

# WII's e-Newsletter

Summer 2023



भारतीय वन्यजीव संस्थान  
Wildlife Institute of India

*Nature is our Password, Conservation the Creed*

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## World Heritage Day Celebration at WII (18 April, 2023)

On World Heritage Day, WII-C2C organised "The Journey: A Natural Heritage Quiz," which saw enthusiastic participation by WII Departments/Cells/Courses' representatives at the WII Porta Cabin. The programme was initiated with an introduction to the World Heritage Convention and World Heritage Day by Dr Nehru Prabakaran, Associate Nodal Officer, WII-C2C. This was followed by the quiz, which took the seven participating teams of six members each, along with all those in attendance, on a trip to the world of heritage – its wonders and its mysteries. There were three rounds of questions dedicated to Pioneers (of the conservation movement), Landscapes (of heritage importance) and Characters (flora and fauna representing natural heritage). The MSc Wildlife Science team came through as clear winners. Dr S Sathyakumar, Registrar, WII, awarded the winners and encouraged the attendees to take an active interest in quizzing as it increased their base of knowledge while asking them to use the World Heritage Site list as an indicator of must-visit places wherever they go. Contact: [nirajkakati@wii.gov.in](mailto:nirajkakati@wii.gov.in)





## Exposure visit organised at WII, Dehradun (18 April, 2023)

WII-NMCG Team organised an exposure-cum-educational visit themed 'Appreciating Nature, Science & Wildlife' for the students of Defence Officers Academy, Dehradun, at Wildlife Institute of India, in which a total of 25 students, along with one teacher, were exposed to the beautiful campus and nature trail of WII. Brief information about the WII-NMCG project was shared with the students, along with creating a sense of responsibility in the young minds towards biodiversity conservation.

## Sensitization Program for the Students of Gurukul Kangri University, Haridwar at WII, Dehradun (19 April, 2023)

An awareness program about the biodiversity conservation of the Ganga River was conducted for the students of Gurukul Kangri University, Haridwar at the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun, where 70 students and 5 professors attended the program.



## Biodiversity Conservation and Management Training for RFO Trainees, Dehradun (19 April, 2023)

The three-day course on "Biodiversity Conservation and Management" Training Programme for Range Forest Officer Trainees of Uttarakhand Forest Training Academy, Haldwani, was coordinated by the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change's EIACP Programme Centre at Wildlife Institute of India. Dr S. Sathyakumar, Scientist-G & Registrar, WII, addressed the course trainees. A total of 57 Range Forest Officers participated in this training programme. More than 20 faculty members from WII and four external resource persons shared their valuable expertise with the participants. All Range Forest Officer trainees greatly appreciated the resource person's presentation, case



studies, and enlightening conversations covering themes such as Wildlife census, Protected Area network, Eco-tourism, Wildlife forensics, and Field botany. Shri V.R. Tiwari, Director, and Dr S. Sathyakumar, Registrar, awarded the course completion certificates to all course trainees.



## Awareness Programs on "Earth Day" 2023, at Different Schools of the Ganga River Basin (22–26 April 2023)

### Ram Raji Inter College Mundera, Ambedkar Nagar, Uttar Pradesh, 22 April 2023.

An array of creative activities was carried out to sensitise the students about the conservation of natural resources and motivate them to do their bit toward making Earth more beautiful. More than 60 students and three teachers actively participated.



### Government High School, Behral, Himachal Pradesh, 22 April 2023.

A sensitisation program at Govt. High School, Behral was organized in which a total of 100 students and eight teachers were exposed to the enriched biodiversity of the Ganga River through various interesting outreach activities. Another sensitisation program was organised under the WII-NMCG project for 100 students and teachers of Govt. Middle School, Tajewala, Haryana.



Second sensitisation program for the 50 students and teachers to inspire young minds toward river conservation. Government High School, Behral, Himachal Pradesh on 23 April 2023.

**Contact:** [sangeetaangom@gmail.com](mailto:sangeetaangom@gmail.com)



## Inception-cum-training workshop of the Gaur Reintroduction Project, Kanha Tiger Reserve (26 April, 2023)

The Madhya Pradesh Forest Department (MPFD) and the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) have launched a long-term project aimed at recovering the gaur population in Sanjay Tiger Reserve. The project is supported by the MPFD and envisages the reintroduction of 50 gaurs from Kanha and Satpura to Sanjay TR.

An inception-cum-planning workshop on gaur reintroduction was organised at Kanha with the participation of eminent scientists, experts, and park managers. A total of 31 officials, including Park Officials and Veterinary officers from Kanha TR, Satpura TR, Bandhavgarh TR, Pench TR and Sanjay TR, besides faculty from the School of Wildlife Forensic & Health, Jabalpur and capture experts from Wildlife and Forestry Services, Ujjain participated in the workshop and provided valuable comments. Various aspects of animal capture, translocation, critical considerations during field operation, learnings from Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve, and monitoring essentials were discussed at length. Sh. JS Chauhan, Principal Chief Conservator of Forest and Chief Wildlife Warden, Madhya Pradesh, steered the workshop and highlighted the learning from past gaur reintroduction from Bandhavgarh. Dr Parag Nigam, Scientist-G, presented the action plan for gaur reintroduction. He flagged various activities planned for ensuring safe capture, capacity building of officers and frontline staff, and post-release monitoring. A document titled "Resurgence of Gaur in Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve" as an outcome of the long-term research on Gaur in Bandhavgarh TR and the Project Logo of Gaur reintroduction in Sanjay Tiger Reserve was released during the occasion. **Contact:** [nigamp@wii.gov.in](mailto:nigamp@wii.gov.in)



**62nd** **22 MAY** From Agreement to Action, Build Back Biodiversity

**International Day for Biological Diversity 22 May 2023**

**Biodiversity Painting Contest**

**"Biodiversity in My Backyard"**

Paint scenes from your local environment, highlighting the diversity of flora and fauna in the area. This could include plants and animals found in parks, forests, gardens, and even backyards.

Submission are open till 18 May, 2023  
<https://tinyurl.com/painting>

Prizes will be awarded to the top three entries, and winning paintings will be displayed on our website & social media platforms.

Organized by  
EACIP Programme Centre, Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun

**LIFE** Lifestyle for Environment

Contest Open up to 12th Class Students

## Online Painting Contest to celebrate International Day for Biological Diversity by the EIACP Programme Centre, WII (22 May, 2023)

To promote Mission LiFE and raise awareness among youngsters, the EIACP Programme Centre at the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun, organised an Online Painting Contest with the topic "Biodiversity in My Backyard" to commemorate the International Day for Biological Diversity on 22 May 2023. This online painting contest was available to all school students up to class XII. Nine-four school students from various states enrolled and participated in the online painting contest. The top three entries were awarded prizes, and three entries received appreciation prizes.

**LIFE** Lifestyle for Environment

**Result of Online Painting Contest on International Day for Biological Diversity 2023 organized by EIACP Programme Centre, Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun**  
Theme: Biodiversity in My Backyard

Appreciation Prize: DEEPSHIKHA DE

Appreciation Prize: ARVILA P NAIR

Appreciation Prize: SARANGI R.

**LIFE** Lifestyle for Environment

**Result of Online Painting Contest on International Day for Biological Diversity 2023 organized by EIACP Programme Centre, Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun**  
Theme: Biodiversity in My Backyard

First Prize: SOMESH KUMAR SATAPATHY

Second Prize: ASHIRBAD DAS

Third Prize: NIRVIGHNA PEETHA



# Mission LiFE activities conducted by WII

May - June, 2023



## EIACP Programme

EIACP Programme Centre at Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun, organised many programmes under Mission LiFE to promote an environmentally friendly lifestyle and raise awareness about Mission LiFE. A Mission LiFE Pledge at Arya Inter School, Dehradun, was organised by WII-EIACP Centre on 26 May 2023. A total of 130 students participated in this Mission LiFE pledge.

WII-EIACP Centre organised various activities, namely Mission LiFE Pledge, Cycle Rally, and Office Cleanliness drive on 27 May 2023 at Wildlife Institute of India to promote mass awareness on seven themes of Mission LiFE. A total of 21 participants actively participated in these activities.

WII-EIACP Centre organised an online Mission LiFE Quiz Series from 23 May to 4 June 2023 with the aim to promote and make people aware of the seven themes of Mission LiFE. More than 1,500 participants participated in this online quiz, and more than 8,000 people visited through various social media platforms and webpage of this activity. All quiz participants were awarded e-certificates. **Contact :** [envis@wii.gov.in](mailto:envis@wii.gov.in)

## WII-NMCG Team



Various activities were conducted to sensitize students, tourists and local communities under the themes of Mission LiFE at Ganga Darpan Interpretation Centre, Sarnath: (i) On World Turtle Day, 23 May 2023, an awareness workshop was conducted with 15 students of the local community; (ii) On 26 May 2023, a capacity building workshop with 32 tourist guides; (iii) On 27 May 2023, another capacity building workshop with 20 E-rickshaw drivers; (iv) During 3-4 June 2023, a puppet-making training workshop was conducted with 35 local vendors and self-help groups at Ahilya Bai Ghat at Varanasi; (v) On 5 June 2023, an exhibition on the theme of Mission LiFE at Dashashwamedh Ghat was installed.

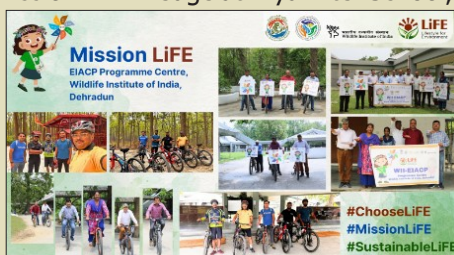


The activities were also conducted at the Anubhuti Interpretation Centre at Kanpur on 3-4 June 2023; an exhibition and awareness program was shown to the visitors to the zoo; and on 5 June 2023, activities were conducted in collaboration with the

Kanpur Zoo for school students and visitors to the zoo. **Contact:** [bcs@wii.gov.in](mailto:bcs@wii.gov.in)

## Earthen Pot Installation

An earthen pot water cooler was installed at Bal Ganga Prahari School at GIC Nagni, Pauri Garhwal, Uttarakhand, under the theme 'Save Energy' of the Mission Life Campaign. Various awareness activities were also conducted to sensitise the school children to keep their surroundings clean. The NMCG-WII project team has Installed an earthen pot water cooler at Bal Ganga Prahari School at GGHSS, Khadkhadi, Haridwar; Bal Ganga Prahari School, Janki Children Academy, Kargi, Dehradun; Bal Ganga Prahari School at GIC Ganga Bhogpur, Pauri Garhwal; Ganga Avlokan, Chandi Ghat, Haridwar; Bal Ganga Prahari School, RNI Inter-College, Bhagwanpur, Haridwar. Competitions on Eco-Art-Project were displayed and various awareness activities were conducted to make them aware of adopting a sustainable healthy lifestyle. A total of 2,700 School children participated. **Contact:** [sangeetaangom@gmail.com](mailto:sangeetaangom@gmail.com)





### Oath Taking Ceremony Under Mission Life

Mission LIFE activities of oath taking were organized under the banner of WII-NMCG Project: (i) On 18 May 2023 at Madhyamik Vidyalaya, Auraiya, for 25 school students, (ii) On 25 May 2023 at Sarnath Zoo, Varanasi, for 50 enthusiastic participants (iii) On 27 May 2023 at Subhash Chandra Bose Academy, Dehradun, for 150 students and teachers; and (iv) On 27 May 2023 with handloom workers and Banarsi Saree vendors of Sarnath, Varanasi, for 30 participants; (v) On 28 May 2023, cleanliness drive at Kaithi Ghat in Varanasi, for 20 members of the local community; (vi) On 29 May 2023, at a village of Chaubeypur, Varanasi at Naipali Dham Temple, for 20 members of the local community (vii) During 30-31 May 2023, at the Ganga Darpan Interpretation Centre, with 20 villagers of Baraipur, ten villagers of Parvatpur; and (viii) During 30-31 May 2023, with 45 members of the local community at Navapura Village, Varanasi. **Contact:** [bcs@wii.gov.in](mailto:bcs@wii.gov.in)



Oath taking activities were also organized at the following places: (i) On 19 May 2023 at Govt. Inter College, Ganga Bhogpur, Pauri Garhwal, for 200 school children, (ii) On 19 May 2023, at Govt. Inter College, Nagni, Tehri Garhwal, for 524 school-children, (iii) On 20 May 2023 at Kisan Inter College, Bijnor, Uttar Pradesh for 1,650 school children, (iv) On 22 May 2023 at RNI. Inter College, Bhagwanpur, Haridwar for 2,700 school children, (v) On 23 May 2023 at Govt. Middle School, Tajewala Head, Haryana for 180 school children, (vi) On 22 May 2023 at Govt. Model Inter College Matli, Uttarkashi for 250 school-children, (vii) On 23 May 2023 at Janki Children Academy, Dehradun for 600 school children, (viii) On 24 May 2023 at SGRR Barkot, Uttarkashi for 420 school-children, (ix) On 27 May 2023 at GIC Chamrada Devi, Bharpoor for 100 school children and ten teachers. **Contact:** [sangeetaangom@gmail.com](mailto:sangeetaangom@gmail.com)





## WII's Foundation Day 22 May 2023



The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) was established on 22 May 1982. The Institute celebrated its 41st anniversary, coinciding with the International Day for Biological Diversity. The celebration took place during a small function held at the WII Auditorium. Approximately 400 participants attended the event, including the Director, Dean, Registrar, current and retired faculty, teaching & non-teaching staff, researchers, students, former Directors, family members of staff and faculty, including retired staff.

The event was inaugurated by the Dean WII, and a collection of vintage photos from the early days of the Institute, shared by the Audio-Visual Cell, were screened. A movie showcasing the Institute's historical background and past research works was also shown, evoking nostalgia and transporting the audience to another time. The Director addressed the gathering, expressing gratitude and honouring

the former Directors and staff present at the event. This was followed by a cultural program featuring a dance performance & a song performed by a researcher, Naitik Patel. The event was live-streamed on YouTube to watch it.

Furthermore, the evening marked a significant moment when the Chairman of AICTE and the Director of WII signed a Memorandum of Understanding, symbolising collaborative efforts to promote technical education in the country. Contact: [vishnupriya@wii.gov.in](mailto:vishnupriya@wii.gov.in)



## Training Workshop on 'Biodiversity & Wetland Conservation', Maldevta, Dehradun (22 - 23 May, 2023)



A training workshop on 'Biodiversity & Wetland Conservation' was conducted at Govt. P.G College Maldevta, Dehradun. The training aimed to enhance knowledge and awareness among participants regarding the conservation of biodiversity and wetlands. The workshop included lectures from experts, interactive sessions, and engaging activities. Dr. Sangeeta Angom delivered a lecture on the overview of WII-NMCG project, providing an overview of its objectives and activities related to the conservation of biodiversity in the Ganga

River. Ms. Anupama Koliyal delivered a lecture on "Millet Milap" highlighting the importance of millets in sustainable agriculture. Furthermore, other lectures were conducted on "Mission Life" which focused on promoting an environmentally friendly lifestyle, solid waste management, and wetland conservation. The interactive activities further enhanced the learning experience and encouraged active participation from the students. About 70 students and 11 professors participated in the training. Contact: [sangeetaangom@gmail.com](mailto:sangeetaangom@gmail.com)



## World Environment Day Quiz (5 June, 2023)

Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change, Government of India's EIACP Programme Centre and M.Sc. Wildlife Sciences, Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun collaboratively organised a quiz to celebrate World Environment Day on 5 June 2023 at WII Auditorium. The Director, Wildlife Institute of India distributed prizes and certificates to winning teams in the presence of Dr S. Sathyakumar, Scientist G & Registrar and Dr K. Ramesh, Scientist F& EIACP Programme Coordinator. **Contact:** [sangeetaangom@gmail.com](mailto:sangeetaangom@gmail.com)



## Successful Translocation of Gaur from Kanha and Satpura to Sanjay Dubri Tiger Reserve (June 2023)



Gaurs play a vital role in maintaining the ecological balance of forests and are an integral part of India's natural heritage. As a part of the collaborative project between Madhya Pradesh Forest Department and the Wildlife Institute of India, a total of forty-four gaur (*Bos gaurus gaurus*) were successfully captured from Kanha Tiger Reserve (KTR) and Satpura Tiger Reserve (STR) and translocated to Sanjay Dubri Tiger Reserve (SDTR) during June 2023. This initiative is part of a long-term project aimed at recovering the gaur population in Sanjay Tiger Reserve.

The project envisaged capture and translocation of a total of 50 gaurs, with 35 individuals from Kanha Tiger Reserve and 15 individuals from Satpura Tiger Reserve, to Sanjay Tiger Reserve. The objective of the project is to enrich the biodiversity of the park and showcase the unwavering commitment of the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department and the Wildlife Institute of India in preserving India's natural heritage. Additionally, the translocation of these majestic creatures serves multiple purposes. Not only do they help manage the grasslands and shape the forested landscape, but this endeavor also contributes to the establishment of a viable and genetically diverse population of Gaurs in the Sanjay Tiger Reserve. By expanding their range, the chances of their long-term survival are increased, promoting a healthy population dynamic in this new landscape.

The translocation operation was conducted with utmost care and consideration for the safety and well-being of the animals involved. A team of veterinarians, forest officials, and wildlife experts, led by Mr. J.S. Chauhan, PCCF & Chief Wildlife Warden of the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department, and Dr. Parag Nigam, Senior Scientist and Project Investigator at the Wildlife Institute of India carried out the field operation.

Sh S.K. Sigh, Field Director, Kanha Tiger Reserve and the team of KTR, Sh L Krishnamoorthy Field Director, Satpura Tiger Reserve and the team of KTR, Sh Amit Dubey and his team at Sanjay Dubri Tiger Reserve, Field Officers from Pench Tiger Reserve, Sh Karikeya Singh, Wildlife & Forestry Services, Field Veterinary Officers from other Reserves (Pench, Panna, Bandhavgarh, Satpura, Rattapani), Mahouts and elephants at KTR, faculty of School of Wildlife Forensic & Health, NDVSU, Jabalpur and WII Project researchers played a key role in the entire field operation.

The program started with the meticulously planning with seeking of relevant permissions, defining role and responsibilities of officials, veterinary professionals and field staff, training of field staff in animal capture and associated procedures, training of mahouts and captive elephants, procurement of immobilization drugs, equipment and radio-collars and travel route reconnaissance surveys, modifications and fitness testing of transport vehicles.



Field operation at Kanha was carried out between 1st to 7th June 2023 and between 26th to 29th June 2023 at Satpura Tiger Reserve. The capture and translocation was facilitated by effective use of narcotic - Thianil ® (Thiafentanil, Wildlife Pharmaceuticals) and an array of short, intermediate and long acting tranquilizers (Azaperone, Haloperidol, Perphenazine). Narcotics provided short induction time and tranquilizers provided support to counter initial excitement during capture (Azaperone), during transport (haloperidol) and to manage post release acclimatization (Perphenazine). The captures were carried out during early morning hours and animals transported during the day.

The field procedures following immobilization included stabilization and positioning of animals, shifting on to stretcher, animal weighing and taking body measurements, biological sampling, deploying colour coded neck bands and radio-collars and finally loading into transport truck.

Special attention was given during transportation to ensure that the animals are subjected to minimum stress and environment is conducive for travel. For the travel from Kanha Tiger Reserve, the distance of about 400 km was covered in 13-15 hours while it took almost 22-24 hours for covering a distance from Satpura Tiger Reserve. Few essential stoppages during the journey were taken for providing fodder and water to the animals, cooling of vehicle, health examination of animals during transport. Releases of animal captured from Kanha were carried out in the night while the animals from Satpura were released during day time in specially designed soft release enclosure in SDTR. Forty-four gaur (28 from Kanha Tiger Reserve and 16 from Satpura Tiger Reserve) were successfully reintroduced in Sanjay Tiger Reserve. The animals are being intensively monitored in SDTR by a dedicated monitoring team comprising frontline staff of SDTR and WII research team.

The successful translocation of these magnificent animals is a testament to the combined efforts of forest officials, Scientists, experienced veterinarians, and wildlife experts, who worked tirelessly to ensure the safety and well-being of the gaurs throughout the process. **Contact:** [nigamp@wii.gov.in](mailto:nigamp@wii.gov.in)



**Photo credits:**

MPFD Kanha database  
MPFD Satpura database  
WII project records  
SWFH records





# Following A River: Tale of Kolhu

Krishnapriya M

Mahseer yearlings were swimming in shallow calm pools of the river while our feet received the cool welcome of Kolhu waters, marking the beginning of our five-day trek along the riverine habitats of Lansdown Forest. We set out from Saneh Forest rest house with our faculties, Dr Suresh Kumar, Dr J A Johnson, Dr Navendu Page, and a few Gujjars, to Kolhu Chaur when the sun was almost above us. We crossed the river and started walking the moist deciduous forests along the banks of Kolhu. On the way, we observed tracks of Otters on fine sand leading to the river. Otters, semi-aquatic species, enjoy habitats with nice deep pools of water with the potential of big fish catch and fine sand banks as their grooming sites.

Further, we encountered a small congregation of Tiger beetles, a predatory beetle species. They are one of the favourite meals of Amur Falcons. Throughout the day, our task was to try identifying plants by observing the leaf arrangements, feeling their texture, and smelling and tasting them. It was easy for species like *Aegle marmalade* since they have a characteristic smell. Giant *Bauhinia* climbers were quite fascinating and were sighted throughout the journey. These are now known as *Phanera*, and this particular species whose nice big leaves we borrowed for eating our food out in the forest is *Phanera vahlii*. Agave plants which looked like giant Aloe vera, were seen with lots of tiny bulbils on the central stalk. These mini-Agaves are the vegetative propagules of the plant and are not to be confused with flowers or germinated seeds. A few meters before our first camp in Kolhu Chaur, we saw a great slaty woodpecker on top of a snag which was quite an exciting sight. Since the sun was almost going down, we could only note down their characteristic bald head and relatively bigger-sized body. By the time we reached the camp, we had crossed the river so many times as if we were walking the river and crossing the trek paths. Later at night, we all slept on the veranda in our sleeping bags. After an excellent fortifying breakfast, we set out before nine o'clock the following

day. Near Kolhu Chaur grassland, we spotted a group of River Lapwings. An interesting fact about river lapwing is that they have claws at the bent of their wings, somewhat similar to *Archeopteryx*. A golden jackal flashed out from nearby bushes, stared at us and then ran away. At the beginning of the journey, Dr Suresh told us about the chances of seeing collared falconet, whose westernmost limit is the Kolhuchor grassland. So naturally, we kept our eyes on the sky to spot the bird. Giving us an utter delight, suddenly it flew to the sky from a tree on the periphery of the grassland, caught an insect and again came back and sat on the branch. We also saw a baya weaver nest near a small swampy patch within the grassland. Baya weavers always prefer to nest near waterlogged areas.

On the way further, there were a few oroxylem trees bearing its flat log pods, which gave it the name Indian Sword tree. The big red flowers of this tree will be open only at night and are specifically bat pollinated. *Catunaregam spinosa* is an attractive tree with a curious feature called thigmotropism which means the tree feels ticklish or is believed to be giving a shivering response when we softly touch it. One of my friends, who claimed to have the softest hand, volunteered to tickle the tree. We were curious to see the outcome, and when he did it, to our great surprise, the tips of the branches started shivering, which was unbelievable. On the way, when we got a nice cascade and pool of water, we threw ourselves into it. Enjoying the splashing water, we didn't want to get out of it. When we climbed on the banks to dry ourselves, we saw leaves without petioles lying on the floor. Those were the leaves of *Terminalia elliptica* (Crocodile bark tree) dropped by Langurs after feeding on its petioles. Usually, chitals eat these dropped leaves forming a feeding association between them.

In the streams, there were lots of huge rocks covered by slimy green algae called periphyton algae, with long, broad marks on them.



Dr Johnson explained to us that those were the feeding trails of Labeo which use their suckorial mouth to scrape out those algae. These rocks are essential for riverine species since they act as a hideout and feeding grounds. We could see *Syzygium* trees and *Acacia catechu* all along the waterlogged areas. We had to climb a bit to reach our next camp Chowkam. On the way, we saw *Colebrookia oppositifolia* plants whose leaves will be convenient when we live in the wild as their soft leaves can be used as toilet paper.

Dr Navendu was so excited to show us the snow orchid, *Diplomaris hirsuta*, a rare sight. It grows on rock, and the plants we saw bloomed with white flowers, which were even rarer. Reaching the Chowkam camp, we spotted nest sites of great slaty woodpeckers. These social hole nesters prefer to have individual nests that are closer to one another. We camped at Chowkam, and the next day, we went

to the fire line ridge between Lansdown Forest division and Sonanadi wildlife sanctuary. From there, we could see an elephant herd drinking water in the Ramganga reservoir at a distance. We also spotted a flying Red-headed vulture from there. They are also known as King vultures, as the other vulture species wait for their arrival when they spot a fresh carcass because only the red-headed vulture can tear open the carcass.

We stayed there one more day because of the heavy downpour, and the water level in the river was relatively high. We spent our day observing the visitors of profusely fruiting ficus trees and learning fish trapping methods in a nearby stream. The very next day, we trekked back to where we started and returned to campus with an arm full of valuable learning from nature brightening our spirit of enthusiasm and adventure.







# High Altitude Tour

Sanjana

Before our high-altitude tour this May, I was sure I wanted nothing to do with mountains. I knew I would struggle to climb for kilometres, forced to watch my classmates go ahead. And I don't do well with cold, and I'd never pitched a tent in the rain, and I wasn't interested in alpine animals anyway, and - well, I had a hundred and one reasons for why it would be the least enjoyable of all our tours.

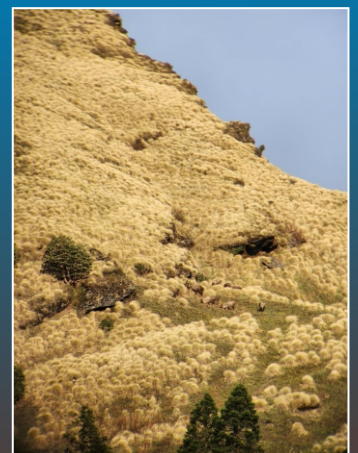
And I wasn't wrong about any of those things. It was colder than I imagined, the climbs were steeper and more taxing than I expected, and my knees still hurt even now, two weeks after the last day's long downhill trek. There was one point at which I actually lay down and refused to climb any further! And yet, by the end, I was pleasantly surprised to realise that I was more grateful than anything else. I pushed my limits further than I knew I was capable of, and I saw landscapes that I never thought I would experience.

There are, of course, the views that invariably make their way to photo exhibitions and glossy book covers. Everyone can appreciate the beauty of an unbroken, mist-shrouded snowfield, the source of a dozen crystal-clear streams of water cold enough to make your teeth ache. No one remains unmoved by the sight of a ring of immense white peaks encircling the horizon, each with legends to their name, bearing the weight of thousands of millennia on their ancient shoulders as they reach for the sky. And the sky itself is beautiful in its own way, one minute thick with clouds close enough to touch, the next minute a clear, wonderfully deep blue that lets the sun flood the mountain slopes with gold. At

night, the one and only time I braved the cold to leave the tent, it glowed brightly with twice as many diamond-like stars as it normally held.

But as incredible as the views were, the wildlife really charmed me. I may never work on alpine animals, but I can no longer say I'm indifferent. The first to greet us was the thick-maned Himalayan langurs, majestic and powerful and afraid of nothing. We saw several Royle's quick and busy pikas scurrying past our feet to safety in rock crevices. There was goral on lower slopes, neat and dainty from their heads to their hooves, butting heads fiercely on a riverbank; there were monals with feathers painted a hundred brilliant, shimmering colours; raptors were soaring high enough to defy identification, playing with the wind like a toy. And of all the people who climb the more well-worn temple paths, how many stop to notice the herd of tahr, thirty or forty strong, nearly invisible among the grass tussocks and rhododendron bushes on the cliffs opposite? How many sit and watch them, admiring how easily these proud animals climb the steepest slopes and navigate the narrowest paths?

I still don't want much to do with walking mountain trails, but the untameable peaks, the endless sky, the air as pure as ice and the animals reign supreme over it all.... they weave a spell that defies description. A







spell that I was fortunate enough to experience, no matter how briefly. I returned painfully exhausted, oddly content, and convinced of this single fact - it is the mountains themselves that are more surely



touched by the divine than any holy place they shelter, and the biologist is more blessed than the pilgrims who cannot see this, who walk them with eyes and ears only for idols and temple bells.



## A Wish Came True

Charushree Santosh

We all chase experiences, mostly good ones. We dream about them, we try to feel them, and sometimes even run away from a few. I'm taking this opportunity to take you, readers, to one such experience I have dreamt about since childhood. Living in a city, the only exposure to wildlife I had was through television. I used to watch shows like Animal Battleground, Big Cat Diary, The Future is Wild, and many others likewise. All that I saw started being written down on my bucket list, and now during every MSc tour, I get to experience something that I have always wished for.

My favourite one until now happened in Odisha. It was the month of March this year when Dr Gopi G.V. and Dr J.A. Johnson took the batch for the Wetland Tour. Our first stop was Bhitarkanika Wildlife Sanctuary, where we stayed for three days and learnt about saltwater crocodiles, different species of mangroves and their associates, birds residing in the habitat, etc. We sailed in and out of many creeks, and while going to Khola Creek, we saw the beautiful

Mangrove Pitta showing its brilliantly coloured body. It looked so surreal. We also got to see seven species of Kingfishers:- The Common Kingfisher, the utterly beautiful Brown-winged Kingfisher, the White-throated, Black-capped, Collared, Stork-billed and my favourite, the Pied Kingfisher. It is the only kingfisher known to use hover-plunge as their fishing technique, and I was so happy witnessing that moment. We next went to Habalikhati Beach, a part of Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary, and learnt about a few management errors in the area. We also witnessed around 12-13 dead Olive Ridleys along the shore. They had drowned due to trawlers which are operating in the area. This allowed us to learn about fishing rules and regulations that must be followed in protected areas, how it affects these species, etc. Further, we also spoke about their nesting behaviour.

Our next stop was at the Chilika Development Authority and then to Rushikulya, where every year, these turtles come up to the shore and form arribadas (meaning – arrival by sea). Although the mass



nesting period was over, sporadic nesting still occurred, and we were lucky enough to spot some turtles in the sea. Later that night, we went to Ponnampet, hoping to see some turtles come up to the shore and nest. We waited for the tides to return, under a night sky adorned by shiny stars, with the cool breeze trying to put us to sleep. The sand reflected the night sky. Seeing the broken and half-eaten eggs of these turtles made us gloomy.

After around 3 hours, we witnessed this amazing moment for which we were all eagerly waiting. A female Olive Ridley, laying eggs. This was it. The moment I was waiting for. We shifted the sand slightly without disturbing the turtle to see the eggs. Having seen these amazing creatures only on TV until now, the moment felt so miraculous. Seeing it, in reality, was really mesmerising. An experience that the 10-year-old in me wanted finally came true. Our journey ended in Chambal sighting beautiful Skimmers, Terns, etc., but the turtles were the best memory I got from this trip.



## Farewell..

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