

THE MUD ON BOOTS PROJECT

IMPACT REPORT 2025-26



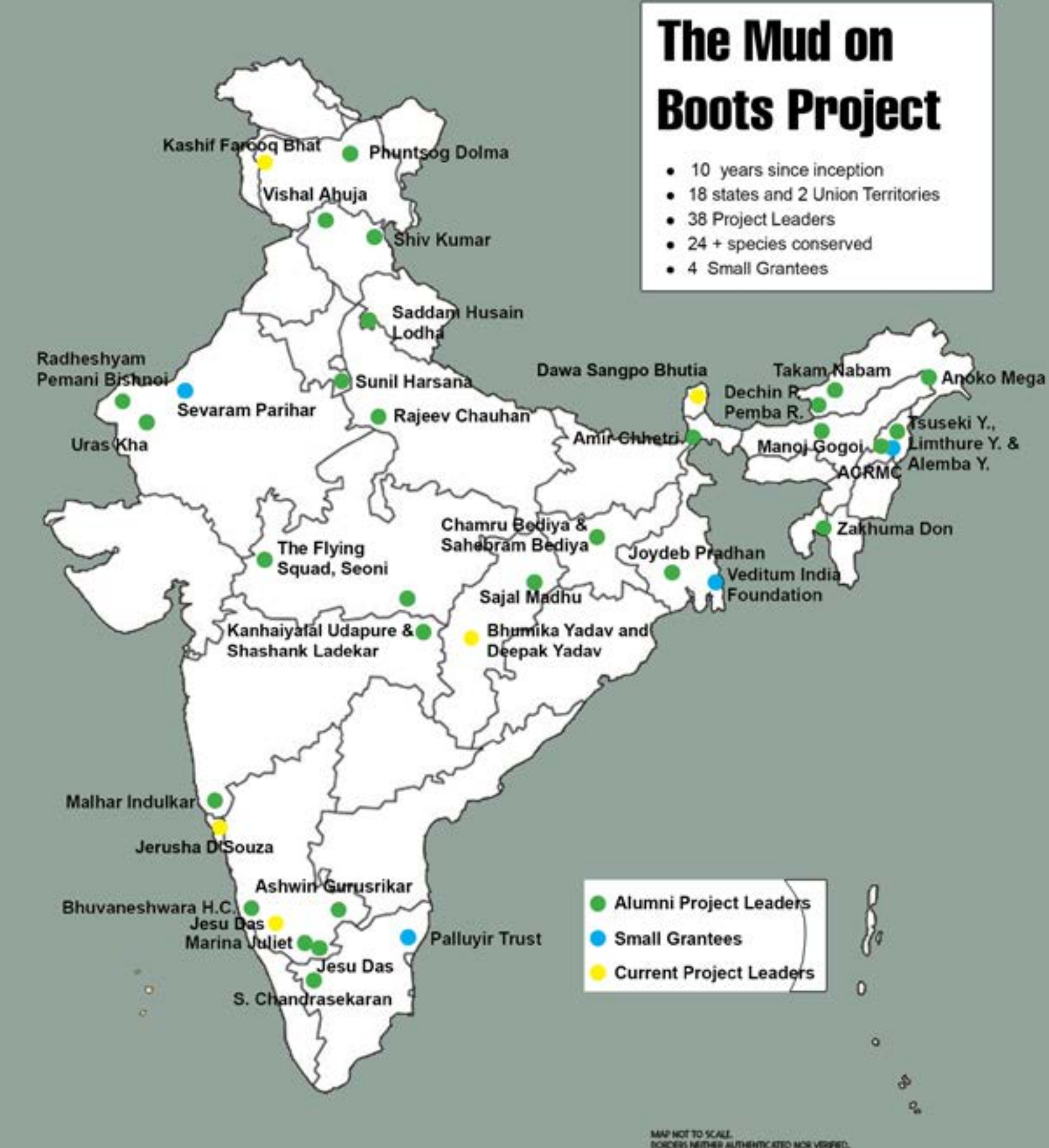


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Sanctuary Nature Foundation's youngest project, the [Mud on Boots Project](#) is a unique, customisable and flexible booster programme designed to recognise and support grassroots conservationists across India. The project focuses on supporting those individuals whose conservation leadership potential and contributions to biodiversity conservation are overlooked because of a lack of affiliations, educational qualifications, language barriers, and other mainstream opportunities. Over two years, Project Leaders receive a monetary grant and strategic support from the Sanctuary team. Such support can include field trips, expert inputs, troubleshooting, publicity, and more! Since its inception in 2017, the Mud on Boots Project has supported over 38 grassroots conservationists from 18 different states and two Union Territories in India.

Beyond this, the Mud on Boots Project extends solidarity and resources to grassroots organisations and lends support to numerous environmental campaigns. Over the years, we have stocked rural libraries, sponsored apprenticeship programmes, enabled native nurseries, organised field trips, lobbied for conservation causes, designed and conducted workshops, and also raised medical aid for frontline forest staff. We keep our support flexible and bureaucracy to a minimum.





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Jesu Das



Publication Alert!

In 2025, Das and his colleagues produced a short note highlighting the nesting behaviour of Leith’s softshell turtles in the wild (a first-ever report!). The short note is based on Das’s account of chance observations of a Leith’s softshell turtle while carrying out surveys on mahseer along the Cauvery river. This peer reviewed short note is published in the [Hamadryad](#) journal.

**LOCATION: MANDYA DISTRICT
STATE: KARNATAKA**

For Jesu Das, the river is more than just a source of livelihood – it is a living, breathing world that he understands with an intimacy few can match. A gifted fisherman with deep knowledge of fish behaviour and traditional fishing techniques, Das has spent years navigating the waters of the Cauvery river basin, witnessing first-hand the changes in its fragile ecosystem. His expertise in species identification and river ecology have led to remarkable discoveries, including the rediscovery of fish once thought to be locally extinct. Today, working as a field operative with the [Wildlife Association of South India \(WASI\)](#), Jesu Das contributes to all aspects of humpback mahseer conservation efforts underway in the Cauvery river basin.

Partnerships Enabling Mahseer Conservation

In 2025, Project Leader Jesu Das worked with the Fisheries Department of Karnataka and [Coorg Wildlife Society](#) to develop a brood stock of Critically Endangered humpback mahseer from the headwaters of Coorg. He also led a fish biodiversity survey for the Department in the Hosur and Krishnagiri divisions as part of a [RAMSAR](#) assessment, and safely captured and identified humpback mahseer juveniles for a conservation breeding programme. Meanwhile, he has been caring for 35 mahseer at the Sangam Fish Repository, which he helped establish in 2024 to house juvenile mahseer from the Moyar river.

Once considered only a traditional fisherman, Das is now known as a partner by the staff of the Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary (CWS). He is frequently invited to lead fish surveys and studies for the Departments of Fisheries and Forests (Karnataka). Das has been integral in education and research expeditions across the Cauvery river basin, the Moyar gorge in the Bandipur Tiger Reserve, Ranganthittu Bird Sanctuary, Valnoor in Coorg, and the Hemavathi river in Sakleshpura.



Cauvery Fish Field Guide

Das is collaborating with a team of taxonomists and fish keepers to create a fish field guide for the Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary. Drawing on his expertise in cast-net fishing, deep understanding of river ecology, and fish identification skills, the team has completed two expeditions that documented over 60 native fish species.

Leading the Mahseer Radiotelemetry Study

Jesu Das started his conservation career as a field operative with WASI in 2015. His field knowledge, dedication towards fresh water fish conservation and hardworking nature have supported all aspects of the ongoing research and conservation efforts by WASI towards the humpback mahseer.

Das currently leads the data collection part of the mahseer radiotelemetry work (launched in January 2023 by WASI). The data painstakingly gathered by Das and his team provides the first insight into the ecology of the humpback mahseer within the Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary (CWS). In 2025, Das spent months along the Cauvery river basin tracking fish, and trained volunteers, peers and Forest Department staff on the use of radio telemetry devices. When not in the field, he dedicated his time towards creating awareness on freshwater and mahseer conservation by orienting visitors at the Bheemeshwari Mahseer Repository on the ongoing work.

In November 2025, Das took the lead in showcasing ongoing work and the research potential of radiotelemetry in studying the ecology of native fish to members of the public, eminent fisheries experts, government officials, the Minister of Animal Husbandry and Fisheries, and the Chief Minister and the Deputy Chief Minister of Karnataka at the three-day '*Mathsya Mela 2025*' organised by the Department of Fisheries, Karnataka.

In 2026, Das continues to lead most aspects of the mahseer radio telemetry work, and has already tagged seven adult fish since January.



Cauvery Nature Education Diaries

Inspired by the nature education works of peers Bhumika Yadava and Deepak Yadav in Chhattisgarh, in July 2025 Das attended a day-long capacity building workshop organised by [Vanodaya Trust](#), [Kenneth Anderson Nature Society](#) and [Aroach, India](#). Using the acquired skills, Das has so far assisted three education programmes for school children residing in villages abutting the Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary. During the interactions, he shares about the ongoing conservation work on humpback mahseer and other freshwater fish. He also led three conservation awareness sessions for corporate groups visiting the sanctuary.

In September 2025, while facilitating a nature awareness workshop for a corporate group from Bengaluru, Das expanded his skills by learning the abc of conducting forest vegetation surveys. An earnest and fast learner, these opportunities have been great learning experiences for Das, whose ultimate goal is to spread the message of river and fish conservation among the region's youth through nature education sessions.



Kashif Farooq Bhat



Publication Alert!

In 2025, Kashif penned an article titled *‘Echoes of Dachigam’* for *Sanctuary Asia’s* December 2025 issue. Revisiting his family’s long history of wildlife conservation efforts in Dachigam National Park, Kashif shed light on the fact that continuing in his family’s legacy is also a means of following his inborn passion and awe of nature.

LOCATION: DACHIGAM NATIONAL PARK, SRINAGAR UNION TERRITORY: JAMMU AND KASHMIR

Growing up on the fringe of the Dachigam National Park in Srinagar’s Muftibagh village (J&K), Kashif Farooq Bhat is an emerging local conservation leader with strong ties to his community and the Forest Department alike. A fourth generation nature conservationist, Kashif’s experiences and professional training (M. Sc. degree in Wildlife Science from Aligarh Muslim University, Uttar Pradesh) is expanding the reach of ongoing conservation efforts towards wildlife conservation at Dachigam.

Kashif uses a combination of scientific techniques (including research and monitoring, habitat restoration and rewilding activities) and community engagement through awareness and education to further streamline the ongoing conservation efforts towards the Critically Endangered and endemic Kashmir stag (hangul), and other wildlife in and around the [Dachigam National Park](#) (DNP).

Mentoring Young Minds

Kashif believes that providing safe and well-guided opportunities to interact with nature can encourage children to become ambassadors for the region’s wildlife. Since January 2025, Kashif has been leading nature education sessions for children living on the fringes of DNP. His goal is clear – instilling a sense of environmental responsibility and awareness about wildlife conservation, especially for the Critically Endangered hangul among children. So far he has conducted seven sessions, which included bird, river and tree walks, nature-themed drawing events, storytelling time, clean-up drives and visits to the wildlife rehabilitation centre in DNP.



In Conference

In January 2026, Kashif delivered a presentation on his work at the National Conference on Lesser-Known Species of the Central Indian Landscape (Bhopal). The conference enabled Kashif to share learnings and challenges with fellow researchers, practitioners, students, and policymakers working in the conservation sector.

Not one to undermine children's learning potential, Kashif's sessions began with explanations of scientific concepts others may deem too complex for young minds such as the ecological role and importance of the species in focus for the day (birds, trees, butterflies, rivers, soil and animals). Children's capacity in understanding complex concepts, their emotional outlook towards wildlife, and enthusiasm to partake in conserving the wilderness around them has been motivating Kashif to keep working. Meanwhile, he is positive that his sessions empower children by highlighting simple everyday actionable steps that help protect local wildlife and reduce negative human-wildlife interactions. Amid all the science and conservation talk, Kashif makes sure to distribute snacks, gifts and certificates to children hoping to keep their interest and to encourage a lively learning environment.

Rooting for Local Communities

Kashif understands that community perceptions, traditional knowledge systems and local stewardship are all key to the long-term survival of the hangul and its fragile forest home within DNP. Since January 2025, Kashif is slowly building on-ground community support for the protection of Dachigam's unique biodiversity through door to door surveys, one-on-one interactions, and nature education sessions for children.

Kashif's efforts have been concentrated at Mulnar village, directly abutting the northwestern boundary of Dachigam. In January 2025, he conducted a survey to understand local people's perspectives on wildlife and their possible roles in conservation efforts. Based on the learnings that point to the fact that people are willing to participate and play an active role in wildlife conservation, he has reached out to residents via several door-to-door conservation awareness drives. During such visits he makes it a point to dedicate time to understand people's challenges and share information on the importance of protecting the region's wildlife. A conservationist with his ears to the ground, his efforts are creating the base crucial to fostering a



culture of human-wildlife coexistence in Dachigam. Taking a step further, Kashif with the support of the [Wildlife Conservation Fund](#) (WCF) and Voice of the Wild has also launched 'The Nature School', which he envisions to be a safe space for the village children to learn about and engage with their biodiverse surroundings.

Documenting Dachigam's Wildlife

Since January 2025, Kashif has monitored the population of hangul and other wildlife for a better understanding of wildlife within the Dachigam National Park.

Through field surveys conducted between January and February 2025 using camera trapping and direct and indirect observations, Kashif was delighted to record two groups of female hangul with fawns. However he noticed that hangul populations did not retreat to lower elevations even during the peak winter months,

a behavioural change that according to Kashif could be attributed to heavy disturbances in their habitats in the region. His camera traps also documented wildlife such as common leopard, red fox, yellow-throated marten and leopard cat, among others.

Following the above, in March 2025, Kashif designed and conducted a door-to-door survey in Dara and Faqir Gujri, two villages adjoining DNP, to assess local perceptions toward wildlife and its conservation while exploring the community's interest and possible roles in conservation efforts. Serving as an important bridge between the local community and Jammu and Kashmir Forest Department, the study revealed that the majority of the community members were interested in playing a role in wildlife conservation.

Bhumika Yadav and Deepak Yadav



**LOCATION: SARSOHA VILLAGE,
MUNGELI DISTRICT
STATE: CHHATTISGARH**

Having built a reputation as an outstanding Green Hub fellow, Project Leader Bhumika Yadav started '*Hamar Jungle La Ham Padhbo*', a nature education initiative in Sarsoha village with support from Project Leader Deepak Yadav (a fellow Green Hub alumni) in 2024.

Located in the fringes of the [Achaanakmar Wildlife Sanctuary](#) and Tiger Reserve in Chattisgarh's Mungeli district, the remote Sarsoha village lacks formal educational facilities. With support from the Mud on Boots Project, Bhumika and Deepak are streamlining the *Hamar Jungle La Ham Padhbo Project* (HJLHPP) to build a nature education programme to fill the absence of a structured learning space for children, while bridging the existing gap between children's local ecological knowledge and formal education. The project also aims to promote environmental awareness that supports community development in Chattisgarh's Mungeli district and nearby areas.



Nature's Educators

Envisioned as a safe learning space for children belonging to the marginalised *Baiga* community, the nature education sessions led by Project Leaders Bhumika Yadav and Deepak Yadav are the only source of structured learning for the children in the remote Sarsoha village, which lacks even a primary school. Their sessions are replete with activities encouraging locally relevant art forms such as mud toy making, creating nature-inspired art from raw materials found in the environment, guided bird walks, butterfly identification, and several rounds of traditional games for children.

Before the launch of the HJLHPP, children in Sarsoha accompanied their parents to work and spent their days either in fields, forests or nearby towns. The team has gradually won the trust of parents and children with their hard work, reliability and dedication. In the past year, they have led over 50 nature education sessions, which included butterfly rearing exercises, bird identification, art and craft, and games sessions. The team celebrated this feat by organising a *gumai bera* (annual picnic) for the children.

Celebrating Nature

In November 2025, the *Hamar Jungle* team came together and organised a picnic (known locally as *gumai bera*) for the children of Sarsoha village to celebrate the successful first year of their nature education initiative. The children enjoyed local games and shared their experiences and learnings and relished local dishes lovingly prepared by the team.



With overwhelming local encouragement, several nature education sessions were also organised in two Government Primary Schools located in the nearby villages of Dagnia and Madmada with support from teachers and volunteers Manisha Dhurve and Sarita Kujur.

Training Mungeli's Trainers

With growing support for Bhumika and Deepak's nature education project, they have added two young locals Manisha Dhurve and Sarita Kujur to their team. Bhumika and Deepak are constantly on the lookout for capacity building and exposure opportunities to complement the place-based knowledge of their growing team. In July 2025, Deepak along with two students travelled to Bhopal to participate in the [Green Hub Central India Festival](#). Representing their grassroots initiative, they showcased artwork and handmade crafts created by children at the two-day event held on July 12 and 13.

Following this, in January 2026, Sarita and Manisha attended a 'Friends of Nature Programme' organised by the [Wild Routes Foundation](#). The two-day programme helped the duo learn concepts through curated birdwatching, butterfly walks, field visits, and nature-based games, strengthening observation skills and ecological understanding for the budding nature educators. Continuing their quest, the team travelled to Tezpur (Assam) and participated in the [Future Full of Forests Fellowship](#). The team received training in project management, developing locally relevant biodiversity-themed games, and were taught tools to incorporate the ideas of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) into their conservation-oriented work as part of the week-long residential programme.

These experiences offered a much-needed confidence boost and a sense of belonging to a wider conservation community – a refreshing shift from their usual work in remote village settings. For most of the team, it was their first-ever visit out of Sarsoha, and the exposure, learning, and encouragement they received left a lasting impression.



Happy Anniversary!

The *Hamar Jungle La Hum Padhbo* Project became a year old on June 9, 2025. The team organised a three-day celebration marking this important milestone with nature-based games and sports, an exhibition of children's handicrafts such as mud toys and artwork using materials found in nature such as leaves, flowers, and twigs.

A Bid to Strengthen the Community

Project Leaders Bhumika Yadava and Deepak Yadav know that the support and participation from locals is an important part of the work they are doing in Mungeli district. Therefore, they promote environmental awareness and support community development in Chattisgarh's Mungeli district and nearby areas. The success of the children's nature education project has created a platform for Bhumika and Deepak to engage with youth and elder members on wildlife conservation, an issue close to their hearts. In May 2026, the team hosted an open-air discussion with 15 local youth, where topics such as the importance of conserving local wildlife and nature-based green jobs as a source of decent income were discussed at length. The team also organised a village movie fair where several nature-themed movies were screened. These events created a friendly and fun environment where conversations with over 30 participants revolved around conservation and other community issues.

In February 2026, Bhumika and Deepak took their conservation efforts to the local *Baiga* community through a community awareness programme highlighting the deep connection between local ecological knowledge and cultural identity. This event was organised in collaboration with the [Adivasi Samta Manch](#) in the nearby Kabirdham district. A rangoli making and drawing event set the base for women exploring and expressing their relationship with nature.



Dawa Sangpo Bhutia



LOCATION: CHONGRI, GYALSHING DISTRICT
STATE: SIKKIM

Born into a yak herder community in Chongri, a remote village located within the [Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve](#) in Sikkim’s Gyalsing district, Dawa Sangpo Bhutia’s identity and worldview has been shaped by the majestic mountains and the rich biodiversity surrounding him. An alumni of Green Hub (Tezpur, Assam), Dawa has been an integral part of WWF-India’s field teams conducting biodiversity/threat monitoring surveys and population assessment surveys for snow leopards and wild ungulates in Sikkim Himalaya since 2021.

With support from the Mud on Boots Project, Dawa is streamlining a sustainable and responsible ecotourism model to benefit visitors and protect the region’s wildlife while safeguarding the fading tradition of yak herding – a way of life with profound cultural and ecological significance. Further, Dawa is leading wildlife monitoring and patrolling activities, conducting workshops and awareness programmes in schools and adjoining villages and building a comprehensive plan for reducing, recycling, and the proper disposal of waste to keep the region clean and pristine with support from relevant organisations, the Forest Department and local stakeholders.

Sharing Stage with Peers
In the first week of December 2025, Dawa shared his experience as a grassroots conservation leader and aspects of responsible ecotourism work at the [Shared Futures Conclave](#) in Gangtok. This event served as a great opportunity for him to meet like-minded people and the ever-growing conservation community of the Sikkim Darjeeling Himalayan region.

Responsible Ecotourism in Chongri
Disturbed by the growing damage caused by unchecked commercial tourism in his homeland, Project Leader Dawa Sangpo Bhutia is leading the conservation driven Yambong Ecotourism Committee (YEC) in building a model for responsible tourism that respects both nature and tradition. Coming from a yak herding community, Dawa strongly believes that the age-old wisdom embedded in these practices holds valuable lessons for conservation. In June 2025, Dawa led the formation of a ‘Yak Herders Society’ in his home village with the aim of fostering a sense of community among local herders. This initiative led to the official recognition of the presence of herders in Gyalshing district following which yak feed was provided to all members as part of state government schemes.



Tree Plantations and More

On June 5, 2025, Dawa led a plantation drive leading to planting of over 1,000 native plant saplings in and around Chongri village. During this event, Sangkhola Government School students, local Forest Department personnel, and local community members were brought together as part of a conservation awareness programme on World Environment Day.

Motivated by the positive response of yak herders and swift action by the Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Sciences Department (Sikkim), in August 2025, Dawa spent 20 days living alongside yak herder families in the high-altitude regions of Gyalshing. His goal: to assess the potential of working with herders to open their homes to visitors and create a tourism model rooted in sustainability and respect. And by September, the Yak Herder Federation of India and Yak Herder Association of Sikkim were formed with the help of the Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Sciences Department (Sikkim) and [International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development](#) (ICIMOD), with Dawa being elected as the executive member in both bodies.

Following these tremendous developments, the team constructed an eco-camp in their village with funding support from the [Royal Enfield Social Mission](#) to provide safe and affordable accommodation for nature enthusiasts visiting the region. The space is also envisioned as a community nature camp for locals to rekindle their bonds with their environment. The team plans to use the space to host events that encourage exchange of traditional ecological knowledge between village elders, youth and children.

Meanwhile Dawa and his team are working with families in five villages within the Sindrabung ward under Gyalshing district to develop the region as a living museum through curation of guided food and cultural trail in the villages. To further this and assess local people's perspectives, in March 2026, the team organised a community get-together where residents of all five villages held lively discussions on the importance of local food, agricultural and cultural practices rooted in nature. A *lungta* (prayer flag) was hoisted to represent the community's commitment to preserve their local traditional and ecological knowledge. Having worked tirelessly to create a viable alternative to the conventional model of commercial tourism, Dawa and his team are hopeful that this approach will diversify people's income and incentivise especially the youth to take up jobs that align with the principles of responsible tourism.

Dawa's approaches are thoughtful and deeply intentional, focused not just on economic benefit, but on ensuring cultural integrity and ecological balance. The team's hard work has begun creating a positive buzz and young residents are slowly but surely coming around to the view that the region's wildlife is integral to their development.



Monitoring Gyalshing's Wildlife

Located within the [Kanchenjunga Biosphere Reserve](#), Project Leader Dawa Sangpo Bhutia shares his home with a spectacular array of wildlife including snow leopard, blue sheep, red panda, and Himalayan black bear, among others. A trusted local ally, he has been an integral part of WWF-India's field teams conducting biodiversity/threat monitoring surveys and population assessment surveys for snow leopards and wild ungulates in Sikkim Himalaya since 2021. With support from the Mud on Boots Project, since January 2025 Dawa and his team have spent over 100 days monitoring wildlife in sub-zero temperatures above 2,100 MSL within the [Kanchenjunga National Park](#) (KNP).

In January 2025, following talks of alleged illegal activities (poaching, hunting and logging) in the region, Dawa and his team sprang into action by expanding their documentation efforts and wildlife patrols in the lower regions of KNP, which are closer to human settlements. This exercise resulted in documenting elusive small cats such as the Asiatic golden and marbled, other wildlife such as clouded leopard, common leopard, spotted linsang, Himalayan black bear, serow, red panda and several species of birds, some of which were first time reports from the area. While the images of wildlife from camera traps far within KNP have left the locals in awe of the region's biodiversity, cameras placed closer home near villages have triggered a sense of responsibility among young residents to protect their wild neighbours.

Skilling Women and Youth

Wildlife conservation is a long-term community affair, the basis of Project Leader Dawa Sangpo Bhutia's responsible tourism initiative. Dawa has therefore left no stone unturned in exploring collaborations with like-minded NGOs and the Forest and Environment Department (Sikkim) to provide training and workshops for village youth, members of women's Self Help Groups (SHG), school students, and the entire community. He believes that skilling locals on various aspects of nature conservation will positively impact their life.

Dawa and his team began 2025 by organising a workshop to create awareness about the impact of human activities on nature, conservation laws, environmental rights, and the importance of nature conservation. A three-day event designed for local youth, where the first day of indoor sessions was followed with two days of outdoor activities, which included nature walks and birdwatching to encourage the 20 participants towards building a personal bond with nature.

The following March, Dawa and his team along with a local women's SHG ran a pilot of the long-term initiative that aims at tackling plastic pollution through repurposing waste collected during village clean-up drives into baskets and other products. Once a pristine mountain village, Chongri is now burdened with plastic waste generated as part of the rampant commercial tourism in the region. Further in October 2025, the team completed construction of a Resource Recovery Centre (RRC) to segregate collected waste. Currently, Dawa and his team are refining the product designs with help from skilled crafts persons and plan on training interested SHGs to expand the initiative's reach and impact.

Ghokivi Yeptho and Katoshe Chishi



Planting Wild Fruits

In June 2025, ACRMC and the Asukhomi Village youth department came together and planted 500 plum fruit saplings across the village to promote sustainable farming practices and contribute to the ecological balance of their village.

**LOCATION: ASOKHOMI VILLAGE,
ZUNHEBOTO DISTRICT
STATE: NAGALAND**

Spread across 280 ha. of forest, the Asukhomi Community Reserve was notified in 2020 with the consent and support of residents of Asukhomi village. This lush forest ranges in elevation from 600 to 2,200 m. above sea level, and boasts a wide diversity of wild species. Through their persistent outreach programmes and using their strong social bonding, the members of the Asukhomi Community Reserve Management Committee (ACRMC) have cultivated conservation practices that include the nurturing of native plants, sustainable collection of non-timber forest produce, and wildlife rescue and rehabilitation. Allies and collaborators of the Department of Foorest (Nagaland), the committee is trusted with awareness programmes, livelihood initiatives, and community outreach. ACRMC is dedicated to building an inclusive culture of community-based conservation in Asukhomi.

As part of their association with the Mud on Boots Project, two youth members of ACRMC – Ghokivi Yeptho and Katoshe Chishi, took on the leadership mantle, leading forest patrols, biodiversity documentation, conservation awareness, plantation drives, and livelihood training sessions, among others.

Supporting Community Livelihoods

Since 2020 the Asukhomi Community Reserve Management Committee has led implementation of several livelihood projects in Asukhomi in collaboration with local non-government organisations (NGOs), self-help groups (SHGs), and the Department of Forest (Nagaland) Taking this practice forward, in January 2025, with funding support from the Department of Forest (Nagaland), the committee procured a banana fibre extraction machine. Following this, a six-day training programme was conducted to teach interested youth the use and handling of the instrument with the help of the Nagaland Tool Room and Training Centre.



Lighting Asukhomi

In February 2025, the Department of Forests (Nagaland) donated solar street lamps to Asukhomi village. The members of ACRMC took the lead in installing it in the village, ensuring an easier and safer commute at night for residents.

Later in April 2025, Ghokovi and Katoshe partnered with the village Sunday School Department for a deliciously innovative project – stink bean seed pickle! This revival of a traditional recipe helped cultivate local skills, encouraged entrepreneurship and gave youth a delicious way to support their community's economy. ACRMC also kicked off a brand-new partnership with the INALIMI SHG and launched a mushroom cultivation initiative. Several village members learnt the ropes of sustainable farming while planting seeds for a long-term income. With hands-on training, this initiative turned fungus into a force for good!

Not stopping there, in May 2025, ACRMC collaborated with local stakeholders (the Asukhomi Youth Department, the Asukhomi Baptist Church, and the Asukhomi Student's Union), and successfully organised a comprehensive skill development programme. Following several discussions, the programme was curated to cater to the local livelihood scene and with the aim of empowering the youth of Asukhomi by enhancing their capabilities across various fields. The programme consisted of an awareness and counseling session on mental health, training on the abc



of baking, hands-on session on floral arrangements, a photography workshop, and a career guidance event. The programme turned out to be a valuable and transformative opportunity for many youth of the region.

Forest Patrols

Project Leaders Ghokivi Yephtho and Katoshe Chishi along with other members of the ACRMC have been conducting wildlife patrols within the Community Conserved Area (CCA) to ensure there are no violations of the complete ban on hunting in the region. In April, the duo led a week-long trek into the forests and checked for signs of alleged illegal activities (hunting, poaching and deforestation). This early-detection patrol isn't just for surveillance; it's a commitment to keeping the forest thriving and safe for generations to come.

The team also undertook a trekking path clearance drive, ensuring safe and accessible routes for community members and visitors. The initiative aimed at promoting eco-tourism, encouraging outdoor activities among youth, and on maintaining the natural beauty of the area while preserving its environment. Additionally, the team installed camera traps (on loan from the Nagaland Forest Department) to gather valuable data on local wildlife. With the gathered information on wildlife, members of ACRMC hope to make informed decisions to support local biodiversity and maintain a healthy ecosystem.

Nature Education and Plantation Drives

Project Leaders Ghokivi Yephtho and Katoshe Chisih gradually expanded their conservation efforts to include the students at Government High School Asuloto (Asukhomi) as part of their work with the Mud on Boots Project. Starting off with organising environment-themed drawing and extempore speech events, they gradually built a rapport with the teachers and students over months. On June 5, 2025, the duo along with members of ACRMC with support from the Department of Forests (Nagaland) celebrated World Environment Day with the school teachers and children. The team organised a native tree and flower plantation programme for students for a second year in a row. This initiative helped raise environmental awareness among students while creating a colourful campus for the children to learn in.

Highlights 2025-26



Riding the DEI High

In March 2023, the Mud on Boots Project and [Canopy Collective](#) brought together a group of multidisciplinary practitioners to design a workshop titled 'Embracing the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in nature conservation'. The same year we pooled resources and organised the first DEI workshop for 20 grassroots conservation practitioners at the Living Labs in Tezpur (Assam). Based on the overwhelming positive response of participants, the workshop has been conducted two more times.

The workshop is a three-day event consisting of in-depth discussions on concepts of biases, caste, class, sexuality, nature and conservation practices and leadership. A set of mixed techniques/ approaches including body movement and visualisation exercises, zine making and use of drawing, meditation and sound healing sessions have been built into the workshop to help break down complex real life situations and concepts that encourage introspection and reflection among participants.

In March 2026, the DEI Workshop was incubated into the [Future Full of Forests Fellowship](#) and voted the most impactful event within the fellowship that offers a bevy of innovative and well-built workshops!



Dechin Marches Ahead

A passionate conservation leader, Mud on Boots Project alumna Dechin Pema Saingmo has continued working with [WWF-India](#) for wildlife conservation in her home valley of Jemeithang (Tawang district, Arunachal Pradesh). In a bid to balance her personal and professional responsibilities, Dechin now focuses on actively working with her community to address the pertinent issue of waste management in Jemeithang.

In March 2026, Dechin travelled to Tezpur and attended the Future Full of Forest Fellowship, where she received training on developing biodiversity games, evaluation and monitoring of projects, and the importance of DEI in conservation, among other things. She also met with some Mud on Boots Project Leaders along with other practitioners from across Northeast India.



Welcoming Jerusha

In January 2026, we welcomed Project Leader Jerusha D'Souza. Experienced with creating modules on place-based education and having in-depth understanding of the mapping and planning landscape in Goa, Jerusha is leading 'Map Makers of Goa', a resource mapping project in Aldona village to revive local people's interest in decision-making and land use.

Having worked with grassroots movements such as the award-winning [Amche Mollem Campaign](#) and the [Goa Foundation](#), Jerusha focusses on using her experiences to design engaging learning experiences rooted in the local context. In her work, she has incorporated stewardship towards land and the natural world, while encouraging students to be learners and knowledge creators.

So far she has conducted a two-day visioning workshop for 29 panchayat members and students, helping them understand common goals for mapping in the context of village development, designed and led a one-day nature education workshop for nature educators of Goa, and conducted mapping exercises in eight wards within Aldona.



MoB Project Leaders Meet

Between March 6 and 12, 2026, Project Leaders Jerusha D'Souza, Dechin Pema Saingmo (2020 batch), Bhumika Yadav, Deepak Yadav and two members of the '*Hamar Jungle*' team Manisha Dhurve and Sarita Kujur met in Tezpur (Assam) at the first edition of the 'Future Full of Forest Fellowship'. This meeting allowed shared learning and helped Project Leaders better understand each other's efforts and bond over things beyond wildlife conservation. More importantly, it helped build a sense of camaraderie and belonging to a larger conservation community.

Dawa Attends Yak Festival

Uptill May 2025, the yak herding community in Gyalshing district, Sikkim did not make it to the state government's official records, depriving herders of essential support and aid. In June 2025, Project Leader Dawa Sangpo Bhutia and the members of the Yambong Ecotourism Committee consolidated the yak herders of Chongri and nearby villages through the formation of a yak association as part of the responsible ecotourism model. Following this in April 2026, Dawa represented the Yak Herders Federation



of India at the annual Yak festival in Charratey (Phalelung, Nepal). At the event, he met and exchanged ideas and knowledge with yak herders from Nepal. This is crucial as Chonri and nearby villages in his home share common grazing grounds with the Nepalese counterparts along the Indo-Nepal international border.

Vishal Continues to Rewild Chamba

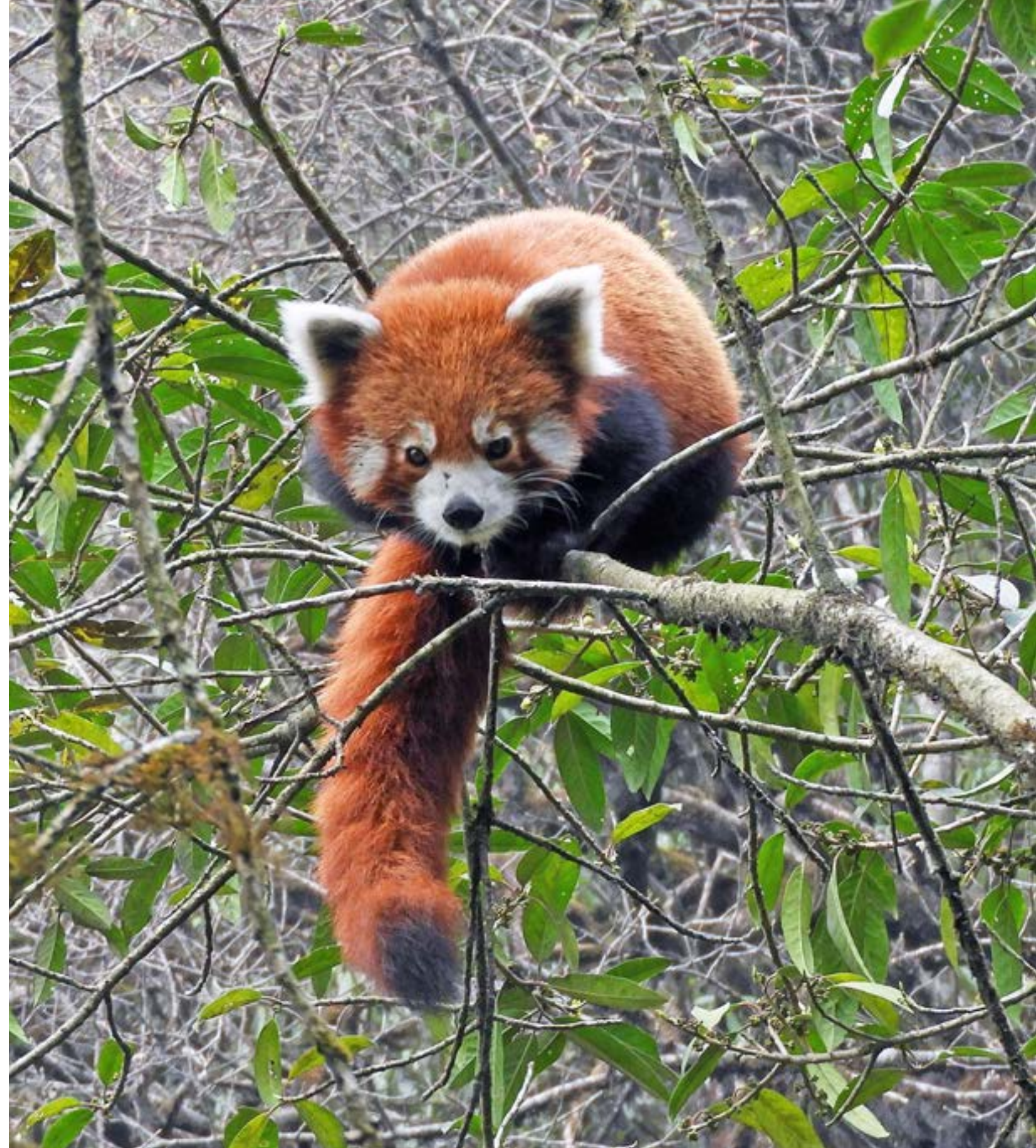
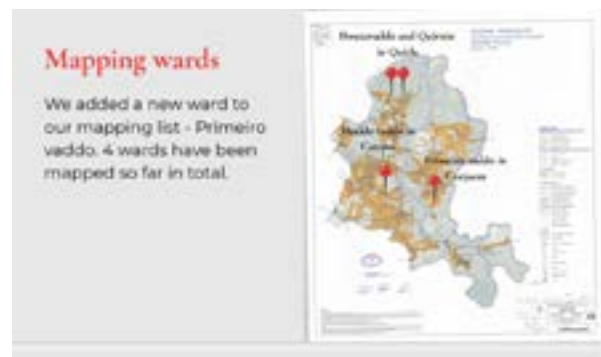
In 2023, the Mud on Boots Project's seed funding enabled alumni Project Leader Vishal Ahuja in fulfilling his long-standing dream of starting a nursery to grow and nurture native plant saplings



for use during local plantation drives. With support from [Zoo Outreach Organisation](#), Vishal continues to lead his rewilding project with the aim of fostering human-wildlife coexistence by growing native fruit trees for the wildlife in Chamba (Himachal Pradesh). In 2025, he planted 3,000 saplings grown at the nursery at Dugli village with support from farmers, school students and volunteers.

Bimonthly Online Check-ins

Working alone in remote locations (often under challenging environmental conditions) tends to take a toll on work and also on one's drive. To address this issue, in January 2025, Project Coordinator Neyi Jamoh and all current Project Leaders decided to meet online once every two months on a predetermined date and time. Envisioned as a space for Project Leaders to find solidarity and camaraderie through sharing work updates, experiences and challenges faced on field, the bimonthly meets are slowly growing into a medium for knowledge exchange among the team. Despite experiencing internet issues at each meet, the team has already met thrice in 2026.



Acknowledgements

Sanctuary Nature Foundation's Mud on Boots Project is a testament to the collaborative nature of conservation efforts. We are thus privileged to partner with many stellar like-minded professionals and organisations that propel us forward.

Thank you, Naren Sreenivasan of WASI; Nandini Velho and Dikshya of Canopy Collective (Tezpur); Mallika Chandra; Rita Banerji, Bonti Saikia, Nikita Buragohain of Dusty Foot Foundation; Krishnapriya Tamma of Azim Premji University; Yamini Srikanth of Dakshin Foundation; Salil Subedi; Rituparna Neog; Rohan Pandit of WWF-India; Nadeem Quadri of Wildlife Conservation Fund; Yama Sandeep and Shivangi Moondra of Padmini VNA Mechatronics; Rutuja Dhamale and Ashish Gokhale of The Habitats Trust; Uddipana Kalita, and Taniya Buragohain of Canopy Collective.

We are grateful to folks at Canopy Collective and Green Hub (Tezpur) for helping us bring the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) workshop to reality for the fourth year.

We are also indebted to the many members of the Indian Forest Service, who have supported the Mud on Boots Project. We are thankful to the support given by the Forest Department and the Fisheries Department of Karnataka. A heartfelt thanks goes out to the staff of Dachigam National Park and the Jammu & Kashmir Forest Department. We are grateful to the Government of Sikkim's Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Sciences Department and the Forest and Environment Department for their support.

Thank you, Cara Tejpal, for selflessly continuing to nurture the project. Undoubtedly, this project would not be possible without our wonderful team – Prachi Galange, Shatakshi Gawade, Lakshmy Raman, Qamruddin Shaikh, Raj Gopalan, Vina Sonu and P. Nishita Kumar at the Sanctuary Nature Foundation, which provides backend support in uncountable and invaluable ways each month.

We would once again like to acknowledge the work of our Project Leaders and all grassroots conservationists across India. It is your drive and conviction that gives purpose and merit to the Mud on Boots Project. Thank you for all that you do.



Our Supporters

The Mud on Boots Project is a publicly funded initiative. It is the love and generosity of our supporters that has fuelled the incredible work carried out under the project. So far, we have found stability and strength through steady contributions from Dia Mirza and Anushka Singh. Their generosity has enabled the conservation works and dreams of over 38 Project Leaders in various corners of our beautiful country.

We are deeply moved and encouraged by all contributions – small and large towards the project. A special thanks goes out to Viveka Bhandari for her faith in the Mud on Boots Project.

Our team is delighted to receive support for the fourth year in a row from Padmini VNA Mechatronics. Their generous donation has enabled the works of Mud on Boots Project Leaders since January 2023.



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Pg 10	Courteys: WASI	Pg 27	Courtesy: ACRMC
Pg 11	Courtesy: WASI	Pg 28	Left: Canopy Collective Right: Canopy Collective
Pg 12	Courtesy: Kashif Farooq Bhat	Pg 29	Left: Jerusha D'Souza Right: Jerusha D'Souza
Pg 13	Courtesy: Kashif Farooq Bhat	Pg 30	Top Left: Courtesy: Dawa Sangpo Bhutia Botton Left: Vishal Ahuja Top Right: Jerusha D'Souza
Pg 14	Courtesy: Kashif Farooq Bhat	Pg 31	Reva Duraphe/Sanctuary Photolibrary
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