



IndiaWilds® Newsletter

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Conservation & Individual Action:

The old year 2015 which saw some massive challenges on India's wildlife and environment has given way to the New Year 2016. In nature the old gives way to the new, and along with it brings hope and optimism. It is the time of the year where we have hope and a fervent prayer in our lips hoping that the new year 2016 will be better for India's wilds as well as that of the environment of the world with which it is inextricably linked.

The world can't only run on hope. There needs to be suitable action from all of us as our population of 7 billion is way more than the Earth can sustain. Given how numerous we are, are there any actions which can be triggered using a bottoms up approach ie. which can start from each individual and result in saving our environment and wilderness? Are there any things that an individual can adopt as a new year resolution?

Water:

Before we preach, we can look within us and our immediate surroundings. In Delhi, I saw several kids waiting with plastic bottles to fill it not from a tap but from the overflow pipe from



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a house. Given the state of the pipes with construction dust and debris all around the water was certainly not clean. Nevertheless, these kids and a lady were filling their big plastic cans. I stopped to observe and then saw that soon the kids started bathing in the water after filling their cans.

The reality of the situation may escape many of our well-to-do readers. There is a huge gulf between the haves and have-nots in our society. Where as we consume and waste water without batting an eye lid, there are millions of people who don't have a single drop of water to drink or wash clothes.

People can easily dismiss this incident terming these people as street kids. However, they are not just street kids. They are people like us but are financially challenged and had to stay in shanties without access to water. A few years back when I was heading an Industry association in Delhi, I was stunned by a request from the peon. He requested me to change the colour of his uniform to a deeper shade. On asking the reason I was told that he never has water to take bath at his home. So he takes bath in the office and hence washing white office uniform is a big challenge.

When I was narrating this incident to a corporate bigwig he expressed sympathy. Unfortunately, by sympathizing we are missing the point.

As cities are growing bigger and bigger - despite the smart or would be smart tag - they are creaking and groaning due to the huge pressures of millions of people wanting a high carbon lifestyle. Our earlier agrarian civilisations were based near the rivers. Today the water needs of millions of people ensure that huge dams are built on rivers - stopping their flow and killing them – and also constructing canals to bring that water to the cities. As most of us are now well aware, water has become the key bone of contention between various states. With increasing demand on water there is increased fights between various states.

If there is no water security, then our economy will also be jeopardised. It is estimated that by the year 2030 when the human population on Earth reaches 9 billion, the global demand for water will exceed supply by 40%. The price of one litre of bottled water today would have been close to 66% of diesel had our Government not raised excise duties on fuel as the international fuel prices has nose dived to close to 30 dollars a barrel. India with its hundreds of rivers and streams is now increasingly facing problems of fresh water and within a few years it would become as costly as petrol or diesel. Something we need to really think hard.

With our own limited influence all we can do is try to look at our wasteful lifestyle and stop water leakage and wastage in our homes, workplace and in our hotel rooms when we are

traveling.

Every drop of water saved per minute can lead to massive savings.

In most of the houses the taps leak. Given the fact that plumbers these days don't come for minor repairs and also they charge a lot, these leaks remain unrepaired. More importantly, such leaks in the water closets remain unnoticed.

If we assume that there is a small leak ie. one tiny drop a minute which is barely noticeable, and If on an average three taps leak then it results in 1 litres of water wasted per household. If the leak is bigger, which is often the case then this figure would be way more and the water leaked per household can go anything between 50-100 litres. If we calculate the total water leaked in a city in India, then it would be to the tune of several million litres per day. That is a sizeable sum.

To this figure add the water wasted in the showers. Reducing the flow of the showers or reducing it by even 2 minutes will save a lot of water as we spend anywhere between 10-30 litres of water per minute based on the flow of the shower. Given the reputation of Indian's for frugality, this is shocking. However, one reason why it doesn't shock individuals is because the water provided to households is not charged at market rates given the subsidies, lack of meters etc.

Awareness is the first step in the long path of preservation. If we can sensitise people then attitudes towards water wastage and preservation can definitely change. Along with individuals there can also be corporates who can take up initiatives to plug leakages in different towns and cities. Given the state of Governance or the lack of it, expecting them to initially wake up might be a tough ask. Nevertheless, concerned citizens can continue to remind their official representatives.

The water table in most of our major cities and towns has depleted. According to Central Groundwater Board the water table in Delhi is depleting by 1.44 meters per year due to increased legal as well as illegal extraction. Unfortunately this critical thing is not of concern for many including the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC). The DMRC in the past has failed to conserve ground water and had illegally and unscientifically undertaken dewatering while constructing its tunnels so the water level has drastically depleted. Such a large scale construction could have also undertaken rain water harvesting and has also got a notice from the NGT in the past.

As concerned citizens we can always start raising awareness within our own societies and asking the society management to start rain water harvesting. Writing to large public entities like DMRC (Delhi metro Rail Corporation) to adopt rain water harvesting will definitely put pressure on them to mend their ways.

Pollution:

Improper garbage and sewage disposal is leading to contamination of ground water. Fluoride and arsenic poisoning which were primarily known to be in the vicinity of some rouge industrial units are now increasingly being found in city ground waters. Due to lack of certification and lack of vigilance in the part of authorities, it is not known as to how many of the RO water suppliers providing waters to offices and households depend on such illegal extraction of ground water and have fluoride and arsenic above permissible levels. We are all happily closing our eyes to the health hazards creeping into our homes due to environmental pollution.

Rather than just silently cursing the authorities when we come across such practices, it would be good if you can document these even with a mobile phone so that we can raise our voice. If all of us raise our voice by being assertive, the authorities have no way but to mend their ways.

Electricity

Most of us are aware about the need to save power. Some of the companies are moving towards installing automatic sensors to automatically switch off lights when there are no people in the room. At homes many people have the tendency to use blankets and maintain the air conditioner at around 19-20 deg centigrade in their bedrooms. It virtually defeats the purpose of AC. Use a thin sheet if you must and set the temperature at around 24-25 degrees depending upon weather.

I am sure in this new year we all can do more to reduce our energy requirements as our power demands leads to construction of too many dams in the rivers drowning hundreds of square kilometres of forests and displacing lot of people. The thermal power plants cause a lot of pollution and are a big bane of our forests as coal mining has decimated some of our once pristine forests.

Promote Organic:

We have a rich cultural heritage and virtually every month there is a festival. In many such festivals we make idols. There was a time when the idols were made of clay and the colours used to paint the idols were made from naturally occurring substances like charcoal, coconut shell burnt to make black etc. Today chemical paints with many different shades are available. Unfortunately, those are highly toxic and the day after the immersion of idols in our rivers, lakes and ponds thousands of fishes and other aquatic life float dead. These days due to our increased level of affluence we are spending more money in celebrating our festivals. So we should also focus our attention in ensuring that our idols are made out of organic substances.



The increased use of synthetic fertilisers have resulted in poisoning of our ground water as well as our food. Even an innocuous drink like tea is poisoned due to the higher chemical residues (Green Peace study).

It may be a good step if in this year we can also think about adopting an organic way of life and start demanding organic vegetables from our grocers. Writing to the Central and State Governments for promoting organic farming and reducing the subsidies on synthetic fertilisers and pesticides would certainly put pressure on them and make them act.

Trees not Lawns

In this era when most of the people are staying in apartments rather than independent houses, there is not much land available for planting trees. However, one can have lot of plants in the balconies adding a tiny bit of greenery which is not only soothing to our eyes but also helps in carbon sequestration. These days many people have started growing vegetables in their terrace gardens as well.

Many of these large societies and SEZs have to maintain a green area according to the rules. If possible one can talk with their society management to plant more trees instead of just having lawns. There is more water wasted in the lawns. One can also be proactive in tree plantations in the local parks, fallow lands and SEZs which can be very useful.

Think Global Eat Local

In an increasingly integrated world, we now have many fruits and vegetables etc from around the world available in the grocery stores. If you want to buy the fancy fruits and vegetables, you are ensuring that the demand for those products increase. With each such purchase our individual carbon footprint increases. These products are transported from thousands of kilometres, use up lots of electricity for refrigeration and obviously contributes to global warming. Remember we are a billion plus population in India and each tiny action adds up to a big carbon footprint.

Also it might be pertinent to remind you that we are not sure whether these products have any pesticide residues and there is information of some Genetically modified ones coming in to India. So it is better to have “Think Global and Eat Local” as our motto.

Say No to Food Wastage:

Did you know one third of the food that is grown in this world is wasted? This shocking piece of statistic has been provided by Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (FAO). This adds up to a massive 1.3 billion tons of food wasted every year. This excess production of food grains adds to 3.3 Gtons of Co2 equivalent annually.

(<http://www.indiawilds.com/diary/indiawilds-newsletter-vol-5-issue-ix/>)

If we stop wasting food then atleast one third of our agricultural lands can remain fallow without cultivation. This will result in less usage of water reducing the water wars. There will be less of ground water exploitation and less need for dam building. It might be pertinent to mention that globally roughly 70% of fresh water is used for agriculture. In the poorest countries the fresh water used for agriculture increases to 90%. (World Economic Forum report). So in a country like India, a lot of water will be saved in agriculture if less food is wasted.

Less area under cultivation will also result in less chemical pesticides and fertilisers used which in-turn means less poisoning of our mother earth. With lands remaining fallow, native vegetation can grow there helping in carbon

sequestration. Hopefully it can also act as suitable habitat for lesser wildlife. In short the world will be a better place to live in. In this new year if you can follow this as well as make others aware than this can be a very big move towards conservation.

Tourism

I have observed tourists demanding for facilities in the wild which they are used to at their homes. Remember, each item needs to be specially transported for you. So that adds to your carbon footprint.

In places with scarce rainfall, people demand swimming pools, bath tubs, discotheques etc. Water in swimming pools need to be regularly changed and disinfected. That sure doesn't make us real eco-tourists. Remember if you demand locally grown vegetables, then you would get food which doesn't have the regular pesticides and fertiliser residues which we often get in cities. So why not do what is good for our health?

Too often while driving from one city to another, we pass through a sanctuary, a protected area or wetland etc. We often prefer to munch on fast foods and throw the wrapper out of the car, bus or train window. These wafer packets and other polythenes are licked and chewed by herbivores due to the salt content. In the process they swallow the polythene and die and painful death. Since they come close to the road or railway line they also cause accidents. These polythene and plastic packets also pollute our fresh water resources. There is a huge need for generating awareness. Our members may take it up as a New Year resolution of properly disposing garbage and educating others.



I hope this is enough food for thought for you to start the New Year.

New hope in the New Year:

In the past we have seen many scientists and biologists being accused of pandering to the industry and other lobbies and working against the interests of wildlife preservation. However, there are also many others who are actively working to preserve whatever little is left of our wilderness and wildlife in India. In January this year came the news of Dr. Ravi Chellam, a wildlife biologist of repute deciding to helm Greenpeace India in these troubled times. When a well known biologist decides to play an active role in advocacy it is definitely a big win for the conservation in India.

It is well known that Greenpeace is at the receiving end of the Government's iron hand. Many NGOs have been prosecuted. In such a situation taking up the challenge of heading Greenpeace is certainly a bold move. I am sure, many of our other members can take inspiration from this and at the minimum become bold enough to raise their voice by writing emails and letters to authorities on various issues.

Sand Mining Threatens Bird Habitat in Damodar River, West Bengal:

By Sandipan Ghosh

World environmental convention of 1992 at Rio, Brazil emphasized on the burning issue of sustainable development in relation to environmental conservation for our future generations. In spite of all-round environmental awareness as well as campaigns in social media, the natural habitat of living organisms is seriously affected by different anthropogenic activities. Whereas large infrastructural projects like dams, canals etc. which submerge and fragment the habitat gets immediately noticed, small actions like land use conversion and mining cause a massive impact as they are carried out by huge number of people and agencies. Unfortunately, Damodar river too is witnessing sand mining at a massive scale.



Sand mining is regularly observed in the active river bed of Damodar. This sand mining is undertaken by the Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC) at upstream and Irrigation and Waterways Department (IWD) of West Bengal at downstream. River sand is in high demand as it is a key element in building construction. Hence they regularly dig the Damodar river bed.



Active and rigorous sand mining activity (both legal and illegal) destroys eco-hydrological balance in the riverine habitats of numerous species. If sand is removed from the river bed then water cannot percolate and this leads to the death of the river. A number of sand mining pits of Damodar River are clearly observed in the satellite image in between Belkash and Jamalpur.

On the basis of field survey (December, 2014 to January, 2016), we have found an inverse relation between numbers of sand mining pits and degree of biodiversity. Now the time has come to decide that whether we want to see the ill-treated river bed and hostile riverine environment or to witness mass gathering of beautiful migratory birds and resident mammals in the river. From the perspective of environmental ethics, we have to think about the species' right to live in their habitat uninterrupted, because they are the part of biotic resource and key element of riverine ecosystem as human. The Hon'ble Supreme Court while delivering a judgment on relocation of lions from Gir to Kuno has said that our view should not be anthropocentric but ecocentric. The judgement says "While giving effect to the various provisions of the Wildlife Protection Act, the Centrally Sponsored Scheme 2009, the NWAP 2002-2016 our approach should be eco-centric and not anthropocentric."

The easy route to reach that place is the bus stop of Sadarghat, Bardhaman town where a long bridge, named '*Krisok Setu*', was constructed to connect Arambag and Bankura.

On our periodic survey visits to this region of Bardhaman, in each visit our checklist of bird species and mammals have



increased. The river bed of Damodar (including associated part of river banks), especially in winter (from October to March) becomes a mini birding hotspot. More than sixty types of birds and three types of mammals (viz., Indian Golden Jackal, Bengal Fox and Grey Mongoose) are found in this place. This riverine environment is chosen by different



migrant bird species (during their winter migration from Himalayas, Ladakh, Baluchistan, Central Asia, Mongolia, Siberia, European countries etc), like Ruddy Shelduck, Gadwall, Bar-headed Goose, Common Pochard, Brown-headed Gull, Osprey, Common Kestrel, Peregrine Falcon, Booted Eagle, Black-eared Kite, Long-legged Buzzard, Kentish Plover, Lesser Sand Plover, Barn Swal-

low, Streak-throated Swallow, Small Pratincole, Little Stint, Temminck's Stint, Common Greenshank, Green Sandpiper,



Common Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper, Pin-tailed Snipe, Black-winged Stilt, Grey-headed lapwing, Great Crested Grebe, Barn Swallow, Brown Shirke, Isabelline Shrike, Indian Golden Oriole, Plaintive Cuckoo, Richard Pipit, Olive-backed Pipit, Black Redstart, Siberian Stonechat, Blue-throat, Taiga Flycatcher, Verditer Flycatcher, Paddy-field Warbler, Oriental Skylark, White Wagtail, Citrine Wagtail, Yellow Wagtail and different warblers etc.

Also the water, sands, bars, grasslands, bushes and trees of

Damodar River Valley are perfect home to Sand Martin, Little-ringed Plover, Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Common Babbler, Grey Francolin, Common Quail, Black-headed Ibis (near threaten), Grey Heron, Asian Open-bill, Lesser Whistling Duck, Ashy Woodswallow, Bush Lark, Sand Lark, Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark, Plain Prinia, Zitting Cisticola, Paddyfield Pipit, Sliverbill, Chestnut Munia, Tri-colour Munia, Scaly-breasted Munia, Indian Roller, Brahminy Starling, Chestnut-tailed Starling, Baya Weav-



er, Black-breasted Weaver, Pied Kingfisher, Common Kingfisher, White-throated Kingfisher, Greater Cormorant, Common Hawk Cuckoo, Oriental Honey Buzzard, Shikra, Black-winged Kite, Black Kite, Spotted Owlet, Yellow-footed Green Pigeon, White-browed Wagtail, Common Hoopoe, Pheasant-tailed Jacana and different barbets etc. We have located a large flock of Jacanas, Grey Francolin and Small Pratincole at the river bed of Palla and Hatsimul respectively.

The huge number of people along with movement of giant machines, tractors and other vehicles are continuously degrading the river bed through digging, sand mining, temporary road and bridge construction (obstacle across the active river). It has been repeatedly reported that the labourers of mining activity have killed the ducks for lunch and dinner. They occasionally displace the ducks from one place to another along the river. The vegetated



mature river islands are habitat and ecological niche to a number of above mentioned species (mainly Grey Francolin, Quail, Jackal and Fox etc.). Gradually after post-monsoon period these vanish due to exhaustive sand mining activity of winter period.

Unfortunately this riverine landscape is widely used for picnic as well in the winter months when the loud sounds, mass gathering and pollutions very much disturb them. It has been found that intentionally the grasslands are fired for agriculture and also fired in the time of picnic.

Due to habitat destruction many species have lost their home for ever. In the month of late December to early January we have found very low birds' activity in this region. We have recently observed that Ruddy Shelduck, Osprey, Kentish Plover and Small Pratincole are frequently displaced from the river bed in between Sadarghat and Palla due to intensive sand mining. This phenomenon can be managed through conserving these places only for wildlife. The sand mining, picnic and agricultural activity should be restricted at those places (viz. Belkash, Idilpur, Hatsimul, Barsul, Palla, Chanchai, Sadighat etc.). If the government, forest department, BDA (Bardhaman Development Authority) and district magistrate can take initiatives to stop unscientific and illegal sand mining activities in the bed of Damodar River, then we can save those wild habitats for our future generations.



Before this beautiful Eden is lost, we should act to save it. This riverine habitat can be grown as a bird watching hotspot in West Bengal and that can help in tourism which can help in employment generation. We earnestly request all environmentalists, nature lovers, bird watchers and NGOs to please save and conserve the birds' habitat in and around the floodplains of Damodar River, near Bardhaman town.

You may raise your voice to protect this beautiful habitat by writing emails to the following officials:

Shri Babul Suprio,

Minister of State of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, Urban Development

Email: bs.baral@sansad.nic.in

Member of Parliaments:

Prof. Dr. Mamtaz Sanghamita,

Email: mamtaz.sanghamita@sansad.nic.in

Shri Sunil Kumar Mondal,

Email: sunilk.mondal@sansad.nic.in

Chief Secretary of West Bengal:

Shri Sanjay Mitra,

Email: cs-westbengal@nic.in

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Conservation News

Raising Dam height to impact biodiversity of Kaas

Satara Municipal Corporation has been trying to raise the height of the Kaas dam since last year. The interim report of National Green Tribunal has come out against the plans to raise the height of the Kaas dam as it found that the biodiversity of the Kaas plateau will be adversely affected if the dam height is raised.

Kaas plateau cannot exist in isolation. It's surrounding areas, the slopes as well as the marshy area needs to be preserved.



Flowers in bloom on Kaas Plateau

Courtesy : Jitendra Katre

If ruined due to drowning, it would be difficult to compensate or recreate. Short sighted approach like this can cause irreversible harm to this fragile ecosystem. The final report is expected around March. Hope better sense prevails and the idea of raising the dam height is dropped.

Eviction of New Kalagarh Irrigation Colony

The case of New Kalagarh irrigation colony residents not being evicted till date has been reviewed by the National Green Tribunal bench headed by Justice Swatanter Kumar.

In Corbett Tiger Reserve houses were constructed for people when the dam on Ramganga river was being constructed. At that time in 1966 the Corbett Tiger Reserve had handed over 9000 hectares to the Irrigation department. However, nearly eight years later in 1974 when the dam was completed, the residents continued to illegally stay there. In 2004 the Central empowered committee had given a report about stating that the area needs to be returned to Corbett Tiger Reserve.

The Hon'ble Supreme Court in its judgment in 2013 had asked the irrigation department to vacate the houses and handover the land to the Corbett Tiger Reserve to which it rightfully belongs.

Conservation News

The National Green Tribunal has come down heavily on the State administration and has said “Despite specific order of the Supreme Court which was passed in furtherance to report submitted by the Central Empowered Committee before that court on April 30, 2004, there is practically no progress and there is clear non-compliance to the orders and directions. The conduct of the State authority only exhibits apathy towards compliance to directions. Besides, non-implementation of the orders of Supreme Court, it will have adverse impact on the ecology, environment and wildlife in one of the most prestigious park of the country”.

The NGT Bench has created a committee and has directed it to do a study and submit a report within two weeks regarding the structures in the area, whether any of those is of any use for forest activity. This committee comprises representatives from Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand Government officials as well as Field Director of Corbett, MoEF&CC and irrigation department officials.

Hopefully this saga will get completed this year.

Rare Bear Cat Seen in Buxa

Jan 06th 2016 02:27 PM

A rare Bear Cat or Binturong has been sighted in Buxa Tiger Reserve. Acting on reports of a bizarre bear like creature with a bushy tail resulted in forest officials making this unprecedented discovery in Buxa on Wednesday the 13th of January. It was the first ever sighting of a binturong, or bearcat, in Bengal.

The Binturong body length is from 2.3 feet to 2.8 feet and its tail is 2.2 to 2.3 feet long. The tail is bushy. It has a cat like face and its body resembles that of a bear. The Field Director of Buxa Tiger Reserve Shri Ujjwal Ghosh confirmed the first ever sighting of Binturong in Buxa Tiger Reserve. He said "this animal's sighting in the Bhutan foothills is rare. And its sighting here is of great importance because it shows the rich biodiversity of Buxa."

According to IUCN, The binturong is widespread in south and southeast Asia occurring in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, China (Yunnan), India (including Sikkim), Indonesia (Kalimantan, Java, Sumatra), Lao PDR, Malaysia, Nepal, Philippines (Palawan), Thailand, and Viet Nam (Heaney et al. 1998; Wozencraft 2005). Records from outside this range include a 1928 record from Guangxi, China (Zhang 1997) and record from Calauit Island, Philippines (Corbet and Hill 1992) and several from Cambodia (Walston 2001). In Assam, India, the binturong has been noted as not uncommon in forested areas, and is most common in regions with good tree cover (Choudhury 1997).

Binturongs are primarily arboreal and since they are heavy they have to descend the trees and hence most of the reports are from camera traps. Binturong feeds on fruits and small animals like insects, birds, and rodents, as well as fish (Lekagul and McNeely 1977). India included the binturong in CITES Appendix III in 1989 (UNEP-WCMC Species Database: CITES-Listed Species 2006).

This sighting proves that there is need for more expeditions to these forests to unravel many of its mysteries.

100 Whales stranded in Tuticorin

Jan 12th, 2016

In an unusual event in Tamil Nadu at Tuticorin, around 100 whales have been stranded in shallow waters and sand on 11th January night. The fishermen noticed this unusually large pod of whales stranded in the beaches near Manapadu and Kallamozhi villages. Initially reported as Baleen whales these whales have been identified as short-finned pilot whales.

These whales appear to be completely disoriented as they are coming back to the shore even when pushed back to the water by the fishermen.

When one whale gets stuck in the shallow shore others hearing its distress call try to come its rescue and get stranded. However, in this case since they are repeatedly coming back to the shore, they may have got disoriented by the Navy sonars or some experimentations by the Navy. In the past, such kinds of catastrophic standings have been witnessed due to experimentations of the US Navy.

The whales depend on their advanced echolocation modes which are even more sophisticated than the sonars used by our navies. However, the man-made sonars and sounds of other equipment in water play havoc with them. There are specific frequencies which just can “jam” them and make them disoriented and get them to the shores.

Some feel that these strandings can also be due to natural change in magnetism of earth as they use geo-magnetic contours for their movement.

The bodies of the whales are designed based on the buoyancy of water. When a whale gets stuck in shallow water, the reduced buoyancy places enormous stress on its body. The huge weight of their bodies push down the vertebrae which is not designed to support such weight. Their lungs also gets compressed. Heavy internal bleeding occurs and it is a sureshot case of death unless they are pushed back into water immediately.

Bird song helped to discover a new bird species

Jan 21-2016

A team of scientists from India, Sweden, China, the US and Russia have discovered a new bird species called 'the Himalayan Forest Thrush' thanks to a unique bird song. The team included Per Alstrom from the department of animal ecology in Sweden-based Uppsala University and Shashank Dalvi from the Wildlife Biology and Conservation WCS-India Programme at the Bengaluru-based National Centre of Biological Sciences.

The Himalayan Forest Thrush was discovered while studying the birds at different elevations in the mountains of western Arunachal Pradesh. They first noticed that two birds found at different elevations that were seemingly of the same species, called the Plain-backed Thrush, had two different song types.

“The one below the tree line had a beautiful song and that intrigued us. There were also physical differences such as a longer bill, shorter wings and shorter legs, but we noticed them much later. The first clue was the song,” said Dalvi. What was thought to be Plain-backed Thrush in the coniferous and mixed forest had a melodious song, but the ones found in the same area but on rocky habitats above the tree-line had a “much harsher, scratchier, unmusical song”.

Ironically, the Himalayan Forest Thrush is a very common bird in these areas. “It was hidden in plain sight. It was so similar to the Plain-backed Thrush that unless you hear the song, it is hard to make out the difference,” said Dalvi.



Himalayan Forest Thrush

Image Courtesy : Sanctuary Asia

Studies of specimens from 15 museums in seven countries revealed consistent differences in plumage and structure between birds from these two populations. It was found that the species breeding in the forests of the eastern Himalayas had no scientific name, and so it was named "*Zoothera salimalii*" after the late Dr Salim Ali, a prominent ornithologist who made significant contributions to ornithology in India.

Amendment to CRZ Notification:

There has been an amendment to the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) notification which has permitted road building in the reclaimed lands. This basically has been designed to ensure that the CRZ notification banning construction of roads is neatly bypassed. So now brace up to some dumping of debris along the coastline for construction of roads. The scenic views and fragile marine ecosystem be damned. The builder lobby is rejoicing at this news.

Creative isn't it? Unfortunately this Government has already proved to be worse than the previous UPA Government as far as their impact on environment and wildlife is concerned.

This new amendment has been issued by the MoEF&CC using an extraordinary gazette notification on the 30th of December, 2015. Cynics may say that the Government works even during the new year eve. This notification also permits the construction and installation of associated public utilities and infrastructure to operate the roads, mass transport or multi-modal transit systems. They have mentioned that there would be compensatory afforestation and any mangroves cut will be replanted elsewhere. It is well known that no amount of new mangrove plantation can replicate the biodiversity lost. The mangroves are not just trees but a key part of an ecosystem. Unfortunately, it has been reduced to a numbers game.

Conservation News

Government Issues Directions for Pollution Control and Improving Ambient Air Quality in Delhi and NCR

Dec 30, 2015

The air quality or the lack of it in Delhi has been a matter of discussion of late. Following the admonishment by the Court, the Government in Delhi led by the AAP is introducing the controversial odd-even car rule from January. The Central Government had been quiet till now. However, today the Central Government has issued directions to all agencies falling under Delhi airshed area, under Section 18 of Air Act, 1981, to control air pollution and improve the Ambient Air Quality in Delhi and National Capital Region (NCR). The directions have been issued to state governments of Delhi, Rajasthan, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.

These directions include action against polluting vehicles, stopping overloading of vehicles, ensuring no-parking in non-designated areas, mechanized sweeping of roads, stopping waste and wheat stock burning etc. The Govt. also talks about promoting battery-operated vehicles. If sufficient push is given, then the price of batteries would come down making the battery operated vehicles economical. The order by the Central Govt. also talks about introduction of staggered office timings for minimizing the peak traffic.

I am sharing the complete text of the directions given under Section 18 (1) (b) of the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981 regarding prevention, control or abatement of air pollution and improvement of National Ambient Air Quality in Delhi and National Capital Region (NCR):

“Whereas, under Section 17 (1) (a) of the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981, one of the functions of the State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs) and Pollution Control Committees (PCCs) is to plan comprehensive programmes for prevention, control or abatement of air pollution and to secure the execution thereof;

Whereas, levels of Particulate Matter (PM₁₀ & PM_{2.5}) exceed the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) 2009 in the National Capital Region (NCR);

Whereas, the primary sources of air pollution in NCR States are: a) vehicular emissions; b) burning of biomass, Crop residues, Municipal Solid Waste and Garbage, c) Road dust; d) Constructions and Demolitions; and g) Industrial emissions, etc;

Whereas, serious concerns have been expressed by Hon'ble Supreme Court, High Court of Delhi and the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in the matter from time to time and specific directions have been issued;

Whereas, there have been regular meetings between Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change (MoEF&CC) with the Government of Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan to evolve and implement short and long-term action plans;

Whereas, the concerned State Governments have agreed to implement identified actions on short and long term basis; Whereas, clean air is a matter of right and it is necessary to implement steps towards improvement of Air Quality in the National Capital Region;

Whereas, functions of the Central Pollution Control Board under Section 16 of the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981 include improvement of quality of air and to prevent, control or abate air pollution in the country;

Whereas, steps are urgently required to improve air quality adopting a multipronged and integrated approach including close monitoring of implementation;

Conservation News

NOW, THEREFORE, in view of the above stated facts, the following directions in exercise of powers under section 18(1) (b) of the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981 are hereby issued in order to improve the air quality in Delhi and NCR as per timelines indicated:

Control of Vehicular Emissions:

| Sl. No. | Action Points | Time Frame for implementation |
|---------|---|-------------------------------|
| i) | Launch extensive awareness drive against polluting vehicles; | Immediate |
| ii) | Ensure Strict action against visibly polluting vehicles; | Immediate |
| iii) | Install weigh in motion bridges at Delhi borders to prevent overloading; | Immediate |
| iv) | Take steps to prevent parking of vehicles in the non-designated areas; | Immediate |
| v) | Introduce early alarm system for benefit of commuters related to traffic congestion on major routes for route diversion ; | Immediate |
| vi) | Consider introducing plan for Flexi/staggered timings to minimize peak movement of vehicles on the road; | Immediate |
| vii) | Take steps for retrofitting of diesel vehicles with Particulate Filters; | Immediate |
| viii) | De-congest pathways; | Immediate |
| ix) | Synchronize traffic movements / Introduce intelligent traffic systems for lane-driving; | 30 days |
| x) | Install vapor recovery system in fueling stations | 30 days |
| xi) | Take steps for installation of remote sensor based PUC system etc.; | 90 days |
| xii) | Formulate action plan for controlling decongestion of fuel stations including increasing number of dispensing machines; | 90 days |
| xiii) | Prepare action plan to check fuel adulteration and random monitoring of fuel quality data; | 90 days |
| xiv) | Prepare action plan for public transport on CNG mode; | 90 days |
| xv) | Undertake road widening and improvement of infrastructure for decongestion of road; | 90 days |
| xvi) | Promote battery operated vehicles; | 90 days |
| xvii) | Take steps to expedite early completion of Western and Eastern Peripheral expressway and submit completion schedule | 60 days |

(B) Control of Road Dust/Re-suspension of dust and other fugitive emission:

| Sl. No. | Action Points | Time Frame for implementation |
|---------|---|-------------------------------|
| i) | Formulate action plan for creation of green buffers along the traffic corridors; | Immediate |
| ii) | Introduce wet/ mechanized vacuum sweeping of roads; | 30 days |
| iii) | Maintain pot holes free roads for free-flow of traffic to reduce emissions and dust; | 60 days |
| iv) | Introduce water fountains at major traffic intersection, wherever feasible; | 90 days |
| v) | Undertake greening of open areas, gardens, community places, schools and housing societies. | 90 days |
| vi) | Take steps for blacktopping / pavement of road shoulders to avoid road dust; | 180 days |

Equipment Discussions -

(C) Control of Air Pollution from Bio-Mass Burning:

| Sl. No. | Action Points | Time Frame for implementation |
|----------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| i) | Take stringent action against open burning of bio-mass/leaves/tyres etc to control such activities and submit periodic status reports; | Immediate |
| ii) | Ensure proper collection of horticulture waste (bio-mass) and composting—cum-gardening approach; | Immediate |
| iii) | Ensure strict enforcement of ban on burning of agriculture waste and crop residues | Immediate |
| iv) | Prohibit use of coal in hotels and restaurants and eliminate use of kerosene for cooking in Delhi; | 60 days |

(D) Control of Industrial Air Pollution;

| Sl. No. | Action Points | Time Frame for implementation |
|----------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| i) | Ensure strict action against unauthorized brick kilns | 30 days |
| ii) | Ensure strict action against industrial units not complying with standards ; | 60 days |
| iii) | Enforce strict compliance of conversion of Natural draft brick kilns to induced-draft; | 90 days |
| iv) | Launch action plan for switching over to natural gas by industries, wherever feasible. | 120 days |

(E) Control of Air Pollution from Construction and Demolition Activities:

| Sl. No. | Action Points | Time Frame for implementation |
|----------------|---|--------------------------------------|
| i) | Control dust pollution at construction sites through appropriate cover | Immediate |
| ii) | Undertake control measures for fugitive emissions from material handling, conveying and screening operations through water sprinkling, curtains, barriers and dust suppression units; | 30 days |
| iii) | Ensure carriage of construction material in closed/covered vessels; | 30 days |

(F) Other Steps to control Air Pollution

| Sl. No. | Action Points | Time Frame for implementation |
|----------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| i) | Set-up helpline in States/UT for taking action against reported non-compliance; | Immediate |
| ii) | Evolve a system of reporting of garbage /municipal solid waste burning through mobile based applications and other social media platform linked with Central and State level Control Rooms ; | 30 days |
| iii) | Establish Standard Operating Procedure to provide quick and effective response to complaints | 30 days |
| iv) | Take steps for maximizing coverage of LPG / PNG for domestic cooking purposes with intention of achieving 100%; | 90 days |
| v) | Ensure DG sets meeting the standards only be allowed to operate | 30 days |
| vi) | Promote use of LPG instead of coal in restaurants/ dhabas/ road side eateries; | 90 days |
| vii) | Undertake Satellite based monitoring for tracking and enforcing agriculture waste burning; | 90 days |
| viii) | Take steps for setting up of bio-mass based power generation units to avoid bio-mass burning. | One year |

The State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs) / Pollution Control Committee (PCC) shall acknowledge the receipt of this direction immediately and shall communicate the status of the implementation before 31st January 2016 supplemented with ambient air quality monitoring data being maintained by them. The SPCBs/PCC shall issue further directions to such authorities, as may be necessary, for implementation of these directions by 15th of January, 2016.

IndiaWilds App for Android Mobile

In India most of the internet penetration is happening through mobile phones. And the existing users who have access to desktops and laptops are becoming much more mobile then they used to be a few years ago. So to raise awareness and reach out to more people we need to adapt ourselves and make IndiaWilds easily accessed through a mobile phone using android OS.

Today, I am pleased to announce that we have created a mobile phone app so that people can access IndiaWilds anytime, anywhere without being tied to a computer. No need to type. One can access at the click of a button.

We have developed this app through Business Compass LLC a company based in Randolph, New Jersey, United States so that we create a good app.

Awareness is the first step before a person can become a champion of wildlife. I hope this will help us in reaching out to more people to raise awareness and make a real impact on the conservation landscape. If you have an android device then please download the app from this link:

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.businesscompassllc.indiawilds>

Equipment Discussions -

Canon Cinema C300 Mark II Camera Review

This short review is based on my hands on with a Canon Cinema C300 Mark II camera in the wild as well as in the city. This camera has got a huge number of features and mastering all of those would require more time. So this review may be treated as an emerging review and would be updated later and the video review will be in several parts.

Also, I would like to mention that while shooting this review in Keoladeo Ghana National Park in Bharatpur and in Delhi, there was no respite from the heavy fog. Visibility was pretty poor most of the time. So any shots that you see in the review film has been shot under trying conditions. Many a time I felt as if there was a veil in front of the subjects. So thick was the fog. Nevertheless, the C300 Mark II worked flawlessly. Watch the C300 Review on You tube -

https://youtu.be/dUVBOjMP_VM



Physical Characteristics of C300 Mark II

The Canon C300 Mark II is also a compact camera like the C300 Mark I. It is 7.5 inches x 12.1 x 12.8 inches with the grip, handle and monitor. The **Canon Cinema C300 Mark II** camera feels a bit heavier than the C300 Mark I. One of the reasons is the heavy duty top handle which can be attached or removed by means of an allen key. This means that you have to always have an allen key in your pocket when you are in the field. I use long lenses. India is incredibly dusty. So every time after taking a shot I remove the top handle and LCD and then pack it in my long lens case. With the C300 Mark II that is a challenge as I have to use the allen key to remove it. However the good part is it is more steady while holding shorter lenses.

The C300 Mark II also has bigger exhaust vents which are visible on the side and back. The body appears more solid. Since I have used the original C300 Mark I in dusty deserts, cold mountains, rain forests, humid seashores etc and it worked

Equipment Discussions -

well, so the C300 Mark II should just be even more rugged and Canon appears to have listened to people to remove their pain points from the original C300.

The top handle of the C300 Mark I was difficult to loosen at times as if it had a mind of its own. It was not as strong. However, most of the times it used to be easy to remove the top handle in the field. So there are pros and cons for each. The good thing is if needed then one can use the C300 Mark I handle in the Mark II as well.

The cables of the *Canon C300 Mark II* are sturdy and detachable. The cables are also marked video and audio and these cables are interchangeable. Love it all the way.

The waveform monitor is visible even in the EVF. So when I am not shooting with the top handle and LCD monitor, I can still judge the exposure well using the waveform. In the original C300 Mark I camera, the waveform was not present in the EVF. So this is a very good update for me. The waveform monitor in the C300 Mark II is positioned higher up, so one can monitor both the waveform as well as the sound levels. Also the waveform monitor has got numbers marked so one clearly knows where the 100 or 80 falls.

C300 Mark II Resolution:

The C300 Mark II shoots 4K and UHD at 25p and also 2K/1080 at 50p. It also shoots 2K/1080 at 100p using a centre crop of the frame. You can see the comparison in the video review. The 4K files shot at 10 bits at 4:2:2 at 410Mbps and recorded internally to CFast 2.0 cards are lovely. I have even pulled still shots from it.



The C300 Mark II has dual CFast 2.0 card slots. The CFast 2.0 cards were pretty expensive when the C300 Mark II was announced in April 2015. However, the price of CFast 2.0 cards are falling and hence one shouldn't be worried about those.

Excellent Autofocus of C300 Mark II:

The autofocus of the C300 Mark II is several notches above the C300 Mark I. The autofocus uses 80% of the vertical and horizontal area and has face detection. One can also shift the AF area by using the toggle switch or by using the WFT (Wireless File Transmitter) and a touch device.

Equipment Discussions -

However, the autofocus in the C300 Mark II doesn't work at 100p. So for erratically moving subjects, it would not be easy manual focusing and moving the camera at the same time. So I am sure many would avoid the 100p in such situations. I have included one shot in the video review, filmed at 100p, where I have missed the critical focus. Do let me know which one. 😊

Low Light Performance of C300 Mark II

I wanted to check the low light performance of the C300 Mark II. Though I started shooting both the C300 Mark I and Mark II on inanimate objects, I didn't choose to upload those as the lighting is too good to be true. I wanted to shoot in extreme lowlight and hence took the Canon CN-E 24mm T1.5 cinema lens and shot handheld between ISOs 12800, 20000 and 25600. In the field I didn't try the extended ISOs ie 51200 and ISO 102400. Watch the low light footage from 2:39 to 3:13 in the video review. All the low light shots were created in 4K in 10bits with 4:2:2 colour space recorded internally to CFast 2.0 cards.

I also tried testing the low ISO files and noise reduction and found that the files look good with slight noise reduction. Those tests will be uploaded in later part of reviews.

A clarification on the views on audio expressed in the video review. I am not suggesting that the audio recorded in camera through the internal microphone is good enough. However, at times if you are really close to the subject and your subject is not a common subject or if you have witnesses some really great action and you hadn't attached your microphone to your camera, then you may try to salvage the situation by looking into the audio recorded through the built in microphone. I did that for one of the situations where a snake bird calls. It was shot with an 800mm optical focal length with the lens on my lap without any support. The bird was close and you can see what I could do with a bit of processing in FCPX. I could have done a bit better by exporting the audio to a professional audio editing software like audition, audacity etc. However, there would be some noise and will never be the same quality when recording using an external microphone to the camera.

The C300 Mark II records audio in 24 bits vis-à-vis 16 bits in the C300 Mark I. So now I would not have problems recording audio directly to my C300 Mark II using microphones through boom poles, wireless etc. Remember the microphone should always be close to your subject. Microphone is not like a telephoto lens. So using microphone off camera is always better. The 24 bit audio in the C300 Mark II is good especially for documentary purposes when you don't have a separate sound recordist or when you are using many more microphones in your sound recorder as well as in camera. For example I use a 2 channel Sound Devices SD 702T. So when I am using a Telinga parabolic microphone for distant sounds for effects, then I am forced to use the C300 Mark II for audio recorded through boom mic or through a wireless microphone.



The quality of the LCD monitor is better than the C300 Mark I LCD.

Equipment Discussions -

The C300 Mark II starts much faster than the C300 Mark I. This will be a big help in wildlife. I used to miss shots in C300 mark I as it used to take more time for booting up. The C300 Mark II has two Digic DV5 processors so they are appearing to do their job. According to Canon the Sensor read out is double that of the original C300 and hence the moire is virtually non-existent. Purposefully I have included a shot of an iron mesh as well as shots with lots of fine thorns and patterns.

Initialising media also is quick in the C300 Mark II which suggests that the processor is much faster.

I would love the C300 Mark II more if Canon decides to include 50p at 4K. That would be a big help.

I feel the C300 Mark II is good for wildlife, corporates, commercials as well as feature films. I can visualise its many uses with a small crew and faster shots. While shooting an interview of the Chairman and founder of Bharti group, he had felt the LED lights that I was using as bright. One of the reasons was that the room was dark and hence the lights appeared much brighter. However with the C300 which I was using to shoot his interview, it was not easy to push up the ISO without getting noise. The C300 Mark II due to its better high ISO performance will shine in such situations as one can use a higher ISO and lower the light levels. So the C300 Mark II will be good for corporates as well.

The excellent AF and the low light abilities will be a big help in feature film shoots as well. In lower budget movies it can work as the main camera. It will also work well with the Alexa cameras used in bigger budget productions. The 10 bit 4K files and 12 bit 2K files can be pushed and pulled in post a lot more. And if there is budget one can record to an external recorder and shoot raw. So the Canon C300 Mark II will appeal to a wider category of situations. So if you are yet to decide whether to buy the Canon C300 Mark II or not then rest assured that this camera will work out well.

This is an emerging review and will continue updating this review as well as more shots filmed with the C300 Mark II.

If you have any questions then you can ask below and I would strive to answer those here or in subsequent reviews.

The Canon C300 Mark II costs **15999 USD**.

You can buy the C300 Mark II by clicking this link: [Buy from B&H](#)

Watch the C300 Review on You tube - https://youtu.be/dUVBOjMP_YM

Equipment Discussions -

Leica launches underwater camera

Leica launches the Leica X-U camera which can shoot under water

Leica has made its foray into underwater. It has launched the Leica X-U compact camera with a fixed 23mm lens to shoot 16MP stills and HD Video at 30p.



The Leica X-U has an APS-C sized CMOS sensor. The camera has a Summulux 23mm f1.7 lens and considering the APS-C sensor it gives a field of view equivalent to 36mm in full frame. The lens is made of 10 elements bunched into 8 groups. It has got 4 aspherical elements and one UW protective glass on the outside.

Aperture: widest setting of f1.7 to narrow f16 apertures are possible in this camera.



It can shoot in JPEG and adobe DNG formats.

The video is recorded in MP4 format in either 1920x1080 at 30frames per second or 1280x720 at 30p.

ISO: The lowest ISO setting is at 100 and it can go up to 12500.

UW Mode: There is a separate button for operating this camera in underwater mode where the white balance changes and there is a distortion correction applied for underwater conditions. The Leica X-U can shoot underwater upto 49 meter deep and for an hour.

Shutter speed: One can use 30s in bulb mode for extreme low light photography and the fastest shutter speed is 1/2000s.

Size and Weight: The camera is 5.5 inch x 3.1 inch x 3.4 inch and weighs upto 635g with battery.

Price: 3000 US dollars.

The price would be a major limitation for many people. Many hobbyists are currently using Go Pro cameras. I am even able to intercut Go Pro 4 footage from aerial shots with C300, ofcourse with adequate processing. So if you have the money and the ability to add the famous Leica brand to spice up your holidays, then Leica X-U may be a camera for you. This camera can just be put in your pocket while you are visiting some of the architectural wonders of our world or in adventure conditions. If you are into snorkeling and the existing fish eye of the Go Pro doesn't excite you, then the Leica X-U may be a fit for you.

B&H in US is taking orders priced at \$2950 and you also get a free download of lightroom software:

<http://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/buy/Le...DFF/d10-v1-t12>

Natural History -

COUNTRY NOTEBOOK: M.Krishnan: 'SNAKEBIRD'

The Sunday Statesman: 27-December-2015 (shared by Shri. Saktipada Panigrahi)

" I NEVER see a Darter without thinking of Archaeopteryx! There are other birds with strange, even bizarre, looks - the Spoonbill, Hornbill, the Florican and fantastically mallet-like and pink Flamingo, for example. But for all their improbable shape and colour and plumage, they are patently birds; in fact their exaggerated oddness itself is peculiarly avian. Only the Darter suggests the reptilian ancestry of the birds.

To some extent, I suppose the scale-like patterning of the plumage conveys this suggestion, but it is the long, S-shaped serpentine neck, ending in the snake head and dagger bill, that gives the bird semi-reptilian look - and its common name,



"Snakebird". Even when soaring on high on sharply triangular wings, the neck outstretched and pointed bill pointing slightly upwards, there is something definitely prehistoric-seeming about the Darter. But, of course, it is when it is swimming that the Snakebird is at its snakiest.

Last year, I had occasion to travel many miles each day along the waterspread of a dammed-up lake. The top boughs of great trees, which had once towered in the forest that was now the bed of the lake, jutted out of water here and there. Naked and gout, with the bark removed by submersion for almost a century and the wood closely pitted and textured, the projecting dead wood looked more like the fossilised outgrowth of some extinct, freshwater coral than the limbs of trees. Darters sat on these perches, lending the long-dead wood a quite primeval air.

Many of them sat with wings outspread, replete from a spell of underwater hunting, with the fully extended flights and long, spread tail "hung out" to dry in the air. They preened themselves from time to time and in spite of this display of wing and tail and the toilet peculiar to birds, they looked semi-reptilian still, the lanceolate, paleshafted plumes on the back and the snaky fluidity of the long, kinked neck very much in evidence.

At the approach of our boat they would close their wings, crouch low on their perch and extending their heads forward to the limit, peer anxiously at us. Then they would fly away, with rapid, rather laboured wingbeats, almost skimming the surface

of the lake. But sometimes they would just drop down to the water, submerge and swim to the other side of the perch. One would expect a big-bodied bird like the Darter, dropping straight down into the water (and not nose-diving into it), to make an audible plop, but awkward as the move seemed it was both swift and soundless.

The bird would sink completely, and then for a minute there would be no sign of it; then 30 yards away, the sharp-jawed head of some watersnake would show up on an upraised neck, take a quick look around and submerge again. Surfacing again at a safe distance, the darter would swim around, watching us all the time.

Darters swim with the heavy body totally submerged and are much more at home in the water than in the air. I tried it twice, but could not get a swimming darter to fly by following it. It would submerge and reappear unexpectedly a fair distance away, and by the time the boat could be manoeuvred around it would be too far away to be chased.



Incidentally, I had ample opportunity at this lake, to observe darters hunting and feeding. I never saw them hunting together, as their cousins, the Cormorants, do in shallow water. I can confirm what I have already said in these columns about their method of capturing prey; in spite of the power and rapidity with which they can shoot out their dagger bills at quarry (the kinks in their necks operate as a propulsive spring), they do not 'transfix' fish, as many have said they do, but catch their prey between the mandibles, like other fishers. Since all of a Darter's hunting is under water, I never saw the actual seizure of the prey, but usually the bird surfaced to swallow its catch, often flicking up a fish, held crosswise in the bill, into the air to catch it and swallow its head first. I never saw the prey transfixed on the bill. Fish are the main prey, but more than once I saw a questing Darter come up with something shapeless and unidentifiable in its bill, something that looked like a large aquatic snail, but which had no shell, obviously, for the bird swallowed its catch with ease. I wonder what it could have been."

- M.Krishnan

This was published on 4 June 1961 in The Sunday Statesman

Designs in Nature:

By Arun Acharjee

Publishers Note: (Nature gives us much joy. It always pulls us towards it. People tend to forget their worries, stress of modern life and immerse in the beauty of nature. These days with the advent of internet, people have become used to sharing their images of charismatic species like Tiger and that has resulted in a mad rush to click images of mega carnivores like tigers and lions. This forces other people to make a beeline to a few national parks where the chances of sighting of such mega-fauna is high. In this process we forget to enjoy nature.

Many decades ago Jim Corbett had written that the book of Nature is very vast. There are many mysteries waiting to be unravelled. If one spends time observing the tiny creations of nature, then one would be at a loss of words to explain. IndiaWilds member Arun Acharjee shares the beauty of nature's patterns which he discovered while walking on a Digha beach in West Bengal.)

The tiny red crabs are abundantly found on the sea shore of Digha, West Bengal. On the beach they used to make little holes in the sands to rest therein. To humans, they appear to be very shy. When you approach these tiny crabs, they immediately hide in their tiny holes.

But the most amazing fact I noticed is the designs they create while making their shelter. Generally they do so in the early morning and in the evenings. These designs are of various forms like flower, flame or just a simple pattern etc.



Why are they creating these designs? Do they knowingly create it? They are known to sieve through the sand and take out the nutrients for food and deposit the rest as tiny balls of mud or sand. However, when these tiny balls of sand look like being placed to create a flower, I am sure any one will be surprised as these crabs are too tiny to have observed a flower. Their sculptures remind us the unity among the nature-dwellers. The cause behind the making of such designs is unknown however those piqued my curiosity and sharing those images for others to enjoy.



Wilderness Updates :

The magnificent necklace - Necklaced Laughing-Thrush

By Samrat Sarkar

“Chhoto Penga”, this is what the Bengali name of the bird is. But I never dreamed of sighting this bird anywhere in any jungle of west bengal. I have heard the chirping of this bird along with its bigger counterpart, i.e., “Boro Penga” or Greater Necklaced Laughing-thrush in very lowly lit bushes of some deep forests in Manas. This time it is no other than Bungkulung where we have arrived in search of these birds. And this seems to be never a ending search. They are very much unwilling to come in the open out of the dense forest.

I combed the hilly area along serpentine and bushy footpaths with the gigantic lens on my shoulder in search of these birds for two square days. All of a sudden I heard faint chirping of the birds and guessed that they will be not less than ten in number. Being excited I moved on along the damp foot trails infested with leeches, mosquitos, spiders and being stung by small tree branches with a hope to sight them. The next moment it became all quiet. They are expert in camouflaging in the dry leaves and small branches of trees to such an extent that it is hardly possible to spot them. And however best you try not to let them feel your presence, they somehow become aware that you are there.



At that moment their tendency is to remain quiet. And at that situation you have no choice other than waiting surreptitiously. They collect their food generally from damp and dense bushes under thick coverings created by large tree tops. That is where they move around as well. In some exceptional instances and when they see no danger around, they come out over the bushes as when they desperately pursue some insects. That is only when it is possible to spot them clearly. I have gathered all these experiences following them in the forest hours after hours for two whole days from dawn to dusk.

They are endemic not only to West Bengal but also to the damp and dense bushes created in the evergreen forests in the foothills of all the north-east Himalayas in India. But they are not that common compared to the other birds. I have visited many forests of north-east India including the Manas on the part of Assam and Kaziranga many times. But I can confidently say that the best place to spot them is only Bungkulung. Bungkulung is a small human settlement near Mirik in the District of Darjeeling, West Bengal. It is about 750 to 800 meters higher than the MSL. I visited this place in the first week of October this year[2015]. That was after the end of their breeding season. As the breeding season ends they move around in a flock

Wilderness Updates :

numbering about 20 to 25. But during the breeding season, that is, in between March and October they are seen in smaller flocks or in pairs.

The "Chhoto Pengas" are always busy, just like the Jungle Babblers.. They move forward in the ground jumping in joint feet. It is really funny viewing them moving across the roads; At first one will enter a small bush on the other side of the road with a small and brisk flight, and then the others will follow it in quick successions. At first viewing I was very much confused whether they were Greater Necklaced Laughing-thrush or not.



There is only one dissimilarity between them; the Lesser one has yellow iris and the Greater one has it black.



Wildlife Photography -

Tiger cub in Ranthambore by Ashok Sorout



Leopard in Bandipur by Shyamala Kumar



Wildlife Photography -

Tiger in Ranathambore by Vipin Sharma



Ruddy Shelduck by Samrat Sarkar



Wildlife Photography -

Shikra by Sabyasachi Patra



Pallid Harrier female by Bibhav Behera



Wildlife Photography -

Keelback by Prajwal Ullal



Duttaphrynus melanostictus by Dheerendra Singh



Wildlife Photography -

Scale insect nymph by Prajwal Ullal



Leaf Porter by Sabyasachi Patra



Wildlife Photography -

Passiflora racemose by Prajwal Ullal



I look forward to your inputs and support in preserving the last tracts of wilderness and wildlife left in our beautiful country. For other interesting articles and images check - <http://www.indiawilds.com/forums/>

To post in the IndiaWilds forums, you can register free of cost using your Full Name as user id at - <http://www.indiawilds.com/forums/register.php>

If you are already a member of IndiaWilds and have forgotten your user id and/or password you can mail administrator@indiawilds.com

Regards,

Sabyasachi Patra

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