



A beauty called Crimson Rose

Regardless of their protected status, these butterflies stand a slim chance of survival without nectar-bearing plants to support them, says **Ramya Coushik**



Crimson Rose butterfly.

Kari Uttraani, Subbiah muttered. I was quizzing him about the Kannada name of the Indian snakeweed (*Stachytarpheta jamaicensis*) that grows readily all over Navilu Kaadu. It was a warm June day and the creature that had piqued my interest in this plant, flitted about nectaring among lavender *Kari Uttarani* blossoms — the exquisite Crimson Rose butterfly (*Pachliopta hector*).



I gaped at a clutch of them fluttering on wings dark as the velvety night sky with licks of red on the hindwings and white markings on the forewings. Subbiah continued to tackle the deeply rooted *Lantana camara* shrub. Ironically, the blooms of both the lantana and the Indian snakeweed — one, a prolific alien, another, native and benign — are favoured by Crimson Rose butterflies for nectaring. At Navilu Kaadu, we uproot the pesky invaders and let the natives thrive.

Earlier in March, I had spotted a larva of the butterfly. The plump inch-long caterpillar was as nattily attired as the parent, a shade of deep purple with funky red spikes called tubercles all over its dorsal side.

In nature, most poisonous creatures don vibrant hues in a defence mechanism known as aposematism. The striking garb serves a weighty purpose — a portent to potential predators, of the dreadful fate that awaits them should they harbour thoughts of making a meal of them. The larvae of Crimson Rose butterflies aren't born laden with toxins. They gorge on various species of *Aristolochia*, commonly known as birthwort plants and stockpile aristolochic acids contained in these plants, rendering themselves unpalatable even in adulthood. Another butterfly, the female of the common Mormon (*Papilio polytes*) impersonates the Crimson Rose to mislead predators that they are as distasteful.

Crimson Rose butterflies breed year-round with their numbers spiking during the monsoon season. Fertilised females lay six to eight vermilion-tinted eggs on the ventral side of the leaves of the Indian birthwort or other *Aristolochia* plant species. Soon after hatching, the larva snacks on its eggshell and

begins to fatten on the leaves of the host plant. As it gains girth and length, the caterpillar moults a bunch of times, crawling out of its old skin each time. The gluttonous little thing devours the shed skin too before returning to chomping on leaves. The intervals between moults are called instars. The Crimson Rose larva grows through five instars before turning into a dormant pupa, and finally emerges as a magnificent imago. Butterfly experts in India and Sri Lanka have been observing swarms of Crimson Rose butterflies fly to the sea and over the Gulf of Mannar from India's southeastern coast to Mannar Islands off Sri Lanka's northwestern coast, a migratory behaviour that is yet to be studied. These butterflies relish the nectar of diverse plants, pollinating them in return. Besides nectaring, butterflies also congregate on damp patches of soil and puddles, sucking up vital salts and amino acids, a behaviour known as mud-puddling. The male butterfly transfers these nutrients to the female as a nuptial gift during mating, enhancing the quality of eggs and bolstering their chances of survival. (Medley S R & Eisner, T, 1996)

Several species of Indian butterflies are protected under the Wildlife (Protection) Act (WPA), 1972. Some like the Crimson Rose butterfly enjoy Schedule I protection on par with the Royal Bengal tiger under WPA, 1972.

Regardless of their protected status, butterflies stand a slim chance of survival without native larval host plants for their young, and nectar-bearing plants and tree species with which they have coevolved. Monoculture farming practices, unbridled use of pesticides and herbicides, habitat loss from anthropogenic factors, and illegal trade have imperilled these lovely creatures.

Instead of focusing on exotic alien varieties, planting clusters of native flowering plants and tree species that support butterflies in urban gardens and local parks can preserve their habitats.

Rooting for Nature is a monthly column on an off-kilter urban family's trysts with nature on a natural farm.

The author chipped away at a software marketing career before shifting gears to sustainable entrepreneurship and natural farming. She posts as @ramyacoushik. Reach her at bluejaydiaries@gmail.com

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**BIBHAB
TALUKDAR's**
unwavering
mission to protect
wildlife continues
unabated.



A conservation crusader

It has been over three decades and for Bibhab Talukdar, the fight is still on. The man is on a mission. His love for wildlife not only inspired him to study Animal Ecology and Wildlife Biology but also motivated him to start Aaranyak, now a household name in conservation across Assam and India. Over the years, Talukdar's tireless work in the field of wildlife conservation has turned him into a figure synonymous with hope and resilience in the conservation community. Among his numerous accomplishments in a field marked by struggles and challenges, Talukdar was recently honoured with the prestigious IUCN Harry Messel Award.

IUCN Harry Messel Award

The Harry Messel Award, instituted by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Species Survival Commission (SSC) in 2004, is an honour given to individuals who demonstrate extraordinary service to species conservation, especially through leadership or field work as part of SSC Specialist Groups or Task Forces. For Talukdar, receiving this global recognition is a validation of years of dedication. In his words, the award acknowledges his specific efforts to conserve Asian rhinos, a cause he has championed tirelessly. The award has bolstered his confidence, confirming the impact his work has made not just regionally but internationally.

For Bibhab Talukdar, however, this recognition is not just a personal milestone. It serves as a beacon of hope for Assam's conservation community and especially for the young conservationists from the Northeastern region of India. Reflecting on this achievement, he humbly shares that his journey from Assam to a global stage is proof that passion and hard work can carve a path for others.

"If I could make a contribution in the field of wildlife conservation over the past three decades that the global community recognises, the next generation of conservationists from this region holds the same potential to create changes conducive for wildlife to thrive," he says.

International collaboration

Talukdar has been part of several influential committees globally and nationally, from the International Rhino Foundation to India's National Board of Wildlife. He emphasises that while international agreements address overarching environmental concerns, country-specific approaches are crucial for effective conservation.

"The environmental issues and their severity may vary from country to country. As such, country-specific plans to ensure ecological as well as economic security is very much essential," he explains.

In India, where population pressures are high, the stakes are particularly acute. "India is unique as the most populous country on the planet, yet it shelters some of the world's most iconic and endangered species — from tigers and the Greater One-Horned Rhino to the Golden Langur, Hoolock Gibbons, and Great Indian Bustards," he says.

For Talukdar, this biodiversity is both a privilege and a responsibility, underscoring the need for a more nuanced approach to development in ecologically sensitive areas, such as North-East India and the Western Ghats.

Talukdar advocates for "green infrastructure" in these regions — development that minimises environmental harm and supports sustainable co-existence with wildlife. "Development is essential, but it must be aligned with environmental priorities. Projects should be least damaging to the environment, wildlife, and critical water sources," he asserts. This holistic approach, he believes, is essential for long-term resilience, not only for India's biodiversity but also for the well-being of communities that depend on these ecosystems.

Touching young minds

Talukdar is clear on one thing: fostering a love for Nature in young minds is essential. He believes that instilling a sense of environmental stewardship in students is not only about imparting knowledge but also about shaping positive attitudes towards addressing ecological issues holistically. "We need to equip the next generation with a strong understanding of the environment and the ecological processes that support life," he emphasises, noting that a clean and green environment should be a shared goal of every nation.

Talukdar points out that making students more responsive to environmental concerns is critical, especially given the urgent challenges ahead. "Any further environmental degradation could have catastrophic effects on human survival. The COVID pandemic was a stark warning — we must respect Nature's processes and human interventions that may disrupt these must be carefully monitored," he says.

"Environmental protection must become a shared responsibility for every citizen," he asserts.

Development and conservation

For Talukdar, the challenge of balancing development with environmental preservation in Assam is one that requires careful thought and planning. He acknowledges that development is inevitable, but stresses that it should not come at the cost of irreplaceable ecological and environmental heritage. "There has to be a balance, but pristine and historically significant areas — whether they are forests or age-old trees — should never be compromised," he says firmly.

Talukdar advocates for better planning and an ecological orientation in the development process. "With proper planning, the cutting of trees can be minimised significantly," he explains, pointing to examples from other cities like Bengaluru and New Delhi. "In Bengaluru, even when roads are being expanded or constructed, old trees are carefully preserved. Delhi, too, has managed to save mature trees during roadworks," he notes.

He adds that the slow pace of ecological recovery is often overlooked. "We must realise that dieback — the loss of older trees — happens quickly, but regrowth is much slower," he says. Talukdar believes that preserving mature trees is not just about aesthetics but about maintaining the balance of the ecosystem, which provides critical services like air purification, carbon sequestration, and wildlife habitat.

For Assam, Talukdar proposes that urbanisation projects incorporate green infrastructure and eco-friendly design principles. He stresses that development should not be at odds with Nature but should rather work in harmony with it, ensuring that both urban needs and environmental preservation are addressed in tandem.



Biodiversity-rich Panje goes dry as officials remain busy with polls: Green activists

Vijay Singh

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With government machinery on election duty, the controversial 289-hectare wetland at Panje in Uran which once housed vast biodiversity has gone dry again with the shutting down of "illegal" sluice gates on the adjoining creek, environmentalists have complained to the authorities.

Even during the 2019 Lok Sabha poll, major wetlands and stretches of mangroves were buried in Uran and Vashi, activists said, expressing regret that no action was taken despite subsequent official inspections confirming the damage.

"As per the state environment director's November 11, 2020, order, Cidco was supposed to maintain tidal water flow to the wetland, which is the size of around 30 Azad Maidans, yet the city planner keeps violating norms," Nandakumar Pawar, head of Sagar Shakti group, said.

"This is worrisome as India ranks 176 out of 180 countries in the international biodiversity index and it is high time that we started building back the biodiversity of Panje," NatConnect Foundation director BN Kumar said.

Panje, which attracts at least 50 species of birds including 30 migratory ones, is now more or less dead with the blocking of intertidal water flow. Pawar and Kumar warned that the killing of the Panje wetland would spell disaster for Uran as tidal water will find its way and flood other areas. In fact, the burial of intertidal wetlands has already been causing unseasonal floods in the villages, they said, appealing to the government to take the issue seriously and conserve the wetland.

The govt order clearly stated that the wetland was a CRZ area due to the presence of mangroves and as such the tidal water flow must be uninterrupted. The sluice gates built by Cidco do not have mandatory CRZ clearance, information obtained under the Right to Information Act shows.



Panje wetland, which attracts at least 50 species of birds including 30 migratory ones, is now more or less dead with the blocking of intertidal water flow, say environmentalists

Cidco had earlier leased out the wetland area to NMSEZ, now NMIA, and even marked the land as sectors 16 to 28 under the Dronagiri Development Plan (DP), Kumar regretted. The DP also does not have CRZ clearance, he said quoting RTI information. The importance of Panje gets reinforced with the 141-year-old Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) stating that the wetland, along with five other properties, needs to be conserved as a satellite wetland of the Ramsar property, Thane Creek Flamingo Sanctuary (TCFS).

Flamingos fly to these wetlands when the high-tide level goes up beyond their tolerance levels of 12-15cm. It is unfortunate that the NMSEZ security has halted the BNHS research project at Panje to study bird flight patterns as part of the Centre's mandate for the environmental clearance for the Navi Mumbai International Airport (NMIA). Ironically, the study itself had been commissioned by Cidco.

Despite the environment department's stand, Cidco has been claiming that Panje is "not a wetland" and the govt has not been able to take any action, Kumar said in his complaint to the

govt. Mangrove Foundation had earlier suggested that Navi Mumbai's five wetlands – Belpada, Bhendkhal, Panje, NRI and TS Chanakya – be handed over to it for conservation under the Wildlife Protection Act. But this was not done. Mangrove Foundation is part of the state forest department and the environment department is also under the state govt.

"Any commercialisation of Panje will be disastrous for the environment and the rich avian biodiversity there. That is why we green activists have again pointed out that Panje has gone dry, with most govt officials busy with election work," said Kumar. Mirror contacted Cidco spokesperson for a comment, but there was no response till the time of going to press.

Pawar criticised the "apathy" of governing agencies in preparing cadastral (village level maps) at 1:4000 scale, as mandated under the CRZ notification 2019, to demarcate high tidal lines in coastal districts such as Uran, Panvel. Besides, the Maharashtra Biodiversity Board, Nagpur, has also failed to conduct any studies despite being mandated by law.

Govt moots dedicated optical fibre network in Gir for lion conservation

Micro-Link System Faces 'Bandwidth Limitations'

Himanshu Kaushik
& Kapil Dave | TNN

Ahmedabad: A roaring leap forward in lion conservation is on the cards as the state forest department plans a dedicated optical fibre network in Gir, the last abode of the Asiatic lions, to tighten its grip on real-time monitoring of the big cats.

A senior official explained that the current micro-link system struggles with bandwidth limitations, especially in no-network zones, making it hard to effectively monitor lion movements. As the range



File pic

FOR REAL-TIME MONITORING

of lion movement continues to expand, officials have proposed the 'IT Intervention in Lion Conservation' project for effective monitoring and sent it for govt approval.

The officials stated that the proposal highlights, "Gir Forest boasts the highest concentration of two majestic big cats: the Asiatic lion and the Indian leopard. The success of conservation efforts in this region can be attributed to

Lion pride spotted close to Diu

A lion pride being spotted on Diu Island has caused forest officers to break into a bustle of activity. The group — a female and four or five sub-adults — was observed in Dangarwadi the area of the island, reports Nimesh Khakhariya. A video emerged on Friday night showing the lions roaming the island. **TNN P5**

stringent protection measures and the unwavering support of local communities. Numerous technology-driven scientific initiatives have been implemented, including radiotelemetry, GPS, GIS, and CCTV.

► Continued on P 5

Fibre network will boost surveillance

► Continued from P1

However, there are key challenges in the conservation efforts. The growing population of the wild cats has expanded their range, resulting in increased conflict and wildlife fatalities. The current bandwidth is inadequate for efficient data transmission, hindering monitoring of lion movements in Gir National Park."

Nityanand Srivastava, principal chief conservator of forests (wildlife), said the exclusive optical fibre network would be crucial in enhancing surveillance, allowing for real-time monitoring through tools such as drones, night vision cameras and AI-enabled cameras.

A senior officer said once approved, the project will begin with a survey to determine the required network co-

verage across Gir's landscape. According to the 2020 census, some 674 lions roam an area of about 30,000 sq km, with a permanent presence on 22,000 sq km. The initiative will focus on reducing lion accidents on railway tracks, a major cause of fatalities.

The department also plans to roll out a speed monitoring system to prevent vehicle collisions with wildlife and upgrade CCTV systems at checkpoints to 40 Mbps. Advanced tools like AI-powered cameras and night-vision drones will help provide alerts, reducing risks to animals and humans. The officials said that the technology for speed monitoring, which is installed on the Sasan Mendarda road, will be implemented across the region at all crossroads and locations where lions move about.

Gujarat agrees to give pair of Asiatic Lions to Van Vihar

Rajan Raikwar

BHOPAL

The long cherished dream of Van Vihar National Park to have Asiatic Lions is going to become a reality soon.

Gujarat has agreed to give a pair of Asiatic Lions to it. Now the ball is in the court of Central Zoo Authority (CZA). On getting CZA permission, Van Vihar officials will make efforts to bring a pair of Asiatic Lions.

The Asiatic Lion will arrive at Van Vihar from Sakkarbaugh Zoological Park (Gujarat). The Gujarat Ecological Education and Research (GEER) Foundation will facilitate the procedure. Sources in Van Vihar said that it is under animal exchange programme that Gujarat will give a pair of Asiatic Lions. In lieu of Asiatic Lions, Van Vihar will give a pair of tigers to Gujarat.

A senior officer of Van Vihar National Park told Free Press that Gujarat is ready to give a pair of Asiatic Lions. 'Now, a team of Van Vihar officials will visit Gujarat to



examine the pair of Asiatic Lions which has been identified to be given to us.

The team will examine their health and other things,' he said. He added that officials of both Van Vihar and Gujarat have written a letter to the Central Zoo Authority, informing about the animal exchange programme. Once Asiatic Lions reach Van Vihar, they will become huge attraction for visitors.

It is learnt that a team of Gujarat forest officials have already visited Van Vihar to see the pair of tigers which they are likely to receive in lieu of Asiatic Lions pair. Gujarat is craving to get a pair of tigers for Gandhinagar Zoo. On being contacted, Van Vihar Director Meena Avdeshkumar told Free Press that, 'We are closely pursuing the things and hoping to get a pair of Asiatic Lions in future'.

Tigers in exchange of lions

Gujarat Ecological Education and Research (GEER) Foundation had approached Van Vihar to get a pair of tigers more than one-and-half years ago. At that time Padmapriya Balakrishnan was director of Van Vihar. She had put a condition before GEER Foundation that in lieu of giving a pair of tigers, Van Vihar shall get two pairs of Asiatic Lions.

In celebration of our mountains

Climate change, biodiversity collapse, air and water pollution – the impacts of the triple planetary crisis, as the United Nations Environmental Programme terms it, are clear and visible to all of us. We have seen its effects in Bengaluru this year, in prolonged heat waves, unseasonal rains leading to flooding, air pollution spiraling out of control, and hospitals filled with patients battling respiratory diseases. Nothing will change unless we, the people, demand solutions from those we elect to positions of power. Sadly, as a citizenry, we seem to have become apathetic to the signs of environmental collapse that are all around us. Absorbed in battling the challenges of living in a dense and crowded city like Bengaluru, where much of daily life is spent on the road, surrounded by traffic, we are left with little time, or energy, to think of larger issues, even those that fundamentally shape the quality of our life.

Public education can play a major role in changing the way we think about our environment. An annual climate festival is running now at Azim Premji University's Bengaluru campus, and the goal of this festival is to inspire people to re-engage with nature, approaching the environment through joy, wonder and discovery. Each year, we focus on one concrete, easily visualisable and omnipresent theme. In 2022, it was rivers, in 2023 forests, and in 2024, we focus on mountains. The theme of the festival this year is Mountains of Life, and we draw on this theme to celebrate the essential role that mountains play in shaping our culture, civilisation, architecture, ecology, and daily life.

These are festivals for the young – we get close to a thousand visitors each day from schools – and by the young, drawing on the experiences of many interns who travel across the length and breadth of the country to document stories of mountain songs and cuisine, travel diaries, tales of living root bridges and ancient stone monuments, and more. There are interactive three-dimensional models, activity-based workshops, film screenings, music and dance performances, quizzes and art workshops. We also get some very interesting older visitors. Shantha, a woman in her 70s, saw a story in this newspaper about the exhibition and came to the university for two days, looking at every exhibit in detail. She had trekked many of the trails we describe in various parts of the country when she was younger, and talked to us about the changes in India's landscapes over the past decades. Her main complaint? Young people these days spend hours on the road, stuck in traffic jams. What a waste of life, she told us; we couldn't help but agree.

A young student from a nomadic grazing community in the Himalayas sang beautiful songs that described the allure of the mountains. Her mesmerising voice filled the hall and captivated the students, its reverberations lingering in their minds, and ours, for hours afterwards. A group of young students looked at the large globe hanging above the trees, debating whether the land mass they saw near the Himalayas belonged to Afghanistan or not, and was Afghanistan a country or a continent? Elsewhere, women from Ladakh and Spiti, working with the Nature Conservation Foundation, talked about their experiences with setting camera traps to document wildlife. Experienced naturalists from WWF showed three-dimensional raptor models to students, making them flap their arms like birds to understand how much muscular effort this involved.

Experiences like this are essential for students to engage with the rich diversity of India, in ways that go beyond the rote memorising that has become a sadly commonplace feature of most curricular and classroom material today. These efforts are crucial for the times we live in because they facilitate new ways to connect with the environment, and can inspire people to work towards its protection. The hope is for similar efforts that help initiate conversations around reimagining a better Bengaluru, and a better world for us all.



Harini Nagendra

the Azim Premji University Prof prides herself on barking up all trees, right and wrong

Jumbo calf dies, mom keeps vigil

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Jalpaiguri: An elephant calf died early on Saturday after it fell into a drain at the Karbala tea estate in Jalpaiguri's Banarhat block.

In the morning, tea workers spotted the carcass in the drain. Near the spot, a full-grown female elephant stood guard.

They informed foresters. Soon, a team from the wildlife squad stationed in Binnaguri reached the spot. However, as the foresters tried to reach the carcass, the agitated mother elephant attacked their vehicle and toppled it.

"It seems the mother elephant is angry. She is standing near the carcass. Some other elephants of the herd are in the vicinity. We have to wait till the elephants leave before recovering the carcass," said a forest officer on Saturday evening.

Hundreds of onlookers reached the garden to see the elephants. Banarhat police had to control the crowd.

Long dry spell, parched wetlands delay arrival of avian visitors to Valley



A flock of migratory birds at the Hokarsar wetland in Srinagar. FILE

ADIL AKHZER

SRINAGAR, NOVEMBER 16

The prolonged dry weather in the Kashmir Valley has left its wetlands parched, significantly impacting the arrival of migratory birds. As December approaches, bird watchers report a notable decline in the number of avian visitors compared to previous years.

Typically, by late September or October, lakhs of birds from Siberia, China, Central Asia, and Northern Europe migrate to the Val-

ley's wetlands, with the Hokarsar wetland—a Ramsar site of international importance near Srinagar—hosting the largest numbers. However, this year, officials and bird watchers note a sharp decline.

“If we compare the numbers to the same period last year, it's clear the arrivals are fewer,” said Ghulam Hassan, a wetland official. On average, 7-8 lakh migratory birds visit the Valley's wetlands annually.

Experts attribute the lower bird numbers to various

factors. “We're witnessing the effects of global warming. Prolonged summers have delayed the onset of extreme winter, causing a 10-15 day delay in bird arrivals,” said a Srinagar-based bird expert. He added that local conditions, such as reduced rainfall and dry wetlands, have exacerbated the problem. “These factors combined are responsible for the fewer birds this November, but with changing weather, the numbers are expected to rise in the coming days.”

Bird watcher Reyan Sofi highlighted the dryness of the wetlands as a critical issue. “By this time last year, we had more migratory birds. This year, due to the dry wetlands, we haven't seen as many yet,” he said. The key wetlands of Shallabugh, Hygam, Mirgund, and Hokarsar remained dry for a significant period. “Birds have started arriving now, but if their habitats are unsuitable, they'll move to other areas,” he warned.

Experts and researchers

have expressed concern over the Hokarsar wetland, also known as ‘Queen of Wetlands’, which has shrunk considerably over past many years. Researchers say from 1969 to 2008, the spatial extents of wetland have reduced from 18.75 sq km in 1969 to 13 sq km and a marshy area within the wetland has also shrunk by 150 hectares.

Without action, these vital bird habitats—and the migratory birds they attract—face an uncertain future.

The Hindu

Chennai, 17 November 2024



Mountain lions in Los Angeles become more nocturnal

Mountain lions in greater Los Angeles are proactively shifting their activity to avoid interacting with cyclists, hikers, joggers, and other recreationists, finds a study. The study found that mountain lions, living in areas with higher levels of human recreation, were more nocturnal than lions in more remote regions who were more active at dawn and dusk. The authors said their findings offer a hopeful example of human-wildlife coexistence amid a large, dense human population.

NBWL team inspects site for oil, gas exploration

The team would take about a week to submit their report to Board (NBWL). If Board gives final approval then only Cairn Oil and Gas would be allowed to begin operations

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

JORHAT, Nov 16: A team of the National Board for Wildlife (NBWL) on Friday inspected the site close to the Hollongapar Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary under Mariani Range of Jorhat forest division, where Vedanta-owned Cairn Oil and Gas proposes to carry out exploration and drilling activities for oil and gas.

Forest department sources stated that a team of four/five members inspected the site on Friday and held discussions with Forest department officials and the proponents of the proposed exploration and drilling activities.

The sources said that the team would take about a week to submit their report to the Board (NBWL). If the Board gives final approval then only Cairn Oil and Gas would be allowed

to begin operations.

It may be mentioned here that the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change about two months back had granted approval to the private company's (Cairn Oil and Gas) proposal for exploration and drilling on 4.49 hectares near the Hollongapar Gibbon Sanctuary located in Jorhat district, bordering Nagaland.

Meanwhile, Jorhat MP and deputy leader of Congress party in the Lok Sabha, Gaurav Gogoi in August too had voiced concern over the proposed exploration activities to be carried out near the sanctuary. Gogoi, in a letter to the Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Bhupinder Yadav, had urged the minister to reconsider the said decision.

The matter was also raised

in the last session of the State Legislative Assembly in August this year by leader of the Opposition Debabrata Saikia. State Forest and Wildlife Minister Chandra Mohan Patowary, while replying to the query, had stated that after examining the matter, the State Board of Wildlife had approved the proposal of oil exploration around 13 kms from the sanctuary and had forwarded the approval order to the Union Ministry of Forest, Environment and Climate Change.

The Jorhat Press Club last month also sent a memorandum to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to reconsider the decision of granting approval by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change to the private company to carry out exploration and drilling activities.

Never too old to click!

S SENTHIL KUMAR @ Coimbatore

TRA Arunthavaselvan cross-checked pugmarks again and stood at Sathymangalam Tiger Reserve, waiting for the shy civet cat to show up. Everything was in place - a perfect camouflage using plants, artificially spread soil, serene moonlight, and an accurate aperture. It was a long wait. Twelve days later, this shutterbug finally caught the animal on camera, engraving an unforgettable day in his photography career.

For Thuckanaickenpalayam Ramasamy Andavan Arunthavaselvan, popularly known as TRA Arunthavaselvan, one's love for photography cannot be confined to age barriers. At 74, this veteran wildlife photographer (one of the oldest wildlife photographers in Tamil Nadu) finds solace in clicking pictures of birds, reptiles, and insects, spending more time with nature.

While most wildlife photographers often have a story to share about what inspired their entry into the world of photographs, Arunthavaselvan somehow missed that gateway. His motivation has always been a sheer interest in capturing moments, and after getting a camera from his cousin, while in Class 9, this diligent worker got hold of his first tool.

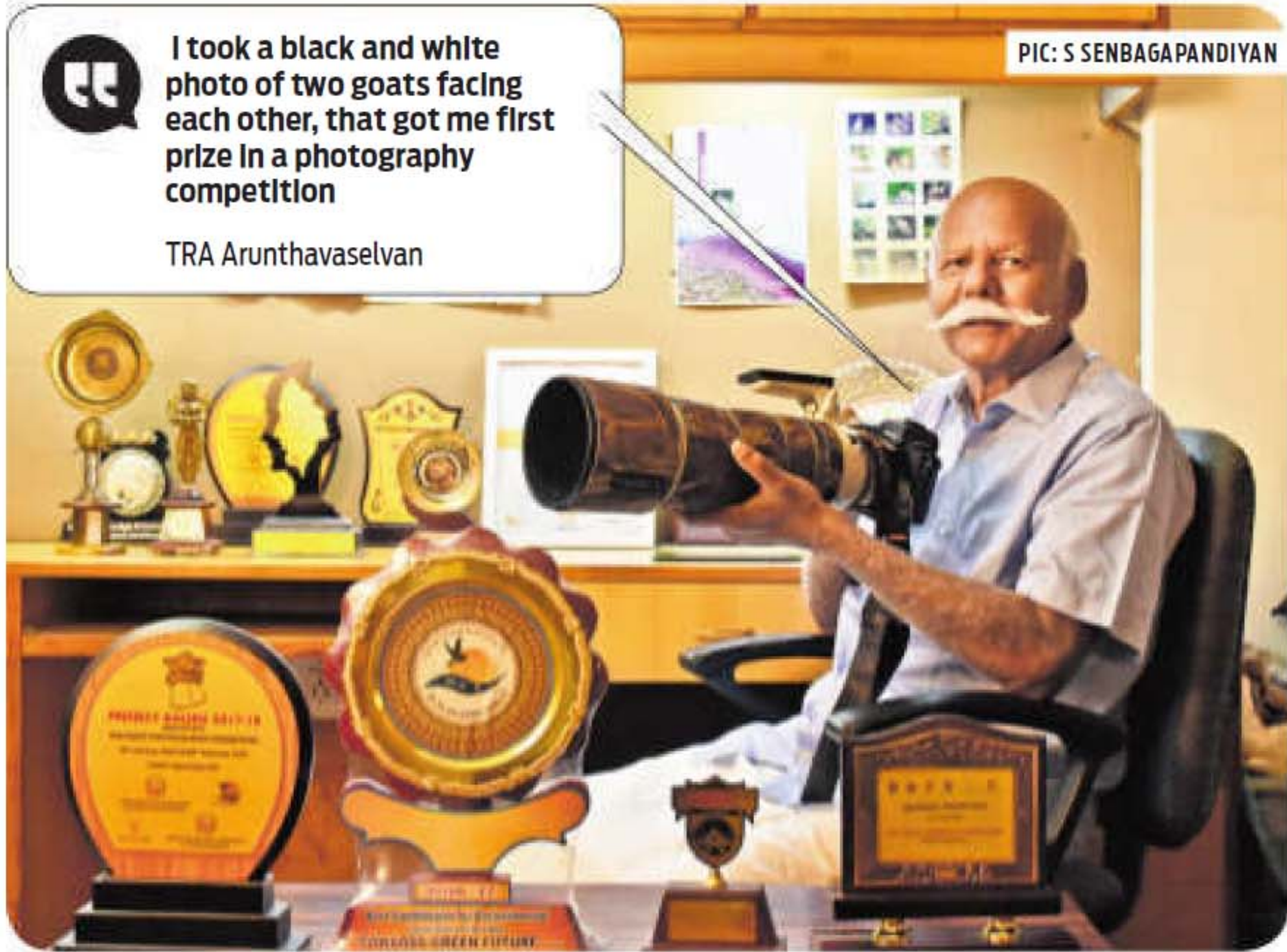
Growing up in an agrarian family from Thuckanaickenpalayam village near Sathyamangalam, Arunthavaselvan had plenty of opportunities to observe birds and animals keenly. "During school days, I used to draw pictures of elephants and birds, and my interest later extended to photography. Subsequently, I started taking

Arunthavaselvan uses his wildlife photography as a tool to educate and motivate students to take an active role in protecting the environment and inspiring the youth to become stewards of nature

KINDRED SPIRITS



pictures of black-naped hares in Chettipalayam near Podanur. In 1965, I went to Mudumalai with my friends, and that's when my camera captured a wild elephant for the first time," said Arunthavaselvan, who went on to purchase a second-hand SLR camera from an Army man later. "With the SLR camera, I took a



black-and-white photograph of two goats, facing each other, ahead of engaging in a fight near the Maruthamalai temple hill. The picture got me first prize in a photography competition conducted by a Mumbai-based company," recalled Arunthavaselvan, who has now completed over 55 years in this field.

After finishing Class 12 at Mani Higher Secondary School, Arunthavaselvan went on to pursue a BA in Politics at Government Arts College, Coimbatore in 1972. He began visiting forests in Karnataka along with TNA Perumal, a wildlife photographer, and learnt the nuances of clicking pictures of insects from another



The septuagenarian's collection includes pictures of various animal species, showcasing the diversity of the region's wildlife | EXPRESS

photographer K Jayaram. "I was a regular visitor at the photographers' club, where I learned about competitions. I won first place for a barn owl photo and an international award for a Brahminy Kite picture. But those were just stepping stones. Now, my latest photo? A scorpion, its pincers gripping a centi-

pede, the struggle frozen forever. That's what I call a masterpiece," said the septuagenarian. He uses his photography to teach students about the importance of protecting wildlife. "I will be happy if school or college students will become involved in taking wildlife pictures in the future," he says. He encourages them to learn about wildlife behaviour using photography to advocate for the environment. He adds, "I am spreading awareness for school and college students about wildlife behaviour and how forest flora and fauna play an important role in essential requirements of water and fresh air, etc to the human beings who live outside the forest." So far, he has clicked pictures of as many as 530 bird species by travelling through forests across the country and bagged over 175 awards from various government and private organisations. Unlike colour photography, he says, one ought to be extra careful while taking pictures in black and white due to the use of limited exposure and shutter speed. At present, he is meticulously engaged in writing articles about wildlife in Sangam Literature for various magazines like Sanctuary Asia, Hornbill, Better Photography, Best Photography Today, Diary On The Nesting Behaviour of Indian Birds, and others, appealing to young photographers to acquire knowledge about the behaviour of the birds, big cats, reptiles, and wild elephants before venturing into the forest. He was one of the top 10 wildlife photographers winning cheers at the national-level photography competition organised by the India International Photography Council (IIPC), for six consecutive years (2001-06). If not with a camera, Kunderpalam villagers often spot Arunthavaselvan rescuing and releasing snake birds and raptors, which get caught in fishing nets and fences installed by farmers to protect their crops from wild boar menace. As someone who wishes to blend with nature, this veteran photographer never misses an opportunity to befriend the avian species and capture their beauty through his camera lens, without disturbing their peace. (Edited by Arya AJ)

Nexus Select malls adopts two lakes

METRO INDIA NEWS | HYDERABAD

Nexus Select Malls has announced that the adoption of two lakes- Gurunath Cheruvu and Khaidama Cheruvu in Hyderabad as part of its 'Lakes of Happyness' initiative, reinforcing their commitment to environmental sustainability.

As part of the Lakes of Happyness initiative, which was started in 2021, Nexus Select Malls set an ambitious goal to rejuvenate 10 lakes. To date, the company has successfully revitalised eight lakes across Bengaluru, Chennai, and Maharashtra, with two additional projects in Hyderabad for

which Bhoomi puja was done on Saturday.

With these new additions, the 'Lakes of Happyness' initiative will now encompass 10 lakes, positively impacting over one lakh people, local wildlife, farmers and creating local job opportunities.

The rejuvenation of two lakes in Hyderabad, each covering 19 acres, in partnership with the Maligavad Foundation. This is Nexus Select Mall's largest lake rejuvenation project to date, dedicated to enhancing water quality, promoting biodiversity, and supporting the well-being of surrounding communities.





An injured leucistic peacock that was rescued by the Forest Department in Coimbatore on Saturday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Rare 'white' peacock rescued in Coimbatore to be treated for injury

Wilson Thomas

COIMBATORE

Tamil Nadu Forest Department staff and members of a non-governmental organisation rescued a rare peacock with white feathers, caused by a genetic condition called leucism, in Coimbatore on Saturday, after the bird was spotted with an injury.

Members of the Rapid Response Team (RRT) of the department and volunteers of the Trust for Environment and Ecosystem (TREE) rescued the peacock from a farm on Nallampalayam-Sanganoor Road in the city.

S.S. Akshai, a Class XI student in Yuvabharathi Public School, Coimbatore, spotted and photographed the injured peacock a few days ago and informed TREE coordinator R. Sathish.

"The peacock was spotted when I was taking photographs as part of the activities in the school's photography club," Mr. Akshai said.

Mr. Sathish, in turn, alerted the Forest Department about the peacock that was struggling with an

injury on its right leg. "People residing in the locality said that stray dogs were seen chasing the peacock," Mr. Sathish said.

RRT members, Mr. Sathish, B. Sakthi, Aparna, R. Akshath, and T. Anitha from TREE visited the site. In order to avoid causing stress to the bird, its eyes were covered with a cloth while being shifted to the avian recuperation centre of the Forest Department on the District Forest Office campus.

The Forest Veterinary Surgeon of the Department will examine the injured peacock.

Experts said the peacock is believed to have got its white plumage due to leucism, a condition that prevents melanin and other pigments from being deposited on feathers at normal levels.

"Dark eyes with pink bill and feet indicate that the bird is fully leucistic," said Rajah Jayapal, Senior Principal Scientist at the Sálim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, the south India centre of Wildlife Institute of India, after examining the photos of the bird.



Surprising social lives of pythons

Ball pythons were long assumed to be solitary, but scientists discovered the snakes in captivity prefer each others' company when given the chance to live socially

ASHER ELBEIN

THE BALL PYTHON does not seem like a snake with hidden depths. Small African pythons, they're the second most popular pet reptile in the world, beloved for their rich colors, intricate patterns and docile tempers. They are easily bred and almost always kept alone.

"People don't think of certain snakes as social at all, especially in the reptile hobby," said Morgan Skinner, a quantitative ecologist who studied at Wilfrid Laurier University in Ontario. "And they tend to keep them alone or isolated, because of these preconceptions." But in a study published last week in the journal *Behavioral Ecology and Sociobiology*, Skinner and his colleagues show that ball pythons are much cuddlier with one another than anyone had guessed. The study of snake social behaviour has been undergoing a renaissance over the past few years, said Noam Miller, who is an author on the paper and also at Wilfrid Laurier. Researchers have tended to focus on garter snakes and rattlesnakes, which both give birth to live young, spend winters together massed in dens and form "friendships" during active seasons.

While working on his doctorate in Miller's lab, Skinner began wondering how snakes not known to be social interacted with one another.

Because ball pythons lay eggs and don't

have live births and have no need to hibernate, they seemed like the perfect study candidate. In 2020, Skinner and his colleague Tamara Kumpan placed a mixed-sex group of six pythons for 10 days in a large enclosure - one with enough plastic shelters for each snake - and left a camera running. To Skinner's shock, all six snakes quickly squeezed together in the same shelter and spent over 60% of their time together. Assuming that all of the snakes had simply liked something about that specific shelter, the team removed it. But after some initial confusion, the snakes eventually chose another home base in which to curl up together.

As the team repeated the experiment over the next few years - with five different cohorts of young pythons - the pattern held. Twice a day, Skinner came in and shuffled the snakes. He put them in the middle of the enclosure. He placed individual pythons under different shelters to force them to go find each other. Over and over, the snakes chose to pile up rather than coil alone. When snakes left to explore the enclosure, they often left together. And though males tended to wander more than females, they always returned to the home base.

"That blew my mind," Skinner said. "I was not expecting that from a snake I wasn't expecting to be social." In fact, Miller said, the ball pythons were more social than garter snakes. The team's past research has shown that garters can be surprisingly cliquish, with individual snakes showing clear preferences about who they spend time with. The juvenile ball pythons, meanwhile, didn't appear to care much about who they denned with. "They just wanted to be together all the time, in one shelter," Skinner said. No animal behaves quite the same in captivity as it does in the wild, said Vladimir Dinets, a specialist in reptile social behaviour at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, who did not participate in the study. But since wild snakes are difficult to study, research on social behaviour in captive snakes is still useful.

—NYT

The muddled origins of ‘rescue’

The idea of ‘giving voice to the voiceless’ or providing deliverance is steeped in our saviour complex, but it can often be damaging to animals, writes **Spoorthy Raman**

In the last four years, whenever we meet a dog-loving stranger on our walks with Pippi, our sequence of conversations turns very predictable. They first get attracted to Pippi’s puppy eyes and his ‘exotic’ looks. Once they approach us, they notice his deep scars — on the forehead and his legs — and his erect but clipped ears. Aww, is he a rescue, they ask. We nod. They



ask where Pippi is from. We slip into a flashback. We share about his life on the streets of Bengaluru and how he ended up being ours. By the end of the story, we

see their eyes moisten. They share a kiss and a few treats with Pippi. They leave us with these words: “Oh, bless you for rescuing him; he’s having a fantastic life now.”

That’s when my heart becomes muddled with many emotions. Don’t get me wrong, I appreciate people taking the time to talk to us and pet Pippi. But what unsettles me is trying to find a rational answer to the parting comment. I begin to ask myself — Is Pippi really having a fantastic life now compared to his past? Did we ‘rescue’ him? Did he need humans to ‘rescue’ him in the first place?

Why is ‘rescue’ controversial?

In the literal sense, the word rescue means to help someone or something out of a dangerous, harmful, or unpleasant situation. In Pippi’s case, he had no sickness or injuries. He was enjoying the life of a street dog — scavenging food, guarding the streets and, at times, playing a role in containing the rodent numbers. Thousands of years ago, these traits brought humans and dogs together, and the two species co-evolved.

But in today’s urbanised parts of the world, these exact traits don’t seem to sit well with our ways of living, increasing conflicts between the two species. That’s what happened to Pippi too, and it did not take long for him to be the ‘bad dog’. When Pippi chose to come into our house for safety, we were happy to indulge him, and eventually, we decided to take him in as his life was in danger. Some hint that he owes his life to us. I vehemently disagree.

In return for his life, Pippi gave up his freedom. Instead of scavenging and eating whatever he wanted, he now has to wait for predetermined portions of food that we choose for him. It might be nutritious, but he has no say in it for the most part.



Humans need to introspect more about the very idea of rescue.

Rather than saunter the streets to his heart’s content, he now has to time his pee and poop for when we take him for walks. He has access to a yard, but he depends on us to open the doors. Compared to his past, his life now perhaps feels quite monotonous and boring. Was it all worth it for him at the end? That’s a thought I wrestle with. When he snuggles in our bed each night, lying his head on my hand, I appreciate how forgiving

he is — I would not have been so forgiving if someone had snatched away so many aspects of my freedom.

As I delve more into our relationship with animals, it’s obvious that much of it comes from a place of our superiority as a species. The idea of ‘rescue’, for instance, is often steeped in our saviour complex—the need to “save” animals by fixing their problems. We might feel that instant gratification of ‘saving’

something and be proud about it, but once we start looking at it from the animals’ point of view, our pride should fall flat. Instead, it becomes an evident selfish act. Think of all the animals euthanised in the USA’s Yellowstone National Park when humans ‘rescued’ them. Think of all the bears, elephants or other wildlife that were culled because people fed them and they lost their natural fear of humans, risking the safety of both. The idea of rescue reinforces the narrative that animals, by definition, are dumb, helpless and vulnerable. In reality, they are far more intelligent, resilient and sentient. I’m not against humans helping an injured animal or showing kindness or compassion in a world that needs copious amounts of it. But I urge people to introspect on the idea of ‘rescue’ — who are we rescuing, from what and why. And more importantly, what are the consequences for the animal in question.

Tailspin is your monthly column on everything that’s heartwarming and annoying about pet parenting.

The writer is a science communicator and mom to Pippi, a six-year-old rescued Indie. She posts on X @RamanSpoorthy

