

“Just like the two large trees remained unrecognised by science until now, the enormous efforts of these two women, who dedicated part of their lives to botanical work, remained largely unrecognised by the community,” said researcher Jorge C. Trejo-Torres.



PUBLIC DOMAIN

New species of aquatic snake discovered

Herpetologists are delighted by the discovery of a new endemic* species of non-venomous aquatic snake nocturnal snake, which hunts for prey underwater.

The adults have off-white bellies and black spots with an olive-brown skin, whereas

the young ones are olive green with a yellow belly. Another characteristic difference is in where they live – the juveniles like water-logged areas, usually on rocky-plateaus, while the adults live in freshwater forest streams.

According to scientists, this species was once considered a variant of the olive forest snake. This study established that the aquatic rhabdops is a new species owing to its

Children give up catapults

The children of Roing, located in The Dibang Valley, Arunachal Pradesh, in a wonderful gesture at *Sanctuary’s* Mud on Boots Project Leader

Anoko Mega’s bidding, came forward and surrendered the catapults that they used to hunt small birds with. Hunting birds using catapults is a common livelihood as well as a ‘fun’ activity here. Dibang valley is home to a diverse range of wildlife, such as the

vulnerable eastern hoolock gibbon, musk deer, Himalayan serow, Rufous-necked Hornbill and the elusive king cobra.

With such species of high conservation concern, community awareness and support for conservation is crucial.

Although changing the age-old tradition of hunting is a big challenge, Anoko is slowly but steadily chipping away at it.



SWAPNIL PAWAR

different colours, patterns, shape, structure, size and genetic make-up.

Did U Know?

I am found only on the island of Bali and am a special bird. Who am I?

A beautiful, pristine white bird with a cobalt blue patch painted across its eyes lives on the island of Bali, Indonesia, and nowhere else in the world. The Bali Starling, also known as the Bali Myna, was, until a little more than a century ago, spread across the north-western region of Bali, but now is limited to a 60 sq. km. Protected Area within the Bali Barat Nature Reserve.

The Bali Starling is easily identifiable due to its entirely white-feathered body, save the tips of its tail and the wings, which are black. But it is the eye-catching patch of blue skin surrounding its eyes that makes it the most distinguishable, even from afar along with its contrasting greyish-blue legs. Both, male and female starlings boast of crests on their heads, with males sporting slightly longer ones. This bird grows up to 25-28 cm. in length and weighs about 85-90 gm. The Bali Starlings 'talk' in a mix of loud and distinct calls, whistles, chirps, squeaks and squawks!

Damselfish are known to choose and 'farm' their preferred species of algae!



PHILIPPE BOURJON/PUBLIC DOMAIN

What makes this bird so special apart from its unique appearance and role in the ecosystem, is that only a few of them are left in the wild today. By the year 2001, only about six individuals were believed to be alive in the wild because of rampant illegal poaching and capture of these birds to be sold as pets. But today, thanks to very inspiring and dedicated conservation efforts to save the species from extinction, the numbers have shown a more positive trend. They have also been introduced on Nusa Penida island after breeding in captivity and releasing them into the wild. Remember, *Cub* kids, never keep any exotic animals as pets at home, because, more the demand, more wild animals such as the beautiful Bali Starling are taken away from their forest 'homes'. Read more on the issue of the cruel pet trade on page 25.



PUBLIC DOMAIN

By the year 2001, only about six of these beautiful birds were believed to be alive in Bali's wilds. Today, thanks to conservation efforts, there are significantly more of them around!



BEN/PUBLIC DOMAIN

In Slope Point, the southern most part of New Zealand's South Island, strong, fierce Antarctic winds have given the *trees* a wonderful and peculiar shape!



ALEJANDRO SANTILLANA/PUBLIC DOMAIN

The vibrant, metallic hues on its body armour give the *rainbow scarab beetle* its name!

Big, Brilliant and Endangered

By Shaleen Attre

When one thinks of elephants, the first word that probably comes to mind is BIG! But elephants, while they may be the largest creatures on land, are not just big and powerful, they're wise and sensitive as well. Recent scientific studies have established that they are among the most intelligent animals in the world. They make and modify tools, are great collaborative problem solvers, and form deep, complex social bonds. They show 'human' emotions like happiness, anger, sadness and grief; they remember long-lost relatives, celebrate when a new member is born into the family and mourn the death of a loved one.

GIANTS ON THE MOVE

Elephant families are known as herds. The head of the family is the oldest, strongest female, called the matriarch. Herds can vary in size and generally have female elephants of different ages, as well as young males. Adult males normally don't stay with the herd; they start living separate lives when they reach adolescence, typically only joining a herd when it's time to mate.

Elephants have often been observed communicating using sign language, touch, smell and sound. Interestingly, they can also communicate with members of their own herd or with other elephants using low-pitched rumbling sounds. These rumbles are infrasonic*, but are so powerful that their messages can carry over several kilometres! This becomes important especially when a herd has split up and elephants need to stay in touch to figure out what resources are available in different areas.



JASOPRAKAS DEEDAS



RUDRA PRASANNA MAHAPATRA/WTI

The increasing fragmentation of forests due to roads, canals and railways and the resulting loss of elephant migratory pathways is leading to conflict with humans.

Elephants are always foraging, moving about in search of food and water. They're so big that they need an enormous amount of food just to maintain their basic energy: an adult female Asian elephant can consume over 240 kg. of plant matter in just 18 hours! It is very important that elephant herds consume these large quantities of food and then move on to the next area in their home range, otherwise the plants in one area won't have time and space to grow back afresh.

Unfortunately, as rising human populations use more land for cultivation and living space, the area available to elephants has decreased significantly in recent years. Because wild habitats are now becoming fragmented, the ancient pathways used by migrating elephants are now getting cut off by roads, canals and railways, or leading herds into newly-established farmlands and settlements. This can prevent herds from getting to food, water and other elephant groups. It can also increase conflict between humans and elephants.

The Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) has been studying these pathways for several

years under its Right of Passage project, and, with its partner organisations and state Forest Departments, has been trying to secure safe passage for elephants through elephant habitats and corridors around the country. In partnership with the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), WTI has now also launched the Gaj Yatra, which is the biggest awareness campaign ever organised around Asian elephants. This is literally a 'yatra', a journey that will travel through all 12 states that have wild elephants in India. 'Utsavs' and 'Mahotsavs' (festivals) will be held along the way, celebrating elephants through concerts and street plays, and activities for kids. Along with the festivities, it is hoped, people will learn why these beautiful, intelligent, powerful beings are so important and why they deserve right of passage through India's elephant corridors. 🐘

To learn how you can participate in the Gaj Yatra and pledge your support for the elephant, India's National Heritage Animal, write to WTI at rightofpassage@wti.org.in.

CUB POSTER

The Sword-billed
Hummingbird
Ensifera ensifera
is found in the Andes
of South America,
from Venezuela
to Bolivia.







**Help save our tigers, our forests,
our water - and ourselves.**



-
- ◆ Morarjee Textiles Ltd. ◆ Peninsula Land Ltd.
 - ◆ Miranda Tools ◆ PMP Components Pvt. Ltd.
 - ◆ Piramal Renewable Energy
-

Half of the world's wild tigers live in the forests of India. Despite roaming over vast areas of Asia a century ago, today habitat destruction and poaching are pushing our national animal to the brink. Global wildlife poaching represents the largest illegal trade in the world after arms and narcotics.

With climate change threatening human societies across the globe and in India, forests such as Kanha, Corbett, Mudumalai and Pench, the home of the tiger, are invaluable. They sequester carbon and store water, providing invaluable services to human society. In return, we need to protect them.

The Ashok Piramal Group is committed to saving the environment for the benefit of future generations.

Photo: Harsh Piramal.

Brought to you in the interest of wildlife protection by the Ashok Piramal Group.

Colour Me

WIN A PRIZE!

Name: _____

Age: _____

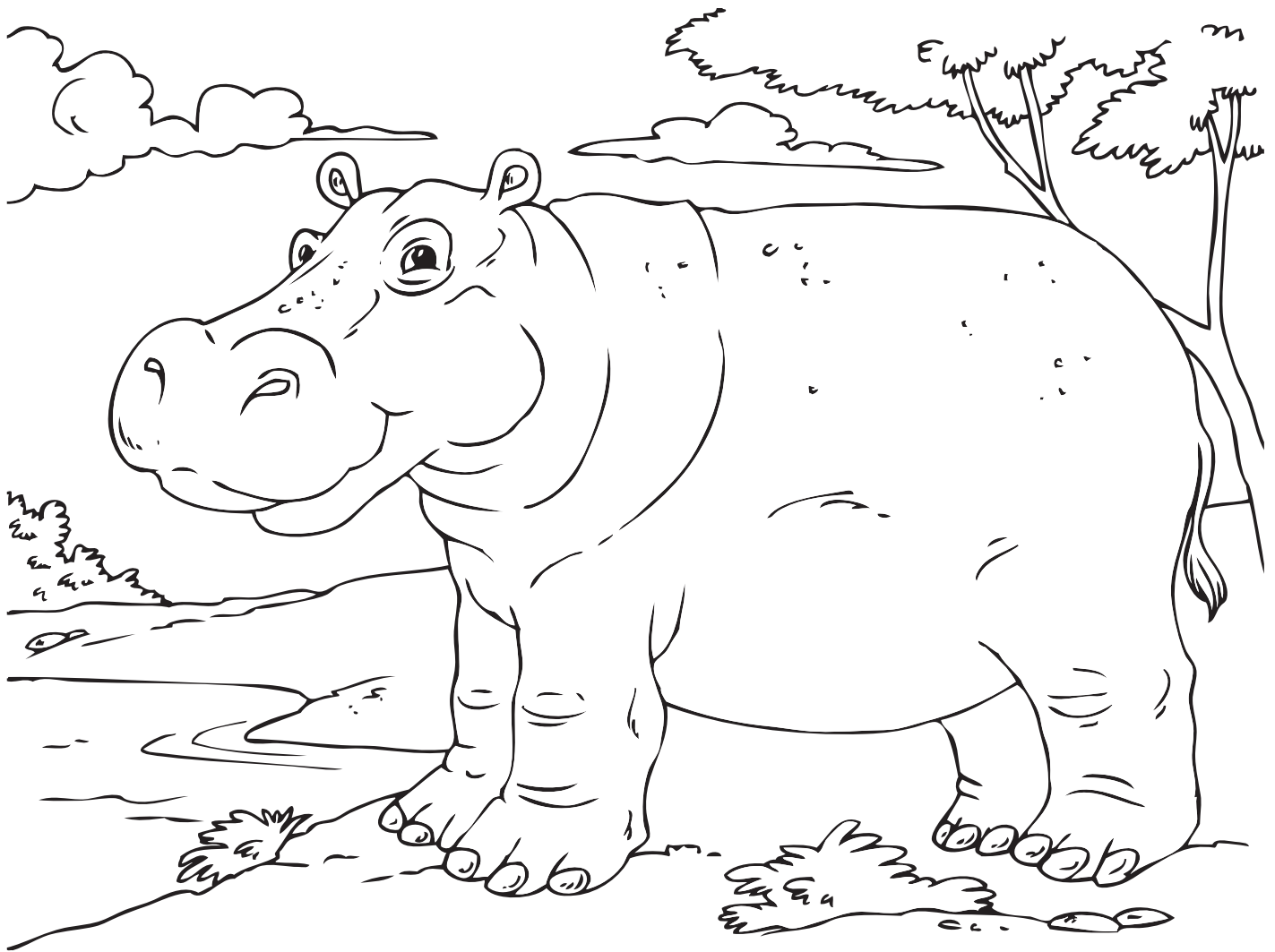
Address: _____

School: _____

E-mail: _____

The name hippopotamus means 'river horse'.

The hippopotamus is a large, herbivorous mammal found in Africa. Though heavy and dumpy to look at, it is a super fast swimmer and can reach speeds of up to 48 km./hour on land. Its eyes, ears and nose are perfectly positioned – on the top of its head to help it see, hear and smell even while submerged eyeballs deep in water! Colour this hippo and you may win a prize! Scan and email your art to anirudh@sanctuaryasia.com.



You never know **what** you might find in the

Mixed Bag



WHO WAS S. P. Godrej?

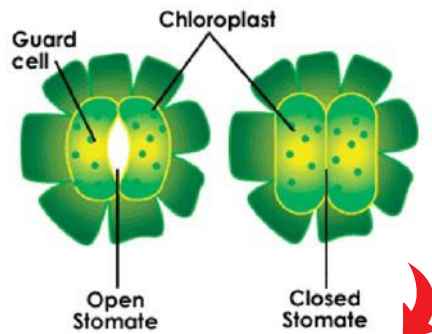
BITTU BHAGAL



'Soli' to friends, 'Sohrabji' to those who would rather use a more respectful form of address, S. P. Godrej was one of the few major industrialists in our country who took an active interest in environment protection.

He supported many causes – Indo-Pak peace initiatives, anti-nuclear protests, the Mangrove Society, Mani Bhavan's Gandhian ideologies, Mumbai's Sarvajanik Holi and of course his beloved tiger. Best known for his support to the World Wide Fund for Nature – India, Sohrabji also encouraged scores of other environmental and social groups whose meetings he would attend despite a tough work schedule that permitted him no more than four or five hours of sleep each night. "If we worshipped Nature as God, perhaps less harm would be done in the name of religion," he often said.

He used the Godrej name to fund tiger recovery plans and insisted that the mangrove swamps* at Pirojshanagar (now perhaps the finest breeding ground for fish, lobsters and prawns in the Mumbai region) be protected, studied and regenerated at his company's cost. He was equally at home breakfasting with Prime Ministers, or working with naturalists at the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) to strategise ways to save this river, that forest or some endangered species or other. "Use me wherever you can to protect nature," he would insist.



Awesome Adaptations!

To survive in dry, hot conditions, plants have to prevent the loss of water. However, the openings in their leaves through which water can be lost are also necessary for absorbing carbon dioxide that is needed to make their food. Some plants have adapted* to this by allowing air into their leaves only at night. During the daytime, the leaves are sealed tightly to prevent loss of water. They do so by closing the small openings in their leaves. Then, at cooler temperatures at night, carbon dioxide is absorbed by the leaves. Examples of such plants include pineapple trees, desert cacti and ice plants.



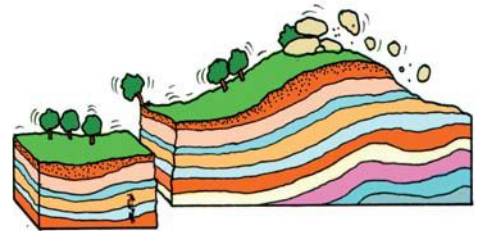
Though leaves have other pigments such as carotene, the intense green colour of chlorophyll overpowers them, so we don't see them.

Where do orcas listen to music?

Orca-stras!

What Makes the Earth Quake?

An earthquake is the sudden shaking of the earth's surface. More than a million earthquakes take place every year. There are about 20 'plates' along the surface of the earth that move slowly past each other. When the plates stretch and squeeze, they can cause earthquakes.



FAR-out Fact...

Mercury and Venus are the only two planets in our solar system that have no moon!



A DAY ON A HILLOCK IN SEARCH OF THE FAMOUS GROUSE

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY SUTIRTHA LAHIRI

It was unusually hot by the time we reached the top of the hillock. The winter season was rapidly fading away. Already regretting my decision to wear a sweater, I stood there on top of a rock, scanning the surrounding areas for any signs of bird life. A Chestnut-shouldered Petronia called from a tree nearby, its loud call in stark contrast to its size, while a couple of Indian Thick-knees took off from somewhere down the slope in a sudden burst of energy. On a tree-top far away from the elevated land, we spotted a Steppe Eagle, causing a ripple of excitement among the 20 birders whom I had joined that Sunday morning to explore the wilderness of Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary in south Delhi.

We reached the gates of Asola at 6:45 a.m. Catching up with Dr. Yogesh Parashar, we proceeded to the parking lot to wait for the others. Red-breasted Flycatchers were calling out loudly from the mesquite trees, while a Hume's Warbler flitted amidst the upper canopy in search of its first prey. When everyone arrived, we assembled at the gates, and followed Lakhan and Prashant into the wilderness.

Being an extension of the ridge, Asola was mostly dry, with scores of mesquite trees lining the dirt track. Peafowls were perched on top of trees, while a flock of House and Yellow-throated Sparrows foraged on the ground along with Rose-ringed Parakeets. The advantage of being in a large group is the number of eyes that are constantly on vigil. At one point, Lakhan pointed at a waterbody and said, "A Barn Owl comes and perches here at 8:30 every night and stays there until morning." This was an exciting prospect,



On closer observation, we also noticed an eye ring that's lemon yellow in colour, and a bright orange beak.

and I could only wonder how surreal it would be to walk these tracts at night and share the silence with a Barn Owl.

Today, however, our targets were two birds unique to this landscape – the Painted Sandgrouse, and the White-bellied Minivet. While the sandgrouse is a stocky, ground-dwelling bird, the minivet is a passerine that had been recently reported from these parts. We were first heading to the sandgrouse area – a rocky habitat along a hilly slope, with plenty of low-lying bushes that provide cover to a bird that, although nondescript overall, has some very distinct and beautiful patterns on its upper parts and head (there is a reason it's called painted!). Reaching the spot, we scanned amidst the rocks for any signs of an orange-billed ochre bird with black barrings on its

head and a very distinct black and white patch on the shoulder. "What's the highest number of individuals you have seen?" I asked Lakhan. "Fourteen," he replied. That was good news. The team by now had scattered in all directions. I decided to explore a scrubby patch nearby. From a little ahead, Lakhan conveyed that he just saw a Dark-throated Thrush. Excited, we began to walk towards his direction, when suddenly, he pointed towards our right with great excitement. It could only mean one thing. Sandgrouse!

Sure enough, scurrying away towards the rocks in great haste were two Painted Sandgrouse. Although one of them went deep inside the bushes, the other decided to sit mum right next to a rock, much to our satisfaction.

The sandgrouse did justice to its beautiful photographs and illustrations. On closer observation, we also noticed an eye ring that's lemon yellow in colour, and a bright orange beak. Satisfied, we moved on.

The mercury level increased as the day progressed, and affected bird activity as well. The White-bellied Minivet eluded us that day. But that's the thing about birding – you sometimes get to see the feathered beauties, and sometimes you don't. Maybe that's another driving force to visit again. For now, we were content with what we got. 🐾



A first year master's student at the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun, Sutirtha Lahiri's main interests lie in bird ecology, writing and exploring new places.



HUMANS of Nature

Every so often come far-sighted humans to tell us what we need to hear – whether we want to hear it or not. Meet two ‘inconvenient truth’ tellers whose super-human efforts are saving the planet!

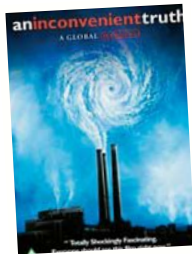
Al Gore

History has shown us time and again that politicians and decision-makers in positions of authority rarely speak up for the environment. Al Gore is the exception. The former Vice-President of the United States of America, Al Gore is one of the most influential champions for the environment today. He was born on March 31, 1948, in Washington D. C., and early in his life – while majoring in English at Harvard University – the issue

“I have always been fascinated with those who try to look over the horizon and see things that are coming at us.”

of global warming caught his attention. He passionately made it his life's aim to make people see and understand the devastating effects of increasing pollution in the form of carbon emissions, destruction of forests and rising global temperature. He stepped into politics after quitting law school and since then has used his influential position to direct the world's attention towards climate change. He served two terms as the Vice-President of the United States and greatly influenced policy decisions on environment and climate crisis.

Gore has gone on to author several powerful books on the climate crisis such as *Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit* (1992) and *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), which was also turned into a documentary film by the same name, among several others. The film went on to win an Oscar in 2007. His efforts have helped convey the truth behind



climate change and silence ‘climate change deniers’. He was honoured with the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007 along with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Gore has created nothing short of a global climate movement, focusing the world's attention on environmental issues. Today, he continues to show us how we are moving towards real solutions to this problem, which threatens the future of life on Earth.

Dr. Vandana Shiva

Dr. Vandana Shiva was born on November 5, 1952, in Dehradun and her father was a conservator of forests, while her mother was a farmer with a love for nature. A brilliant student, she earned her doctorate from the University of West Ontario in 1978. It was when she witnessed a beloved forest that she loved as a child being destroyed and a nearby stream dry up, that her heart began to beat for the cause of working to protect and conserve the environment. She abandoned academics in 1982 to establish the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology (RFSTE). It has been four decades now, since she dedicated her life to the protection of nature and defence of people's rights to nature's resources – forests, biodiversity, water and land. She has

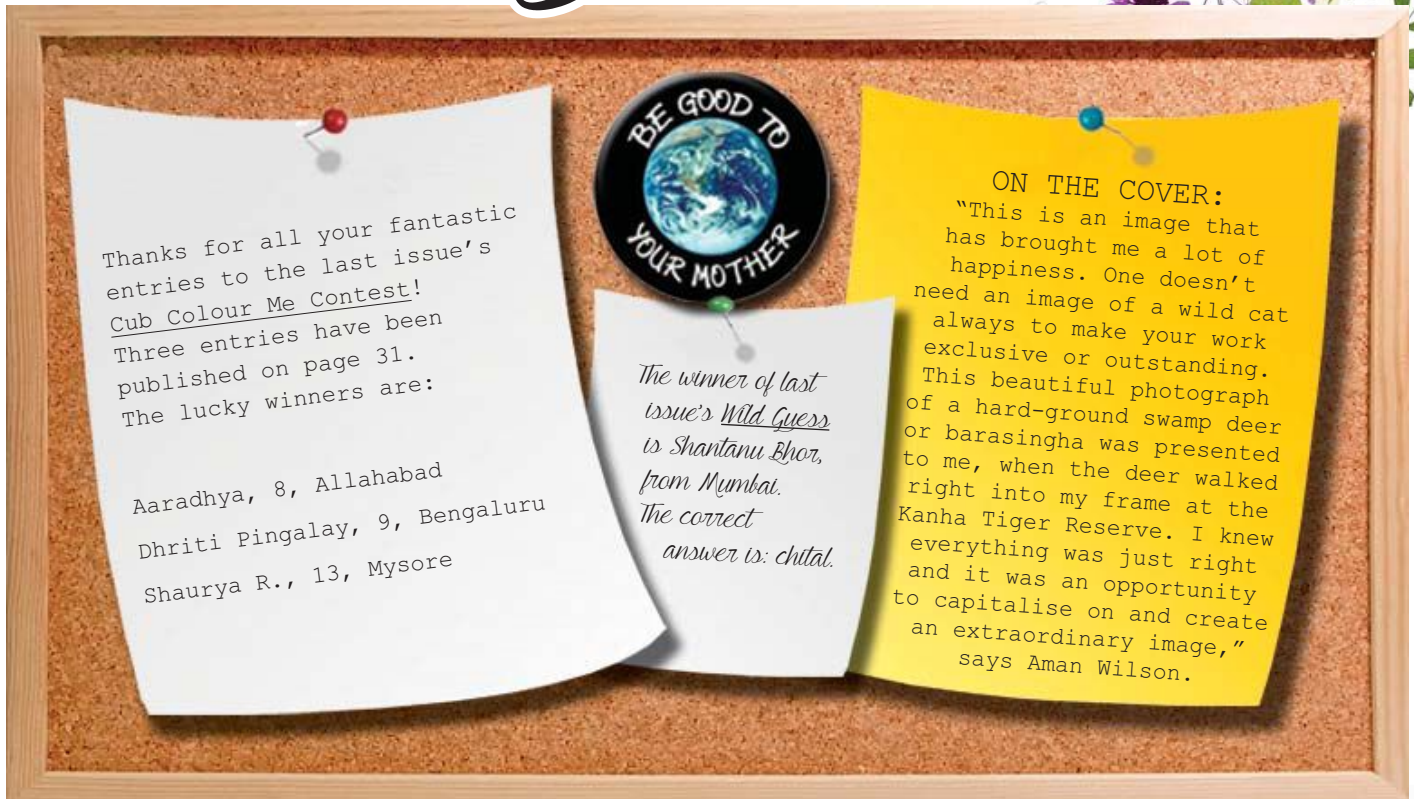
actively campaigned against destructive tree logging and building of dams. She has spoken out against the increasing use of pesticides and fertilisers in agriculture and has protested persistently against Genetically Modified Crops (GMO). Through the programme ‘Navdanya’, she is also working to save seeds, providing an alternative to the GMO and seed monopoly imposed by big corporations in India. To encourage the ancient practice of free sharing and saving seeds, Navdanya has set up more than 50 community seed banks in 16 states of India. It works with 5,00,000 farmers to defend seed freedom (Bija Swaraj) and food freedom (Anna Swaraj).

Vandana Shiva has written several books including *Staying Alive* (1988), *The Violence of Green Revolution* (1991), and *Biopiracy: The Plunder of Nature and Knowledge* (1997). Today, she also supports various organisations such as the Asia Pacific People's Environment Network and Third World Network as an ecological advisor. Shiva was honoured as an ‘Environmental Hero’ by *Time* magazine in 2003.

“The fight for truth...is not just our right as free citizens of free societies. It is our duty as citizens of the Earth.”



The Pin Board



Thanks for all your fantastic entries to the last issue's Cub Colour Me Contest! Three entries have been published on page 31. The lucky winners are:

Aaradhya, 8, Allahabad
 Dhriti Pingalay, 9, Bengaluru
 Shaurya R., 13, Mysore



The winner of last issue's Wild Guess is Shantanu Bhor, from Mumbai. The correct answer is: chital.

ON THE COVER:
 "This is an image that has brought me a lot of happiness. One doesn't need an image of a wild cat always to make your work exclusive or outstanding. This beautiful photograph of a hard-ground swamp deer or barasingha was presented to me, when the deer walked right into my frame at the Kanha Tiger Reserve. I knew everything was just right and it was an opportunity to capitalise on and create an extraordinary image," says Aman Wilson.

SYED ALI HUSAIN

WIN A PRIZE!



Go through *Cub* September 2017 and guess who I am!

WILD GUESS!

1. Arctic fox
2. Pale fox
3. Grey fox

Email your answers to anirudh@sanctuaryasia.com

A Glossary of Environmental Terms

Cub kids, here are the meanings of a few difficult words and phrases used in this issue that will help you understand nature better.

BUSH: Wild or uncultivated country (especially in Australia and Africa).

GUM TREE: A tree that exudes gum (especially an eucalyptus).

ELECTROSENSOR: Sensory nerves that help in detecting electric current or fields.

INFRASONIC: Relating to or denoting sound waves with a frequency below the lower limit of human audibility.

DORSOVENTRAL: With regard to the upper and lower parts of an animal's body.

AMPLEXUS: The mating position of frogs and toads, in which the male clasps the female about the back.

FLEDGLING: A young bird that is just learning to fly.

SPAWNING: A mass of eggs released by animals.

ENDEMIC: Found only in a particular place.

SWAMP: A muddy, wet area due to collection of ground water there.

ADAPTATION: Adjusting better to the circumstances by change in form or behaviour.

Cub Quote: "The love for all living creatures is the most noble attribute of man."

- Charles Darwin

Take Action

Do your bit to help save the amazing birdlife in Khijadiya, Gujarat!

Cub kids, the birds of Gujarat need you. While Gujarat is famous for its roaring royal Asiatic lions of Gir, the lesser-known, but much loved, Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary, in Jamnagar is every birder's paradise. History too bears testament to Khijadiya's avian treasures. Back in the day, Dr. Salim Ali, the legendary 'Birdman of India' spotted 104 species of birds in a single day at Khijadiya. According to records, this sanctuary is home to more than 250 species of resident and migratory birds.

Imagine kids, a Sarus Crane roosting here, an Indian Spotted Eagle swooping down on its prey there. What a sight! Now imagine the same birds getting the fright of their lives by loud crackers bursting in the vicinity. Imagine the young chicks, as their little bodies shudder from the noise and the smoke. Well *Cub* kids, sadly all this is happening in reality, causing the birds of the sanctuary great distress.

While tourism can help conservation if done right, it can also be harmful if rules are not followed. In this case tourism promoted by the Government of Gujarat has been mindless. Not only have government officials placed benches close to roosting sites, they

have also built bridges straight into the nesting sites of these birds. Birding, we all know is an activity, which demands respect for the birds and their space. We cannot barge into their homes, can we? If we do, the birds will move their nests elsewhere. We will be driving the birds away from their homes. Tragic!

Not only that, the government has also chopped down large areas of natural vegetation, all in the name of 'development'. But we must understand that such development is in fact counterproductive.

The concerned citizens and birders of Jamnagar are trying to save their beloved paradise and its beautiful, feathered inhabitants from this destruction. The citizens are now asking the government to take away the intrusive benches and the bridges, which disturb the birds. Let's stand by them. Let us all write polite, yet firm letters to the Chief Minister of Gujarat, Shri. Vijay Rupani, requesting him to stop this needless development, and to restore Khijadiya to its peaceful state. Otherwise Gujarat will lose its little bird paradise, and we definitely do not want that to happen. Let's all help the birds of Khijadiya fly free!

Khijadiya, the largest bird sanctuary in Gujarat, is home to over 250 species of resident and migratory birds.



ASAD RAHMANI



While wildlife tourism is not a bad thing and can help conservation if done right, it can also be harmful if rules are not followed.

You Can Help

Write to the Chief Minister of Gujarat requesting him to restore Khijadiya to its original state of peace. We need to convince him of the treasure that Khijadiya truly is. Here are some points that you can suggest.

1. Regular patrolling by forest guards to ensure that there is no rowdy behaviour.
2. A complete ban on commercial or personal photoshoots inside the sanctuary.
3. Reforestation of important native plant species based on scientific data.
4. Removal of intrusive and impractical benches, hides and bridges from the sanctuary.

You can email your letters at this link: <http://cmogujarat.gov.in/en/write-to-cmo/> with a copy to: editorial@sanctuaryasia.com

Earth Manners

Everyday habits matter! Let's be kind to the planet, animals and ourselves!

The fascination for cute and cuddly animals has allowed the horrendous pet market to thrive. Wild animals – from snakes, turtles, birds, insects to even tigers are captured and sold as pets. These animals are cruelly snatched away from their homes in the wild, separated from their families, taken far away and kept in dreadful conditions in captivity for the rest of their lives. If you truly love animals, read on.

Don't be cruel Animals that are captured for pet-keeping are kept in awful conditions and often hurt in order to be tamed. Some are even forcibly bred so that there is a continuous supply of animals for sale. Animals are transported from one place to another in overcrowded containers with several of them tightly packed together. So many animals die in the course of this cruel transit. Those that survive often pass through airport, railway and road security without being found. Even tiger cubs have been found in suitcases while being illegally smuggled to be sold as pets! When the pet-owners lose their fascination for their new pet, animals are often ill-treated or abandoned.



Vanishing wildlife So many wild species today are on the verge of extinction because of the pet trade. For example, take the Bali Starling (see page 14). Found only on the island of Bali in Indonesia, these beautiful birds became popular as pets, and so many of them were caught from the forests of Bali that by 2001 only six of them remained in the wild. In



India, the Bastar Hill Myna in Chhattisgarh almost went locally extinct because of the demand for these intelligent birds for their brilliant mimicking ability and attractive appearance. And just like birds in cages, fish, often taken from oceans, suffer confinement in aquariums. Is it worth putting animals through all this suffering and risk losing them in the wild forever for our entertainment? We need to keep these animals in our natural ecosystems, not in our homes!

All about the money The illegal trade in 'exotic animals' is worth over \$10 billion! It is such a thriving market because of the unbelievable demand for pets by people. Poachers and smugglers are ready to take huge risks to capture exotic animals and sell them to make a lot of money. We all know someone who spent a lot of money on a new pup or a kitten or



BOYCOTT BREEDERS OR THE MUTT GETS IT.

DON'T KILL SHELTER DOGS' CHANCES.



Animals are not our play things and nor should they be objects for sale. There are millions of homeless animals that would make wonderful companions – be a pet and adopt one!

even a turtle. Explain to them how cruel and dangerous this is. Let them know that if the buying stops, the cruelty will too.

Adopt, don't shop The #AdoptDon'tShop movement has become popular on social media among animal lovers! What true animal lovers are trying to tell you is that never buy a pet from pet stores or breeders or any place that sells animals. There are so many rescued or abandoned animals, especially stray cats and dogs in your neighbourhood, who need homes. They are loving and beautiful and by adopting, you are saving a life. And never ever keep a wild animal as a pet. These animals are meant to be in their own homes – whether it is the forest or the ocean. You wouldn't like to be stolen away from your home and family and neither do they! So be a pet, don't buy animals. Adopt one from your nearest shelter.

A Nilgiri tahr walks precariously on a ledge in Valparai against the backdrop of the imposing Western Ghats.
By Agastya Karthikeyan, 17



Fantastic Beasts

And the photographs that capture them!



Young shutterbugs The photographs you see on these pages are among the best entries in the Young Photographers category of the Sanctuary Wildlife Photography Awards 2017. Do not be surprised if you see the names of these young photographers, all under the age of 21, featured in the world's leading wildlife platforms in the years to come.

A Whiskered Tern lifts off with its early morning catch at the Vankalai Sanctuary in Sri Lanka.
By Sulakna Obeysekera, 17



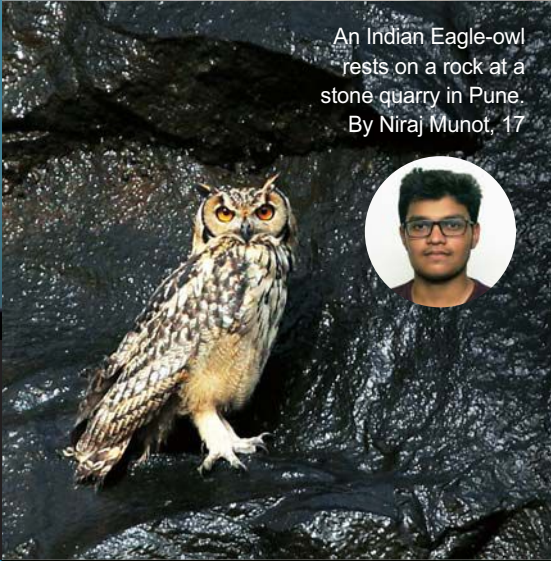
Stray dogs can be a threat to wild animals such as this Indian wolf photographed in the outskirts of Pune.
By Niraj Munot, 17



A herd of Asian elephants frolic at the 'Palm Tree' watering hole in Corbett Tiger Reserve.
By Syed Ali Husain, 17



An Indian Eagle-owl rests on a rock at a stone quarry in Pune.
By Niraj Munot, 17



Tadoba's legendary tigress Madhuri shares a tender moment with her cub.
By Abhaya Shukla, 16



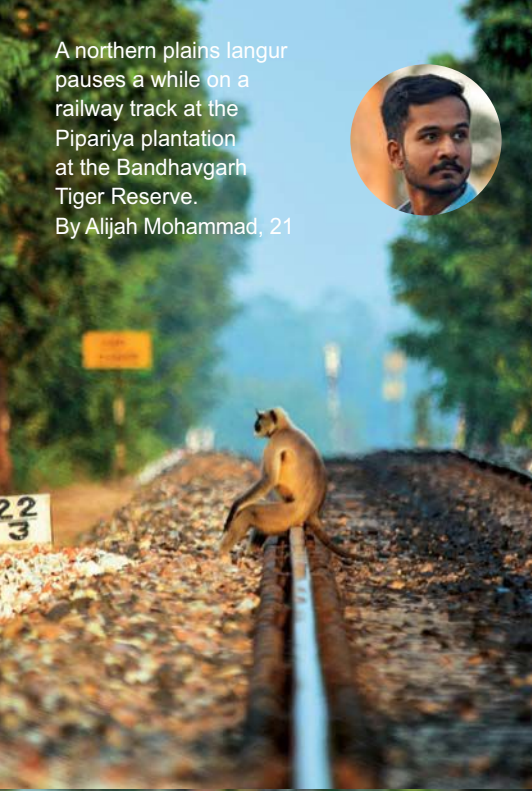
A green spider waits patiently for an unsuspecting victim to pass by in Amboli.
By Soham Joshi, 11



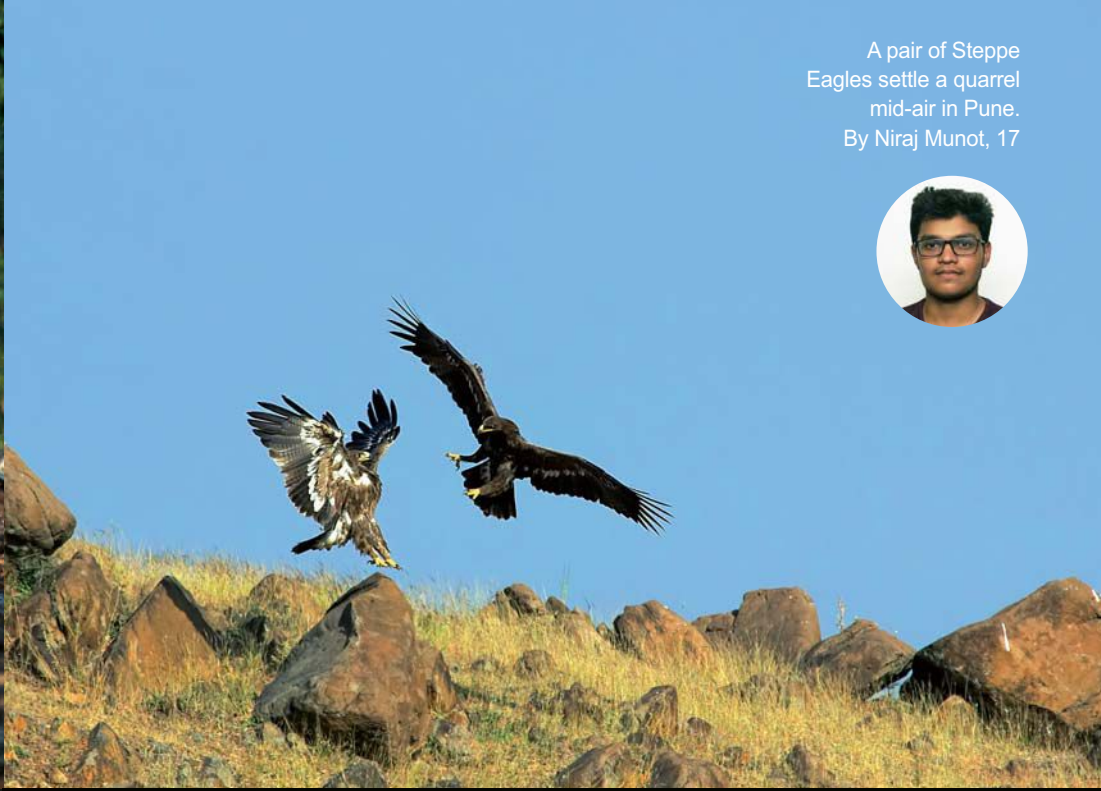
An Amur Falcon feeds on its prey mid-air in Palakkad.
By Agastya Karthikeyan, 17



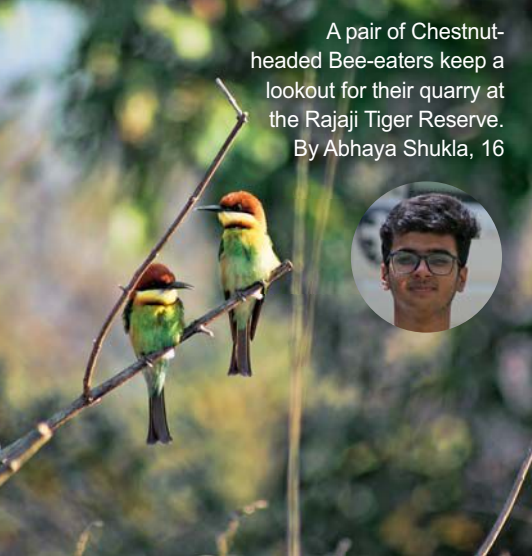
A northern plains langur pauses a while on a railway track at the Pipariya plantation at the Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve.
By Alijah Mohammad, 21



A pair of Steppe Eagles settle a quarrel mid-air in Pune.
By Niraj Munot, 17



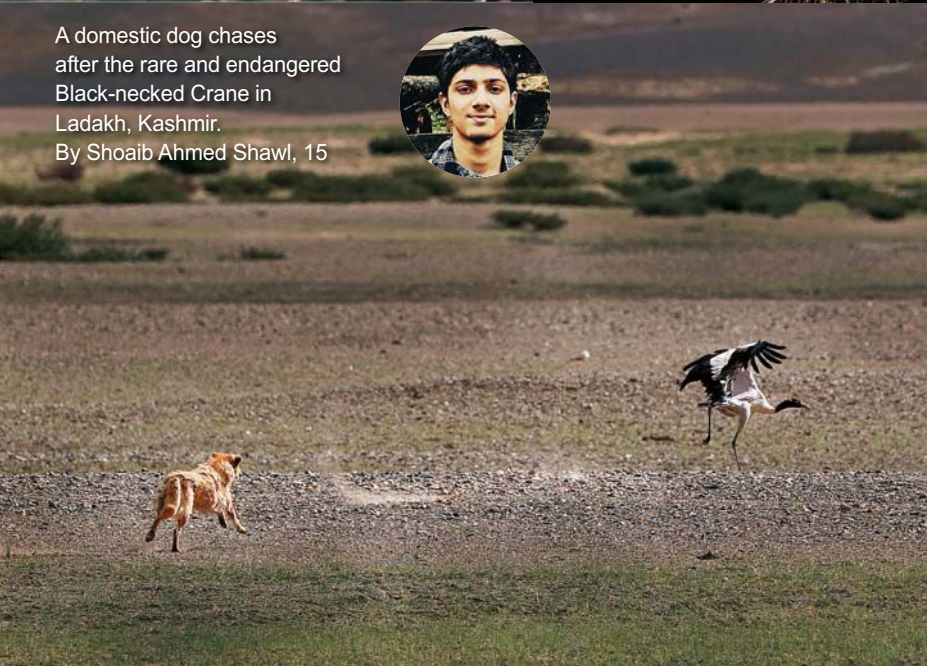
A pair of Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters keep a lookout for their quarry at the Rajaji Tiger Reserve.
By Abhaya Shukla, 16



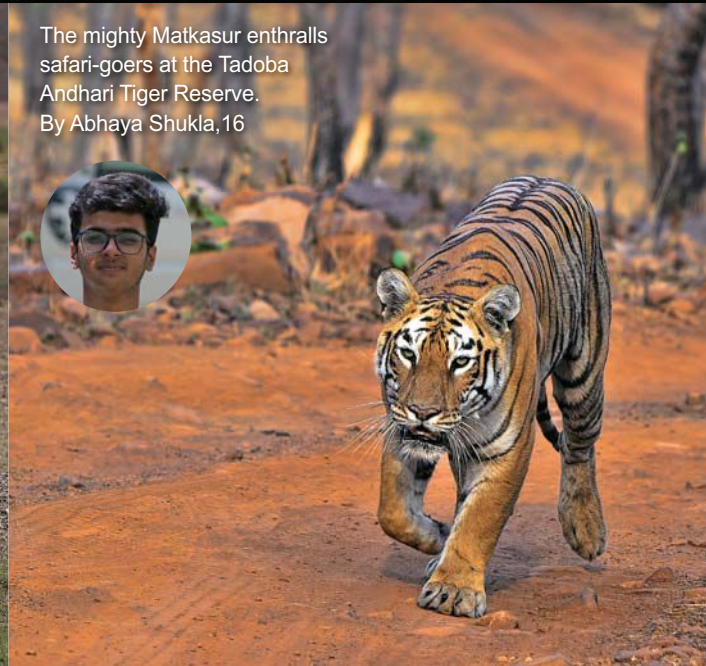
A striped pierrot butterfly finds refuge from the rain on a plant stalk at the Achanakmar Tiger Reserve.
By Aayushi Lal, 19



A domestic dog chases after the rare and endangered Black-necked Crane in Ladakh, Kashmir.
By Shoaib Ahmed Shawl, 15



The mighty Matkasur enthralls safari-goers at the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve.
By Abhaya Shukla, 16



Animals at my School

Green. Green is the colour I see all around me as I wade through the puddles in my school football field wearing my uniform and canvas shoes. It's around four in the afternoon. I have just finished a long day at school and I walk across the grassy field, desperately looking for some wildlife. I am not expecting much; I know that a school is not the best place to search for critters. But I stay patient...

I am luckier than most kids. My school campus is spread over a large expanse of land with a lightly-forested area near the building. So, it's not surprising that since I moved here, just over a year ago, I have spotted animals I never expected to see.

One day, as I trundled down a ramp carrying my heavy school bag, I crossed a small plant and found staring right into my face, a giant **green mantis**, about 13 cm. long. It was quite anxious, considering the considerable human traffic around. I only had a few seconds to admire it before it disappeared. Another time, I was entering the school when I spotted a small flicker on a rock. A small **brown bark mantis** scuttled along the surface and quickly vanished behind the wall. I have a fascination with mantises, as you might have noticed. But an odd spider never escapes my eye. I saw a medium-sized brown **spider** guzzling down a white **moth**, as another thin-legged one fearfully scooted away. Insects such as **crickets, beetles and cockroaches** are common sightings, and the campus abounds in **ants**. Move a step up the species ladder and you

have **amphibians**. Commonly shunned by people as slimy and disgusting, yet intriguing to me, **frogs** are another group of creatures one is likely to encounter here. Tiny brown frogs less than the size of your thumbnail to those almost five centimetres long, hop across the field, especially when it has just rained.

Two lucky sightings of a rat snake and a striped keelback, and a dead black racer, have been my total share of snake sightings till date. Sometimes, when I wait for my sister, I patrol the fields looking for these reptiles. Once I spotted a small yellow thing slide through a crevice. My curiosity compelled me to go further, but by the time I reached, it had disappeared.

And then you have the birds. Apart from the common ones such as **pigeons** and **crows**, there are a few I find now and then within the school premises. **Swifts** glide high, gobbling down **flies** and **mosquitoes** that are looking for school-going mammals to feed on, which makes me like them a lot. **Kites** such as the **pariah** and the **black-shouldered** frequently patrol the skies, and crows and **wagtails** feed on frogs and crickets. There is one brown bird with a green tail, which I have seen and chased at least 10 times, but have not been able to identify.

Coming back to my search that day, I scan the field within minutes and then return to a thick patch of grass that would result in dirty shoes but is worth scouring. I am just about to bend down, which is an arduous task considering my lanky, 1.8 m. frame, when the Big Boss of the

frogs stares me down. He is not really all that big, just about five centimetres long, but is intimidating. I whip out my dad's phone to take a photograph, and that's when he leaps back to safety. Nice move, considering that it will take me at least 10 minutes to comb the patch to find him again. In the meantime, I am almost showered by the school automatic sprinkler, at which the amphibian probably has a good laugh.

I continue my explorations until I find another frog, much smaller this time. It dutifully poses, until it gets bored and hops away.

I realise that he will not oblige, so I run off, this time onto the basketball court, where a colony of huge black ants reside. I spot a tiny ant carrying a huge black one, probably its victim, to the colony, and I pick them up with a stick, at which the ant drops its haul and scurries away. I look up and see a yellow and black wolf spider stealthily stalking a small ant, but it uses the same stealth to escape the spider. Suddenly, rain drops begin to fall on my head. I feel them increase in frequency and hasten back to the building. Even as I am drenched, my friend, the mystery bird, mockingly flutters away as fast as it can onto another tree.

The rain stops as suddenly as it starts, and when I go back onto the field, I see close to 20 frogs, all flushed from their hide-outs. A small gold and black cricket also jumps around the field.

I leave the field with a contented mind and I remind myself that there are always more to be seen in the most unlikely places. 🐾



Shreyas Kuchibhotla, 14, studies at Oakridge International School, Hyderabad. He loves snakes, mantids, birds and other animals, is a technology enthusiast and runs an animal newsletter at www.themynahannual.webs.com



Rat snakes



Mantis



Beetle bug



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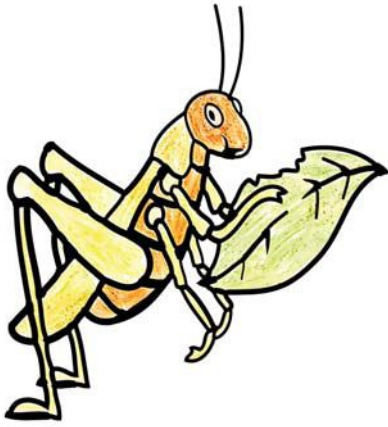
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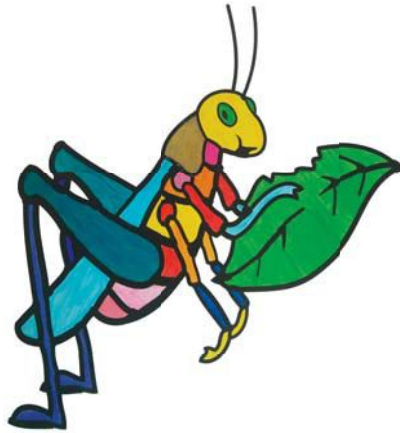
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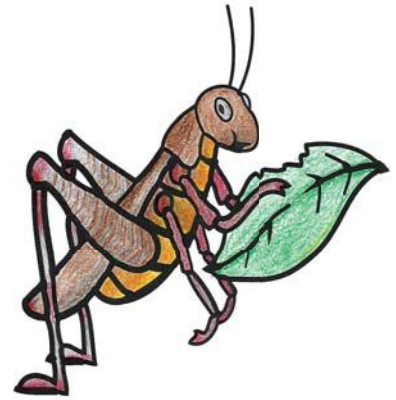
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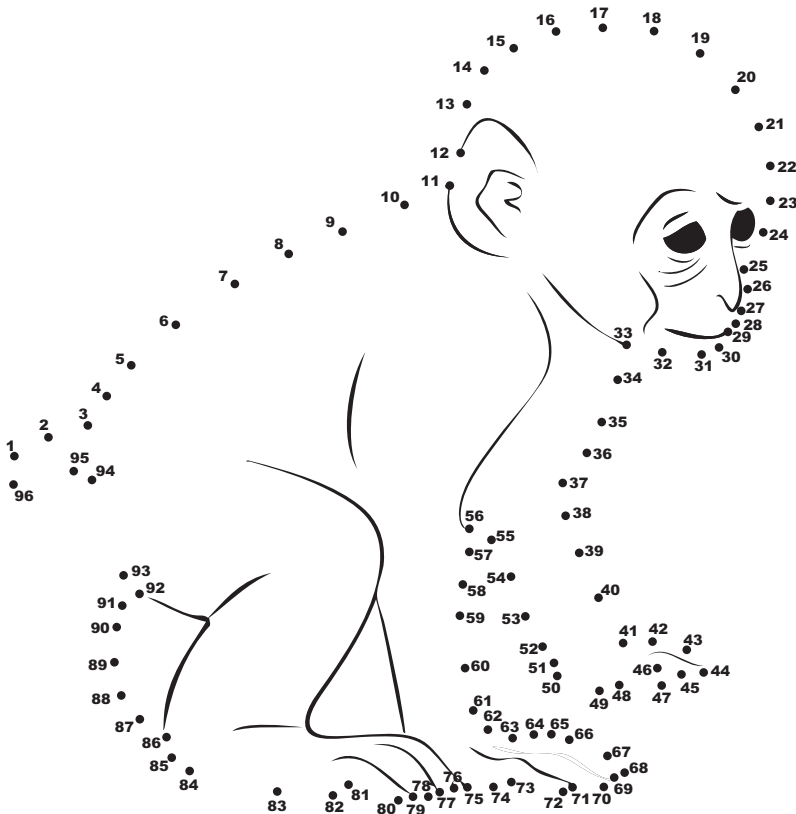


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Shaurya R., 13

Join the Dots



JACK HYNES/PUBLIC DOMAIN

The rhesus macaque stores food to munch later in the 'pouches' of its cheeks!

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The survival of the tiger and all the creatures that share its habitat, including leopards, wild dogs, elephants, rhinos and uncounted plants, insects, birds, reptiles and herbivores, depends on whether humans can set aside vast parcels of land for nature.

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