

Rs 20

ME

Mats
from moss
PAPER FROM
ELEPHANT POO
Ecological
Turnarounds!

Barefoot in the Himalayas

DNA
August 2010

Understanding Dengue Fever

ROOFTOP VIEWS! ● PRISONS YOU WANT TO VISIT



Living on the Wild Side

S a n d e e p M a l l l i v e s h i s w i l d e s t d r e a m s

I am just another entrepreneur in this resurgent Indian economy, working countless hours in a day to keep pace with export orders of engineering products. At one point, I did not have the time to stop or think; my only redemption from this routine was a game of tennis every evening.

But life has its own way of teaching us new things... As luck would have it, I met with a car crash in New York, and though I survived, it came with its baggage of problems — tennis or any sort of active sports was strictly ruled out and my globetrotting travel plans too had to be stemmed.

That is when I saw the writing on the wall, screaming out loud and clear, that life is full of uncertainties — so stop, see, love what is around you and discover more than what you have been living for...



■ A couple of Green Bee Eaters

A chance family getaway to the Madai wildlife sanctuary, Madhya Pradesh, ended up determining how my life was about to change. I never was a serious photographer... Shooting pictures was just another way of capturing speed and locations life left behind; so while at New York, I had bought an Olympus camera.

My first shot was of a python, blissfully ambling along on its own course through the forest oblivious of the fact that a vehicle had stopped in its tracks sighting it! It was thrilling and exciting to see the reptile so close in its natural surroundings and not in captivity.

Since then, I have been a regular visitor to most wildlife sanctuaries throughout India. Photographing animals, birds, bugs and wild flora has instilled in me something I never had before — patience!

It is now one of my strongest acquisitions at both work and home.



■ Black-winged Stilts in flight

I will be going to the island of Ruissalo near Turku, Finland. There are 255 bird species recorded there. September, I travel to Kenya for the great migration and will spend around 10 days in the wild at Masai Mara.

I have travelled to more than 17 countries all across the globe. Earlier, most of my weekends were spent in cities. Now, you will spot me in the jungle.



■ The Common Hoopoe

■ Rose ringed parakeet



■ Painted stork

HOW I LEARNT TO BE A PHOTOGRAPHER

I never had any technical or formal training in photography. It has been more through experience and some insights from self-help photography books. The technical side of using the camera and its adjustments are easy to learn and does not take much time. If we go through the accompanying book that comes with the camera and some videos on the net, it teaches you the most critical side – visualising and composing a shot. In wildlife photography, the simpler a picture is, the better it looks. The third component that comes in a picture is post-processing. There are softwares easily available on the Internet, and in most cases, some come with the camera too. A good start-up kit is a prerequisite for photography. Choice of lens and bodies depend upon your area of interest. As I love to shoot birds more, I have super telephoto lenses. I use Flickr to showcase and connect with people who love my photographs. It is surprising and motivating too to see so many people wanting to learn and follow. There have been almost 50,000 visits and I am humbled by all the appreciation and suggestions, which I have received till date.



■ Flamingos lined up



■ A Pied Myna enjoying a sip of nectar



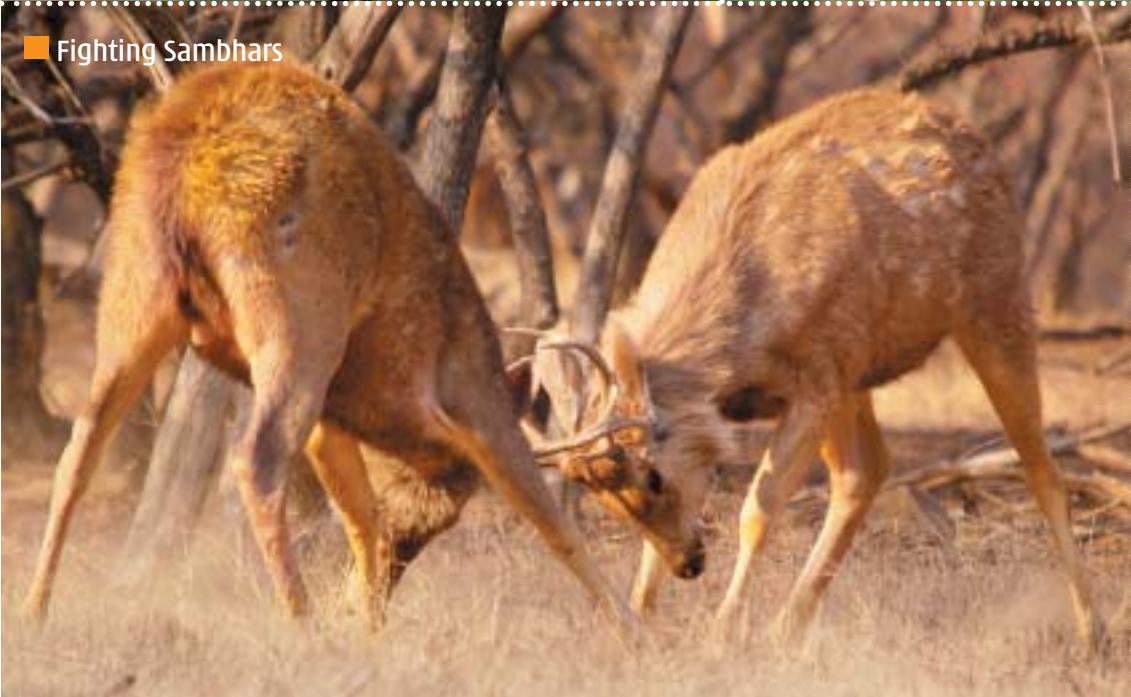
■ The national animal in all its glory



■ The insect world...



■ Fighting Sambhars





HOW CAN WE BETTER INDIAN WILDLIFE?

The general condition and attitude towards preservation of wild life leaves a lot to be desired in India. There is no awareness about animals, their habitat, their protection, and most do not really care. The authorities, too, do nothing to educate people who live off the jungle reserves and often help people wanting to make a fast buck from the wild. We are the dominating creature in this ecosystem and we misuse it to its maximum limit.

Educating people about wild life is a must. Awareness needs to be raised about it. School students in villages and in urban cities need to be educated on ways and means to do their bit to protect our wildlife reserves and parks. Commercialisation of areas around wild life parks should be well researched and then allowed to come up in clusters. A point in case is about Ranthambore. As I understand, the maximum number of tourists allowed inside the park is approximately 450, whereas the number of beds in licensed hotels is around 2,000. Do we need so many hotel rooms in Ranthambore? Moreover, most of them do not practice waste management. The average consumption of mineral water here is more than 5,000 bottles a day and with no proper disposal method all are dumped in empty plots.

Sincerity of the people interested in wildlife tourism and authorities is a must to ensure we do not take away from the wild what we come to discover in the first place, the natural habitat!

Wildlife tourism has to be restrained. I have seen on one of my trips to Ranthambore that a tigress couldn't go after its kill as tourist vehicles kept following it, thereby disturbing the tigress' line of thought. Entry into the parks should be restricted to serious wildlife enthusiasts and not become picnic spots. I have seen mothers bringing along kids who shout and people asking for chips inside the jungle, and then throwing the plastic bags anywhere they please with no one to reprimand them.

As a wildlife enthusiast, you must learn what to do and what not to do during such tours. There is a fine line between viewing and victimising wildlife.