

WILDLIFE ANECDOTES



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CENTRAL ACADEMY FOR STATE FOREST SERVICE
Coimbatore

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Foreword

Welcome to the captivating world of "Wildlife Anecdotes," a collection that transports readers into the heart of nature's wonders. In this collection, authors have encapsulated their personal encounters with wildlife, sharing the awe-inspiring moments and intimate connections forged amidst nature's embrace. Each story unfolds as a testament to the profound impact these encounters have had on their lives, inviting readers to journey alongside them as they navigate the wonders of the natural world. Through vivid descriptions and heartfelt reflections, they aim to convey the beauty, unpredictability, and sheer magic of our interactions with the diverse array of creatures that inhabit our planet. From the majestic roar of a lion to the delicate flutter of a butterfly's wings, each species holds its own unique story waiting to be told. These anecdotes celebrate the rich tapestry of life on Earth, offering glimpses into the daily struggles, triumphs, and moments of sheer wonder experienced by a myriad of species. But beyond mere entertainment, this book serves as a reminder of our interconnectedness with the natural world. As stewards of the planet, it is our responsibility to protect and preserve the habitats that these creatures call home. Through education and awareness, we can ensure that future generations will continue to marvel at the beauty and diversity of wildlife for years to come. So come, join us as we delve into the heart of these captivating experiences,

where every encounter serves as a poignant reminder of the intricate tapestry of life that surrounds us. Happy reading, and may your love for wildlife continue to grow with each turn of the page.



V. Thirunavukarasu, IFS
APCCF & Principal,
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Preface

In the vast and untamed wilderness of our world, there are countless stories waiting to be told. From the depths of the oceans to the heights of the mountains, from the dense jungles to the arid deserts, wildlife exists in all its glory, captivating and inspiring us with its beauty, resilience, and sheer magnificence. This book is a collection of wild life stories that will take you on a journey through the natural world, introducing you to some of the most fascinating creatures that inhabit our planet. From the majestic elephants of Shivaliks to the elusive leopards of the Himalayas, each story offers a glimpse into the lives of these remarkable animals and the challenges they face in their struggle for survival. Through these tales, we hope to foster a deeper appreciation for the wonders of the natural world and inspire a sense of wonder and awe for the incredible diversity of life that surrounds us. Join us as we embark on this adventure into the wild, where every turn of the page reveals a new and captivating story waiting to be discovered.

**Arun Kumar &
Mayank Mehta**

Officer Trainees, SFS 2022-24 Batch -I
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With heartfelt appreciation,
Arun and Mayank

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The Leopard of Badminton Court

Dated : 17th October 1998

Place : Gopeshwar

Gopeshwar is a beautiful hill town and headquarter of Chamoli district in Uttarakhand (that time it was under undivided Uttar Pradesh). It is surrounded by Himalayan peaks like Nanda Devi and Nanda Ghunti. That time the population of the town would have been around Fifty Thousand. Being the headquarters, the town has the mixed population of the district having people from different villages having different accent of the Garhwali dialect. Most of the people came and settled here in search of better education, health and employment opportunities. There was a specific area on the northern most point of the town named as Kund Colony. It was hub of the all Government offices including Collectorate, Forest, Police, PWD, Supply, Agriculture, Horticulture, Public sector Banks etc. There were residential quarters for employees of all these departments in Kund Colony. The town was in the vicinity of beautiful ChirPine Forest in North, East and South, and Oak and Rhododendron forests in the West. There was a depression in middle of the Kund Colony where a Nursery and a Badminton court of Alaknanda Soil Conservation Division were established. Now here goes the astonishing incident of that morning when time stood still for all the inhabitants of Kund Colony...

It was a lovely morning in the month of October, and the forest was alive with the sounds of chirping birds and rustling leaves. The band of Badminton enthusiasts from all the

departments were on their way to the badminton court of the Alaknanda Soil conservation Division. To their surprise when they reached to the Badminton court Building they witnessed a canvas of golden hues and intricate rosettes, Contrasting with the verdant backdrop of nature's embrace. His powerful form sprawled in peaceful slumber. His chest rises and falls in a steady rhythm, a testament to the tranquillity of his unconscious state. The sunlight dances upon his fur, casting a soft glow, Enhancing the regal aura that surrounds him. There was a beautiful young male leopard lying in the lawn beside the building.

They immediately sent a person to Range office to alert the Forest officials about leopard that had ingested a poisonous substance and was in need of urgent medical attention. The Rapid Response Team headed by the veterinarian quickly sprang into action and planned to tranquilize the leopard and transport it to a safe area for treatment.

Word spread quickly in that small town, and soon a large crowd had gathered to catch a glimpse of the majestic animal. Eager to witness such a rare sight up close. I was also among the crowd. I was 9 years old then and very excited to catch glimpse of the beautiful beast along with my two friends Viru and Mukesh. As we approached near the Leopard I was startled by the glimpse of the unconscious giant. a whirlwind of emotions engulfed my young heart. Fear gripped me as I stood frozen in awe of the majestic creature before me, its powerful presence now rendered vulnerable. Curiosity danced in my eyes, sparking a flame of wonderment as I pondered the mysterious circumstances that led to this moment. Empathy tugged at my soul, a tender thread connecting me to the unconscious beast, stirring a wellspring of compassion and a yearning to help. In that fleeting moment, amidst the tangled emotions swirling within myself, I found myself at the crossroads of fear and empathy, curiosity and

concern, navigating the delicate balance of emotions in the presence of the wild and untamed.

As the forest staff tried to tranquilise leopard, the dart hit the wrong point. The huge crowd watching in hushed anticipation and suddenly, the leopard began to stir. Its powerful muscles tensed, and its eyes slowly opened. The crowd gasped in awe and fear as the leopard regained consciousness and took a ten feet leap in the air then back to ground. Panic spread through the crowd as people scrambled to get away from the awakened predator. In the chaos, Me and my friends started running with the crowd and I lost my brand-new Lakhani White and Blue bathroom slippers and got separated from other two boys. I looked around frantically, trying to find them amidst the commotion. Few people got injured during that sudden rush. Meanwhile, the forest staff quickly took control of the situation, using their expertise to calm the leopard and ensure the safety of the crowd. With their swift actions, they were able to tranquilize the leopard in second attempt and move it to a secure location away from the crowd. As the situation was brought under control, my friends found me and we were relieved to be reunited. We made our way back home, reflecting on the incredible experience we had just witnessed. I lost two things that day, one is my blue and white slippers and the other was my perception of Human superiority over Nature.

The incident served as a reminder of the delicate balance between humans and wildlife, and the importance of respecting and protecting the natural world. And for me, it was a day I would never forget, as I left with a newfound appreciation for the beauty and power of the creatures that call the forest their home. About almost 24 years after this incident I joined the Uttarakhand Forest Services and feel myself blessed to getting an opportunity to render my service for the Ecological security of our country.

- Arun Kumar

Nani's Brave Encounter

Every winter vacation during my school years, I eagerly anticipated visiting my Nani's home. Her house stood at the edge of the village, closest to the forest. Many wondered how Nani lived alone in such a remote place.

As I approached her home, I spotted Sheru, Nani's faithful dog, waiting outside. I wasn't sure if he'd recognize me, but as soon as he saw me, he bounded over and showered me with affectionate licks. It was heart-warming. Nani also had a kitten named Debu, but she seemed unfazed by my arrival. After settling in, I went to find Nani. "Nani, where are you?" I called out. Her reply echoed from the buffalo shed, confirming my arrival.

After helping Nani with milking, I presented her with the sweets my mom had sent. She brewed tea, and together we huddled around the fire to stave off the cold and cook our meal. As evening approached, Sheru suddenly started barking frantically. Nani, with her seasoned intuition, sensed danger – a leopard was nearby. In the hills, leopards often targeted dogs and cattle due to food scarcity in the wild.

We quickly moved the wood stove inside and prepared for the worst. Sheru and Debu stuck close to us as we anxiously waited. Suddenly, around 8 o'clock, a majestic leopard burst into the kitchen while Nani was making chapattis.

Fear gripped us as the leopard locked eyes with us. But Nani, displaying incredible bravery, grabbed two burning pieces

of wood from the stove and raised them high, letting out a fierce shout. The leopard hesitated, then retreated into the darkness, leaving us shaken but unharmed. Nani's courage saved us all that night, proving once again the strength and resilience of those who dwell in the wild hills.

- Mayank Mehta

Caregivers' Chronicle: A Tale of Love and Loss

Once upon a time, during my second year at college in Pantnagar, my friend Manoj and I stumbled upon a tiny chick of a wild bird on a scorching summer afternoon. Little did I know then, it was a yellow wattled lapwing chick. Its frantic mother searched for it relentlessly, calling out in the N.K Anantrao complex, but couldn't locate her offspring. We tried to show the chick to its mother, but she remained unseen. Eventually, I decided to take it to my hostel on the ground floor, escaping the heat of the third floor.

We rushed to the veterinary hospital for identification and advice on feeding. Disappointed by the lack of senior doctors, we turned to interns for guidance. Their suggestions, like feeding insects to a day-old chick, seemed impractical. Back at the hostel, we fashioned a comfortable box for the chick and tried feeding it boiled rice and pulses, but it didn't respond. After failed attempts, I mimicked the mother bird's feeding technique by holding water in my mouth and letting the chick drink from it. Similarly, I crushed boiled rice into a paste and fed it to her. Our hostel room transformed into a hub of excitement as we watched the chick grow.

It began to recognize me as its caregiver, and I gladly sacrificed my time on games to nurture it. I documented our moments together through photos and videos, relishing the joy it brought us.

However, tragedy struck on the day of an important exam when I neglected the chick. Upon returning, I found it surrounded by a swarm of ants, chirping in distress. Heartbroken, I hurriedly removed it from the box, but it was too late. The chick was covered in bites and barely conscious. Anger surged within me as I swiftly crushed the ants, but my efforts were in vain. With a heavy heart, I buried the chick, mourning its untimely demise for days to come. After the chick's passing, I instructed Manoj to delete all the photos and videos we had taken, unable to bear the reminder of our lost companion. Even now, years later, memories of the chick remain close to my heart.

Just recently, after nine long years, I came across a week-old squirrel baby. The sight of it stirred familiar emotions within me, prompting thoughts of caregiving once again. However, the memory of the chick's tragic end haunted me, causing hesitation in bringing the squirrel home. Seeking guidance, I consulted my guru about the possibility of the forest department providing care for the squirrel. His response was to release it into the wild.

With a heavy heart, I bid farewell to the squirrel, knowing it was for the best. The fear of another untimely demise weighed heavily on my mind as I left it in the jungle, hoping for its safety and well-being.

- Mayank Mehta

The Black Bear of Guptakashi

Dated : 10th April 2005

Place : Guptakashi

I did my schooling from Jawahar Navodaya Vidhyala(JNV)Jakhdhar, one of the co-ed residential schools under the ministry of Human Resource Development of the Government of India. In India, every district has a JNV for the purpose of giving good education to poor and rural students. JNV Jakhdhar was one among them. Jakhdhar is a remote village in District Rudraprayag of Himalayan state of Uttarakhand. There was a connecting 8 kilometres mud road from NH 109 in Guptakashi to access Jakhdhar. There was an alternative foot pavement which goes through thick Oak, Rhododendron and Myrus esculenta forests which was a good habitat for Black Bears, Leopards and Red Jungle Fowls. Nestled amidst the majestic Himalayas, the small village of Jakhdhar is a hidden gem of natural beauty. Surrounded by dense pine and Rhododendron forests, this picturesque village exudes tranquillity and charm. The crisp mountain air is filled with the sweet scent of pine, and the gentle rustling of leaves creates a soothing symphony that echoes through the valley. As the sun sets behind the snow-capped peaks, painting the sky in hues of orange and pink, the village glows in the warm light, casting long shadows on the lush green landscape.

So, one fine Saturday morning I along with my five friends of class 11th made a plan to watch a movie in a small theatre in

Guptakashi. We decided to jump off the boundary wall of the school campus in the evening and will follow the pavement in the forest to reach Guptakashi. We chose this route to avoid any encounter with our teachers to avoid disciplinary actions against us.

Things went as per plan and we were out of the campus by 0700 pm. The thick forest started about 500 meters from the Boundary wall. As the sun dipped below the horizon, casting long shadows through the dense Rhododendron Forest, we found ourselves on a remote trail, our laughter and chatter echoing through the trees. The air was thick with the scent of pine and the sounds of nocturnal creatures coming to life.

Suddenly, a hush fell over the group as a low growl rumbled through the underbrush. Our hearts pounding in our chests, we froze in place, our eyes wide with fear. And then, emerging from the shadows, we saw it - a massive black bear, its fur glistening in the moonlight as it stood on its hind legs, sniffing the air. Panic gripped the boys as we realized we were face to face with one of nature's most powerful predators. Adrenaline surged through our veins as we scrambled to come up with a plan. With no time to spare, we slowly backed away, trying not to make any sudden movements that might provoke the bear. But the bear seemed to have other plans. With a thunderous roar, it charged towards us. Our screams pierced the night as we turned and ran for our lives downwards, our hearts pounding in our ears as we raced through the forest, branches whipping at our faces. Through the darkness, we could hear the bear's heavy footsteps behind us, its hot breath on our necks. Fear fuelled our escape as we pushed ourselves to run faster, our lungs burning with exertion. We could feel the bear closing in, its growls growing louder with each passing moment.

Just when we thought all hope was lost, we found a Hut in an open space. There was an old man with his goats resting around the hut.

He has ignited a big fire in front of the Hut to ward off the wild animals. This Sight of fire refuelled our energy and we ran more faster towards hut to save our almost gone life. With a burst of energy, we veered off the trail and into the safety of the open space. The bear, upon spotting fire slowed down its speed and stopped at the edge of the open space, its eyes locked on the us as we caught our breath. With trembling hands and grateful hearts, the we watched as the bear turned and disappeared back into the shadows of the forest. Exhausted but relieved, we knew they had narrowly escaped a terrifying encounter with nature's wild side.

As we made our way back to Guptakashi with ignited mashals, the shared a newfound respect for the wilderness and the creatures that called it home. And though our hearts still raced at the memory of that fateful night, we knew we would forever carry with us the thrill of survival and the bond forged in facing danger together.

- Arun Kumar

Harmony in the Hills: A Tale of Man, Beast, and Fruit

In the hills of Auli, tourists flock to witness the stunning beauty of nature. Situated at a lofty elevation of 9000 feet, Auli is a picturesque destination known for its breath-taking landscapes. As a field post for me, it was both tranquil and isolated, with the snow covering the hills for three months of the year. When the snow melted away, signalling the arrival of spring, the hills of Auli burst into life.

In June, the hills adorned themselves with peaches and plums, painting a colourful tapestry across the landscape. And as July and August rolled around, the orchards came alive with the sweet promise of apples and pears. With hardly any people around, my companion became Marshall, a loyal and playful dog. Together, we explored the vast expanse of Auli, spending our days amidst the beauty of nature. However, amidst the bounty of fruiting season, there lurked a shadow of danger – the threat of man-animal conflict.

One morning, while out on a walk with Marshall, we stumbled upon a bear and her cub. Marshall's bark alerted the bear, and in a moment of panic, he lunged towards it. The bear, startled and protective, growled menacingly and chased after us. Fearing for our lives, Marshall and I fled, narrowly escaping harm. Determined to prevent any further encounters, we devised a plan. We placed apples and pears outside the farm fence, along the bear's usual route. To our relief, the bear found the fruits and refrained from entering the orchard.

This simple solution not only averted conflict but also provided for the bear's needs during the fruiting season. As the days passed, our routine of placing fruits outside the fence continued successfully. The bear, along with her cub, found sustenance without venturing into the orchard, and we were spared from any further confrontations. With the fruiting season coming to an end, the bear and her cub retreated into the depths of the forest, leaving behind a sense of peace and harmony in the hills of Auli.

- Mayank Mehta

The wild boars of Pipalkoti

In the serene village of Pipalkoti, nestled in the lush green valleys of Chamoli district of Uttarakhand, life moved at a slow and steady pace. The fertile land of Pipalkoti was adorned with vibrant fields of wheat, rice, and vegetables that swayed gently in the breeze, painting a picturesque scene against the backdrop of towering mountains.

However, the peace of the village was often disrupted by a group of wild boars that roamed the surrounding forests. These mischievous creatures would descend upon the fields under the cover of darkness, raiding the crops and leaving destruction in their wake. The villagers of Pipalkoti were left frustrated and helpless as their hard work was destroyed by these marauding boars. Determined to put an end to the crop raids, the villagers decided to set traps to catch the wild boars.

They carefully laid out snares and baited them with tempting treats, hoping to capture the culprits. One fateful night, their plan succeeded as a baby boar wandered into one of the traps and got caught. The mother of the trapped baby boar arrived at the scene, her distressed squeals echoing through the night. She frantically tried to free her baby from the trap, nudging and pushing at it with all her might. But despite her efforts, the trap held firm, and she was unable to release her precious offspring.

As dawn broke over Pipalkoti, the villagers gathered around the trapped boar and its anguished mother. Their hearts were heavy as they witnessed the bond between the mother and her

baby, realizing the pain they had caused. Moved by compassion, they decided to release the baby boar and vowed never to set traps again. The mother boar, sensing the change in atmosphere, gave one last mournful look at her baby before reluctantly leaving.

The villagers watched in silence as she disappeared into the forest, her sorrowful cries fading into the distance. From that day on, the villagers of Pipalkoti lived in harmony with the wild boars, choosing coexistence over conflict and understanding the importance of compassion in their interactions with nature.

- Arun Kumar

The Ficus of IDPL

During Our OJT in Dehradun Forest Division, we were assigned to help the SDO Rishikesh to vacate encroached forest land in IDPL campus. In the heart of Rishikesh, amidst the serene banks of the Ganges, lay the devastated remains of the once-thriving Indian Drugs and Pharmaceuticals Limited (IDPL) facility. The sprawling complex, which had once been a bustling hub of pharmaceutical production, now stood abandoned and in ruins, a haunting reminder of its glorious past.

When we visited the old remains of factory site, boiler unit and many more technical units in the IDPL complex we witnessed that Nature, had begun to reclaim the land that had been left neglected for years. The old buildings of IDPL were now engulfed by a lush forest of Ficus species, their roots snaking through cracked walls and broken windows, reclaiming the space that had once been dominated by concrete and steel. The Ficus trees had taken root in every nook and cranny, their branches reaching out like eager fingers, seeking sunlight and space to grow. As the years passed, the Ficus trees flourished in their new environment, their roots anchoring themselves firmly in the crumbling structures of the abandoned buildings. Their thick foliage provided shelter and shade for a myriad of wild animals that had made the derelict IDPL complex their home. Birds nested in the branches, monkeys swung from tree to tree, and deer grazed peacefully in the overgrown courtyard.

The once sterile and industrial landscape of IDPL had been transformed into a vibrant ecosystem teeming with life. The air

was filled with the chirping of birds, the rustling of leaves, and the occasional roar of a passing leopard. Nature had reclaimed the land with a tenacity that was both beautiful and awe-inspiring. Visitors who ventured into the abandoned IDPL complex were greeted by a sight that was both haunting and enchanting. The towering Ficus trees cast dappled shadows on the moss-covered walls, creating an otherworldly atmosphere that seemed to transport them to a forgotten realm where nature reigned supreme.

As they wandered through the overgrown corridors and crumbling rooms of IDPL, they marvelled at the resilience of nature and the power of life to thrive even in the most unlikely of places. The once-devastated remains of the PSU had been transformed into a sanctuary for wildlife, a living testament to the inexorable force of nature's growth and renewal. The one thing which kept hitting my mind that day was, would it be Ficus which will cover the whole earth someday...?

- Arun Kumar

Guardians of the Wetland

During my on-the-job training for the State Forest Services, I was assigned to the Terai Central Forest Division in Uttarakhand. This division was home to the Haripura Baur wetland, a haven for thousands of migratory birds. These majestic creatures travelled all the way from Siberia through the Central Asian pathway to escape the harsh winters of the North, arriving at the wetland in November and staying until March.

As my training neared its end, I felt compelled to witness the marvel of these migratory birds up close. I called the field staff the day before to inform them of my visit to Haripura Baur. The next morning, amidst dense fog, I set out on a bike with one of the staff members. Equipped with binoculars and a DSLR camera, I eagerly anticipated sighting and photographing the magnificent birds. Upon reaching the wetland, I was greeted by flocks of common pochard, red-crested pochard, Northern pintail, Eurasian coot, and many others. Determined to get a closer look, I requested a government boat from my staff and embarked on a boating expedition with two others.

As we navigated the reservoir, our attention was drawn to two birds struggling in the water, unable to swim properly. We quickly rescued them, noticing a slimy substance oozing from their beaks. Concerned, we realized they might have been affected by either disease or poaching attempts. Further into the reservoir, we made a grim discovery – five dead migratory birds, all protected under the Wildlife Protection Act. Determined to take

action, I informed my superior and arranged for a case to be filed. A veterinary doctor was called to conduct postmortems on the deceased birds. Back at camp, we cared for the two rescued birds, providing them with water until their condition improved. Once they were fit to fly, we released them back into the reservoir. The following day, I collected samples from the dead birds and sent them to IVRI Bareilly for analysis to determine the cause of death.

With the investigation underway, I returned to my academy, knowing that our efforts had made the staff more vigilant against crimes occurring in or near the wetland. Weeks later, our vigilance paid off as a group of three poachers was apprehended while attempting to trade twenty migratory birds. Our actions had helped protect the precious wildlife of Haripura Baur, ensuring the safety of these magnificent creatures for generations to come.

- Mayank Mehta

The Man-Eating Leopard of Durgapur

In the small village of Durgapur, nestled on the banks of the Alaknanda River and connected by a precarious hanging bridge to National Highway Number 58. Durgapur, a quaint settlement nestled amidst the lush greenery of the Himalayan foothills, exuded an air of tranquillity and simplicity. The village was a close-knit community where every face was familiar, and every voice carried the warmth of shared stories and experiences. As one entered Durgapur, the first thing that caught the eye was the crystal-clear waters of the Alaknanda River, flowing gracefully alongside the village, its gentle murmur a soothing backdrop to daily life. The river served as a lifeline for the villagers, providing water for their daily needs and a source of sustenance for the fertile lands that surrounded the village.

The main livelihood activity for the people in Durgapur was Agriculture and Animal Husbandry. People were dependent on forest for fuelwood and fodder. Mainly Women in the villages used to go to for collection of fuel wood and fodder. One day in the month of September one group of women was collecting fresh oak and kachnar leaves from nearby forest when suddenly a female leopard attacked one of the women who was bent down to pick up her heap of collected leaves. This fierce leopard jumped from the back and punctured the wind pipe of the lady and took her into deep forest. The group of ladies screamed in chaos and tried to save their friend but couldn't succeed. Later that evening group of men in the village organised a search operation with help of Forest department and found the mutilated body of the women. The Leopard had halfeaten carcass.

The incident repeated on the 8th day after the First kill. This time Leopard chose entirely different location on the opposite direction of the first kill. Fear gripped the hearts of the villagers. A man-eating leopard had struck, claiming the lives of two innocent women who had ventured into the forest to collect fodder and fuel wood. The predator had even dared to snatch a young boy of nine years old from the safety of his own backyard, leaving a trail of terror in its wake. The people of Durgapur were consumed by fear and anger, their voices raised in protest against the perceived inaction of the forest department. They demanded justice for the victims and swift action to capture the rogue leopard before it could claim more lives.

Amidst the chaos and fear, the wise range officer of the forest department stepped forward, his calm demeanor and steady gaze instilling a sense of hope in the hearts of the villagers. He assured them that every effort would be made to capture the man-eating leopard and put an end to its reign of terror. Together with his team, the range officer devised a plan to lure the elusive predator into a trap. They placed a sturdy cage near a gurgling water stream, knowing that the thirst of the leopard would eventually lead it to the bait they had carefully set. Days passed, tension mounting as the village held its breath, waiting for news of the capture. And then, one fateful night, the villagers heard a commotion near the water stream. The sound of growls and snarls echoed through the stillness of the night, sending shivers down their spines.

As dawn broke over Durgapur, the villagers gathered near the water stream, their eyes widening in disbelief as they saw the man-eating leopard trapped within the cage. The range officer stood before them, his expression one of quiet triumph as he announced that the predator had been captured, no longer a threat to their community. Relief washed over the village of Durgapur,

gratitude filling their hearts as they thanked the forest department for their swift action and unwavering determination. The man-eating leopard was taken away, its reign of terror brought to an end. And as life returned to normal in Durgapur, the villagers looked upon the hanging bridge that connected them to the outside world with newfound appreciation. They knew that they were safe once more, protected by the wisdom and courage of those who had ensured their safety in the face of danger.

– Arun Kumar

Forest Fire of Banjadi

Banjadi is a dense patch of forest on the western side of Gopeshwar. It is a stunning natural wonderland, filled with the vibrant colors of Rhododendron, Oak, and Myrus esculenta trees. The dense canopy overhead creates a mystical atmosphere, where even the sunlight struggles to penetrate to the forest floor. As you wander through the lush greenery, you may encounter a variety of wildlife that calls this forest home. From the elusive black bear to the colorful francolins and red jungle fowl, the forest is alive with the sounds of nature. Keep an eye out for jackals and leopards, as they move stealthily through the undergrowth, adding to the sense of mystery and excitement in this enchanting forest.

In the Summers of 1999, a devastating forest fire broke out one fateful afternoon. The flames danced wildly, consuming everything in their path with a fierce and unrelenting hunger. The people of Gopeshwar watched in horror as the vibrant green mixed forest turned into a blazing inferno. Rumours spread like wildfire that the fire was not an accident, but a deliberate act of vengeance by a group of angry individuals who held a grudge against the forest department. They were said to have set the forest ablaze in retaliation for what they perceived as injustices committed by the department.

As the flames grew larger and more menacing, the District Forest Officer (DFO) of Gopeshwar, Mr. Rajesh, knew that immediate action was needed to save the precious forest and protect the lives and homes of the townspeople. With a heavy heart

and a determined spirit, he called upon the local youth to come together and join forces in battling the raging inferno. The young men and women of Gopeshwar answered the call without hesitation, knowing that their beloved forest was in grave danger. Armed with buckets of water, shovels, and sheer determination, they marched into the heart of the fire, ready to fight with all their might.

Under the leadership of DFO Rajesh, the local youth formed a human chain and worked tirelessly to contain the fire, dousing the flames with water and creating firebreaks to prevent it from spreading further. Despite the scorching heat and choking smoke, they refused to back down, fuelled by a sense of duty and love for their land. Hours turned into days, but the brave efforts of DFO Rajesh and the local youth began to pay off. The fire slowly began to lose its strength, its once fierce flames reduced to smouldering embers. The forest was saved, its beauty preserved for future generations to enjoy.

As the last traces of smoke cleared from the sky, the people of Gopeshwar gathered to celebrate their victory over the fire. They hailed DFO Rajesh and the local youth as heroes, their courage and unity shining bright in the face of adversity. And so, in the aftermath of the forest fire that threatened to destroy their home, the people of Gopeshwar emerged stronger and more united than ever before, ready to face whatever challenges may come their way with unwavering resolve and a deep sense of community.

- Arun Kumar

Checkered Keelback Rescue in Rishikesh

Mr. Kamal is known in Rishikesh as the go-to guy for wildlife rescue. His love for animals knew no bounds, and he had a special knack for handling even the most dangerous creatures with care and compassion. He is very skilful in handling snakes and leads all the snake rescue operation of the Forest Department. One day I was in Rishikesh when he got a call from someone in the town. They told him about a Checkered Keelback snake that had found its way into their house, Kamal called me to attend this rescue operation so also went with him. we rushed to the location somewhat 8 kms on Haridwar road carrying all our rescue equipment.

Arriving at the house, Kamal found the snake hiding in a pile of dried woods, its distinctive black and yellow scales blending in perfectly with the surroundings. Despite his years of experience, locating the elusive snake proved to be a challenge. But Kamal was determined to rescue the creature and return it safely to its natural habitat. Using all his skills and knowledge, Kamal carefully maneuvered through the pile of woods, inching closer to the snake. With a quick and precise movement, he managed to capture the Checkered Keelback. However, as he held the snake in his hands, it suddenly lashed out and gave him a sharp bite on his hand. Thankfully, Kamal knew that the Checkered Keelback was non-venomous, and he remained calm despite the pain.

We gently released the snake into a container and made our way to the forest developed in IDPL remains, a safe haven for

wildlife in Rishikesh. As we set the snake free among the lush greenery of the forest, we couldn't help but feel a sense of satisfaction. Knowing that we had successfully rescued the snake and returned it to its natural habitat filled us with a deep sense of fulfilment. And as we watched the Checkered Keelback slither away into the undergrowth, I smiled at Kamal and thanked him to give me this opportunity to protect and preserve the wildlife that made Rishikesh so special.

- Arun Kumar

First Tiger Encounter

The last trip of our two-year SFS training program was here. We had been to many tiger reserves and protected areas, seeing wildlife up close. We went on safaris in different places across India, but never spotted a wild tiger. Sometimes, they were close, but we always missed them. Even after exploring all of Satpura Tiger Reserve, no tiger in sight.

Our last chance was Tadoba, known for its many tiger sightings. Our group split into two. I was in the group going to the core area. The guide collected our phones as per rule to prevent any public nuisance. As we ventured further into the core area, the jungle came alive with the calls of grey jungle fowl. Our guide shared insights about Tadoba's history, its diverse flora and fauna. After a few kilometers, we spotted other safari vehicles gathered around 200 meters away, scanning the grassland. Our guide informed us that we were in the territory of Sonam, a dominant tigress, and her mate Chota Dariyal. They had recently had two cubs who were now about 8 months old, learning survival skills from their mother.

Peering through binoculars, we could barely make out the movement of the tigers hiding in the bushes. After a tense wait, a magnificent tigress emerged, a sight that thrilled all of us. She gracefully roamed the area before disappearing into the grassland. Continuing our journey, we entered the Tadoba range. Suddenly, the air filled with the alarmed barks of deer, indicating the presence of a tiger nearby. This was Yuvraj's territory, a

dominant male known for his size and occasional skirmishes with Bijli, a tigress with two young male cubs. To our amazement, we witnessed a spectacle as Yuvraj and Bijli, along with their cubs, engaged in playful yet powerful displays of dominance. It was a rare and exhilarating sight to see seven tigers in the wild, a fitting end to our training program.

– Mayank Mehta

Unbreakable Bond

Mudumalai Tiger Reserve, located in the Nilgiri Hills of Tamil Nadu, is home to a diverse array of flora and fauna, including endangered species like the Bengal tiger, Indian elephant, and Indian leopard. The reserve offers visitors the chance to explore its lush forests, grasslands, and water bodies through safaris and nature walks, providing a unique opportunity to experience the beauty and wilderness of southern India's wildlife. Additionally, Mudumalai plays a crucial role in conservation efforts, aiming to protect and preserve its natural heritage for future generations.

In the heart of Mudumalai Tiger Reserve lies a place -where elephants roam freely, but not without supervision. Elephant camps, they call it. It's not just any ordinary place; it's where wild elephants find a new home and troublesome ones are given a second chance. People from far and wide came to witness the wonders of Mudumalai.

You see, these camps aren't just tourist spots. They're havens for elephants in need. Orphaned elephants find solace here, and the notorious ones are taught a lesson or two about behaving. I remember the day I visited one of these camps. It was like stepping into a different world. We were greeted by a veterinary doctor who told us all about elephants – their features, behaviours, and even their diets.

But the real excitement began when we saw the elephants up close. Each one had a mahout standing guard, ready to

intervene if things got out of hand. One elephant caught my eye. His name was Abhay. He had a troubled past, having taken three lives before being captured. Now, he was in musth, a phase where male elephants become uncontrollable.

But Abhay surprised us all. Despite his past, he was calm, obeying his mahout's every command. That is until he sensed too many people around him. In a flash, he charged towards us. But his mahout remained unfazed. With a simple command, he calmed Abhay down, reminding us of the incredible bond between man and elephant. It's moments like these that make you realize the true essence of these camps – not just places of conservation, but sanctuaries of hope and understanding, where even the wildest of hearts can find peace.

– Mayank Mehta

