

ReWild:Life

Naturalist and amateur wildlife photographer Devendra Singh documents the return of species of mammals, birds and butterflies to the urban forests of Delhi in the last eight years since efforts have been made to protect and rewild them. The photo essay gives reason to hope that rewilding will ultimately result in lost species reclaiming lost habitats...

We think of Delhi as a concrete jungle, which, indubitably, it is. However, the city is on the tail end of the Aravallis and their forests, many of which are, happily, in different stages of rewilding. Recent surveys of these forests show that they harbour an astonishingly rich diversity of wildlife with relatively high densities of mammals in non-protected areas. As someone who has been documenting life in these forests over the last few decades, I have, in recent times, chronicled many species that used to be rare to find and can now be spotted.



This beautiful female Sambar deer took me by surprise on a morning walk in the Central Delhi Ridge, part of a critical wildlife corridor that stretches to Sariska Tiger Reserve in Rajasthan. Conservationists attest that this was the first time in 20 years that this species has been seen in Delhi and its environs. The mammal was very shy and as soon as I started photographing it, it jumped over a five-foot adjacent wall and disappeared into the forest area. I spotted the deer at least thrice and was able to capture its beauty twice.



I encountered this handsome Golden Jackal on a morning walk in the Central Ridge. This wolf-like canid is an opportunistic predator and a scavenger. India's ancient texts, the Jakatas and the Panchatantra, paint it to be highly intelligent and wily. Even with its intelligence, it could not cope with the loss of habitat around Delhi and was seldom spotted till recently. Now, its population has doubled in Asola Wildlife Sanctuary, a rewilded area on the outskirts of Delhi.



This is a Black Hooded Oriole, once a rare sighting in Delhi. Over the decades, as Haryana's Aravallis suffered rapid deforestation to become one of the most degraded forests of India, these stunning yellow birds became rarer and rarer till they disappeared. With focus back on the [preservation, protection and regeneration of ecosystems](#), the habitats around Delhi once again offer a good habitat for these birds and Black Hooded Orioles are once again being sighted by birdwatchers across Delhi.



When I reported a sighting of the charismatic Indian Pitta in 2012, it was the first time in almost 40 years that Delhi NCR had witnessed this migratory bird which stops in northern parts of India seeking a conducive habitat for mating. The pitta is a wondrous bird, its plumage has nine colours and its call always transports me to another world! Seeing this bird once stays with you forever and you want to witness it again and again. Seeing it so close to my home brings me pure happiness. Thanks to the increasing cover of trees endemic to the dry Delhi biome, it has become a regular visitor.



The lifespan of butterflies is very short but they are vital indicators of habitat regeneration and resurgence of flora and fauna. This lovely creature is the Indian Fritillary Butterfly. Until a few years ago, it was a rare sight in Delhi. Now, ever since its habitats are better protected and host and food plants have been reintroduced, it has once again become a common visitor to the capital.

The growing awareness about the conservation and protection of Delhi's urban forests is a welcome

breath of fresh air for [conservationists and wildlife lovers](#) like me. Much more needs to be done but I am happy that in my years as a chronicler of the city's animals, I have got to see some of these amazing species return to their lost habitats.

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Images Credit: Devendra Singh