

**Mud on Boots Project
Impact Report 2022**







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Where are our Project Leaders?

- 6 years since inception
- 14 States and 1 Union Territory
- 26 Project Leaders
- 4 small grantees



MAP NOT TO SCALE.
BORDERS NEITHER AUTHENTICATED NOR VERIFIED.

The Mud on Boots Project is Sanctuary Nature Foundation's unique booster programme designed to recognise and support grassroots conservationists across India. The project focuses on supporting those individuals whose conservation leadership potential and/or 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 Nature Foundation. Such support can include field trips, expert inputs, publicity, communication about their work, and more. Since its inception in 2017, the Mud on Boots project has supported over 26 grassroots conservationists from 14 different states and one Union Territory in India.

Over the years, the project has also extended solidarity, voice, and resources to several small grassroots organisations and campaigns addressing conservation issues. In 2022 alone, we stocked rural libraries, sponsored apprenticeship programmes, enabled native nurseries, organised field trips, lobbied for conservation causes, raised medical aid for frontline forest staff, and more.

“The Mud on Boots team is flexible and accommodating to the needs of the Project Leader and their projects. The effort that they put into making a personal relationship and understanding the Project Leader is what I have liked the most.”

– Priyanka Das
Fellow, The Coexistence Consortium



“We received a small grant from Sanctuary Nature Foundation's Mud on Boots Project, which we utilised towards Veditum's Moving Upstream Fellowship programme. The understanding and freedom we received from friends at Sanctuary was great.”

– Siddharth Agarwal, Founder,
Veditum India Foundation





PROJECT LEADER: AMIR KUMAR CHHETRI

Location: Panihpora Forest Village, Jalpaiguri District, West Bengal

Amir Kumar Chhetri is a skilled ethnobotanist, safari guide, research assistant with the [Coexistence Project](#), and a community conservation leader who has lent his knowledge and support to several researchers working in the landscape. In an effort towards mitigating the once inevitable human-wildlife conflict in his home – Panihpora Forest Village, Amir spearheaded the installation of solar-powered fences after convincing all members of his community to become owners of the fence. According to the first-year data, Amir's solar-powered fences have fostered human-wildlife coexistence by functioning efficiently in deterring wild animal (especially elephant and wild pig) movement in the agricultural fields in Panihpora.

When a Village Stands Together

According to the first-year data collected by Amir and his colleagues at the Coexistence Project, the solar-powered fences in Panihpora Forest Village have functioned efficiently in deterring wild elephants and pigs from entering agricultural fields. This has resulted in saving approximately 50 per cent of the cultivated staple maize crop from depredation. On account of this, farmers enjoyed an abundant yield, some of which was monetised through sales in the local market. The solar-powered fence also alleviated the non-monetary cost of negative interactions with wild animals by drastically minimising the time spent in *tongs* (watch towers) to safeguard crops and chase away wild animals. Additionally, 10 families who had stopped farming because of crop depredation started cultivating paddy after witnessing the success of the previous paddy season.

However, Amir believes that the most important marker of the success of his project is that the village committee (which consists of 58 out of the total 59 households in Panihpora) has participated in all fence maintenance and monitoring tasks without fail, even in his absence. During the peak paddy depredation season between September and October 2022, Amir's community mended the fence 24 times after it was broken by male elephants. This process united the community and served as an instrument of social bonding.

Leading the Way

In addition to mobilising and leading all solar fence maintenance and monitoring work, Amir dedicated his time to conducting conservation awareness programmes in the tea estate forest mosaic landscape of northern West Bengal, shedding light on the legal consequences of electrocuting elephants. In 2022, Amir organised conservation awareness talks in seven local villages (Turibari, Mongolkata Rabha Busty, Bhandakura, Khairkata, Duramari and Kalabara) and interacted with 200 people. During each event, he shared crucial information about wildlife (especially elephants and leopards) such as their behaviour, ecology, food preference, and

2022 IN THE FIELD



COURTESY AMIR KUMAR CHHETRI

To New Beginnings!

In October 2022, Amir and Priyanka Das's (Amir's mentor and colleague) independent proposal titled 'Addressing the underlying driver of human-elephant negative interaction in northern West Bengal' was selected for the current batch of the Coexistence Consortium fellowship. Following this, the duo visited the University of TransDisciplinary Health Sciences and Technology (TDU) in Bengaluru for a month of coursework. This was a wonderful opportunity for Amir and Priyanka to brush up their knowledge, learn new concepts and socialise with others working in the conservation sector.



"The MOB project made a way for me to meet many new people, learn about their work and places. My biggest realization has been that one should never build prejudices about places and people but should try to go and understand their problems with wildlife, be it big or small."

– Amir Kumar Chhetri

ways to avoid conflict, and persuaded locals against using live electric wires to deter elephant movement into villages.

He also shared personal accounts on the community-managed solar fence in Panijhora Forest Village and stressed the benefits of such fences as being human and wildlife-friendly alternatives.

Hindi and Bengali language pamphlets on the legal implications of using live electric wires and the need for peaceful coexistence with elephants were distributed and also pasted in strategic public places during these events. All conservation awareness programmes were conducted with the support of the Forest Department, the respective Panchayat officer, the Coexistence Project, and the [Society for Protecting Ophiofauna and Animal Rights \(SPOAR\)](#), a locally active NGO.

Love Thy Neighbour

Crop loss on account of depredation by wildlife, especially elephants and wild pigs, has been a major issue in the tea estate forest mosaic landscape around Panijhora landscape. Each year between September and October, locals in Panijhora have to guard their lush paddy crop from being depredated by wildlife.

Amidst the mayhem of tending to his paddy field, fulfilling his duties as a father, and continuing to mobilise all aspects of solar fence maintenance and monitoring, Amir made time to visit five revenue villages (Sukhani Busty, Khas Busty, Mongolbari Busty, Salbari Neora Line and Mongolbari Teak Line), where the local communities were willing to apply for compensation. In every village, Amir interacted with approximately 10 people, which included Panchayat members, who then conveyed the procedure to other residents.

Amir has had close encounters with his wild neighbours, and is no stranger to the stress that wildlife and humans face because of such interactions. He understands the importance of ex gratia compensation in mitigating possible negative interactions with the Forest Department and in minimising antagonism against wildlife even among members of communities (resident *Rajbongshis* and *adivasis*) who are traditionally tolerant.

Amir organised several discussions with local Panchayat members to understand the causes of procedural complexities and/or failures while applying for ex gratia compensations. Once he had learned about the procedural challenges faced by locals, Amir explained the right processes in a step-by-step manner to all members.

When in Panijhora

In April 2022, Mud on Boots Project Coordinator Neyi Jamoh visited Amir and his brilliant mentor Priyanka Das (ex-Project Coordinator, the Coexistence Project) in Panijhora. During this four-day long trip the team took stock of the solar-powered fences installed around Amir's village, visited degraded forest patches and fodder species plantation sites within Chapramari Wildlife Sanctuary, attended the monthly gathering with members of the eco-development committee of Panijhora, held a meeting with local *adivasi* youth working towards elephant-human coexistence in the tea estate and forest mosaic landscapes of the Dooars, interacted with locals during a conservation awareness talk held by Amir and his colleagues at the Coexistence Project, and met members of the Forest Department.





NEYI JAMOH



DECHIN PEMA SAINGMO AND PEMBA TSERING ROMO

PROJECT LEADERS:
DECHIN PEMA SAINGMO AND PEMBA TSERING ROMO
Location: Jemeithang Valley, Tawang District, Arunachal Pradesh

Dechin Pema Saingmo and Pemba Tsering Romo are project assistants with [WWF-India](#), and have been conducting essential preliminary work toward developing strategies for the long-term conservation of snow leopards and other high altitude wildlife in snow leopard habitat in western Arunachal Pradesh. A camera trap that was set up by the duo's team documented the first recorded evidence of snow leopard presence in Tawang district, Arunachal Pradesh in 2021. They also conducted qualitative interviews with locals to document their perspectives on conservation, traditional practices, and institutions that are rooted in natural resource management. Dechin and Pemba are also committed to protecting the wintering habitat of the Black-necked Crane in their home – Jemeithang Valley.

For Locals by Locals

Mud on Boots Project Leaders Dechin Pema Saingmo and Pemba Tsering Romo have been working with WWF-India to build inclusive conservation approaches towards snow leopard and other wildlife in the high-altitude areas of Tawang and West Kameng districts in Arunachal Pradesh. Since February 2022, they have travelled to 15 villages across western Arunachal Pradesh, meeting with *Brokpas* (semi-nomadic yak and dzomo herders within the Monpa region) and collecting stories of human-wildlife interactions in the region. Their colleagues at WWF-India believe that Dechin and Pemba's interactions with youth in villages have led to a better understanding of human-wildlife interactions in these areas.

Based on their interactions with locals and the knowledge gained through field surveys, Dechin and Pemba organised first-of-their-kind cattle health camps in four villages in Jemeithang circle. This initiative, which was held between May 27 and June 3, 2022, was a collaborative effort between WWF-India, the National Research Centre on Yak, Dirang (West Kameng district), and the Department of Animal Husbandry, Veterinary and Dairy Development, Lumla (Tawang district). Such animal camps are crucial because in addition to losing cattle to diseases, locals suffer losses from wild animal attacks, especially dholes, Himalayan black bears, and snow leopards. Access to veterinary care and compensation for loss due to depredation by wild animals is lacking in the valley because of its remote location, far from the district headquarters. During the camps, more than 30 herders were provided medicines and health supplements for commonly prevalent livestock diseases such as diarrhoea, parasitic infestation, and malnourishment.

Additionally, Dechin and Pemba's extensive interaction with communities and data collected during socio-economic surveys

2022 IN THE FIELD



COURTESY DECHIN PEMA SAINGMO AND PEMBA TSERING ROMO

Ensuring Human-Wildlife Coexistence

From July 27 to August 2, 2022, Dechin and Pemba surveyed and marked GPS locations of huts in Kharman and Kyalekteng (two out of the six villages in Jemeithang circle) currently facing pressure from wildlife depredation. With support from colleagues at WWF-India, they plan to devise interventions to mitigate negative human-wildlife interactions in all the 12 recorded locations.

Travelling with a Cause

The duo attended the Central India Green Hub Festival held in Bhopal in July 2022. This trip was made possible with the support of WWF-India and their alma mater Green Hub, Tezpur. On the second day of the festival, the duo delivered a talk on their conservation journey and took the opportunity to highlight their ongoing work on conserving the wintering habitat of *Thung Thung Karmo* in Jemeithang Valley. They also met alumnus Mud on Boots Project Leader Sajal Madhu.

in villages across West Kameng and Tawang districts formed the base for WWF-India to procure essential resources such as solar lamps, polythene sheets for constructing greenhouses, and fox lights for distribution among locals. During their travels to Thingbu village (Tawang district) in November 2022, six fox lights were distributed among six groups of herders comprising 41 individuals.

Between November 8 and 20, 2022, they took part in a field survey with colleagues at WWF-India and members of *It's All Folk*, a Jorhat-based enterprise, to explore ways of working with communities in Mago and Thingbu Valleys using yak hair. The goal of this collaborative trip was to explore the creation of modern products from yak hair. Yak hair products can help create a stable source of income for the *Brokpa*, while supporting their nomadic, herding lifestyle that includes practices beneficial to biodiversity conservation.

Beacons of Hope!

Jemeithang Valley in Tawang district is the chosen wintering home of the locally revered Black-necked Crane (BNC). Dechin and Pemba are passionate about conserving the three kilometre-long wintering habitat of the BNC along the *Nyamjang chu* river in Jemeithang. They believe that garnering community support (especially that of local youth and young children) by finding locally acceptable ways to protect the wintering homes of the BNC is the only way to achieving long-term conservation success in this matter.

In this regard, they have conducted several outreach programmes to garner support for conserving the wintering home of *Thung Thung Karmo* (BNC in the local Monpa language) since November 2021. After nearly one year, three formal discussions, and relentless informal conversations, on August 2, 2022, they conducted a workshop that was attended by 33 participants comprising village elders, local leaders and youth, and stone crusher owners of Jemeithang Valley. As a result of these discussions, a consensus was reached on regulating and monitoring human activities such as sand mining and stone crushing after the arrival of the BNC in winter. Several guidelines were formulated and agreed upon by all participants to regulate human activities along the *Nyamjang chu*.

At the end of the discussion, a written document containing guidelines was signed by all participants including the *Gaon Burahs* (village headmen). These regulations, established by the committee, were followed with immediate effect. During the BNC arrival time in Jemeithang Valley from December 2022 to February 2023, the use of machines and heavy vehicles at the wintering site was reduced drastically. There was only one case of violation, which was addressed by the committee.

"In the two years with the Mud on Boots Project, we learned that grassroots conservationists and initiatives are crucial in the process of creating positive long-term gains for biodiversity conservation in any landscape. We are so happy that we got to work with Sanctuary Nature Foundation."

- Dechin Pema Saingmo and Pemba Tsering Romo

All Bases Covered

Dechin and Pemba believe in collaborations and in involving all local stakeholders in their conservation approaches. They are leaving no stone unturned in protecting the natural heritage of their home Valley. Between the constant field visits, making work-related inter and intra-state travels, and ensuring constant support at their respective homes, the energetic duo continued their conservation education and outreach across Jemeithang.

In May and June 2022, they visited three schools in Jemeithang (Government Primary Residential School, Shocktsen, Lumpo Upper Primary Government School, and Taktsang Middle Residential Government School), where they interacted with an audience of nearly 100 students, and staff members including teachers, about the importance of wildlife and conserving biodiversity in a story-telling mode. They also distributed some of the 126 children's books from *Pratham Books* provided by the Mud on Boots Project. Both have found that interacting with children about conservation is challenging but fulfilling and also believe that it is a great opportunity to polish their understanding of basic concepts and also build impactful communication skills.

On May 28, 2022, they made an unconventional move to extend the impact of their local conservation initiatives and met with officials of the Indian Army post in the Jemeithang circle. Located close to the international Indo-China border, Jemeithang has a strong Army presence, which has an inevitable influence on the state of biodiversity in the region. They discussed ways to promote sustainable and responsible tourism as a complementary livelihood strategy for locals, and the possible role of the Indian Army in this regard. The officers appreciated and commended their efforts for protecting and conserving biodiversity in the landscape.

In the same month, the duo also provided a two days training to 56 *Brokpas* of Jemeithang Valley to empower them to document biodiversity in the snow leopard habitat and map regions facing conservation challenges. During this event, step-wise, practical training on reading the GPS and recording of information on biodiversity and human-wildlife conflict were taught. Mapping Books were provided to all participants.

Failures as Pillars of Future Success

With support from WWF-India, Dechin and Pemba took their conservation outreach to the annual *Gorsam mela* held between March 11 and 13, 2022. Being the largest local gathering attended by followers of the Buddhist faith from all corners of Arunachal Pradesh, Dechin and Pemba saw great potential for a dialogue on conservation issues. During this three-day event, they set up a stall showcasing the rich biodiversity of their valley and spoke to people about their conservation causes. Contrary to their expectation, people were engrossed in festivities and their stall had far fewer visitors than expected. This was a good learning experience for them, and they have now decided to avoid organising conservation awareness events during times of local festivals and other social gatherings as it tends to divert people's attention.





NEYI JAMOH



COURTESY PHUNTSOG DOLMA

PROJECT LEADER:
PHUNTSOG DOLMA

Location: Rong Valley, Ladakh

Phuntsog Dolma works as a Flock Supervisor at the District Sheep Husbandry Department, Leh. A botanist by training, she has been using her skills to study and document the diverse high-altitude flora of Ladakh since 2014. As a Mud on Boots Project Leader, she has collaborated with local Pashmina breeders to conduct studies on high-altitude pasturelands to understand their status, and has built baseline knowledge for understanding the conservation issues facing pasturelands in Rong valley. Her work has been crucial in devising locally applicable, sustainable-use strategies for high-altitude pastures, and is fostering human and wildlife coexistence in Ladakh.

Ears to the Ground

In 2016, when Phuntsog Dolma began working in Rong valley with the Sheep Husbandry Department (Leh), her primary goal was to revive the fading local traditional livelihood of Pashmina goat rearing. She believed that if locals had a sustainable income from Pashmina goat rearing, they would have an incentive to continue nurturing and protecting these habitats. But during her visits to villages and interactions with people she learned that livestock rearing as a profession was riddled with many challenges such as degradation of high-altitude pasture areas, depredation of livestock by wildlife and free-ranging dogs, livestock diseases, and unavailability of fodder during the long and harsh winter months. Livestock rearing is no easy profession and had become harder to sustain in the face of these unceasing challenges, so locals gradually gave up on their age-old livelihood altogether.

Empowered by her learnings and with support from the Deputy Director of the Pashmina Goat Farm, Upshi, Mud on Boots Project and the constant guidance of her collaborator Dr. Konchok Dorjee (Assistant Professor, Department of Botany, Eliezer Joldan Memorial College Leh, Ladakh), Phuntsog has worked steadily with locals to address the challenges they face.

Between March and April 2022, Phuntsog surveyed villages in Rong valley to understand problems, perceptions, and probable solutions for pasture conservation. Armed with a short questionnaire and coupled with informal qualitative conversations, she interacted with 30 local breeders and farmers and found that 90 per cent of locals believe that pastures and wild fodders in the region are threatened. She also learned that the shifting/turn-wise grazing strategy in pasture areas has been proving effective in maintaining the health of pasturelands and encouraging the conservation of fodder population within them. This simple strategy was suggested by Phuntsog after studying the baseline knowledge about the existing use patterns and status of pastures based on the maps she prepared with the participation and assistance of breeders between March and April 2021.

2022 IN THE FIELD



NEYI JAMOH

**Inspiring Next-Generation
Ladakhi Conservationists**

On August 10, 2022, Phuntsog gave a virtual presentation titled 'Floral Diversity of Ladakh and Conservation Approaches' while interacting with over 60 graduate-level students studying botany and allied sciences at Eliezer Joldan Memorial College, Leh. During this event, she highlighted the ecological, environmental and cultural significance of plants in Ladakh and the threats faced by the flora and its habitat. Through these presentations, Phuntsog hopes to encourage budding botany professionals to appreciate the floral wealth of Ladakh and to take interest in their conservation.



PHUNTSOG DOLMA



PHUNTSOG DOLMA

Growing Patches of Pasture

Pastures in Ladakh have high ecological and economic importance. They are home to the unique flora and fauna of Ladakh and support the traditional livelihoods of Ladakhi people, who depend on them for livestock rearing, food and medicine. High-altitude flora in pasture lands of Rong valley are facing threats from overgrazing, along with other natural and human-made factors that impact pasture health. Phuntsog understands that the degrading quality of pasture lands is deeply interconnected with the health of livestock, the state of the local economy, and the well-being of the region’s wildlife.

To mitigate the pressure on natural pastures, Phuntsog designed and conducted a trial to propagate 17 important high-altitude medicinal and fodder plants at the Pashmina Goat Farm in Upshi in February of 2022. The polyhouse used for this trial was constructed with the help of her colleagues between September and October 2021. Ten species out of the total high-altitude plants such as *Taraxacum officinale*, *Carum curvi*, *Allium przewalskianum* and *Datura stramonium* showed excellent germination, with germination percentages between 80 and 100. Her efforts were appreciated by the District Sheep Husbandry Officer (Leh), who agrees that this trial has created crucial insights for successful large-scale cultivation of high-altitude flora as fodder for Pashmina goats.

Connecting the Dots

During her six years of work in the tranquil Rong valley, Phuntsog Dolma has built camaraderie with locals and has gained deep insights into situations that may perpetuate negative interaction between humans and wildlife in the region.

On July 8, 2022, three Pashmina goats were killed while three others were grievously injured by Tibetan wolves near the Taklangla pasture area. Phuntsog quickly reached Taklangla and performed all necessary medical procedures, saving the lives of all three injured goats. She then informed her colleagues at the Sheep Husbandry Department, Leh and recommended financial assistance and numerous compensation benefits for the breeder. Phuntsog spent time patiently listening to the breeder, who was saddened by this incident. After assuring support from the department for the loss, she calmly requested the breeder to refrain from retaliatory action against the wolves.

Phuntsog has utilised her association with the Sheep Husbandry Department (Leh) by dedicating her time to helping herders/breeders access departmental benefits schemes such as reinforcing traditional corrals, door-to-door veterinary care to livestock, and ensuring immediate and apt compensation as a strategy to diffuse conflict scenarios in Rong valley. She has experienced first-hand that the loss of cattle to depredation by wildlife, followed by either the presence or lack of support to locals in the face of such economic and emotional shock, is a prominent factor that impacts coexistence in the region.

Thanks to Phuntsog’s persistence, the impacted breeder received a unit of goats comprising 19 does and a buck as compensation from the Department. Locals in Rong have grown more tolerant of attacks by wild carnivores and are also contributing to Phuntsog’s conservation efforts.

Voices From the Field

Mud on Boots Project Coordinator Neyi Jamoh visited Phuntsog from July 29 to August 3, 2022. During these five days, they travelled to several villages and interacted with locals including botanists, Pashmina goat herders, and staff at the Pashmina Goat Farm (Upshi), where everyone lauded Phuntsog’s commitment to her work. It was encouraging to hear the Deputy Director of the Pashmina Goat Farm Dr. Tsewang Morup appreciate her work as a Mud on Boots Project Leader. He further credited Phuntsog’s determination and unparalleled work ethic for the revival of Changra goat rearing in Rong valley, Ladakh.

“Mud on Boots is an innovative platform and a real opportunity for the unseen, underprivileged and often poor heroes working day and night for the conservation of wildlife. It brings together all stakeholders such as wildlife conservationists, researchers, farmers, breeders and government authorities to spread love, compassion and respect for nature and its dwellers”

- Phuntsog Dolma



PROJECT LEADER: RADHESHYAM PEMANI BISHNOI

Location: Jaisalmer District, Rajasthan

Radheshyam Pemani Bishnoi is a wildlife conservationist, trained wildlife rescuer and photographer working to protect the critically endangered Great Indian Bustard (GIB) and other wildlife in Dholia village, Pokhran, Rajasthan. He has been patrolling the 50 sq. km. GIB habitat outside the demarcated area of the Desert National Park in Rajasthan since 2014. With support from the Ecology, Rural Development and Sustainability (ERDS) Foundation, Radheshyam is collaborating with the Forest Department to address conservation challenges in Jaisalmer district, Rajasthan.

Hope in the Desert

Jaisalmer district in Rajasthan is the last stronghold of the critically endangered Great Indian Bustard (GIB) in India. Even here, numerous human-made challenges such as the ever-growing presence of solar parks, wind parks, fenced roadside plantations, free-ranging dogs, stretches of railway tracks, highways, and high-tension electricity lines threaten the future of GIBs.

Amidst these challenges to these birds and other wildlife, Radheshyam was ecstatic when in the breeding period of 2022, he witnessed the rare event of female GIBs laying two eggs in a single clutch. On May 30, 2022, after patrolling in the scorching heat for hours, he spotted his first female-chick duo of the year. The sight filled his heart with warmth and hope for a good future for this pair. He calmly relished the sight before carrying on with his duties.

Between May and October 2022, Radheshyam sighted seven female GIBs with their chicks. Within the same time frame, he spotted several GIBs 90 times in just 22 days! These events lifted his spirit and since then he has been working with a renewed commitment to protect the GIB and its habitat. Radheshyam is aware that direct contact with the birds may compromise their ability to have a safe life, he makes sure to quietly pass by after discretely photo-documenting the magnificent birds.

In the Face of Constant Threats

The year 2022 saw a rocky start for Radheshyam as he learned about incidents of poaching of Grey Francolins on February 12, 2022. Based on the information given by his trusted allies, he photo-documented the poacher carrying a firearm and a bird and wrote to the Forest (Wildlife) Department of Jaisalmer informing them of this incident. Based on the photographic evidence provided, the poacher was detained and his weapon was seized. This incident gained [national attention](#) and helped alert the local Forest Department about an increase in wildlife poaching to supply 'bush meat' to hotels in Jaisalmer!

Just as the desert-grassland habitat and all its inhabitants were starting to experience respite after blistering summer heat, on October 16, 2022 news of a [female GIB lying dead](#) under

2022 IN THE FIELD



Addressing Those in Power

In an attempt to draw attention to the numerous conservation challenges in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan, Radheshyam submitted a memorandum to Bhupendra Yadav, Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India on April 18, 2022. The letter detailed the threats to the well-being of GIBs and other wildlife and requested interventions to address immediate threats such as high-tension electricity lines and the feral dog menace, among other issues in the region.

Rescuing Wildlife in Distress

In 2022, Radheshyam has rescued 70 injured wild animals including chinkaras, nilgais and vultures. Wildlife with minor injuries were released safely into their habitat after providing essential first aid and those found to be grievously injured were immediately taken to Lathi Animal Rescue Centre for specialised care.

"In the two years with Sanctuary Nature Foundation's Mud on Boots Project, I felt part of a larger team. My conservation-oriented work got wider recognition and I received support from different parts of India. The grant money provided the necessary support which enabled me to carry on my work without worrying about the finances."

-Radheshyam Pemani Bishnoi

high-tension electricity lines near Degrai Mata ji Oran, Jaisalmer (Rajasthan) reached Radheshyam, who was conducting fieldwork with Dr. Sumit Dookia, Wildlife Biologist and Hon. Scientific Advisor, ERDS Foundation and Parth Jagani, Field Coordinator, ERDS Foundation nearby. He immediately informed members of the Forest Department of this grave incident, reached the location as soon as possible, and helped coordinate the handing over of the GIB's body for further investigation to scientists of the Wildlife Institute of India and Deputy Conservator of Forest (Wildlife Division), Jaisalmer. This incident deeply saddened and disappointed Radheshyam. In an attempt to draw attention to their continuing demand to lay all high-tension electricity lines in the region underground to protect wildlife, especially the GIB, Radheshyam mobilised conservation-minded locals (who had gathered upon learning about the sad incident) and staged a day-long peaceful protest in front of members of the Forest Department.

Following this, on October 20, Radheshyam, Parth Jagani and their mentor Dr. Sumit Dookia met with the DFO, Jaisalmer (Wildlife Division), and discussed ways to address the region's biggest existing threats to GIBs – high-tension electricity lines. They informed the DFO about the shabby conditions of the bird diverters that have been installed to ensure that GIBs do not hit these fatal electricity lines and discussed the need for checking their quality (before approving their installation) and monitoring their functionality on the field once they are installed.

They also discussed at length other existing threats to wildlife in the region such as the issue of free-ranging dogs and shared possible ideas to tackle these issues. Even amidst constant challenges and threats to wildlife, Radheshyam has been creating small but steady positive conservation impacts for the well-being of the region's wildlife.

Walking the Talk

Radheshyam has been patrolling the 50 sq. km. GIB habitat outside the demarcated area of the Desert National Park in Rajasthan since 2014. Although more physically demanding and time-consuming, Radheshyam finds foot patrolling to be a less intrusive

way of monitoring wildlife-rich zones. This simple strategy has enabled him to closely observe and identify threats to wildlife and develop a nuanced understanding of various complex conservation challenges. In 2022, he dedicated 50 days to patrolling areas known to be particularly life-threatening to the wildlife in the region, such as places under high-tension electricity lines, railway tracks and areas along highways.

November 15, 2022, was another regular day of patrolling until Radheshyam found **four dead and one grievously injured Eurasian Griffon Vultures** on a railway track near his home village of Dholiya (Jaisalmer district, Rajasthan). He immediately informed his contacts at the Forest Department about this incident and attended to the injured vulture, and handed it over to the department for further treatment and care. The following day, he mobilised a small group of friends and removed the animal carcass on the railway tracks that had attracted the vultures.

In the past year, Radheshyam, along with members of the Forest Department and friends from the ERDS Foundation, has conducted 18 emergency patrols on receiving information about possible wildlife poaching incidents. Between August and December 2022, based on the information given by trusted allies from the local herding community Radheshyam assisted the Forest Department in detaining six people (in two separate incidents) who had **poached a total of 30 spiny-tailed lizards**.

Radheshyam also uses his patrolling time to photo document and maintain monthly data on sightings of GIBs and other resident as well as migratory birds and animal diversity, including chinkaras, nilgais, desert foxes, Indian foxes and desert cats, to name a few. His passionate and patient documentation is stunning proof that grasslands are biodiverse ecosystems that deserve appreciation and protection.

Water for Wildlife

Before the onset of the peak summer season (April-July), with the support of his friends, Radheshyam created 14 new waterholes (of varying capacities) at strategic locations between March and June 2022. These waterholes in open forests and/or grasslands are crucial in maintaining the well-being of wildlife in summer months as animals can avoid human settlements where they face the danger of attacks by free-ranging dogs, poachers and other human-made challenges. He monitored wildlife movement in a few of the waterholes by installing camera traps. Radheshyam routinely refilled all waterholes in the region (newly constructed plus existing structures), maintaining constant availability of water supply for use by wildlife.





PROJECT LEADER:

VISHAL AHUJA

Location: Chamba District, Himachal Pradesh

A graduate in zoology, Project Leader Vishal Ahuja has been working in Chamba valley, Himachal Pradesh towards regenerating abandoned and neglected patches of agricultural fallows and degraded forest patches. Vishal has been creating food stock for wildlife in the region by planting native fruiting trees, with the support and participation of locals, to find long-term solutions to the existing human-wildlife conflict in his home valley. He continues to collaborate with scientists, researchers, Forest Department personnel, and local stakeholders such as members of gram panchayats, and farmer's self-help groups to raise awareness and garner support for rewilding degraded forests.

Seed Stories

In Chamba, Vishal Ahuja has slowly but steadily been stocking precious resources central to his long-term forest restoration project – seeds of native fruiting trees. These seeds constitute the Chamba sacred langur's diet and are also eaten by other resident wildlife. Between September and December 2022, Vishal conducted several reconnaissance visits in the region to scan for and locate healthy-looking mother trees that were currently in the fruiting stage. After identifying a few trees, he routinely visited each location and monitored the stages of fruit maturation to determine the appropriate time for seed collection.

Once the fruits of different species started ripening, he made four to five hour-long weekly trips and collected mature and disease-free seeds dropped by langurs to the ground. This required immense knowledge of the feeding times and behaviours of Chamba sacred langurs, as seeds need to be collected right after a feeding event to avoid rotting and damage by rodents. Vishal also ensured the genetic diversity of each species by collecting seeds from several distant locations in the valley. So far, he has collected 130 horse chestnut *Aesculus indica* seeds, 180 soapnuts *Sapindus mukorosii*, approximately 200 seeds of *kainth* *Pyrus pashia*, 133 *bhiul* *Grewia optiva* seeds and 200 *khirk* *Celtis australis* seeds.

Vishal then carefully cleaned, sun-dried, bagged and stored all the seeds for sowing in his native tree nursery established at Dugli, Chamba in December 2022.

Know Your Langurs

The Himalayan grey langur is endemic to the Chamba valley in Himachal Pradesh. Here the langurs use dense forests within and the fragmented landscape around the Khajjiar-Kalatop Wildlife Sanctuary. For the past decade, Vishal has been documenting the wild dietary preferences of the Himalayan grey langur, rhesus macaque, and Himalayan black bear in his picturesque home valley. However, the Himalayan grey langur remains one of the least studied of all langur species.

2022 IN THE FIELD



Conservation Collaborations

At the invitation of the DFO (Wildlife Division) of Chamba, Vishal participated in the Chamba Forest Department's annual **Great Backyard Bird Count** held between February 18 and 21, 2022. He has been documenting the bird diversity in and around Gamgul Siyabehi Wildlife Sanctuary, Chamba (Himachal Pradesh) with the Forest Department since 2019. During this event, Vishal and his team recorded 154 species of birds, including Grey-sided Bush Warblers, Chestnut-tailed Minlas, and White Wagtails among others. His team also reported first-time records of six species in the region, including Brown Bullfinch, Black Francolin and Rufous-bellied Niltava.

"In the past two years, I got to meet many new people and developed new skills. My constant interaction with the Mud on Boots team, opportunities to deliver online presentations regarding my work has helped me gain confidence."
– Vishal Ahuja

On May 13, 2022, Vishal and his team from the [Zoo Outreach Organisation](#) successfully organised a training session for eight officials of the Chamba Forest Department (Wildlife Division), where various aspects of conducting a census of the Himalayan grey langur were shared. Following this, Vishal received the trail maps of Kalatop-Khajjiar Wildlife Sanctuary from the DFO Chamba (Wildlife Division) for planning the census on the life history and ecology of the Chamba sacred Langur in the same month.

Vishal's decade-long conservation-oriented work in the landscape, which included building camaraderie and collaborations with the Forest Department, paid off when in October 2022, he finally led a 21-member team and conducted the first-of-its-kind census of the Himalayan grey langur. During this three-day long event (October 10-12, 2022), seven three-membered teams roamed the far reaches of Kalatop- Khajjiar Wildlife Sanctuary and documented several important pieces of information on the Chamba sacred langur.

Vishal has compiled the data from the census and prepared a report, that will soon be shared with the Forest Department of Chamba (Wildlife Division).

From the Western Himalaya to the Western Ghats

After completing all field-based activities for May to June, Vishal went on a 20-day long exposure cum field trip to learn about restoration and nursery-raising techniques in Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, and Kerala. He spent five days working with and learning from experts at the [Nature Conservation Foundation, Valparai](#) (Tamil Nadu) about restoring degraded forests and the technical aspects of raising nurseries of native plants. Following this he learned about different aspects of conservation, reforestation, and nursery management for three days at Pitchandikulam forest in Puducherry before visiting the Niligiri Biosphere Nature Park located at Anaikatti.

This was a memorable trip for Vishal as he witnessed the regenerative powers of nature when it is provided with the right support and time. He hopes to use the technical and qualitative knowledge acquired during this trip to address challenges, upgrade, and even improve his long-term habitat restoration approaches in and around the Kalatop-Khajjiar Wildlife Sanctuary.

A Dream Come True

In September 2022, the Mud on Boots project secured an additional grant of five lakh rupees as seed money for starting Vishal's nursery of native fruiting trees. Vishal has been dreaming of raising a nursery of his own as it would enable him to grow an easily accessible stock of healthy saplings for plantations and can also distribute saplings free of cost among locals during his awareness and outreach events. Growing saplings by himself in a nursery also meant that his long-term forest restoration project would create a few jobs, a factor he considers crucial to building goodwill and support among locals.

With this donation received from [Astral Foundation](#), Vishal has leased an area of 752 square metres at Dugli village, Rathiyar Panchayat, Chamba. So far, 800 seeds of five native fruiting trees have been planted here.

Monsoon Plantings

On July 17, 2022, with the active participation and help of locals, 520 saplings of native wild fruiting trees were planted in degraded forest lands in Rathiyar and Chataar villages in Chamba, Himachal Pradesh. These saplings were provided by the Forest Department of Chamba, a staunch supporter of Vishal's forest restoration work in the valley.

On August 7, Vishal and the farmers of Talai and Dugli wards came together again and planted another 300 saplings of future food plants for resident wildlife. The Forest Department of Chamba provided these additional saplings in response to a written letter submitted by the Pradhan of Rathiyar Gram Panchayat, Sunil Kumar.

Vishal has seen that a larger number of saplings planted on private lands survive and grow well compared to those planted on open forest lands on account of grazing pressure from livestock in these areas. He hopes to be able to secure planted saplings using guards/protectors in his upcoming plantation drives. However, this will be determined by the availability of funds.

When You Win a Community's Heart

On May 5, 2022, Vishal and his team from Zoo Outreach Organisation, Coimbatore conducted a workshop for a women's self-help group (total of 30 participants) at Gajnui village to create awareness about the importance of restoration and enriching the degraded forest patches in the region. The team focused on understanding local perspectives on the causes of deforestation and collectively arrived at practical solutions through interactive presentations and playful activities. They highlighted issues such as fragmentation and degradation of forest patches and common local reasons for these mainly human-driven developments. Many members of the self-help group agreed to plant saplings alongside their farms in the upcoming monsoon season.





PROJECT LEADER:

MANOJ GOGOI

Location: Kaziranga landscape, Assam

Manoj Gogoi began his career in wildlife conservation in 2005. A skilled nature and conservation educator, he also mentors local children by providing wildlife education and birding programmes. He constantly engages with locals through nature awareness talks in villages to mitigate human-wildlife conflict scenarios. Manoj is collecting and raising discarded ficus saplings and is planting them across the Kaziranga landscape. His persistence in addressing immediate and long-term conservation challenges has won him the support and respect of locals and the Forest Department alike.

Tigers, Snakes, and People in Kaziranga

Residents of many villages in the vicinity of Kaziranga National Park, Assam come face to face with wildlife regularly. Wild animals such as elephants, rhinos and tigers, often come into agricultural fields and villages. These incidents cause stress for wildlife and humans alike, and may lead to injuries to both parties. While elephants and rhinos depredate agricultural produce, tigers are known to hunt cattle.

In the past, on account of a lack of proper and fast compensation mechanisms after heavy loss of property and potential risks to human life, locals have resorted to retaliatory action against wildlife. Being a local himself, Manoj understands the frustrations of people. Addressing this persistent issue of negative human-wildlife interactions, between July and August 2022, Manoj organised conservation awareness sessions in Halua NC Gaon and Gosani Bora village.

Using the format of open discussions, Manoj learned about the concerns and struggles of locals. He then talked about the irreplaceable roles and services of wildlife to humans and stressed the need to coexist with nature. He also used the interactions to learn about people whose compensation claims were pending and connected them to his contacts at the local Forest Department, backing their demands for appropriate compensation.

Manoj also conducted a snake awareness programme at Bocha Gaon on August 7, 2022. During this event, he shared crucial information such as the diet, habits and habitats of snakes, first aid steps to be followed in case of a snake bite, the difference between venomous and non-venomous snakes, and dispelled common myths about snakes. He also showed photographs and video clips of locally found snakes in an attempt to familiarise people with the four or five venomous snakes found in the region. Through such talks, he hopes to build a better understanding of snakes among locals and positively impact their behaviour during encounters with snakes.

Nurturing Future Conservationists

Project Leader Manoj Gogoi believes that empowering people with knowledge about the importance of wildlife makes them receptive to conservation interventions. To encourage locals to become more tolerant of living peacefully with wildlife, he has routinely organised

2022 IN THE FIELD



Children in Nature

Manoj believes that educating young children about the importance of wildlife and its conservation is the best strategy to enable long-term human-wildlife coexistence in Kaziranga. In June 2022, Manoj mentored a batch of 27 students from various villages in a month-long birdwatching and nature education programme at his wildlife rescue and nature education centre at Doomjan-II. Delete from the report.



COURTESY MANOJ GOGOI



COURTESY MANOJ GOGOI

wildlife-conservation awareness programmes in schools, colleges and villages in the region.

Between July and December 2022, Manoj conducted a nature education and wildlife conservation awareness programme for children from government schools in Gosani Bora, Sildubi, Bocha Gaon, Doomjan and Lakhipur, where he interacted with 90 students along with the school staff. Similarly, in three separate events, he spoke with 86 graduate-level students of Deendayal Upadhyay Adarsh Mahavidyalaya, Amjonga (Goalpara district) and North Kamrup College, Assam.

During all these events, Manoj explained the importance of conserving and protecting the wildlife of the Kaziranga landscape. He stressed that each student can become a wildlife conservationist by consciously choosing to not harm wildlife in and around their homes, helping wildlife in distress by informing competent authorities and experienced rescuers, and allowing wildlife to exist where it belongs.

Ficus Guardians

In 2018, Manoj was heartbroken by the cutting of thousands of mature trees of various species, especially that of ficus of in various parts of Assam. After receiving support from the Mud on Boots Project in June 2022, he has been gradually creating a stock of ficus saplings for plantations across the region.

Since August 2022, Manoj has collected over 150 saplings of *aahot*, *jori*, *domoru*, *borgos*, *koruna bor*, etc., and is raising them in his wildlife rescue and nature education centre at Doomjan-II. Ficus saplings are commonly found occupying rooftops of buildings, cracks in walls, and on edges of roads, where they either wither away or are removed due to potential harm to structures.

So far, he has planted 31 saplings after carefully choosing individuals committed to nurturing and protecting the plants. Manoj records and maintains the GPS coordinate of each plant to monitor their status and names each one after its 'guardian'. This, he believes, might ensure the survival and protection of the planted saplings. Areas far from highways and roads are prioritised for planting to avoid losing these plants to future road expansion activities.

"The constant and immense support provided to me by the Sanctuary Nature Foundation's Mud on Boots Project has offered me with the scope to address numerous conservation challenges in different regions of the vast Kaziranga landscape. While being a grassroots conservationist I got to actively create my conservation focus based on the urgency of challenges faced by wildlife as well as people in my region. And therefore, my experience of working on the Project has been the best one. I am thankful for this opportunity."

- Manoj Gogoi

A Second Innings

After Manoj completed his term with the Mud on Boots Project in 2019, Cara Tejpal (ex-director of the Mud on Boots Project) raised an additional sum of five lakh rupees to support his conservation-oriented work in Kaziranga. As the COVID-19 pandemic made field work impossible, work had to be stopped indefinitely. In June 2022, the project revived its support for Manoj's community-focused nature awareness work.



PROJECT LEADER: MALHAR INDULKAR

Location: Ratnagiri District, Maharashtra

A brilliant young grassroots conservationist, Malhar Indulkar has worked in the past to protect the smooth-coated and small-clawed otters of the Tillari and Terekhol rivers along the Maharashtra-Karnataka border. Continuing his mission of habitat and wildlife conservation, Malhar is now working to conserve and regenerate native forests in the landslide-prone areas of Pedhe village in Ratnagiri district, Maharashtra. For this work, he is collaborating with locally active NGOs, conservation-minded individuals, and schools in the region.

Persistence Moves Mountains

In July 2022, Malhar received funding from the Mud on Boots Project to run a year-long pilot project to conserve and regenerate native forests focusing on the landslide-prone areas of Pedhe village.

As part of the project, Malhar is facilitating the signing of a contract with interested individuals to cease tree felling in their lands for 10 years and to allow active restoration activities (planting native trees/shrubs, etc.) for five years from the date of signing contract. Following this, the value of the forest patch will be calculated by estimating the total values of standing trees in the area. An amount slightly higher than what the owner would receive if they had decided to sell the trees, even after five years, will be given as compensation to each owner. This compensation amount will be paid using the one lakh rupees that were donated to Malhar's cause through a crowdfunding event in 2021, after witnessing the devastating effects of the floods in the region the same year.

In preparation for the signing of contracts, in November 2022, Malhar surveyed a 10 m. X 20 m. quadrant forest patch in Pedhe. This exercise was aimed at learning about the common trees present, and the time required for surveys and to understand challenges that come up during such surveys in the region's forest. It also provided information on the approximate value of the entire forest patch.

Malhar has consistently discussed the project with two interested residents, and consulted the Pradhan of Pedhe Panchayat. He has also been collaborating with the locally active NGO Shramik Sahayog for facilitating the signing of contracts. Malhar admits that convincing locals to participate in the project has been the most demanding and time-consuming part of this project. However, he understands that trust-building, will take its due time, and that persistence is the only key to achieving any headway in this matter.

2022 IN THE FIELD



Accolades Alert!

Malhar was delighted when on June 7, 2022, he was recognised for his conservation-oriented work by the Habitat Trust of Tarun Bharat Maharashtra (MTB). He was awarded a trophy, certificate of appreciation, and a sum of 21,000 rupees for his species and habitat awareness work as part of the larger work he undertook with support from the Mud on Boots Project for otter and myristica swamp conservation between 2018 and 2020.



Forest Friends of Ratnagiri

Between September and December 2022, Project Leader Malhar Indulkar conducted nature education cum conservation awareness programmes for 200 students in four schools in Ratnagiri district, Maharashtra. Malhar plans to create a group comprising of enthusiastic and motivated students who will monitor contracted forests in the vicinity of their respective schools. The main aim of creating forest friends is to encourage the participation of children in forest conservation.

During all interactions, he talked about the disastrous floods and landslides of 2021 to highlight the importance of forests and the urgency of conserving them. He further helped students connect the dots between the ongoing deforestation and the increasing intensity of damages caused by natural disasters in the region. So far, students and teachers in all schools have expressed support and agreed to participate in the project.

Malhar has been ideating with principals and teachers of geography and science of all schools to find ways of integrating this within the schools' existing curriculum.

Shouldering Local Causes

On December 12, 2022, Project Leader Malhar participated in a '*Bandhan Satyagrah*', which was held in Chiplun (Ratnagiri). This agitation was led by the *Katkari* community (members of this tribe are known for their traditional fishing skills, including creating temporary dams on rivers) of Ratnagiri to draw attention to the threats, loss to local livelihoods and rampant destruction of the riverine ecosystem because of dredging in the upstream areas of the Vashishti river without prior scientific studies. Malhar designed a poster with written content that was widely circulated in Chiplun and was also published online through a collaboration with *Sanctuary Asia's* official Instagram page.

Pictures are Worth a Million Words

Malhar has been documenting the region's wildlife by setting up and monitoring a camera trap in the forest area that lies behind his homestay in Chiplun village. So far, he has documented leopard, barking deer, porcupine, small Indian civet, palm civet, wild pig, ruddy mongoose, several species of owls, spur fowls, peafowls, Hanuman langur and Nilgiri Wood Pigeon. The idea behind this exercise is to generate curiosity and interest in nature conservation by others in the region. Malhar shares these with locals during his meetings and casual conversations to convince them to conserve their private forest patches. The images invariably generate excitement and act as stark proof of the biodiversity that even privately-owned forests harbour.



"Mud on Boots program has allowed me to connect with grassroots conservationists and their initiatives throughout India- from the Himalayas to the Western Ghats. The programme truly understands the significance of a long term engagement with communities and keeps following up on conservation projects beyond the time bound schedule. The platform provided by the program has allowed me to bring out the conservation stories and Community struggles from the streams of Vashishthi and forests of its catchments."

– Malhar Indulkar

Greens take out march over chinkara deaths in Jaisalmer

Times News Network

Jaisalmer: The wildlife enthusiasts in Jaisalmer took out a 5-km foot march on Friday with an earthen pot painted with blood of seven chinkaras killed by stray dogs. They submitted the earthen pot and memorandum to the district collector. Environmentalists Parth Jagani, Sumir Singh Sarwata, Bhogal

Recently, stray dogs had killed seven chinkaras at under-construction solar park of Eden company due to the long boundary wall which hindered their escape

Singh, Jhalods and others were part of the march. They warned the district administration that if no action is taken on their demands at the earliest then they will conduct a foot

Activists submit memorandum to Jaisalmer collector on Friday

march till Delhi.

Recently, stray dogs killed had killed seven chinkaras, the state animal, at the under-construction solar park of Eden company due to the long boundary wall which hindered their escape.

Sarwata said that the objective of this yatra was to apprise the district collector about the pasture land getting destroyed due to allot-

ment to the energy companies. They have demanded that pasture lands in rural areas should be registered in the government records.

Jagani and Radheshyam Pemani said that two months ago the environment patrons had installed bird diverter near 'Parwar' village near high tension line still a peacock died at Degrai pasture land one week ago.

Siberian demoiselle cranes fly to Jaisalmer weeks earlier

Times News Network

Jaisalmer: With many water bodies in the desert areas being full due to good rains this monsoon, migratory birds have started appearing. Siberian demoiselle cranes, called 'kurja' by locals, have come a month in advance to various parts of Jaisalmer district. Sightings of these birds in flocks in Lathi Dholiya, Khetolai and Nohh have sent waves of happiness among wildlife enthusiasts.

"Siberian demoiselle cranes generally come here in October, but they have come in the first week of September this time. Good rains in Rajasthan have attracted these birds from the Himalayas. Around 300 to 500 of these birds can be seen in the district. Most of them will be here till March next year," said Radheshyam Pemani, a wildlife enthusiast.

Due to severe cold in central Asia and the hilly areas, the Siberian demoiselle cranes come to warm areas in India, and Rajasthan is their preferred destination, he said. "More birds are expected in another few days. These birds come to western Rajasthan from Siberia, Mongolia and Kazakhstan. Then people who do research on them reach," added Pemani.

Siberian demoiselle cranes weigh around 2 to 2.5kg and camp on playing grounds near water; said wildlife lover Shyam Bishnoi.

"The main food of these birds is Motia grass and the insects in the water. Because of the good rains this time, watermelon will grow well. It is the favorite food of Siberian demoiselle cranes," said Parth Jagani, another bird expert.

A flock of Siberian demoiselle cranes in Lathi Dholiya on Wednesday

A LITTLE RECOGNITION

In December 2022, Project Leader Amir Kumar Chettri's inspiring conservation journey was documented by our former Sanctuary colleague Anirudh Nair and published in ROUNGLASS SUSTAIN. The article traces Amir's journey as a young man who was born in a biodiverse landscape and followed his love for nature to start working with the Forest Department and NGOs in West Bengal. It also documents his conservation-oriented efforts in Panijhora during his two-year term with the Mud on Boots Project.

ON BEHALF OF JAISALMER'S WILDLIFE

In 2022, Radheshyam Pemani Bishnoi has highlighted several threats to wildlife through his relentless reporting on conservation issues in Jaisalmer district, Rajasthan. In February, he provided photographic evidence which led to the detention and seizing of a firearm of a man who had poached Grey Francolin birds. This incident alerted the local Forest Department about an increase in wildlife poaching to supply 'bush meat' hotels in Jaisalmer! Following this in October, Radheshyam Pemani reported the death of a female GIB under a high-tension electricity line. In November, he highlighted the gruesome death of four and the grievous injury of one Eurasian Griffon Vulture on a railway track near his home village of Dholiya. Radheshyam's constant vigilance is undoubtedly a huge asset to the Rajasthan Forest Department. Between August and December Radheshyam assisted the Forest Department in detaining six people (in two separate incidents) who had poached a total of 30 spiny-tailed lizards.

THE STORY SO FAR

In May 2022, ROUNGLASS SUSTAIN shared the conservation journey of Project Leader Manoj Gogoi who has been working to conserve and protect the rich wildlife in the Kaziranga landscape (Assam) since 2005. This article written by Cara Tejpal (Founder of the Mud on Boots project) vividly documents Manoj's story.



पत्रिका राजस्थान

राजस्थान पत्रिका patrika.com

जयपुर, मंगलवार, 05 जुलाई, 2022

वन्य जीव हों या परिंदे, रास आ रही जैसलमेर की आब-ओ-हवा

पत्रिका न्यूज नेटवर्क patrika.com

जैसलमेर. जिले के प्राचीन देगराय ओरण में डेजर्ट कैट (रोही बिल्ली) का कुन्बा दिखाई देने पर वन्यजीव प्रेमियों ने खुशी जताई है। पर्यावरण प्रेमी सुमेरसिंह भाटी ने बताया कि इस ओरण में आठ बिल्लियों का परिवार मिला है। उन्होंने बताया कि ये बिल्लियां धीरे-धीरे लुप्त हो रही हैं। भाटी ने बताया कि अब वाइल्डलाइफ फोटोग्राफर्स का रुझान देगराय ओरण की तरफ बढ़ रहा है। यह फोटो पत्रिका को भाटी ने उपलब्ध कराया।



देगराय ओरण में मिला डेजर्ट कैट का कुन्बा।

रिंग पर लिखा है संयुक्त अरब अमीरात धोलिया गांव के पास जंगल में दिखा रिंग पहना मैक्विन बस्टर्ड

लाठी (जैसलमेर). भारत-पाक सीमा से सटे सरहदी जिले में सीमा पार से सदिग्ध पक्षियों की हो रही आबक से सुरक्षा में संध की आशंका बनी हुई है। क्षेत्र के धोलिया गांव के पास जंगल में सोमवार को मैक्विन बस्टर्ड नामक पक्षी मिला, जिसके पैरों में रिंग लगे हुए थे। ग्रामीणों ने नजदीक जाकर देखा तो सामने आया कि यह पक्षी मैक्विन बस्टर्ड है। इसके दोनों पैरों में अलग-अलग रंग की टैग जैसी रिंग लगी हुई थी तथा उन पर अंकों के साथ संयुक्त



धोलिया में मिला सदिग्ध पक्षी।

अरब अमीरात अंकित मिला। गांव के मनोज विश्वा ने वन्यजीवप्रेमी राधेश्याम विश्वा को सूचित किया। इसके बाद पुलिस को सूचना दी गई।

दैनिक भास्कर

जैसलमेर-पोकरण भास्कर 05-07-2022

धोलिया गांव के पास मिला सरहद पार से आया रिंग लगा पक्षी

अनदेखी • क्षेत्र में पूर्व में भी कई बार मिल चुके हैं रिंग लगे पक्षी, टैग पर लिखा यूएई अबुधाबी, विभागीय अधिकारी नहीं दे रहे हैं ध्यान

अब तक की सख्त पार से आया रिंग लगा पक्षी

आप पक्षियों की प्रमूख घटनाएं

25 अक्टूबर 2019 - एक सरहद पार से आया रिंग लगा पक्षी।

6 अक्टूबर 2020 - मैक्विन ने सरहद पार से आया रिंग लगा पक्षी।

10 अक्टूबर 2021 - सरहद पार से आया रिंग लगा पक्षी।

24 मई 2022 - सरहद पार से आया रिंग लगा पक्षी।

4 जून 2022 - सरहद पार से आया रिंग लगा पक्षी।

5 जुलाई 2022 - धोलिया गांव के पास रिंग लगी हुई मिला मैक्विन बस्टर्ड नामक पक्षी।

महाराष्ट्र सरकार (टी) द्वारा जारी किया गया है।

धोलिया गांव के पास जंगल में एक अलग तरह का पक्षी दिखाई देने से पहले तो लोगों में कोहल का महील ज्वाल हो गया। उसके बाद नजदीक से देखने पर मैक्विन बस्टर्ड नामक पक्षी पता चला। जिसके दोनों पैरों में अलग-अलग रंग की रिंग लगी दिखाई दी। देखी पक्षी में लगे हुए अलग-अलग रंगों में अंकों के साथ संयुक्त आब आया रिंग लगी थी। ग्रामीण मनोज विश्वा ने इस घटना को लेकर पक्षियों का नजदीक रहने वाले राधेश्याम को सूचित किया। राधेश्याम विश्वा ने पक्षी को लेकर पक्षियों को अपनाने का फैसला किया।

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HIGHLIGHTS 2022



MUDDY MARCH

The Mud on Boots Team successfully ran an online crowdfunding campaign "Muddy March" in March 2022. The all-women team led by former Project Director Cara Tejpal, Sanctuary's Social Media Manager Malaika Shah, and Project Coordinator Neyi Jamoh surpassed the target amount of 15 lakh rupees to raise a total of INR 16,90,00 in merely 20 days.

SMALL GRANTS BIG IMPACTS

Mud on Boots Project provided small grants to two incredible grassroots projects- "Moving Upstream: Mahakali Project" of Veditum India Foundation and "Urur-Olcott Apprenticeship Program" of Palluyir Trust. The former is designed to create grassroots documentation about Indian rivers, riparian communities, and anthropogenic activities, along with establishing a relationship with riparian communities and the latter is a nature-based learning programme designed for young children from coastal communities to engage in fieldwork on their home beach and other biodiversity areas of Chennai.

ALL IN THE FAMILY

After the successful "Muddy March" Campaign in March 2022, we extended support to the works of two alumni Project Leaders Manoj Gogoi (Kaziranga landscape, Assam) and Malhar Indulkar (Ratnagiri district, Maharashtra). Manoj conducts nature education cum awareness programmes for children and locals in Kaziranga and is leading a Ficus adoption and plantation programme to create food resources for the region's wildlife. Malhar is working to conserve and regenerate native forests in the landslide-prone areas of Ratnagiri district, Maharashtra.

EXPANDING OUR CIRCLE OF LOVE

In October, the Mud on Boots Project team helped raise funds to provide urgent medical aid to the families of two frontline forest staff from the Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary in Karnataka and Pakke Tiger Reserve in Arunachal Pradesh.

We also donated 127 Hindi and English language children's books, 10 *Sanctuary Asia* magazines, and six Sanctuary coffee table books to



the newly established library in Rangrang Junior High School, North Sikkim in December 2022. A set of beautiful learning and activity tools provided by [SeasonWatch](#) was also shared with the students.

LEADERS ARE SPEAKING

On Earth Day 2022, i.e., April 22, Project Leaders Phuntsog Dolma, Vishal Ahuja, and alumni Project Leader Sunil Harsana shared a virtual stage with Bittu Sehgal (Founder, Sanctuary Nature Foundation) spoke about their inspiring conservation journeys through the MoJOsh magnificent seven platform. This was a huge learning opportunity for the three as they got to address a live online audience during the streaming of their talks.

WINNING ACCOLADES

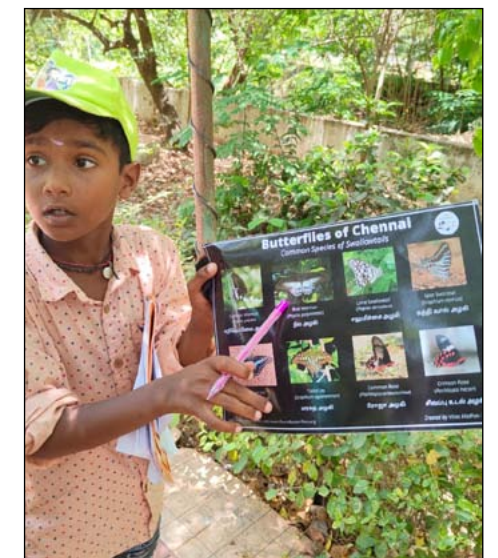
On September 27, 2022 while celebrating World Tourism Day, Project Leader Manoj Gogoi was honoured with a certificate of appreciation by the Department of Tourism, Government of Assam for his wildlife conservation-oriented work in and around Kaziranga National Park, Assam.

IT'S REIGNING DECHIN

In 2022, Dechin Pema Saingmo was featured on [Women of Wild India's](#) Instagram page adding her story to that of other women working for science and nature in India. Dechin hopes such features will inspire the next generation of conservationists, especially young girls in her home state of Arunachal Pradesh.

FIELD RENDEZVOUS

In 2022, Mud on Boots Project Coordinator Neyi Jamoh traveled to three project locations i.e., Panijhora forest village in northern West Bengal, Rong valley (Ladakh), and Chamba valley in Himachal Pradesh. While spending time with each one she witnessed the inspiring works of Project Leaders Amir Kumar Chhetri, Phuntsog Dolma, and Vishal Ahuja respectively. Meeting Project Leaders in their landscapes help to learn about their challenges and to create customised support for each Project Leader.



MEET OUR NEW PROJECT LEADERS!



ILLUSTRATION- MALLIKA CHANDRA

In 2022, our team received over 35 nominations for the 2023-25 batch of Mud on Boots Project Leaders. While each nominee was found to be exceptional in their own right, we narrowed down the selection based on four criteria – mentorship availability, access to other opportunities, project urgency, and potential for growth. The final five projects we have chosen to support represent a diversity of personalities, landscapes, species, and approaches to biodiversity conservation. We are thrilled to work with them over the next two years and bring their stories to our readers and supporters.

SHASHANK LADEKAR AND KANHAIYALAL UDAPURE (Gondia district, Maharashtra)

In the agricultural fields and 'tanks' of the Gondia district, Shashank Ladekar and Kanhaiyalal Udupure are protecting Sarus Cranes and working towards wetland conservation. These young conservationists are volunteers with a local organisation – Sustaining Environment and Wildlife Assemblages (SEWA), and field assistants to a Ph.D. researcher identifying opportunities for waterbird conservation in Central India. Over the years, Shashank and Kanhaiyalal have arranged wildlife awareness meetings in 55 villages and 20 schools in the buffer zones of the Navegaon-Nagzira Tiger Reserve; recorded the presence of the Indian grey wolf in new locations; rescued and rehabilitated injured wildlife; and assisted the Forest Department in managing human-wildlife encounters. They also monitor Sarus Crane nests in their districts and are planning to nurture a seed bank for wetland restoration efforts. Drawing on their past experiences and skillset, Shashank and Kanhaiya are committed to working with Gram Panchayats in at least 10 villages across the district to strategise wetland management techniques that can support wildlife and provide livelihoods to people. While Kanhaiyalal is an excellent birder and fledging photographer, Shashank has the magic touch when it comes to animal care. With support from the Mud on Boots Project, this dedicated pair will give fresh impetus to wetland conservation in Maharashtra.



JESU DAS (Mandya district, Karnataka)

Born in a village near Nanjangud town on the banks of the Kabini river, Jesu Das is a gifted fisherman with immense knowledge of fish, fish behaviour, and traditional fishing techniques. He has been working as a field operative with the Wildlife Association of South India (WASI), where he discovered new applications for his traditional skills and practices. His understanding of river ecology, keen observation skills, and accurate species identification have paved the way for the rediscovery of fish that were once believed to be locally extinct. He has led several field excursions into remote stretches of the Cauvery river basin, looking for the critically endangered and endemic humpback mahseer. His enthusiasm and zeal have led him to serve a crucial role at the Humpback Mahseer Repository Facility set up by the Karnataka Forest Department at Bheemeshwari. With support from the Mud on Boots Project, Jesu is committed to continuing his work towards protecting the humpback mahseer by managing and stocking the Mahseer Repository Facility, providing orientation to visitors, educating his peers, and contributing to research projects underway in the Cauvery basin. Jesu will also be training interested youth in the age-old art of cast net fishing, to ensure the continuity and responsible application of this ancient and irreplaceable skill.

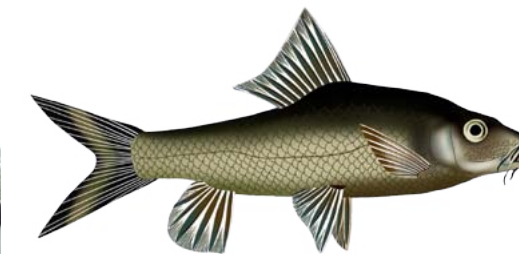


ILLUSTRATION- MALLIKA CHANDRA



ILLUSTRATION- MALLIKA CHANDRA



SADDAM HUSAIN LODHA (Haridwar district, Uttarakhand)

Trained in birdwatching, plant identification, and bat research, Saddam Husain Lodha is an inspiring community conservation leader. Having initially worked daily wage jobs in apple orchards, poultry farms, and chemist shops, he went on to become a brilliant field assistant to researchers conducting studies in his district. Saddam is also a key member of Mae, a unique grassroots organisation founded and run by *Van Gujjar* youth from *Gujjar Basti* in Haridwar district, Uttarakhand. Their work ranges from increasing capacity and generating employment opportunities within their community, documenting traditional *Gujjar* knowledge of the forests, and improving knowledge of gender and sexual identity to imparting nature education and involving children in citizen science projects. With support from the Mud on Boots Project, Saddam wants to sharpen Mae's focus on nature education and conservation by leading local youth in monitoring populations of the barasingha or swamp deer in the Jhilmil Jheel Conservation Reserve and surrounding areas, where they are hunted. Saddam also plans to mobilise Mae's existing army of youth volunteers to monitor the birds around the Jhilmil Jheel Conservation Reserve, and form a street play troupe to perform plays as a form of nature education and outreach in Gaindikhata, Haridwar district, Uttarakhand.



ILLUSTRATION- MALLIKA CHANDRA

SAHEBRAM BEDIYA AND CHAMRU BEDIYA (Ranchi district, Jharkhand)

Described as 'rays of hope for community-led conservation' by their associates, Sahebram and Chamru *Bediya* are shaping new ideas in Jharkhand's Koynardih village. The duo has excellent knowledge of the forests that surround their village and lead Ekastha Trails, a homegrown eco-tourism initiative that introduces tourists to nature via guided treks and trails. They also document local biodiversity, introduce community youth to wildlife conservation, and organise clean-up drives along their trails. Both conservationists are graduates of Green Hub's Central India Fellowship and have been trained in video documentation. As members of the marginalised Bediya community, Sahebram and Chamru want to highlight Jharkhand's wildlife, provide green jobs for their community, and use their cultural knowledge to reduce deforestation and hunting in their village. During their term with the Mud on Boots Project, Sahebram and Chamru plan to document the biodiversity in and around Koynardih by involving interested community members. They will also work with community members to halt incidences of forest fires and the felling of forest trees through various awareness programmes. Independently, Sahebram will be creating videos on coexisting with wildlife, while Chamru will be developing their eco-tourism model to benefit their community.



ASUKHOMI COMMUNITY RESERVE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

(Zunheboto district, Nagaland)

In May 2022, the people of Asukhomi village voluntarily surrendered their guns and hunting weapons at a public meeting organised by the village council. This show of solidarity towards conservation efforts was guided by the 12 conservation-minded residents of Asukhomi village that comprise the Asukhomi Community Reserve Management Committee. Spread across 280 ha. of forest, the Asukhomi Community Reserve was notified in 2020 with the consent of locals. This lush forest ranges in elevation from 600 to 2,200 msl. and boasts a wide diversity of wild species. Through their persistent outreach programmes and using their strong social bonding skills, the committee has cultivated conservation practices that include the nurturing of native plants, sustainable collection of non-timber forest produce, and wildlife rescue and rehabilitation. The committee is also entrusted with awareness programmes, livelihood initiatives, and community outreach. Dedicated to building an inclusive culture of community-based conservation in Asukhomi, the committee is now training youth to document biodiversity. With support from the Mud on Boots Project, they will create a local biodiversity register in both the Sumi dialect and the English language. This will be an invaluable document that will record not just biological diversity but will also preserve local and traditional knowledge, and be used to develop an agenda for conservation action.



ILLUSTRATION- MALLIKA CHANDRA



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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.

Thank you, Priyanka Das (Independent Researcher); Kamal Medhi from WWF-India; Manisha Kumari from East West Seeds- Knowledge Transfer, Dr. Sanjay Molur and Payal Molur of Wildlife Information Liaison Development Society, Coimbatore; The Himalayan Grey Langur Project; Voice for Asian Elephant Society; Mallika Chandra; Rita Banerji of The Green Hub; Munib Khanyari from Nature Conservation Foundation – India; Gerry Martin and Chandini Chhabra of the Liana Trust; Nandini Velho (The Seed Lab, Assam); Dr. Dinesh Vinherkar of Wildlife Conservation and Animal Welfare Association (WCAWA); Dr. Sumit Dookia of Ecology Rural Development and Sustainability (ERDS) Foundation; Solitary Nature and Animal Protection Foundation (SNAP); Vidya Venkatesh of Last Wilderness Foundation; Anirudh Nair of Roundglass Sustain; Range Forest Officer Tage Haniya and Tajum Yomcha (Research Officer, Namdapha Tiger Reserve).

For their guidance and a firm commitment to children's literacy, we are grateful to the team at Pratham Books. Our gratitude extends to the gentlemen at Faraway Originals, who have proved to be invaluable allies in our effort to spotlight the work of our Project Leaders. We thank Season Watch team at Nature Conservation Foundation-India for providing educational resource materials for the students of Rangrang Junior High School, North Sikkim.

We are also indebted to the many members of the Indian Forest Service who have supported the Mud on Boots Project. A heartfelt thanks to the Forest Departments of Himachal Pradesh, West Bengal, Rajasthan, and Arunachal Pradesh. We are also grateful to the Sheep Husbandry Department, Leh (Ladakh) for strengthening the reach and impact of our work.

Thank you, Cara Tejpal, (founder and ex-director of the Mud on Boots Project) for continuing to guide the project and working selflessly to raise funds for the project. Undoubtedly, this project would not be possible without our wonderful team at *Sanctuary*, which provides backend support in uncountable and invaluable ways each month. In addition, former Project Coordinator Maitreyee Mujumdar remains a source of strength.

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.



RADHESHYAM PEMANI BISHNOI

OUR SUPPORTERS

The Mud on Boots Project is a publicly funded initiative. In the six years since the inception of the project, we have found stability through steady contributions from Dia Mirza and Anushka Singh. Their generosity continues to propel the incredible work carried out by our Project Leaders in various corners of our beautiful country.

We are deeply moved and encouraged by all contributions toward the Mud on Boots Project during the Muddy March Crowdfunding Campaign in March 2022.

We thank Gigi Pandole, Kai Bhujwala, Riverbanks Studios, Sandip Bhagat, Geetan Batra, Kiran Rao, Alka Sodhani, Chhavi Sodhani, Amit Kaushik, Susan Mathews, Shantanu Chatterjee, Arun Gupta, Inner Wheel Club Ahmedabad South and Mariwala Charity Trust for their belief in the work carried out by Mud on Boots Project and for donating heartily to its various causes.

Our team was also delighted to receive support from the Astral Foundation, whose generous donation has enabled the establishment of a native plant nursery in Chamba valley, Himachal Pradesh.



RADHESHYAM PEMANI BISHNOI



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