

India Wilds

Newsletter

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Cover Page Photograph:

**Leopard by
Sabyasachi Patra**

Inspiration from Wildlife – Butcher's advice:

When I walked into a shop my ears picked up discussion about wildlife. I moved in close to hear a shopkeeper telling his assistant “*Don't get angry. If you get angry then you can't achieve anything. When a tiger is angry and wants to hunt deer then because of its anger it starts breathing faster. The deer hears the heavy breathing and runs away. Unlike the tiger the leopard doesn't get angry. It moves silently towards its prey and when it is close to the deer it even stops breathing not wanting to make sound. So it is successful in hunting*”.



While much of what he was saying is factually incorrect, it was delivered in a confident tone and a few other customers too were listening to this discussion. This conversation stands out amidst all the chatter of the Bollywood heroine's baby bump and how cute the son of an aged superstar is etc.

If one takes a guess about the religion of this person, in these times of religious polarisation, most likely people may say that he may be a hindu. After all one can see many animals as the vehicle of the Gods and Goddesses adorning the calendars and photos in the walls in many shops. It may also be because a majority of Indians belong to this religion.

However, this person was a butcher selling chicken and meat and is a practicing muslim. Though a vocal part of the ruling party at the Centre wants us to believe that only people belonging to a particular religion are the custodians' of India's culture, it is not the case. The ruling party at the Centre, which talks about preserving India's culture and heritage, has un-



leashed India's biggest war on wildlife and has ordered killing hundreds of wild nilgais, boars, monkeys, peacocks and even as per some reports ordered killing of elephants. There lies the dichotomy. People who are supposed to have interests in wildlife are not always the one who champion the cause of wildlife.

There are wildlife resorts tom-tomming themselves as an ecotourism ventures, and start by cutting off all bushes and pruning trees so that there are no snakes, frogs and insects. In sharp contrast to these people there are communities who have lived in peace with wild carnivores as they know how to avoid them. In the night, most of the maldharis and shepherds lock up their livestock and retire for the night. So there is no conflict.

When I travel across India to film wildlife and encounter conflicts, too often I find that there is a huge level of fear for wildlife in certain sections of people. And this fear for wildlife is harboured by people who had never stayed close to wilderness areas. Most of these people are either displaced and have settled in areas close to wilderness where they encounter wildlife. The sight of a leopard makes them nervous. They immediately think that their life is in danger and start chasing the poor animal. People who have become affluent have now bought farm lands to cater to the craze of owning a farm house as it is increasingly seen as a status symbol. The moment these people sight an animal in their farm, they are driven by fear and start killing the animal.

There are researchers and naturalists who are supposed to love their subjects and stand up to protect them. Unfortunately, there are a few modern day researchers and decision makers who are quick to bow to the wishes of a vocal minority who often have vested interests in eliminating wildlife and trees from areas so that the land use can be changed or areas can be denotified for industry and other projects.

In this modern India, struggling with such a dichotomy, there is still some hope for the wildlife. Even though India is increasingly torn under by religious fanatics, there is indeed an underlying awe in which people of various religious groups and atheists view wildlife.

The butcher's exhortation to his subordinate to not become angry by giving an example of wildlife, albeit factually incorrect, tells us how wildlife is integrated in the psyche of Indians of all religions. With the explosion of human population, we have increasingly become alienated from wilderness. However, there is still a corner in our heart, which perhaps has a place and a soft corner for wildlife, which seeks inspiration from wildlife.

The intolerance for wildlife is there in many of our elites and in upscale localities. In the heart of Delhi a Nilgai (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*) was found roaming around the gardens near the

Parliament. Immediately the security went on high alert and chased the Nilgai which panicked and started running helter-skelter. In the confusion it even banged on a police car. After two hours the forest department tranquilised and captured it. Come to think about it. A herbivore which roams around to feed itself without causing harm to people is chased and captured. Nilgai is not an elephant which can intimidate people. But such is the level of ignorance that the nilgai couldn't be left alone to wander around in the parks. When there are hundreds of cows roaming around the streets, why capture a nilgai?



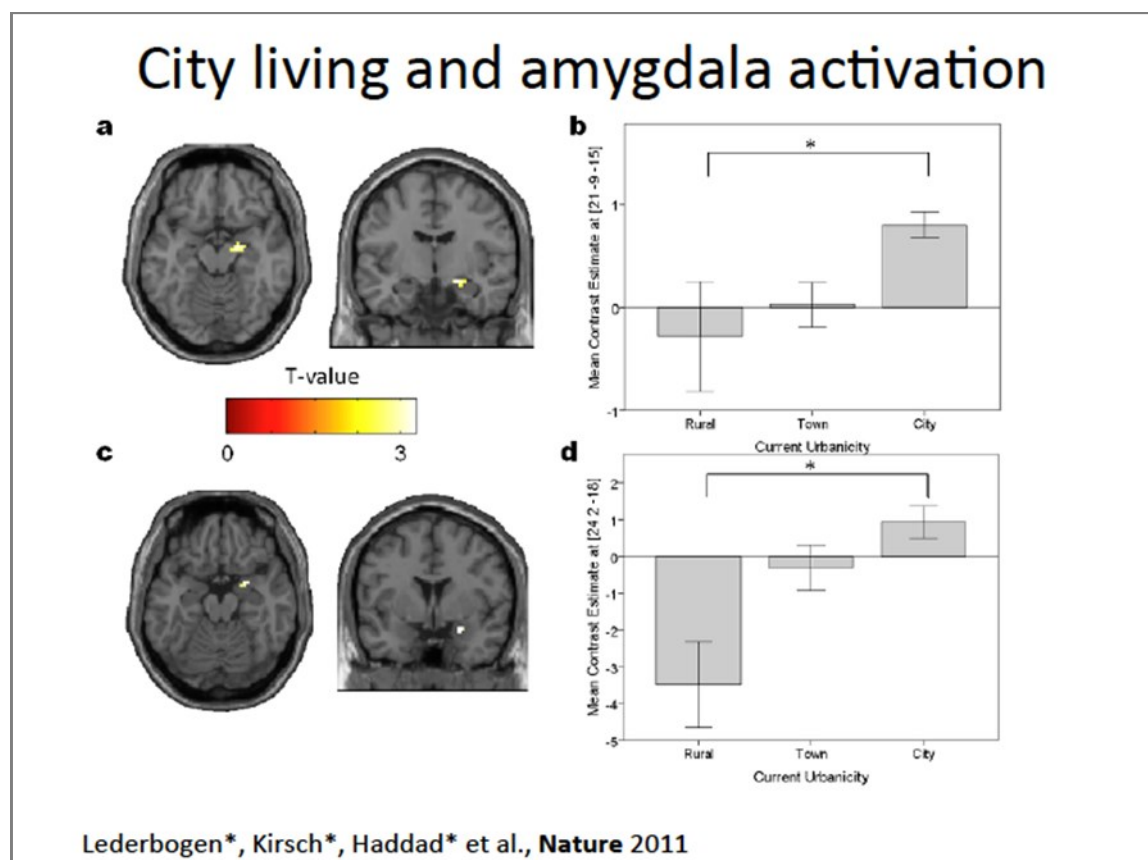
A pair of Nilgai or blue bulls (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*), India's largest antelope

Historically, there were lot of wildlife in the forests around delhi. These days after all the forests have been decimated and even the delhi ridge forest cutoff and encroached upon, the number of sambars and nilgais have gone down drastically. Even jackals are rarely seen these days. So when a butcher in New Delhi starts giving example of wildlife to calm down his assistant, I think it is an extremely positive sign and it is time for us to sensitise people about wildlife and help them take inspiration from nature and wildlife. Hopefully this can make Delhi and other big cities a less violent place.

The stress of living in urban areas with its intense competition for resources perhaps makes people become increasingly violent. In a 2011 study Psychiatrist Andreas Meyer-Lindenberg of Central Institute of Mental Health, Mannheim found that brains of people living in bigger cities don't handle stress as well as rural folks (*City living and urban upbringing affect neural social stress processing in humans*, Lederbogen*, Kirsch*, Haddad* *et al.*, Nature 2011). In the study, Meyer-Lindenberg and his group used functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to examine the Perigenual anterior cingulate cortex (pACC) and amygdala regions of the brain. They found that in people living in big cities, the amygdala of the brain - which is known to be involved in assessing the threat perception and generating fear and emotional reactions- was much more active than that of people living in rural areas. Current city living was associated with increased amygdala activity.

The researchers reported, "urban upbringing affected the perigenual anterior cingulate cortex, a key region for regulation of

amygdala activity, negative affect and stress. These findings were regionally and behaviourally specific, as no other brain structures were affected and no urbanicity effect was seen during control experiments invoking cognitive processing without stress. Our results identify distinct neural mechanisms for an established environmental risk factor, link the urban environment for the first time to social stress processing, suggest that brain regions differ in vulnerability to this risk factor across the lifespan, and indicate that experimental interrogation of epidemiological associations is a promising strategy in social neuroscience”.



The increased level of violent behaviour is often seen in the abusive language people use at each other. It is becoming uniformly true both in cities in India where politicians across the political spectrum have been making unparliamentary language at their rivals as well as in UK (Boris Johnson), USA (Donald Trump, Ben Carson and many other Republican party officials). Though this has become a global phenomena, it would be prudent to use the advice of the butcher to learn from wild animals to remain calm. Schools, colleges and corporates should increasingly take the help of experts to talk about wildlife and learn from their behaviours. If we can create more wilderness areas in our parks, allowing trees and shrubs growing wild to harbour minor wildlife, then the urban denizens can still have a feeling of wilderness and calm. When we start respecting wildlife, we start loving them. When we love them, we start care about their wellbeing. Hopefully we can save our wildlife and wilderness areas for posterity.

Learnings from Wild Animals :

As a filmmaker and photographer, I observe the wild animals for a long time often waiting to capture some unique behaviour. Spending time with them also leads me into analysing them. Many of my subjects, both non-human as well as humans leave some lasting impressions in me. There are many character traits of these wild animals which I find is worth emulating.

Stretch before you get up:

I don't remember many people stretching themselves after waking up. Most of the athletes and sportsmen are taught to stretch and warm up before their events. However, we have seen fast bowlers in cricket bowling without adequate warm up and tearing their muscles. I know of colleagues who have pulled their muscle by just showing up near the swimming pool without warming up and then diving into it for a fast lap. As opposed to use I have seen many species in the wild, stretch themselves after waking up. Every time I see a tiger or leopard, they yawn, stretch and then move on in search of prey.



You can see your pet dog and cat stretching as well. Our yoga gurus have picked up asanas after watching wildlife. Wild animals do that instinctively. Perhaps we humans have lost our instinct for well being and have to be taught these via yoga teachers. The basic tenets of well being never change.

I have even photographed vulture stretching.

You can also see the video of leopard stretching at 1m:40 seconds in this film:

<https://youtu.be/n-Yc5VNUN-o>



Know your strength:

Many years ago just after dawn, I was on an elephant back tracking a tiger. The tiger suddenly found a pangolin and rushed to catch it. The pangolin rolled itself into a knot and hid its head in its belly. The tiger despite trying its best couldn't reach the head. The scales of the pangolin are hard and even the tiger can't break it. The tiger can kill a pangolin only if it can catch its head. After 15 minutes or so the tiger gave up and moved ahead.

The pangolin knew its strength and its weakness. The pangolin can't outrun a tiger. Its strength is its tough armour plate like scales. It also knows that the weakest point is the head. So the pangolin hides its head by tying itself into a knot. Lesson: Hide your Achilles heel within your strong points.

Don't Follow other's footsteps: Chart out your own path

I was standing behind a tree for five hours without moving and had merged with my surroundings. So the birds in the wetland didn't take notice of me. They were engaged in their own activities.

There were some Indian moore hens who were territorial and were prone to fighting. Every now and then one of them starts chasing the other. When they chase, they run on the water surface. Their light weight, speed and surface tension of the water all combined to ensure that these birds can run on water surface.



When they run, they create ripples on the water surface where they land their feet. I found invariably the Indian Moorehen which is chasing failed to keep up to the chase. The reason is the one who chases follows the exact path taken by the one who is ahead.



After chasing for some distance the follower places its feet on the exact same spot where the other one had placed its feet before. And then it immediately sinks. The one running ahead has broken the surface tension at the points where it places its feet. So when the follower puts its feet at the same spot, it sinks and the chase is over.



Every day in life, competitors be it business or individuals, try to outrun their competition. They think they can just be faster and outrun the leader. The leader has the advantage of reaching the place first. A soldier may say that the leader (or retreating enemy) may have mined the path. So don't follow the exact path. The leader would have created a positioning in the minds of its customers and it is not always easy to just remove the leader from that position. So take another route. It may

be a steeper but shorter route.

Chart your own path. You may stumble, but ultimately you can like intrepid explorers discover and get glory.



Think before you Act:

Often adulation goes to our head. At times a stage comes in the life of every successful person when he/she thinks that he/she can do anything. Overconfidence has become the downfall of many a hero. After a few days in the gym, people call themselves tiger and start thinking they can defeat anyone. Whereas the actual tiger doesn't just run in and slaughter deers. The tiger knows its power. It moves in stealthily placing the hind feet exactly at the place where its fore feet was so as to avoid



rustling of leaves and making any sound. While stalking it often raises its head to estimate the distance from the prey and often takes detour for a better approach. Only when the tiger is very close to the prey, it launches the final assault to catch the prey.



Contrast this with the Charge of the Light Brigade in the Crimean war. On 25th October, 1854 in the Battle of Balaclava Lord Cardigan ordered the Light Brigade to make a frontal assault on Russians armed with heavy artillery. The result was a massive casualties of the Light Brigade. So always think carefully before you act. Even when you have taken a very strong position and find that the result may go against you, then think like a tiger and slowly retreat and take a different route for success. (painting by Richard Caton Woodville Jr.)



Patience

Watching wildlife teaches us to be calm. Crocodiles are perhaps the greatest survivors, as they have remained virtually unchanged, except for size, for several million years. One can find mugger crocodiles patiently waiting for hours below a tree with lots of bird nests. Sooner rather than later, one of the fledglings while trying to fly or fight with another one falls from the perch and becomes the prey of the crocodile. For this, the crocodile has to endure bird crap falling on its face. Infact that helps in its camouflage as well. Researcher Vladimir Dinets found that crocodiles also use twigs to camouflage themselves and when nest building birds approach to pick up a twig, the crocodile catches it.



Conservation News

Angry Birds

It is not only humans who are impacted by the stress of living in cities. A recent study titled “Agonistic urban birds: elevated territorial aggression of urban song sparrows is individually consistent within a breeding period” (Scott Davies, Kendra B. Sewall, Biology Letters, June 2016) found that even birds living in cities may appear to be angrier than their counterparts in rural areas as the urban birds display much higher level of aggression to defend their territories.

It is also true that birds raise their voice to be heard above the high ambient noise in urban areas. So if you wonder whether the bird singing near your window is slightly less melodious than the one you heard in the forest during your vacation, then you are not imagining things. We are indeed impacting the world around us in a negative manner.



When our population increases to 9.6 billion in 2050, which would be twice the carrying capacity of Mother Earth, there would be far less space for our wild birds who would have to struggle more to eke out a living in these urban spaces. And their voices would be harsher than what we are used to.

Environment Minister says no policy in the offing to stop elephant deaths by trains

The new minister for MoEF&CC Shri Anil Madhav Dave while replying to a question in Rajya Sabha, the upper house in the Parliament said that there is no policy at present under consideration to stop elephant deaths from speeding trains and electrocution. The minister said that Elephant is included under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, to provide it highest degree of legal protection and Twenty nine Elephant Reserves have been notified in 14 States for conservation of elephants.

Conservation News

In India according to the WPA, any vehicle involved in accident killing wild animals protected by law are impounded. However, trains belonging to the Indian Railways and owned by the Government of India, continues to repeatedly kill elephants throughout India and no action whatsoever has been taken against Indian Railways.



Elephant dragged 400 meters to the middle of a bridge

He said that general advisory was issued jointly to all the railway zones and relevant States Governments suggesting measures to prevent collision of trains with wild elephants. He claimed that the advisory given to the concerned agencies have resulted in significant reduction in the number of elephant deaths due to speeding trains and electrocution. However, the minister failed to provide any supporting data.

The advisory to the railway zones and state governments has these recommendations:

- ◆ Clearance of vegetation on the sides of railway tracks.
- ◆ Underpasses/overpasses/girder bridges across vulnerable stretches of railway tracks to allow safe passage elephants.
- ◆ Signage boards at selected points to alert train drivers.
- ◆ Sensitization programmes for Train Drivers/Guards/Station Masters.
- ◆ Engagement of elephant trackers and communication with Station Masters.
- ◆ To keep Railway tracks free from food wastes, that attracts elephants.

The minister further stated that a permanent coordination committee has been constituted jointly by the Ministry of Rail-

Conservation News

ways and the Ministry of Environment and Forests to share information and monitor the implementation of the advisory. In order to develop specific strategies and Standard Operating Procedures and for better coordination committees have been constituted between Zonal Railway Offices and State Forest Departments. Ministry of Railways has also been requested to regulate the speed of trains in identified vulnerable sections between sunset and sunrise. Chief Wildlife Wardens has been requested to take up the issue with electricity departments to prevent sagging of electric transmission lines and maintenance to minimum ground clearance as per rules.

Financial and technical assistance is provided to elephant range states under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme 'Project Elephant' for conservation and management of elephants. Improvement of elephant habitat, including Elephant Reserves and Corridors is carried out regularly.

Countries Reiterate Commitment to move away from High Global Warming Potential HFCs

India Highlights Importance of Having Verifiable Data on HFCs

Countries across the developing and developed world have reiterated their commitment to move away from high Global Warming Potential (GWP) HFCs to limit the increase in global temperatures while discussing the 38th meeting of the Open Ended Working Group of Parties to the Montreal Protocol currently underway in Vienna. The key issue being discussed is the baseline for non-Article 5 and Article 5 parties. Parties have highlighted that absence of verifiable historical data is a challenge in establishing a baseline for Article 5 and Non-Article- 5 countries.

The Indian delegation highlighted the importance of having verifiable data on HFCs to calculate the baseline and deciding upon baseline years. As such having baseline in the past without objective verifiable data is not logical, in the absence of which, it will be difficult to deal with future and work with uncertainties.

In addition, India has also submitted a Conference Room Paper (CRP) aimed at improving the transparency and flexibility of the Multilateral Fund of the Montreal Protocol (MLF). MLF has been the key in supporting the earlier transition away from Ozone Depleting Substances, and is widely recognised for its success as the only global scale financial transfer mechanism for mitigating environmental impacts. However, based on earlier experience of developing countries, there have been concerns around the flexibility and transparency of this extremely important mechanism. The Indian submission emphasises: (i) developing guidelines for incorporating the principle of flexibility, (ii) improving understanding of methodologies for calculating incremental cost, (iii) developing cost guidance for enhancing energy efficiency, (iv) increasing institutional strengthening for supporting any new commitments, and (v) prioritising technical assistance for building capacity to address safety issues.

Actual data on production and consumption of HFCs is necessary for understanding the historical evolution and establishing a baseline. The baseline is instrumental in determining future consumption and emissions. Many non-Article 5 parties

like Canada, Norway, Japan, the EU, etc. have submitted that they have got reliable data for historical HFC consumption. Such data is not in public domain, besides data for most Article 5 parties (developing countries) is not available at all. Some of the Article 5 parties raised strong concerns that many countries in this grouping do not have an accounting system and inventory of HFCs in place.

Plaster of Paris idols banned in Chhattisgarh

Chhattisgarh environment board realising the impact of idols made of plaster of paris and synthetic paints on the rivers and ponds has decided that idols henceforth have to be made of natural soil and paint. The circular issued by the Chhattisgarh environment board has been sent to all the district collectors of Chhattisgarh, municipal authorities and to the police SPs. The size of the idols have also been fixed to a maximum of five feet. Apart from PoP baked clay will also not be allowed to be used in making idols.

The guidelines have also suggested that non-biodegradable materials be segregated before immersion. The local authorities have to be also informed before any immersion of idols.

Plaster of Paris idols ban in Karnataka

Anyone immersing plaster of paris idols in tanks and lakes of Karnataka will be fined Rs. 10000/- and jailed says Karnataka State Pollution Control Board. Despite awareness campaigns people continued to immerse idols made of PoP and containing harmful synthetic chemicals that often resulted in polluting the waters and killing the fishes and other aquatic fauna, so finally the ban has been introduced. The tests by KSPCB revealed the high levels of pollution.

Procuring Idols from other states will be checked at the border check posts and all implementing authorities have been informed by the pollution control board. The sellers of such idols are liable to be prosecuted. How smoothly this order is going to be implemented is yet to be seen.

Karnataka bans Chinese manja -

The Karnataka Government has banned chinese manja – the string made of nylon and/or other synthetic materials with glass coatings. These threads result in severe injuries to birds. Every year scores of birds get entangled in these threads and their wings as well as body gets severely lacerated. Many of them die or are permanently disabled. It is not just birds, but even people riding motor cycles have got deep neck injuries and have died due to these chinese manja. In most of the towns in Gujarat most of the motorcycles have an arched steel rod in front acting like a virtual shield for these chinese manja.

People use the chinese manja as they try to cut each other's kite strings. What started as a part of fun and festivities have

become enormously dangerous for birds and people.

The Department of Forest, Ecology and Environment of Government of Karnataka has issued the notification on June 24 and necessary action will be taken against violators as per WPA 1972, Karnataka Forest Act, 1963. This is a welcome move and needs to be strictly implemented.

239 rhinos poached in 16 years

The Assam forest department has revealed that 239 rhinos have been killed by poachers in the last sixteen years. This information was revealed by Pramila Rani Brahma, forest minister of Assam, in response to a question in the assembly asked by Ajanta Neog, an MLA belonging to the Congress party.

The figure of 239 rhino poaching cases dates back from the year 2001 to July 2016. It amounts to virtually 15 rhino's per year. The forest minister blamed the lack of modern equipment to fight poachers. She said that the forest guards use ancient .303 rifles whereas the poachers use versions of AK 47 and was quoted as saying "We need to modernize equipment, to give uniforms, shoes to frontline forest staff". It is really sad state of affairs that apart from equipment, the frontline forest staff who have to do routine patrolling duty don't even have shoes and uniform. It is quite natural that the morale of the staff would be abysmal.

The forest minister said that Assam forest department will probe the rhino killing incidents by transferring all the rhino poaching cases to the National Investigation Agency. The minister said that, 661 poachers who involved in rhino killing incidents were apprehended during the period. On the surface the handling of the probe to NIA may show some seriousness of the state government. However, one should also take it with a pinch of salt, as Assam has just got a change in Government from Congress to BJP after 15 years. In such situation one expects political witch hunting to be a part of this. We hope to be wrong.

We would be happy if every poaching of all charismatic species/mega fauna is handed over to the NIA (National Investigating Agency).

Green Train Corridor:

The Union Railway Minister Mr. Suresh Prabhu on Sunday inaugurated India's first 'Green Train Corridor' between Rameshwaram and Manamadurai. In this 114-km long section, ten passenger trains with 286 coaches have been fitted with bio-toilets. Indian Railways have been using toilets which dump the human excreta on the tracks. It not only corrodes the tracks but also results in contaminating the ground water level as well as fresh water resources and spreading E. coli bacteria and other diseases. The fecal matter is also foraged by wild pigs, mongoose, birds etc and even antibiotic resistance pass-

es to their bodies and from them to the food chain of wild animals. So stopping this open disposal of fecal matter through the toilets of Indian Railways will be a very good move

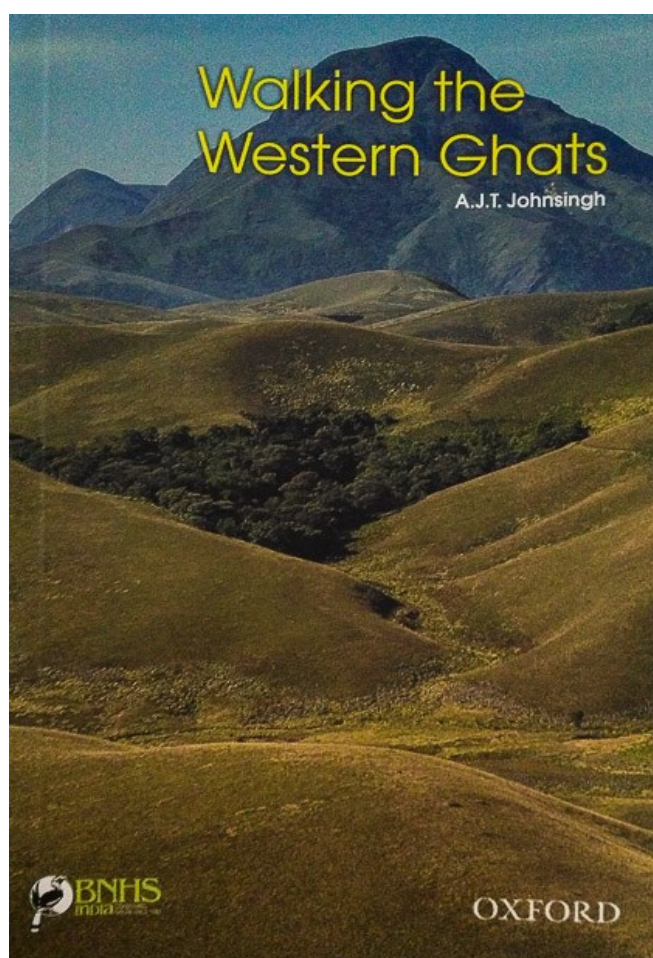
The Indian Railways have tied up with DRDO to develop environment friendly bio-toilets. The discharge from these bio-toilets are broken down by anerobic bacteria into water and gasses. The water is chlorinated and discharged onto the tracks.

According to the ministry, the Indian Railways have already installed 40,750 bio-toilets in all its coaches and it will completely shift to bio-toilets two years ahead of schedule by September 2019.

Book Review -

Walking the Western Ghats By Dr. A.J.T. Johnsingh

The foreword to the book “Walking the Western Ghats” by Dr. A.J.T. Johnsingh has been written by John Seidensticker. To the laymen who have not heard of Dr. Johnsingh and who would like to know about this book, Dr. John Seidensticker has nicely summarised it in his foreword by writing “*After a distinguished career at the Wildlife Institute of India, the renowned Indian conservation biologist Dr. A.J.T. Johnsingh returned to his home in the south to begin his second act. That included looking for the wild places, wildlife, and grand vistas in the Western Ghats by jeep and on foot because Dr Johnsingh lives to walk. This book is the chronicle of his quest as he travelled north and south in the Ghats seeking to identify where forest connections and other conservation interventions can be implemented to increase ecological resiliency in these mountains*”.



Before the foreword, Dr. AJT Johnsingh has included a chapter on Mr. J. C. Daniel, acknowledging his special role in motivating him to nurture his interest in nature by studying plants and wildlife as well as introducing him to opportunities, which led to his journey as a wildlife conservation biologist of repute.

Dr. Johnsingh's association with Western Ghats spans over sixty years. He has mentioned the changes to some of these places during his multiple visits and that perspective is highly valued. In the introduction chapter, he has given brief de-

Natural History -

scriptions about the various landscapes in the Western Ghats. So in a nutshell, one can quickly get appraised about the varied Western Ghats landscape.

What I find interesting in this book is that Dr. Johnsingh has crisscrossed the vast Western Ghats landscape in jeep and in foot, some of the which have been so less travelled that even the forest guards and watchers accompanying him have difficulty in finding the routes. He recounts those experiences in a matter of fact manner without any exaggeration, as the reader can well understand the pain as well as likelihood of danger. In the Chapter “Lost enroute to Muthukuzhivayal” the author recounts the story when in the evening the guide confesses that he lost the way and then amidst the rain and the leeches, they had to find a flat rock in the middle of a stream which was wetter and colder than the forest floor but free from leeches. They had to spend a sleepless night sitting on the rock and shivering due to the continuous drizzle. Certainly one would appreciate that these experiences are not for the fainthearted.

In the chapter Pilgrims progress in Periyar, he tells us an incident when they were sandwiched between two groups of elephants virtually 50m away in a steep slope. A lot of people recounting their wildlife experiences are prone to padding to show their expertise in a positive light. However, Dr. Johnsingh tells his readers “as a teacher of wildlife field craft, I am often asked whether walking in forests is dangerous and I invariably reply, Yes, if you go on your own as an inexperienced person; no, if you are experienced or with an experienced person who knows the forest”. His words “Nothing in my lifetime experience had prepared me for this kind of contingency” is a testimony to the fact that howsoever experienced a person might be, nature is too vast to unravel for us mere mortals and one should remain forever the learner like Dr. Johnsingh.



The author writes “the real challenge of conservation in present day India lies in assiduously linking and managing larger landscapes, and upholding and maintaining species like the tiger, elephant, gaur, lion-tailed macaque, great hornbill and king cobra as flagship species, which alone can ensure the ecological values of the landscapes for posterity”. The treks that Dr. Johnsingh had undertaken is not just for personal pleasure. He has identified the conservation challenges and had sug-

gested measures, some of which are being implemented.

For Periyar he feels that *“the idea of establishing connectivity between the Periyar and Anamalai landscapes remains buried forever as a result of encroachments, cardamom cultivation in Kerala and loss of foothill forests in Tamil Nadu. The existing tenuous connectivity along the Theni Forest Division (Tamil Nadu) should be strengthened as much as possible”*.

Similarly for Parambikulam Tiger Reserve he notes that there are human populations in the core as well as in the buffer. *“Tigers have a huge problem living in habitats that are intruded upon by people. Highly intolerant of human proximity, a tiger may abandon its kill made after an enormous effort if someone cuts wood nearby or a group of people go past the kill talking loudly. There is dire necessity, therefore, to ensure that at least the core area is made free of disturbance”*.

He talks about the benefits of Conservation of the western ghats in a manner the stakeholders can understand. The interesting feature of this book is that in each chapter, there is a map which tells us the location of the place in the vast western ghats in Goa, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala or Tamil Nadu. The book is adorned with some nice photographs, which help in telling the story. Infact most of these photos are clicked by the author himself, revealing another facet of his personality.

Dr. Johnsingh has also suggested reintroduction of some species in their former range. In the sigur range he suggests that *“we should also initiate steps to reintroduce the chinkara and nilgai since nearly 600 square kilometres is available to house this species”*. In the chapter titled a *“Bridge across the ghats”* he writes *“one management goal for the Satyamangalam Tiger Reserve should be to bring back the nilgai and chinkara which occurred in this landscape, according to Major Phythian Adams. He recorded seeing the nilgai on the Mettupalayam road and its occurrence in a greater number in the Moyar valley. He also wrote about the occurrence of the chinkara in the Coimbatore Forest Division”*. Dr. Johnsingh’s suggestions should act as a big solution as the Government has given orders to cull nilgai from many North Indian states and hundreds of them have already been killed. Rather than pandering to the interests of the hunting lobby, some nilgais can be captured and reintroduced in the Sathyamangalam and sigur landscape.

Dr. Johnsingh’s love for the Western Ghats seeps through his writings. *“I have quenched my thirst in the many rivulets and often my tired body has been soothed by the passing mists. Each time I have descended to the warm plains with increasing conviction that the Western Ghats, with its peaks, breath-taking scenery and numerous streamlets, is a legacy for humankind and its destruction should not be permitted any longer. It is an inheritance of the people of Peninsular India and should be protected with all our might and vision”*.

“Walking in Western Ghats” by Dr. A.J.T. Johnsingh contains 168 pages packed with information, maps, attractive colour images, sketches and references as well as adventure stories which will keep the reader return again and again to digest it.

Published by BNHS and Oxford University Press, this book in paperback is priced at **Rs. 450/-** and is a must read for nature enthusiasts, adventure lovers, naturalists, conservationists, researchers, officials as well as students. The book is available online in **Amazon at Rs. 414/-**. Personally I would treasure it, as the author has gifted me a signed copy, which will take pride of place in my book collection and also because it will help me in my journeys.

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 EOS 80D Review

Canon had announced the EOS 80D in the month of February 2016. Since April this camera is available in the market. Following is the hands-on-experience with this camera.



The Canon EOS 80D is a successor to the Canon EOS 70D. Whereas the Canon EOS 70D had 20.2 megapixels, the EOS 80D has 24.2 Megapixel APS-C sized sensor.



The form factor remains similar to the previous EOS 70D.

The size and weight is less and hence if you are in a trek then this camera slung around your neck is going to hurt less than the professional 1DX II.

Autofocus:

The 70D was the first camera to feature the Dual-pixel AF of Canon and many videographers took up this camera for use in steadicam and handheld gimbals due to the autofocus. I am happy to find the EOS 80D has a better autofocus than the previous version.

The EOS 70D had a 19 point autofocus for stills shooting. The EOS 80D has a 45 point AF for stills and these 45 points are all cross type sensors. Out of these there are 27 AF points which can focus with teleconverters at f8 aperture. It might be pertinent to remind people that the previous generation top of the line professional camera EOS 1DX when it was launched in 2012 didn't have the ability to focus at f8. So wildlife photographers were particularly upset as they were unable to use AF when the telephoto lenses had teleconverters making it f8 aperture. With the prosumer 80D camera having the ability to autofocus at f8, one can realise how far Canon has come. So now you can use your lens say a 100-400 plus a 1.4x TC to shoot at 560mm optical focal length at f8. Similarly if you have a 500mm f4 lens and you want to use a 2x converter, then you can AF with the 80D at 1000mm at f8. Many people are likely to use this feature. I tried it and found the autofocus to be quite accurate.



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One can also use the excellent Dual-pixel AF for stills shooting in live view mode. And more interestingly you can just touch the touch screen and lock focus on your subject. So no more fiddling the dial to place the right autofocus point on your subject. So you are going to save much more time. This is a fantastic feature in my opinion. This is one of the reasons why I bought this camera for my production house as a back up for stills. The main stills camera being the 1DX II.

Vari-angle LCD Screen:

One of the reasons why the focusing is so easy is because of the LCD screen which has 1.04m dots and is 3 inches in size. I love the fact that the screen is foldable and one can set the screen at variable angles based on your shooting. So if you are crawling in the mud to get the lower angle, now you can just place the camera on the ground with the screen at an angle to shoot. However, this vari-angle screen was present in the previous version ie. EOS 70D as well. With the improvement in AF, this feature makes the EOS 80D a very handy camera. I wish the EOS 1DX II had such a variable angle screen.

The pentaprism of the previous EOS 70D ensured 98% viewfinder coverage. Now with the EOS 80D you get 100% coverage.

So in essence what you see through the viewfinder while clicking is what you get in the frame.



7 FPS

The Canon EOS 80D can click photos at 7 frames per second. Though my EOS 1DX II has got ability to shoot at 14fps, I always believe that you have to know when to shoot. If you understand the behaviour of your subject then you don't need to spray and pray. 7 fps is good enough for many wildlife applications. Just think before you shoot. The more garbage you shoot then more time you need to edit and find out the right shots. So be careful before you "fire".



Highlight Rendering

I find the 80D raw still files to have nice dynamic range. Even pulling up the exposure for against the light situations works very well.

High ISO:

The EOS 80D has a higher standard ISO of 16000. The lowest ISO is 100. The previous EOS 70D had ISO range of 100-12800. In both these cameras the ISO range is expandable to a maximum of ISO 25600. Don't expect to push up the ISO to such high levels unless you come across a once in a lifetime event where noise levels doesn't matter. In normal light levels upto ISO 3200 noise is not an issue. If you want to shoot in very low light, then the higher end 1DX II is the camera.

Timelapse Mode:

There is a timelapse movie mode in the EOS 80D camera. It is like boon. You don't need to use a remote timer and set the camera to automatically take the shots for timelapse. The camera can click still images at set intervals. Now I can place the 80D with a lens and set it in timelapse mode while I am shooting some thing else. I wish Canon had given this timelapse mode in EOS 1DX II as it is good to have the ability to do timelapse once in a while when I want another angle. For example if a timelapse of wide angle composition is being done in the 80D, then I could have set up the 1DX II at a medium or tele lens to have another angle while I am filming with the Cinema C300 camera. Wish Canon can later on give a firmware update to the professional camera 1DX II and give a timelapse mode as it has in the EOS 80D. So cheer up guys, you have something in this camera which even the topmost professional camera EOS 1DX II doesn't have.

According to canon the Shutter speed is good for 100,000 shots. A normal prosumer is not going to click that much.

Movie Mode:

The Canon EOS 80D can shoot in Full HD mode at 50fps in PAL and 60fps in NTSC mode. I find the movie mode due to the nice flip screen a joy to shoot. My main film camera is Cinema C300. The 1DX II also provides 4K files as backup. So only in very specific cases I am going to use may be a few seconds of footage shot with the EOS 80D. I find the files to be soft compared to my cinema cameras, which is understandable. Sample HD footage from the 80D will be uploaded later in the indiawilds youtube channel and linked to this review.

There are a lot of other features like wireless sharing of files etc which can be at times useful if you want to quickly share a file to the client for uploading in the social media.

There are also some creative filters provided in camera like black and white, soft focus, water painting effect etc which can be done before sharing to the social media. I always prefer to do these in my computer as it gives more leeway to tweak. Nevertheless, one may quickly use a filter for the instant demands of social media. There are also other bells and whistles which I don't consider as key to determining which camera to buy, so I don't want to delve on those. If you want, then you always ask a question and I can answer it in the comments below. I wanted to give you guys a perspective of this camera being used in my official productions.

Conclusion:

Overall I am pretty happy with the 80D. I have been suggesting this camera to many amateurs who are just beginning their photography instead of the entry level EOS 1200 D or EOS 1300D. The reason is the number of features which they will need later on is present in this camera. I love the vari-angle screen which can be used for low angle stills as well as video work. The small form factor suits many applications. The files have got good dynamic range. I have no hesitation in highly recommending this camera.

Price: \$1199 USD

To purchase click the below link:

http://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/buy/Canon_80D/Ntt/Canon%2B80D/N/o/kw/search/BI/19990/KBID/13252/DFF/d10-v1-t12

Natural History -

Stretching the wings

By Samrat Sarkar

A good many types of birds regularly frequent the fields of our village. Many of them are permanent residents of this place. Some are short distance migratory birds. And in many other cases they come here migrating from large distances.

Myna, Pied Starling, Dove, Babbler are those that come in the group of the permanent residents. Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Blue tailed Bee-eater, Jacobin Cuckoo and some such other birds migrates from short distances. There are some fascinating names among the large distance migratory birds; such as, Sandpiper, Wagtail, Redstart, Flycatcher etc.

Among these the Yellow wattled Lapwings (*Vanellus indicus*) used to arrive by the end of April and stay here till the end of November. This is based on the observations of the last three years. They generally stay in groups of 8 to 10 in number. Ear-



lier at the end of April, two to three sub adults in each group have been noticed. However, this year surprisingly a number of sub-adults have been found in their groups during mid of July. This possibly means that they are now breeding in the fields of our village.

I have heard of their mating a number of times; but never observed with my own eyes. They lay their eggs in the ground only. And, as such, they do not build any nest. They lay eggs somewhere in some low depressions in the ground itself. It camouflages so intricately with blades of grasses and lumps of clays that one can hardly notice it from outside.

Previously I had a strong intention to document the nesting ecology of the ground dwellers like them with pictures. But I discovered that whenever I tried to do that, the nest becomes marked by the other local people. Many cultivators go on moving here and there in the fields here all the time. Some of them steal the eggs and eat them. They enjoy this opportunity of coming across eggs of wild birds. Don't know whether they do this out of poverty or of something else. This has resulted in arousing a strong feeling of disinterest and apprehension for photographing the nests.

Instead, I watch the sub adults for a long period of time during my weekend-birding. They are precious to all of us. The innocent faces of the chicks reminds us of the hurdles that they would face in their lives to survive. One can wonder about the tough risks they face for survival and the hardships they endure to successfully reach adulthood. They stroll here and there, look for morsels of food with their heads towards the ground and sometimes sit with their knees folded and take rest peacefully. It is easy to watching them for hours.

In the yellow-wattled lapwing, a specific behaviour was observed. A sub adult suddenly stopped for a moment while walking. It then took its two wings over its back. Then it slowly raised them upwards. After that it fully spread the wings vertically above its back. Then it lowered its raised wings. It again starts walking.

Natural History -

It continues walking with its half closed wings.

This took a few seconds and there are four reasons behind this activity:

- 1] This increases the blood circulation in the wings. Fatigue develops as they walk with closed wings for a long period.
- 2] The muscles of the wings become energized through this blood circulation.
- 3] It helps to keep their body temperature on the lower level.
- 4] It is their “comfort behaviour” which means that it feels safe in this field; He is happy.



It took its two wings over its back Then it slowly raised them upwards.



After that it fully spread the wings vertically above its back.



Now it has to lower its raised wings. It again starts walking.

It continues walking with its half closed wings.



Observations, photographs and text in Bengali by Samrat Sarkar

Translated into English by Biswajit Debnath.

Equipment used - Canon 7D + Canon 500mm f4 IS II USM + Monopod

Observed in July, 2016.

Natural History -

COUNTRY NOTEBOOK: M.Krishnan: 'The Laughing Hyena'

The Sunday Statesman: 30-December-1962 (shared by Shri. Saktipada Panigrahi)

THE LAUGHING HYENA

" SOME days ago I was asked to arbitrate on a rather noisy point. Three of us was discussing a mutual acquaintance, given to loud, discordant, ill-timed laughter, who had just snubbed us all rudely and one of my friends remarked that the man was unquestionably a hyena, as was proved by his having the very laugh of the beast. At this, my other friend, a lawyer, raised a technical objection on the ground that the laugh of a hyena was a myth. It was this point that was referred to me and, with my usual tact, I satisfied both sides by pointing out that if a faunal epithet was needed for our mutual acquaintance, then surely it would be more appropriate to call him a laughing jackass.



Striped Hyena carrying a carcass of a dog (record image)

But in point of fact, the HYENA does laugh. Only its laugh is not, like the laugh of that man, a sustained cackle of triumphant derision, but the nature of a friendly overture. I have a photograph (reproduced here) of a Hyena actually laughing, while coming up to be petted by a man it was fond of -- taken that young, hyenas develop a deep attachment their human friends.

The Hyena's laugh is a weird, excited, staccato cacophony, sinister in its general effect in spite of its peaceful import. No other animal is capable of the same vocal expression or anything like it. but sometimes, when I try to get Australia on my radio, that result is strikingly similar. No doubt that the hyena's laugh has a social significance, and is probably used to convey a placatory or friendly approach both in intra and extra-specific relationships, but this is not the call used by a pair of Hyenas keeping in touch with each other. That is a sensibly and economically brief call, much less loud, and since it does

not appear to have been mentioned by anyone else so far, I may describe it fully here.

For years, when I was living in Deccan, I had heard a peculiar nocturnal sound, half-yelp, half-mew, repeated at intervals. It did not sound like a bird's call, and enquiry of the Boyas and other hunters of the area brought no enlightenment. A trapper assured me that it was the call of the dinky little Indian Fox, and I assured him even more emphatically that it was not, for this charming creature was not to be found within the valley (though it was almost common, immediately outside it) and, moreover, the call of a fox, as I knew well, was a high, chattering, long-drawn cry. The one night, accompanied by a Boya youth and armed with a five-cell torch, I set out to investigate the call, which we could hear just beyond the road.

It was 11 o'clock and visibility was excellent, for there was a brilliant moon. We crossed the road and entered the harvested groundnut fields and scrub beyond, but stopped almost at once and crouched behind a bush when we realised that there were two calling animals, and that one of them was coming our way. The ground in front of us was bare and sloped gently upwards, and then dipped sharply down, and suddenly a Hyena appeared on the rise, and trotted towards us.

A Hyena by moonlight is unforgettably beautiful sight. The warm greys and streaky blacks of its long coat, the high ridge of silky hair along the neck and back, and the short, full brush take on a silvery ethereality in that light, and there is no substance at all to the animal -- it is a moving aerial shadow, its fluffy hair and the peculiar give of the hocks in movement (which is quite pronounced) endowing it with a phantom-like, slinking grace. The Boya lad with me was as much moved by the sight as I was, and clutched me tight in his excitement.

The silvery, insubstantial shadow halted, lifted and turned its head, and came out with its short, mewling yelp, a call that was not loud, heard from a mere 20 yards away, but which carried far through the night. From across the nullah to our left, almost a mile away, came an answering call, thin and sharply audible. I heard and saw that Hyena call once more before a nocturnal lorry, rumbling along the road behind us, sent it packing, and since anyhow it was going away, I flashed my torch on its retreating figure and saw every hair distinctly in the powerful beam before it disappeared into the dip.

I may add that I noticed a difference in attitude between a Hyena laughing and one giving voice to its communication call. The animal lays its long, pricked ears back, stretches its head out in a line with the body and shakes itself from side to side in a cringing, fawning gesture when it LAUGHS, but when CALLING to its mate the head and ears are held alertly erect, and it stands still, listening for the response."

- M. Krishnan

This was published on 30 December 1962 in The Sunday Statesman

Wildlife Photography -

Chinkara from Mayureswar Wildlife Sanctuary by Subhash Shrivastava



Young Tusker in Corbett by Debasis Bose



Wildlife Photography -

Indian Golden Jackal by Sandipan Ghosh



Bijlee Tigress in Ranathambore by Ashok Sorout



Wildlife Photography -

Golden Langur by Samrat Sarkar



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Irrawaddy Dolphin at Sundarbans by Suman Bhattacharjee



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Wildlife Photography -

Grey Headed Fish Eagle by Shyamala Kumar



Rufous Necked Hornbill (Record Photograph) by Subhajt Chaudhuri



Wildlife Photography -

Parasitism by Surajit Bhadra Roy



Red Pumpkin Beetle by Arun Acharjee



Wildlife Photography -

Indian Chameleon 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/>

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Regards,

Sabyasachi Patra

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