



spell that I was fortunate enough to experience, no matter how briefly. I returned painfully exhausted, oddly content, and convinced of this single fact - it is the mountains themselves that are more surely



touched by the divine than any holy place they shelter, and the biologist is more blessed than the pilgrims who cannot see this, who walk them with eyes and ears only for idols and temple bells.



A Wish Came True

Charushree Santosh

We all chase experiences, mostly good ones. We dream about them, we try to feel them, and sometimes even run away from a few. I'm taking this opportunity to take you, readers, to one such experience I have dreamt about since childhood. Living in a city, the only exposure to wildlife I had was through television. I used to watch shows like Animal Battleground, Big Cat Diary, The Future is Wild, and many others likewise. All that I saw started being written down on my bucket list, and now during every MSc tour, I get to experience something that I have always wished for.

My favourite one until now happened in Odisha. It was the month of March this year when Dr Gopi G.V. and Dr J.A. Johnson took the batch for the Wetland Tour. Our first stop was Bhitarkanika Wildlife Sanctuary, where we stayed for three days and learnt about saltwater crocodiles, different species of mangroves and their associates, birds residing in the habitat, etc. We sailed in and out of many creeks, and while going to Khola Creek, we saw the beautiful

Mangrove Pitta showing its brilliantly coloured body. It looked so surreal. We also got to see seven species of Kingfishers:- The Common Kingfisher, the utterly beautiful Brown-winged Kingfisher, the White-throated, Black-capped, Collared, Stork-billed and my favourite, the Pied Kingfisher. It is the only kingfisher known to use hover-plunge as their fishing technique, and I was so happy witnessing that moment. We next went to Habalikhathi Beach, a part of Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary, and learnt about a few management errors in the area. We also witnessed around 12-13 dead Olive Ridleys along the shore. They had drowned due to trawlers which are operating in the area. This allowed us to learn about fishing rules and regulations that must be followed in protected areas, how it affects these species, etc. Further, we also spoke about their nesting behaviour.

Our next stop was at the Chilika Development Authority and then to Rushikulya, where every year, these turtles come up to the shore and form arribadas (meaning – arrival by sea). Although the mass

nesting period was over, sporadic nesting still occurred, and we were lucky enough to spot some turtles in the sea. Later that night, we went to Ponnampet, hoping to see some turtles come up to the shore and nest. We waited for the tides to return, under a night sky adorned by shiny stars, with the cool breeze trying to put us to sleep. The sand reflected the night sky. Seeing the broken and half-eaten eggs of these turtles made us gloomy.

After around 3 hours, we witnessed this amazing moment for which we were all eagerly waiting. A female Olive Ridley, laying eggs. This was it. The moment I was waiting for. We shifted the sand slightly without disturbing the turtle to see the eggs. Having seen these amazing creatures only on TV until now, the moment felt so miraculous. Seeing it, in reality, was really mesmerising. An experience that the 10-year-old in me wanted finally came true. Our journey ended in Chambal sighting beautiful Skimmers, Terns, etc., but the turtles were the best memory I got from this trip.



Farewell..

Shri Dhyan Singh

Laboratory Assistant
(27.03.1987-30.06.2023)



Shri Mahesh Ghosh

Laboratory Assistant
(26.3.1987-30.06.2023)

