



THE MUD ON BOOTS PROJECT

IMPACT REPORT 2021



**THE
MUD ON BOOTS
PROJECT**

The [Mud on Boots Project](#) is Sanctuary's unique booster programme designed to recognise and support grassroots conservationists across India. The project focuses on supporting individuals from local communities whose contributions to biodiversity conservation are overlooked because of a lack of affiliations, educational qualifications, mainstream opportunities, and language barriers. Over two years, Project Leaders receive a monetary grant and strategic support from the Sanctuary Nature Foundation. Such support can include communications, field trips, expert input, publicity, and more! Since its inception in 2017, the Mud on Boots Project has supported over 26 grassroots conservationists from 14 states and one Union Territory across India. The project has also extended support to small grassroots organisations and citizen groups that are campaigning for environmental protection or addressing conservation issues. Owing to the pandemic, 2021 was an exceedingly difficult year. Despite this, the Mud on Boots Project has continued to grow. To read about the work of our present and alumni Project Leaders, go to our [website](#).

Where are our Project Leaders?

- 5 years since inception
- 14 States and 1 Union Territory
- 26 Project Leaders
- 2 Small Grantees





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Amir Kumar Chhetri



**LOCATION: PANIJHORA FOREST VILLAGE,
JALPAIGURI
STATE: WEST BENGAL**

Amir's home, Panijhora forest village, lies adjacent to the Chapramari Wildlife Sanctuary and the territorial forests of the Jalpaiguri Forest Division in West Bengal. The forest provides non-timber forest produce, water for irrigation, and occasional employment through works carried out by the Forest Department. However, living within forested areas also means that locals have constant close encounters with their wild neighbours, which can leave both parties stressed. Using a combination of technological interventions and through constant engagement with residents, Amir has been working to foster coexistence in his village as well as in the tea estate-forest mosaic landscapes in northern West Bengal.

Fences of Hope!

Amir's fences have proven to be effective against wild pigs. He and his team are already preparing to collect data in the upcoming maize cultivation season. This second season data will provide a better understanding of the type of solar fences that are more suitable for deterring specific kinds of wild animal movement into agricultural fields. This data will also inform modifications to the existing fence design to make it a more effective animal-friendly alternative that can foster human-animal coexistence in Panijhora.

Building Fences for Human-Animal Coexistence

After conducting five public awareness meetings and follow up interactions with the 10 farming households in his village (between January and June), Amir finally won the approval of all local stakeholders i.e., the Forest Department, the local Eco-Development Committee (EDC), and residents of Panijhora forest village to install solar fences to protect crops. Following this, in August 2021 he travelled to Dekagaon, Assam, and attended a week-long training programme organised by Arjun Kamdar of WWF-India to learn about the construction and maintenance of solar fences. He also interacted with several residents to understand the intricacies of community fence management and maintenance.

Using the technical knowledge gained through this training, regular guidance provided by his team from Coexistence Project (Amir's affiliate organisation), support from various organisations such as Voice for Asian Elephant Society, Solitary Nature and Animal Protection Foundation (SNAP), and the Mud on Boots Project, Amir installed two types of solar fences to assess the effectiveness of each in deterring wild animal movement into crop fields. The fences have a total length of three kilometres and cover the entire area under cultivation in Panijhora. They are owned by the residents and keeping them standing has been a true team effort made possible by



Regenerating Degraded Forests using Ethnobotanical Knowledge

Between August and September 2021, Amir Chhetri used his knowledge about local flora and assisted Priyanka Das (Coordinator of Coexistence Project) to carry out vegetation sampling in the degraded areas of the Chapramari Wildlife Sanctuary. The knowledge generated from this exercise has been shared with the Forest Department of Jalpaiguri Forest Division and will also be used to plan and prepare systematic ecological restoration within Chapramari.

the overwhelming support from residents. In the past few months, Amir has led routine monitoring exercises and repaired the fences whenever it was damaged by wild animals especially elephants.

This year, Amir recorded the total crop area that was damaged by elephants and wild pigs before and after the fence installation. He also set up three camera traps to monitor the movement of wild animals into the crop field.

Growing Food for Wild Elephants

Between March and April 2021, Amir participated in a plantation programme organised by the Forest Department within the Chapramari Wildlife Sanctuary, which lies adjacent to Panijhora. The forests in the fringes of the sanctuary have been degraded by unregulated anthropogenic pressure. He worked with the Forest Department in identifying and strategically removing invasive species to aid the renewal and growth of native plant species, which forms the food base for wild herbivores, especially wild elephants. Along with other residents of Panijhora, Amir planted native fodder plants such as *chalta* and *sindure* for use by elephants in an area covering 30 ha.

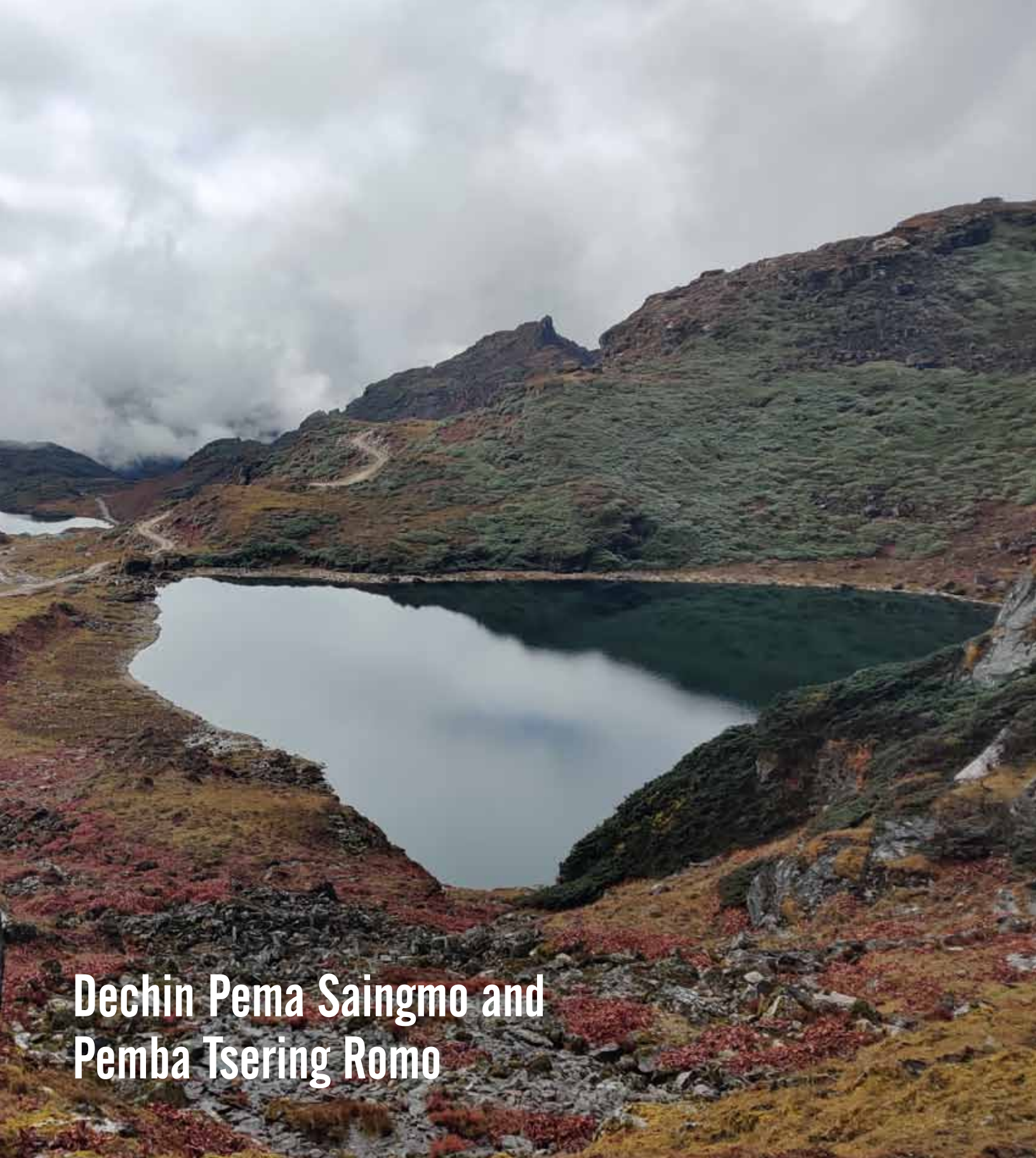
Such restoration work, which focuses on creating food stocks for wild animals within the sanctuary, is being used as a strategy to diffuse depredation pressure on agriculture fields and to foster human-wildlife coexistence in the region.



Safe Homes for Leopards, Safer Homes for Humans

Apart from humans and elephants, the tea estate-forest mosaic landscape in northern West Bengal is home to another large mammal, the leopard. This cohabitation situation often leads to accidental interactions and possible mishaps, causing stress and agony to both humans and leopards. Together with his colleagues from Coexistence Project, Amir Chhetri is working on a long-term project to estimate the population density of leopards in this landscape. He conducted surveys to identify suitable locations for installing camera traps and built camaraderie with local people to ensure the safety of the devices after their installation.

Between November and December 2021, he installed 30 camera traps and routinely monitored and collected data to shed light on the current population density of leopards, their population dynamics, and life-history traits. So far, the project that is headed by Aritra Kshetry (Team Leader, Coexistence Project) has found the leopard density to be a whopping 15 leopards per 100 sq. km. within tea estates, a finding that will help plan future strategies to ensure that the landscape is a safe home for humans as well as leopards.



Dechin Pema Saingmo and Pemba Tsering Romo



LOCATION: ZEMITHANG CIRCLE, TAWANG STATE: ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Dechin Pema Saingmo and Pemba Tsering Romo have been working with WWF-India (Dechin and Pemba's affiliate organisation) to develop strategies for the long-term conservation of snow leopards and other high-altitude wildlife of Mago-chu valley in Arunachal Pradesh. Toward this, they are using camera trapping technology to study the density and distribution of the ghost cat and also conducting qualitative interviews with locals to document their perspectives on conservation, traditional practices, and institutions that are rooted in natural resource management. They are also committed to protecting the wintering habitat of the Black-necked Crane in Zemithang valley.

A Win-Win Approach!

In January 2021, Dechin and Pemba convinced one of the 12 local cricket teams to support their awareness campaign focused on protecting the wintering habitat of the Black-necked Crane (BNC) during the two-week-long annual cricket tournament in Zemithang. The team adopted the BNC as their official logo and wore t-shirts with a BNC image, which was photographed by Pemba. This subtle conservation awareness measure helped in initiating conversations on the cultural significance of the BNC and the need to protect them among many groups within the 300 odd audience members who had gathered to witness the matches.

Sharing Knowledge Means Creating Knowledge

Between March and April 2021, Project Leaders Dechin and Pemba travelled to three districts in Arunachal Pradesh – East Siang, West Kameng, and Changlang – and conducted training sessions to demonstrate camera trapping methods and data analysis techniques to Forest Department personnel. These training sessions were conducted in anticipation of a state-wide snow leopard and high-altitude mammal population estimation. They shared and taught the usage of important GPS settings such as marking waypoints, tracking routes, and finding previous locations, to over 60 participants comprising forest guards, field biologists, research officers, and Range Forest Officers from eight Forest Divisions. Dechin and Pemba also assisted the participants in designing exercises for the upcoming surveys based on the existing field conditions in each district and/or division.

In mid-July, the duo was part of another camera trap training exercise jointly organised by the Tawang Forest Department and WWF-India at Tawang. This exercise was organised to train the district Forest Department staff for the camera trapping exercise aimed at finding evidence of snow leopard presence in Tawang. Seven staff members from three different forest divisions – Tawang, Jang, and Lumla – took part in the five-day training. The use of two different models of camera traps i.e., Browning and Cuddeback were taught to the participants. Details of the movement and behavioural ecology and diet of snow



leopards were shared and GPS training specific to the ghost cat's habitat was also taught to all participants.

Walking Amid Snow Leopards

In mid-July 2021, following the completion of a five-day training exercise for the Forest Department personnel of Tawang and a detailed discussion of all aspects of field work, Dechin and Pemba took part in the first-ever camera trapping exercise to find evidence of snow leopard presence in the district. This was a collaborative project that was organised and executed by the Forest Department of Tawang and WWF-India. The duo were part of a nine member team and were responsible for setting up camera traps in two locations – the mountain ranges above Tatsang Gompa and Lumpo villages in Zemithang Circle. It took them 12 days of trekking and surveying above the tree line to strategically place 24 camera traps in various locations across the two mountain ranges.

This camera trapping exercise was challenging even for the likes of Dechin and Pemba, who have grown up roaming the valley. Amidst the fog, rain and fatigue, the team trekked from 2,000 to 5,000 masl. and found moments of respite while marveling at high-altitude wildlife such as beavies of pheasants, herds of blue sheep, several lone-ranging musk deer, all while walking through meadows carpeted with wild native flora in full bloom. Assistance from local porters and seasoned *drokpa* (yak herder in the local *Monpa* language) was sought to guide the team into and back from the wild.

They waited for almost three months before returning to the mountains to retrieve the camera traps in the last week of October 2021. This time around, the team endured harsher weather conditions. As the valley was preparing to welcome another winter season, the mountains were often blanketed in fog and light showers were a constant. They were glad to be guided by seasoned *drokpas* who led the way based on their experiences, usually by identifying easily unnoticed stones stacked as markers on mountain passes. The team was excited to find that their camera traps have indeed captured the first-ever photographic evidence of snow leopards in the Tawang region! This kept their spirits high for most of the arduous trek.

This camera trapping exercise is an important step towards planning and designing the long-term project for the conservation of snow leopard and other high-altitude wildlife in Mago-Chu valley, Arunachal Pradesh.

Working With Locals

On December 11, 2021, (International Mountain Day), the duo organised a village cleanliness drive to raise awareness about the importance of biodiversity conservation. Residents from Brokenthang, Khalengteng, Zemithang, and Kharman villages participated in this event and learned about responsible ways to dispose off plastic waste and also about the importance of protecting the wintering habitat of the BNC in Zemithang. The event was appreciated by all village elders and local leaders.



Speaking Up for *Thung-Thung Karmo*

The three-kilometre-long stretch along the *Nyamjang chu* river in Zemithang valley, which forms the wintering habitat of the Black-necked Crane (BNC) is also used for sand mining by a few members of the resident *Monpa* community. On November 26, 2021, Dechin and Pemba organised a meeting with 12 members of local youth (two of whom are sand miners) from all six villages in Zemithang Circle to discuss strategies for protecting the wintering habitat of the BNC in *Pangchen* valley (Zemithang is known locally as *Pangchen* or the valley of non-violence).

After three hours of discussions, everyone agreed to Dechin and Pemba's suggestion that holding a meeting with the larger group of local sand miners could lead to a practical solution with everyone's support. On December 12, 2021, the duo organised a meeting with 11 sand miners and the owner of a power plant used for operating a stone crusher. They shared information on the ecological significance of the BNC's wintering habitat and stressed its importance as being the last standing armour against an impending dam on the river. They also focused on the religious significance of *Thung-Thung Karmo* (BNC in local *Monpa* language) to rekindle feelings of ownership towards the BNC among the participants.

All participants of the meeting also expressed their points of view and ideas openly. Dechin and Pemba proposed halting sand mining during peak wintering months as a way to continue livelihood activities without hampering the wintering

of BNC. All the participants responded positively and assured their cooperation to halt sand mining during the active wintering months, which extends between mid-November and February-end every year. They believe this strategy will allow the BNC to enjoy their winter homes without disturbances and also cater to the livelihoods of locals by allowing sand mining in months before and after the wintering period.

Inspiring Future Generations to be Wildlife Conservationists

Dechin and Pemba understand and believe that children are the most important stakeholders of the rich natural heritage of Zemithang. On November 26-27, 2021, they conducted conservation education talks in two schools in Zemithang circle. They interacted with 14 teachers and 70 students and using a storytelling format, shared information on the migratory route of the Black-necked Cranes, its wintering habitat in Zemithang, and the importance of conserving the rich biodiversity of the valley.

Further, they showcased a selection of pictures of the fauna photographed during their numerous field visits in the region and also shared experiences from the recently concluded camera trapping exercise. The teachers appreciated their efforts in raising awareness about biodiversity conservation and expressed their support for all future conservation awareness drives, especially those focusing on the Black-necked Crane.



Phuntsog Dolma



LOCATION: RONG VALLEY, UNION TERRITORY OF LADAKH.

A botanist by training, Phuntsog has been studying and documenting the diverse high-altitude flora of Ladakh since 2018. She is working with local stakeholders, such as livestock rearers, to understand pasture richness and is building baseline knowledge for understanding the conservation issues facing pasture lands in Ladakh. Her work will be crucial to devise sustainable-use strategies for high-altitude pastures, an important community asset. It will also help foster the coexistence of nature and people in Ladakh. Phuntsog is also the Flock Supervisor at the District Sheep Husbandry Department, Leh.

Maps the Way!

Between March and June 2021, Project Leader Phuntsog Dolma visited 60 pasture areas in Rong valley and created seven participatory pasture maps with help from residents who learned rudimentary mapping techniques. For this, she undertook regular field visits to meet with livestock owners to identify suitable pastures near their village and created hand-drawn village maps highlighting various indices such as roads, current use of pasture, the season of use, and so on. Such documentation will offer detailed information on pastures to breeders, researchers, and policy makers and can be used to plan pasture conservation strategies. This is probably the first effort of its kind to create a participatory map of pastures in Ladakh. Phuntsog's efforts were acknowledged and appreciated by the Forest Department, who have requested the District Sheep Husbandry Department, Leh, (Phuntsog's affiliated organisation) to create maps for all the villages in the valley.

Finding Humane Solutions to the Free-Ranging Dogs Issue

Through her many travels around Rong valley, Phuntsog learned that free-ranging dogs (FRDs) are one of the major threats to wildlife and livestock there. She surveyed Teri, Kyungyam, and Himya villages and spoke with 40 residents to have a clearer picture of this issue. On September 27, 2021, she organised a formal interactive session with residents, which included the *Sarpanch*

Phuntsog becomes an Author

Phuntsog collaborated with Dr. Konchok Dorje, Assistant Professor, University of Ladakh, and published an exquisite field guide in July 2021. This book titled *Plants of Ladakh*, published by the Nature Conservation Foundation – India, spotlights the rugged flora of Ladakh and is a valuable addition to India's natural history documentation. Over the past four years, Dr. Dorje and Phuntsog have trekked across the region to collect, identify, and document plant species, recording nomenclature, botanical features, and indigenous uses, and capturing excellent photographs of 193 plant species.



and the *Nambardar* (representative of village heads) of Changthang region and learned that FRDs frequently kill wild animals, compete with wildlife for food, and also interbreed with closely related species, resulting in a spike in their local population. Phuntsog and her colleagues from the Sheep Husbandry Department, Ladakh, went on to organise a week-long Animal Birth Control (ABC) Camp across three villages between October 3-9, 2021. During this camp, her team safely and humanely sterilised 35 free-ranging dogs.

Fostering Human-Wildlife Coexistence in Rong Valley

Phuntsog understands that herders bear huge economic losses when wild predators hunt their pashmina goats. In 2021, Phuntsog exhibited fine negotiation and decision-making skills while dealing with two separate cases of wildlife (a Eurasian lynx and a snow leopard) killing pashmina goats in Kyungyam village in Rong valley. Each time, she was quick to arrive at the house of the livestock owner, patiently interact with them to take stock of the situation, and recommend two specific forms of compensations – replacement with a new batch of goats as a form of immediate relief and provide chain-link fencing to reinforce the shed to prevent such incidents in the future.

Such fast and practical steps taken by Phuntsog, along with building camaraderie with residents through her constant interaction, has ensured that livestock owners understand and accept that such incidents are a part of rearing livestock in the valley as it is also home to *Ee* and *Shan* (local names for Eurasian lynx and snow leopard respectively).

Sowing Seeds of Awareness

Phuntsog believes that creating awareness about the rare floral biodiversity of Ladakh among resident communities, especially the youth, is the key to conserving these natural marvels. Keeping this in mind, Phuntsog delivered two presentations namely 'Conservation of Medicinal plants of Ladakh Trans-Himalaya' and 'Floral Conservation and Threats in Ladakh' on March 7 and December 27, 2021 respectively. The former was attended by over 30 local youth from colleges and schools while 30 trainees and staff members of the Sheep Husbandry Department, Ladakh attended the latter. During both presentations, she highlighted the importance of highland pastures as being home to native wild flora, which in turn nurtures wildlife



Sharing Her Skills

In October 2021, Phuntsog provided practical training for 29 Stock Assistant Trainees at the Pashmina Goat Farm, Upshi. During this 10-day event, she taught skills for identification and documentation techniques such as sample collection of important fodder species to the assistants of the Sheep & Animal Husbandry Department, Leh.

and sustains humans in the region. She also highlighted the major threats and discussed conservation strategies to promote the sustainable use of high-altitude pasture lands in the region.

Growing a Piece of Pasture

Pastures support wildlife and the traditional livelihoods of the Ladakhi people who are dependent on them for livestock rearing, food, and medicine. Phuntsog believes that well-planned trials on ex-situ propagation followed by the cultivation of important native flora can help in reducing pressure on highland pasture areas. Keeping this in mind, she constructed a polyhouse at the Pashmina Goat Farm, Upshi, with the help and support of her colleagues between September and October 2021. This polyhouse will be used to conduct trials on the production of important high-altitude fodder plants, a strategy for pasture and plant conservation in Rong valley. In the past year, Phuntsog visited 60 pasture lands and collected seeds of over 20 important high-altitude fodder plants. These seeds have been carefully dried and stored for propagation in trials that will commence in the spring of 2022.



Radheshyam Pemani Bishnoi



**LOCATION: POKHRAN, JAISALMER
STATE: RAJASTHAN**

Radheshyam Pemani Bishnoi is a wildlife conservationist, a trained wildlife rescuer, and a photographer working to protect the critically endangered Great Indian Bustard (GIB) in Dholia village, Pokhran, Rajasthan. He is a volunteer with the Ecology, Rural Development and Sustainability (ERDS) Foundation that focuses on garnering community support and participation in protecting the GIBs and their habitat, which lies outside the notified areas of the Desert National Park in and around Pokhran.

Congratulations Radheshyam!

In recognition of his remarkable wildlife conservation-oriented work, in and around the Desert National Park, Radheshyam was honoured with the [Sanctuary Young Naturalist Award](#) on December 4, 2021.

Wildlife Rescue and Patrol

Project Leader Radheshyam Bishnoi patrols over 50 sq. km. of the Pokhran landscape in Rajasthan to monitor the critically endangered Great Indian Bustard (GIB), its habitat, and associated wildlife found here. During his weekly patrols, he routinely covers grasslands, waterbodies, open forests, and areas where human-introduced challenges such as speeding vehicles and high-tension electric wires endanger the region's wildlife. These strategic patrols in the GIB habitat, which lies outside the Desert National Park framework, have ensured wild animals in distress are rescued and given immediate care. This also enables Radheshyam and his friends to closely monitor the arrival of migratory birds, and prepare waterholes in the summer by identifying areas that are frequently used by specific wild animals and birds.

In 2021, Radheshyam rescued over 50 wild animals and birds injured in road accidents, those that were victims of electrocution, or those attacked by free-ranging dogs. These rescues included chinkaras, Common Cranes, nilgai, wild pigs and more. He provided essential first aid, took care of the injured individuals, and released them into the forest once they had fully recovered.

Radheshyam also routinely organised emergency night patrols along with his colleagues from ERDS Foundation and Forest Department personnel to nab wildlife poachers. This past year he was involved in executing 13 such patrols and helped the local Forest Department officials in apprehending and arresting seven poachers



Godly Godawans!

Radheshyam's image of a GIB from Pokhran, Rajasthan graced the [cover](#) of the January 2022 issue of *Sanctuary Cub* magazine. He also shared his experiences from the desert landscape and how he is working to spread awareness about the GIB, and the current threats to their survival, with the younger generation by contributing an [article](#) to the coveted magazine.

between June-July 2021. He exhibited extraordinary communication and negotiation skills and continues to maintain a network of allies from local herding communities, who are his trusted informants keeping a close eye on illegal activities in the desert landscape. His wildlife conservation work in the region has won strong support and appreciation from the local communities.

Conservation Awareness Through Wildlife Threat Reporting

While monitoring the unique biodiversity of the Desert National Park landscape, Radheshyam also made a point to document and report incidents that pose immediate and long-term threats to wildlife in the region. This he believes is an effective way of drawing public attention towards such grave issues, garnering wider support for biodiversity conservation, and creating awareness on threats being faced by wildlife.

He highlighted several issues being faced by wildlife in Pokhran through his prompt and accurate reporting of the same in local and national print media outlets. Some of the many important issues that he helped bring to public attention were high-tension electric wires being death traps to resident wildlife, especially the GIB, the alarming number of wildlife casualties due to accidents on rail and roadways passing through biodiverse regions like Pokhran, and several incidents of wildlife poaching in the region.

In addition to these, after witnessing several cases of fatal attacks on wildlife by free-ranging dogs in Pokhran, he was quick in bringing attention to this grave issue by photo-documenting incidents of attacks and regularly shared them with the then Mud on Boots Project Coordinator Maitreyee Mujumdar. Based on his relentless documentation, she drafted a letter appealing for appropriate humane interventions to address the threat of free-ranging dogs to wildlife across India. This letter was addressed to the Animal Welfare Board of India and relevant officials of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. Similarly, his reporting formed the basis for a letter appealing to the PCCF of Rajasthan and the Chief Wildlife Warden of Desert National Park to address the long-standing issue of mange infestation in desert foxes in the region.

A Picture Is Worth a Million Likes

During his routine patrols around the western arc of the critically endangered GIB habitat in Pokhran, Radheshyam has ardently documented the biodiversity of the landscape



by maintaining date-wise entries of all wildlife sightings and capturing mesmerising photographs of the same. He sighted and photographed resident wildlife such as the GIB, chinkara, nilgai, desert fox, Indian fox, spiny-tailed lizard, White-rumped Vulture and King Vulture among many others. He also documented over 25 species of migratory winged visitors including the Houbara Bustard, Demoiselle Crane, Rosy Pelican, Cream-coloured Courser, Sociable Lapwing, Red-backed Shrike, Cinereous Vulture, Himalaya Griffon Vulture, Eurasian Griffon Vulture, and Short-eared Owl that made Pokhran their home for a few months this year.

Radheshyam has been using his vivid photographs to showcase the rich biodiversity of the desert grassland habitat in Pokhran to captured public attention to highlight the need for protecting this landscape. Many of his wildlife photographs were featured by local and national Hindi and English language print media outlets alongside important conservation-oriented news pieces.

He has also curated a library of wildlife images on his Instagram profile ([Radheshyam Bishnoi Photography](#)) and believes it plays a huge role in bringing awareness among the masses, especially the younger generation, about the many creatures that share these desert grasslands with the human inhabitants.



Vishal Ahuja



**LOCATION: CHAMBA
STATE: HIMACHAL PRADESH**

Vishal has been working around the Kalatop-Khajjiar Wildlife Sanctuary in Chamba Valley, Himachal Pradesh, to develop locally relevant long-term solutions to the existing human-wildlife conflict in this landscape, famous worldwide for its exquisite natural beauty. During his decade-long career in conservation, he has conducted several studies to understand the ecology of the Himalayan grey langur (also known as the Chamba sacred langur). He has also collaborated with scientists, Forest Department personnel, and local stakeholders such as students, gram panchayats, and farmer's self-help groups, to raise awareness about [rewilding degraded forest patches](#) as a way to secure food for the Chamba sacred langur and other wild animals in the region. His rewilding project aims to foster farmer-wild animal coexistence in Chamba in the foreseeable future.

Supporting Local Rewilding Initiatives

At the invitation of the Territorial Forest Department of Chamba district, Vishal took part in the celebration of the 72nd Van Mahotsava on July 21, 2021, in Masroond village. This event was also attended by residents from Masroond village, the students of Government Medical College, Chamba, volunteers from two local NGOs, the Red Cross Society, Chamba, and PRERNA – the Inspiration. He participated in a mass afforestation event by planting saplings of locally important trees such as deodar, ban oak and wild pomegranate.

A Sapling Here, A Sapling There

Project Leader Vishal Ahuja has spent this year championing rewilding initiatives in Chamba, Himachal Pradesh. Even while facing challenges brought on by the raging coronavirus pandemic, with the support of local volunteers, Vishal planted over 703 saplings of wild native fruiting plants in various abandoned terrace farmlands and degraded forest patches around the Kalatop-Khajjiar Wildlife Sanctuary. These plantations are part of Vishal's long-term habitat restoration project, which aims at protecting the Chamba sacred langur by ensuring local people's participation to sustainably restore the degraded forests in the region. The project aims at eventually reducing the pressure on cultivated crops from wild animals, a well-planned approach that will also lead to the protection of several threatened native fauna.

The saplings were planted through numerous local-scale mini plantation drives in Gajnui, Randoh, Mayarigla, Baadi, and Guwaani villages, which lie adjacent to the sanctuary. Pulling off these plantations drives is no easy feat, especially when one has to work all aspects such as procuring healthy saplings of wild native fruiting trees from many far-flung forest nurseries, hiking long distances alone to interact with residents of villages that are only accessible on foot, coordinating with Forest Department personnel for saplings and permits, gathering volunteers, hiring daily wage earners



Raising Future Forests

In the past year, amidst challenges due to COVID-19 lockdowns, flash floods, landslides, and an early onset of snowing season, Vishal has collected seeds of four out of the eight native wild fruiting trees that have been identified as crucial food trees for wildlife in the region. These seeds will be sown in his tiny backyard nursery. This is aimed at understanding the challenges of raising seedlings of wild native flora for long-term rewilding projects in Chamba.

and also convincing locals to willingly spare their degraded terrace farmlands for habitat restoration plantations. But Vishal remained self-driven and has continued in his pursuit of restoring the once lush forests in his home valley, planting one fruit tree at a time.

Vishal is combining sound contemporary scientific methods, locally acceptable social approaches, and exceptional planning and coordination skills to further rewilding around Kalatop-Khajjiar Wildlife Sanctuary. Using his knowledge on the dietary preference of the Himalayan grey langur, he prepared a list of eight critically important native flora and used this to source healthy saplings of horse-chestnut, walnut, wild pomegranate, wild Himalayan pear, wild Himalayan cherry, and more from Bhandal, Mayarigla, Kariyan, and Haripur forest nurseries. A total of 703 such food trees were planted during the pre-monsoon season with support from local stakeholders, which included volunteers from the Khajjiang Sewa Samiti, farmers, and the Chamba Forest Department.

Conservation is a Community Affair

Vishal understands that forests in Chamba are socio-ecological entities and rewilding there is as much a social process as it is an ecological one. He believes that the success of all conservation-oriented initiatives is measured and also heavily dependent on the support of local stakeholders, farmers in this case. Intending to increase the reach and impact of his habitat restoration project, he had planned mass awareness drives along with the Forest Department (Chamba), and Arpana Rural Community Health and Development Centre, a locally active NGO. However, the imposition of lockdowns in Chamba to prevent the spread of COVID-19 infections led to the cancellation of his rewilding workshops and all work had to be stopped.

Once restrictions on local movements were eased, Vishal modified his conservation awareness approach and completely shifted to conducting one-on-one qualitative interactions with farmers. As one can imagine, this has been a tedious, lengthy and at many times isolating journey. But it also allowed him to engage meaningfully and understand farmers' perspectives through hours of patient listening, followed by reconciling their insecurities and doubts regarding the core objectives of the project. His persistence has borne much fruit as several farmers across Chamba have agreed to plant native wild fruiting trees in their degraded terrace farmlands in the pre-monsoon planting season of 2022. The women farmer's self-help group in Kakela village, Chamba, is one such group that



has decided to support his cause and carry out restoration work in their abandoned farmlands this year.

Growing a Tiny Forest in His Backyard

Vishal believes that rewilding abandoned and degraded terrace farmlands by planting native wild fruiting trees is a long-term strategy that can help minimise depredation pressure on farm crops. His habitat restoration work can therefore become a catalyst for human-animal coexistence in Chamba valley. However, such large-scale and long-term projects require a ready supply of healthy saplings before each planting season.

Vishal has been planning to build a permanent forest nursery for this purpose. This nursery will serve as a storehouse for saplings of native wild fruiting trees and will be owned and managed by interested members of the resident community upon whose land the nursery will be constructed. He believes this will be a sustainable way for involving farmers in his long-term habitat restoration project and also an environment-friendly way to generate income as all saplings for the rewilding exercises will be brought from the same nursery.

While he is still exploring options to fund this long-term venture, Vishal has started tending to a tiny nursery in his backyard! In the spring of 2022, he will start conducting mini-projects to understand the germination capacity of wild fruiting trees. This, he believes, will help in identifying species that are easy to germinate and grow in polyhouse conditions,

to learn about necessary pre-sowing treatments and other crucial information, which will ensure the success of his long-term plan.

Conservation Needs Collaboration

Building and nurturing collaborations with local stakeholders such as the Forest Department of Chamba and Himachal Pradesh State Forest Department has been an essential part of Vishal's conservation-oriented work in Chamba. He routinely meets with members of the Forest Department and has built a rapport with them, which has facilitated all biodiversity conservation awareness and education and habitat restoration work in the valley.

In July 2021, he attended a three-day workshop (July 3 to 7), which was organised by the Himachal Pradesh Forest Department in the Great Himalayan National Park, Kullu. He delivered a presentation on his decade-long study on primate feeding ecology and about developing a community-based conservation module in the western Himalaya. He narrated his experiences and learnings with the 30 participants comprising fellow researchers, Forest Department staff, and students. Conducting such talks enables knowledge sharing with Forest Department personnel, which aids in appropriate biodiversity conservation work in the Himalayan state.

First Impressions

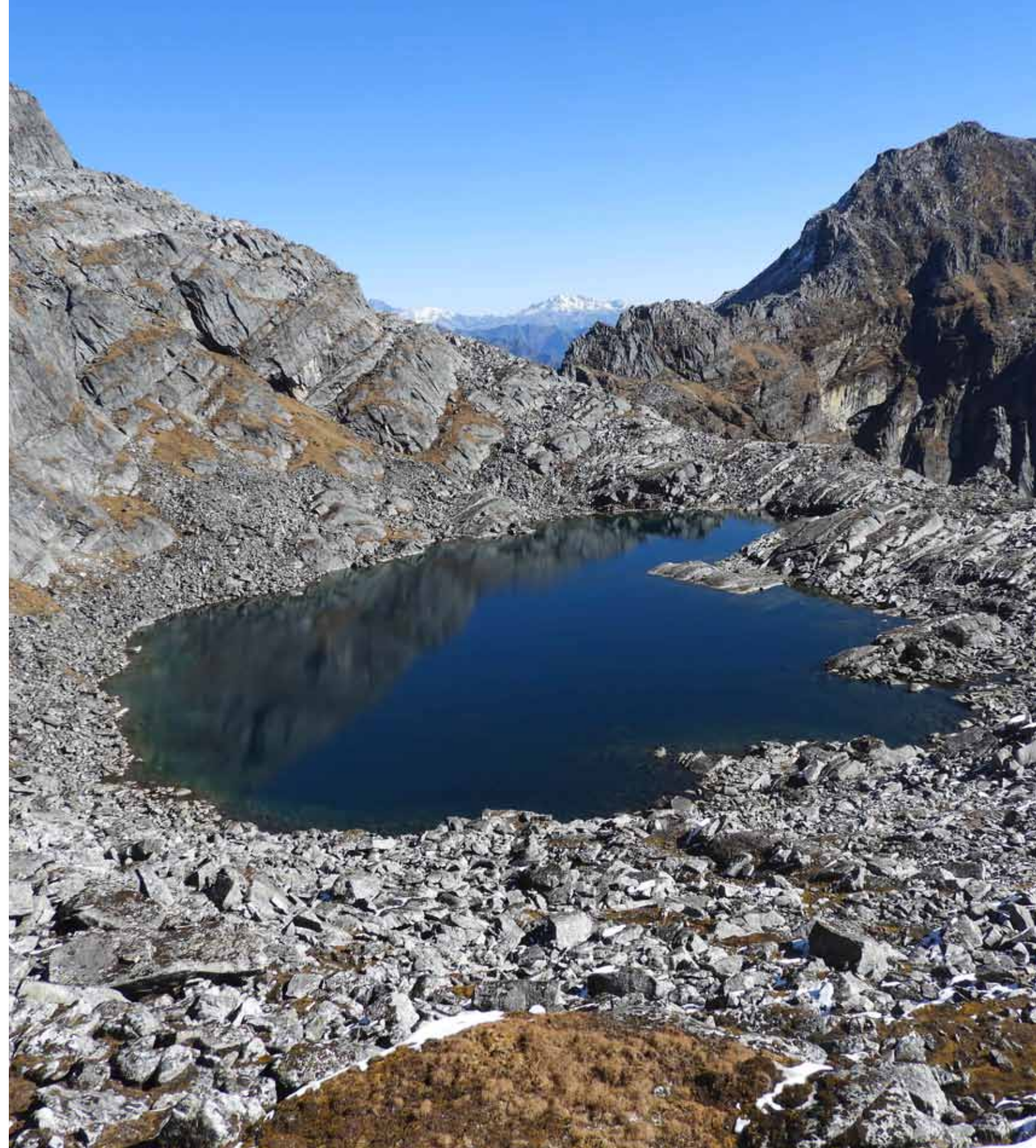
Notes from Neyi Jamoh, Mud on Boots Project Coordinator

Hailing from the mountainous state of Arunachal Pradesh, pursuing a post-graduate degree in Forestry and working in the biodiversity conservation sector came quite naturally to me. However, I faced a moral dilemma – being part of a system where the grassroots conservationists, whose hard work forms the backbone of biodiversity conservation, do not get due credit for their knowledge, contributions, and services. The fact that the Mud on Boots Project celebrates the contributions of India's grassroots conservationists, whose sweat and soul continue to strengthen all conservation initiatives across the country, is what motivated me to become a part of it.

I began my journey with the Mud on Boots Project in October 2021. It has so far been a personally and professionally gratifying journey of learning about each Project Leader's work and supporting the various biodiversity conservation causes they lead. Whether it is Vishal's massive rewilding project to regenerate degraded forests in Chamba to foster human-wildlife coexistence; Phuntsog's participatory pasture maps to document baseline information to build sustainable-use approaches for the life-nurturing habitats of Ladakh's cold deserts; Amir's use of technological interventions such as solar fences and camera traps to promote safer homes for both wild animals and humans in Panijhora (northern West Bengal); Radheshyam's resolve to protect the critically endangered Great Indian Bustard and its habitat around the Desert National Park in Pokhran, Rajasthan; or Dechin and Pemba speaking up to protect the wintering sites of the Black-necked Crane in Zemithang valley, Arunachal Pradesh – all project leaders are working steadfastly and making meaningful incremental contributions to protect the rich natural heritage of our country.

Through the Mud on Boots Project, I would like to continue enabling all Project Leaders to build collaborations so that they can expand both the reach and impact of the amazing conservation work each one is leading.

I believe that the stories and the works of the Mud On Boots Project Leaders will inspire the younger generation, especially from local communities living in biodiverse regions across India, to become conservation leaders of the future.



Highlights 2021



Spot Me If You Can!

The [first photographic record](#) of a tiger in Mizoram's Dampa Tiger Reserve in seven years was captured in 2021. The camera trap was placed by forest guard Zakhuma Don, who has patrolled Dampa's forests for many years and is an alumnus of the Mud on Boots Project. Zakhuma set up the camera trap (borrowed from the Wildlife Institute of India) in February 2021 and retrieved it three months later in mid-May. When going through the images, he found the picture of the tiger and sent it forward to the authorities for confirmation. Dampa has been referred to as a "tiger reserve without tigers" after the last census in 2018 brought forth no proof of the big cat's presence.



Winning Accolades

Three of our Project Leaders Radheshyam Pemani Bishnoi, Amir Chettri, and alumni Project Leader Shiv Kumar were featured by the Young Naturalist Network – Chennai in their special series 'In Nature's Defence: The Tales of Wild India's Unrecognised Soldiers'.



Sowing Seeds of Curiosity

In September 2021, alumni Project Leader Sunil Harsana spoke about his journey as a conservationist and work protecting the unique landscape of Mangar Bani, Haryana, with more than 50 graduate students from SIES College, Mumbai. This year, Sunil also [discovered ancient cave paintings in Mangar Bani](#) that have drawn the attention of archaeologists across India and strengthened the demand that Mangar Bani be notified as a Protected Area.



Supporting Community Conservation Collectives

This year, the Mud on Boots Project had the privilege of extending a little support to four community conservation collectives. We provided a library of over 100 Hindi language nature and science books to Maeer in Uttarakhand; facilitated funds for Hathi-Sathi Foundation in West Bengal; facilitated communication materials for the Save Karpu (*karpu* translates to pangolin in the Karbi language) campaign led by a youth-collective in Assam and donated 120 children's books along with six [Sanctuary Cub](#) magazines for students in six schools across Zemithang valley in Arunachal Pradesh.



खामा गांव में डेजर्ट नेशनल पार्क की घटना, वन विभाग मौन दो दिन पहले तीतर के शिकार की पूरी जानकारी दी, फिर भी मुकदमा दर्ज नहीं

भास्कर संवाददाता | जैसलमेर

जैसलमेर के खामा गांव के पंच चौदहवें को मगह पर दो दिन पहले शिकारियों द्वारा तीतर का शिकार किया गया। इसका फोटो व शिकार की पूरी जानकारी उपलब्ध करवाने के बावजूद वन विभाग द्वारा कार्रवाई नहीं की जा रही है। पौराणिक है कि विस्तृत पक्षम में फैले जैसलमेर में शिकार को बरतने अंगूठे दिन बढ़ते ही जा रहे हैं। भास्कर द्वारा शिकार पर फर्जीबंद लगाने के बावजूद शिकारियों को किसी भी प्रकार का कोई खतरा नहीं है। जैसलमेर में कई अंगण हैं, जिसमें हजारों की संख्या में वन्य जीव स्वच्छंद विचरते हैं। इसी बात का फायदा उठाकर शिकारी मुक्त वन्य जीवों का शिकार कर रहे हैं। लेकिन वन विभाग व पुलिस इस संबंध में कोई कार्रवाई नहीं कर रहा है। इससे शिकारियों के हौसले फुलते हैं। शिकारियों द्वारा कई बार विरोध प्रदर्शन भी किया गया। लेकिन उनके बावजूद वन विभाग द्वारा शिकार को बरतते पर अंकुश नहीं लगा रहा है।

कई मामलों की जांच भी अगूरी, मुकदमा दर्ज नहीं, फोटो से कर रहे हैं शिकारी की तलाश, अवैध हथियारों की भी भ्रमरा



जैसलमेर, खामा गांव के पास तीतर का शिकार कर दो जूता शिकारी।

शिकार के मामले में वन विभाग पूरी तरह से निष्क्रिय बरत रहा है। पिछले कुछ महीनों में शिकार को जो बरतना शुरू है। उन घटनाओं की जांच अभी तक पूरी नहीं हो पाई है। वन्य जीव विभागों द्वारा शिकारों का फोटो व शिकार की पूरी जानकारी तक वन विभाग को उपलब्ध करवा दी गई है। लेकिन इनके बावजूद वन विभाग के अधिकारियों द्वारा मुकदमा दर्ज नहीं करते हुए आरोपियों को कसब की जा रही है। शिकारियों द्वारा अवैध बंदूकों का उपयोग किया जा रहा है। जिसका ना तो उनके पास स्टॉर्पस है और ना ही कोई वैध दस्तावेज। लेकिन इसके बावजूद इस पर कार्रवाई नहीं करना इच्छा से रहे है।

वन विभाग व पुलिस को शिकार की जानकारी व फोटोसक उपलब्ध कराकर व खामा गांव की प्रभारी को ज्ञापन दे दिया है। अधिकारियों की तलाश को तेज कर दिया जा रहा है। शिकारियों के वास्तविक को अज्ञान दे रहे है।

शिकार को घटना की जानकारी मिली है। अभी तक मुकदमा दर्ज नहीं किया गया है। इन संबंध में संबंधित रेंज अफसर को फोटो के आधार पर शिकारों की तलाश करने के निर्देश दिए गए हैं।

-जी. के. चर्मा, लेखक

रेगिस्तान में पाई जाने वाली मरु लोमड़ियों का अस्तित्व खतरे में



वाहन दुर्घटनाओं में मौत से संख्या में कमी, अब फैल रहा है चर्म रोग

विश्वनोई ने बताया कि जैसलमेर के पोकरण क्षेत्र में डेजर्ट नेशनल पार्क के आसपास जुलाई और अक्टूबर 2021 के बीच छह मरु लोमड़ियों के शव मिले जो मेंज से संक्रमित थे। दिसंबर 2021 के प्रथम सप्ताह में दो जीवित मरु लोमड़ियों को भी मेंज बीमारी की अवस्था से पीड़ित देखा गया। पारिस्थितिकीविद् डॉ. सुमित झुंझिया ने बताया कि वर्ष 2008 में डेजर्ट नेशनल पार्क में रेगिस्तानी लोमड़ियों के बीच सरकोप्टिक मेंज संक्रमण देखा गया था। तब से बीमारी में लगातार वृद्धि देखी गई है।

थार के अन्य वन्यजीवों के लिए भी खतरा

संक्रमित मरु लोमड़ियों का उपचार एक कठिन कार्य है, जिसमें अनुभवं वन्यजीव चिकित्सक की टीम की ओर से उनको पकड़कर प्रतिरोधी टीके और दवा लगाना शामिल है। जब गंभीर रूप से संक्रमित जानवर को अनुपचारित छोड़ दिया जाता है, तो यह आगे चलकर घरेलू पशुओं और थार के अन्य वन्यजीवों में रोग फैला सकता है। नेचर फाउंडेशन के मड ऑन बूट्स प्रोजेक्ट समन्वयक के नेयी जामोह ने एपीसीसीएफ राजस्थान को पत्र लिखकर संक्रमण रोकथाम के लिए हस्तक्षेप का अनुरोध किया।

बढ़ रहा प्रतिशत सर्वप्रथम वर्ष 2006 में जैसलमेर जिले के थार क्षेत्र से सरकोप्टिक मेंज की घटना दर्ज की गई थी। संचुरी नेचर फाउंडेशन के मड ऑन बूट्स प्रोजेक्ट लीडर राधेश्याम

अब शुरू होगी गिद्धों की आवक, शीतकाल में करते हैं प्रवास

हिमालय के उस पार से आकर देंगे स्वच्छता का संदेश



पोकरण



पोकरण, डेरा डालकर बैठे गिद्ध।

की शुरुआत में दुर्लभ प्रजाति के गिद्धों का फलना जल्द यहां पहुंचता है। मध्य एशिया, यूरोप, तिब्बत सहित अन्य प्रदेश, जहां अक्टूबर माह में गर्मी का मौसम शुरू हो जाता है, वहां से दुर्लभ प्रजाति के गिद्ध उड़ान भरकर परिचामी

राजस्थान में पहुंच जाते हैं। अक्टूबर से फरवरी माह के अंतिम सप्ताह तक उनके लिए यहां अनुकूल शीत का मौसम रहता है। गिद्ध पशु बाहुल्य क्षेत्रों में ही अपना डेरा डालते हैं, ताकि उन्हें भोजन की तलाश के लिए भटकना

नहीं पड़े। जैसलमेर जिले में कई जगहों पर पशु बाहुल्य क्षेत्रों में ये गिद्ध अपना डेरा डालते हैं। विशेष रूप से प्रवासी गिद्ध ओढ़ागिया, लाठी, भादरिया, लोहाटा, खेतोलाई गांव के आसपास

अपना डेरा जमाते हैं। शीतकाल के दौरान प्रवासी गिद्ध क्षेत्र में प्रवास करते हैं। कुछ ही दिनों में आवक शुरू होने वाली है। ऐसे में क्षेत्र में गश्त बढ़ा दी गई है। रेल पटरियों के आसपास व अन्य जगहों पर कारियों की ओर से अतिरिक्त गश्त की जा रही है। पेस्टीसाइड के उपयोग को कम करने को लेकर किसानों को पाबंद करने के लिए प्रशासन को पत्र लिखा जाएगा।

बढ़ाई गई है गश्त

शीतकाल के दौरान प्रवासी गिद्ध क्षेत्र में प्रवास करते हैं। कुछ ही दिनों में आवक शुरू होने वाली है। ऐसे में क्षेत्र में गश्त बढ़ा दी गई है। रेल पटरियों के आसपास व अन्य जगहों पर कारियों की ओर से अतिरिक्त गश्त की जा रही है। पेस्टीसाइड के उपयोग को कम करने को लेकर किसानों को पाबंद करने के लिए प्रशासन को पत्र लिखा जाएगा।

ये प्रजाति पहुंचती है

क्षेत्र में प्रतिवर्ष शिफान, सिनेरियस, यूरोशियन, इजिप्शियन प्रजाति के कुछ प्रवास पर आते हैं। इसी प्रकार सफेद पीठ वाला गिद्ध, भारतीय गिद्ध, लाल सिर वाला गिद्ध स्थानीय की श्रेणी में आते हैं तथा इनकी प्रजाति गंभीर रूप से खतरे में है।

सुरक्षा के हो पुख्ता प्रबंध

संकटग्रस्त प्रजाति के गिद्ध प्रतिवर्ष लाठी क्षेत्र में पहुंचते हैं। मृत पशुओं के मांस व अवशेष खाकर सफाई करते हैं। जिससे इन्हें सफाईकर्मी भी कहा जाता है। पूर्व में रेल की घंटे में आने से हुए हादसों में कई गिद्धों की मौत हो चुकी है। प्रशासन व वन विभाग को इनकी सुरक्षा के पुख्ता प्रबंध करने चाहिए।

- राधेश्याम पेमानी, वन्यजीवप्रेमी व जिलाध्यक्ष अखिल भारतीय जीव रक्षा विश्वी संघ, जैसलमेर।

यह है बड़ी समस्या

जैसलमेर के ग्रामीण क्षेत्रों में ग्रामीणों का मुख्य व्यवसाय कृषि व पशुपालन है। फसलों को कीटा व रोगों से बचाने के लिए किसान पेस्टीसाइड व डाइक्लोफेनिक का उपयोग करते हैं। इन्हीं फसलों को खाने से पेस्टीसाइड घरेलू पशुओं में पहुंचता है तथा मृत पशु को खाने से गिद्धों में पेस्टीसाइड प्रवेश कर जाता है। जिससे शारीरिक नुकसान होता है तथा प्रजनन क्षमता कम हो जाती है। ऐसे में गिद्ध संकटग्रस्त प्रजाति में जाने लगते हैं। पूर्व में पशुओं में लगाए जाने वाले दर्द निवारक डाइक्लोफेनिक इंजेक्शन केन्द्र सरकार की ओर से बंद करवा दिए गए हैं। जिससे गिद्धों की मौत कुछ कम हुई है।

खेत में रेस्क्यू सेंटर बनाकर वन्यजीवों का उपचार



वन्य प्रेमी राधेश्याम विश्वनोई कर रहे सेवा

पत्रिका न्यूज नेटवर्क patrika.com



लाठी, वन्य जीवों की देखभाल करते वन्य प्रेमी राधेश्याम विश्वनोई।

बचाई है। वर्तमान समय विभिन्न हादसों में शिकार करीब आधा दर्जन से अधिक वन्यजीव हरिण, खरगोश व नीलगाय के बच्चों का रेस्क्यू सेंटर में इलाज व पालन पोषण किया जा रहा है। गौरतलब है कि क्षेत्र में वन्य

जीवों के संरक्षण के लिए विभाग की ओर से कोई ठोस व्यवस्था नहीं होने से क्षेत्र में वन्य जीवों की तादाद तेजी से घट रही है। शिकारी श्वानों व शिकारियों द्वारा मौख पाकर वन्य जीवों का शिकार किया जाता है।

इसके बावजूद वन विभाग की ओर से वन्य जीवों के संरक्षण के लिए ना तो समय-समय पर गश्त की जाती है और ना ही अन्य कोई उपाय किया जा रहा है। जिससे हरिणों के शिकार की घटनाओं में बढ़ोतरी हो रही है। लाठी क्षेत्र के भोलिया गांव

बच्चों को पिलाते हैं दूध

वन्यजीव प्रेमी विश्वनोई व उनकी माता रतनी देवी अपने खेत में स्थित रेस्क्यू सेंटर में देखभाल के लिए रखे गए वन्यजीवों को हटा व सूखा घारा लाकर उन्हें खिला रहे हैं। यहीं बीमार व वन्यजीव के छोटे बच्चों को राय का दूध भी पिलाया जाता है।

आवाज लगाते ही दौड़ आते हैं वन्यजीव

राजी जन्मते हैं खुले में रवचंद्र विचरण करने वाला शतजीव हरिण, खरगोश, नीलगाय हर किराी को देखकर ही भाग जाते हैं। लेकिन यहां राधेश्याम विश्वनोई परिवार का वन्यजीव के प्रति ऐसा प्रेम बन गया है कि एक आवाज सुनते ही हरिण दूध के साथ दौड़ आते हैं और उपशान्त दूध शुरू कर देते हैं।

इलाज के साथ आहार

विभिन्न हादसों में घायल होने वाले वन्यजीवों के लिए खेत पर एक छोटा सा रेस्क्यू सेंटर खोला गया है। उनके इलाज के लिए आवश्यकतानुसार बचाव, खाने के लिए हरा घारा-पानी की व्यवस्था की गई है। देखरेख व उपचार के बाद संतुष्ट हो जाने पर उन्हें जंगल में छोड़ दिया जाता है।

- राधेश्याम विश्वनोई, वन्यजीव प्रेमी घोसिया

पोषण कर रहे हैं। राधेश्याम विश्वनोई व उनकी परिवार रिश्ते लंबे समय से वन्यजीवों की सेवा कर रहा है। वर्तमान समय में उनके खेत में स्थित रेस्क्यू सेंटर में आधा दर्जन से अधिक वन्यजीव हरिण खरगोश नीलगाय व बड़े देखरेख की जा रही है।

तीन हरिणों का शिकार, वन्यजीवप्रेमी पहुंचे मौके पर

अधोपे कान्त, वन विभाग की टीम में एक की तलाश

शिकार की घटना पर जताया रोष

शिकारियों के अनाधिकारिक शिकार को घटाने के लिए वन विभाग को पत्र लिखकर संक्रमण रोकथाम के लिए हस्तक्षेप का अनुरोध किया।

Acknowledgements

At Sanctuary, we firmly believe that conservation depends on collaboration and cooperation – a philosophy that is embodied by the Mud on Boots Project. We are thus privileged to partner with many stellar professionals and organisations that propel us forward.

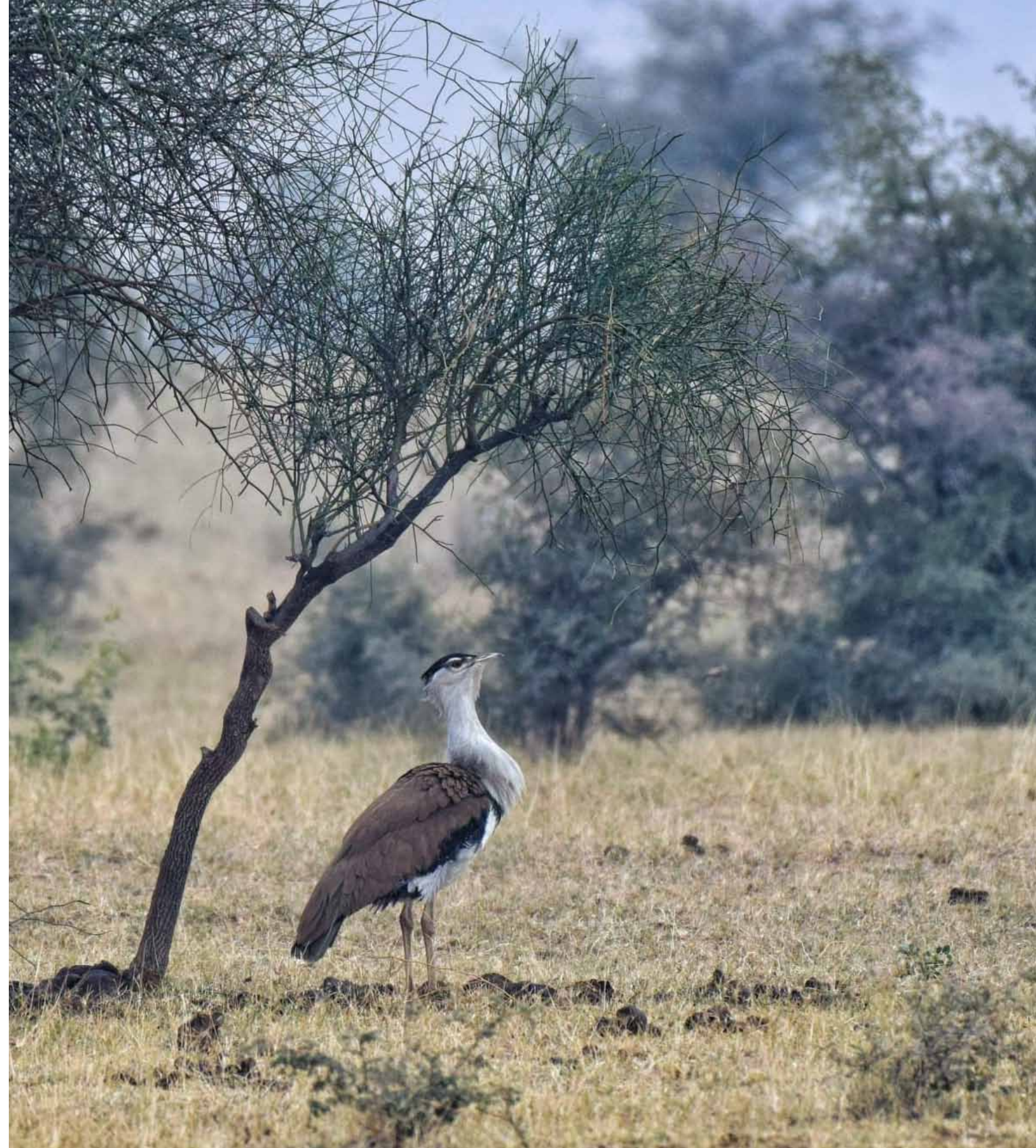
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We would once again like to acknowledge the work of our all Project Leaders and all grassroots conservationists across India. It is your drive and conviction that gives purpose and merit to the Mud on Boots Project. Thank you for all that you do.



Our Supporters

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