

# Compassionate conservation

Wallach et al. (2018) champion the cause of wildlife individuals as the primary focus for action under the framework of compassionate conservation. According to them, compassionate conservation “aims to safeguard Earth’s biological diversity while retaining a commitment to treating individuals with respect and concern for their well-being”. The four key tenets of this approach include: “do no harm; individuals matter; inclusivity; and peaceful coexistence” (Wallach et al. 2018: 1258). A central



**Rescued carcass of Hog Deer.**

tenet of compassionate conservation is that empathy should form the founding principle for conservation action (Vucetich & Nelson 2013). Vucetich & Nelson (2013) have proposed that in

the context of conservation, “the purpose of a person living a sustainable life would have to be *“to treat others as one would be treated, if one were in their position”*. It is here that empathy plays a crucial role. Indeed, empathy is taken to provide the “objective, empirical knowledge ...about the conditions and capacities of others (to flourish and suffer)” (Vucetich & Nelson 2013). Empathy can be defined as the ability to know/understand the moods/mental state of the others including human beings, animals, and fictional characters. It is a new word in comparison to the word sympathy. Sympathy is the ability to feel the suffering of the others including human beings, animals, birds and



**Ranjan Roy, the village boy.**



**Communication among the local people.**

fictional characters. As an expert on 'empathy and emotional intelligence', Mr. Daniel Goldman defines empathy as having three levels: (a) cognitive empathy, (b) emotive empathy, and (c) compassionate empathy. The first level is the cognition/ understanding the mental state of others. The second level is the emotion/feeling of the mental state of others. In the final level someone wish to help others with 'Karuna' (compassion).

One can empathize with the mental state of others, when she/he is able to put her/his feet in the shoes of others. Compassion is there in sympathy also; where someone is able to

feel compassion for others, but can't understand. In simple terms compassionate empathy is a deeper emotion than the compassionate sympathy. One can understand compassionate empathy, but one can feel only the compassionate sympathy. Sympathy is to feel for the others, but empathy starts where otherness disappears.

Empathy is the understanding of both happiness and sufferings. Sympathy is the feeling of sufferings for the others.

Conventionally, every year the territorial staff of all the territorial and wildlife divisions of the Directorate of Forests,

Government of West Bengal conduct anti-poaching duties, area domination, and awareness creation among the tribal and local people during the festival of colour (Holi) to save the wild animals from the malpractice of ritual hunting. But this time during the days of anti-poaching duty as on 28 March 2021 a village boy named Ranjan Roy of Ambari, Block- Coochbehar-II under the PS- Pundibari of the Coochbehar Division, West Bengal showed that the ethos of compassionate conservation towards wildlife are also embedded among the villagers.

Compassionate conservation of local people towards wildlife can be elaborated by

the following field experiences gathered direct from the field. During the field visit to Gir National Park, Gujarat in the year 2013 I had interacted with the local farmers of the fringe areas. To my astonishment, I came to know that local farmers were very happy co-existing with lions in that landscape, although lions hunt the livestock of the local farmers. They explained that they were compelled to night watch to protect their crops from the Blue Bull/Nilgai *Boselaphus tragocamelus* every night during the crop season on a rotation basis by the family members. When they spot lions resting surrounding/in their crop fields, they became tensionless and return home with the satisfaction that Nilgai will not raid their crop.

When asked about the loss of valuable livestock by the lions, they indicated that the average annual individual loss of a farmer was negligible. Because lions prey mainly on Nilgai; in case of loss of livestock local farmers get suitable compensation from the state government. This wonderful embedded ethos of nature-culture linkage of fringe people is supporting the in

situ Asiatic Lion conservation in the Gir National Park, Gujarat.

As on 28 March 2021 at about 10 AM a village boy named Ranjan Roy of Ambari, Coochbehar saw a stray Hog Deer *Axis porcinus* (a Scheduled I wild animal on the Wild Life Protection Act, 1972) was attacked by two feral dogs. The Hog Deer is an endangered animal which is distributed from the alluvial grasslands of the Terai/Dooars forest of Corbett to Jaldapara, Buxa to Kaziranga (Saha 2020).

**Study Area:** Ambari is a revenue village situated in Coochbehar District. It is totally a non forest area 30 km away from Patlakhawa protected forest. The local

people depend on farming for livelihood. Between Patlakhawa protected forest and Ambari village laid the Torsa River and the rural markets. The soil and water of Ambari village are mostly suitable for vegetables farming. Apart from that people rear domestic cattle and goats for milk and meat, respectively. People of Ambari had seen a Hog Deer for the first time and so were curious.

With utmost urgency the boy rescued the stray Hog Deer, who was injured from dog bite on the back. Though the injury was severe, the animal was alive for a while and the boy tried his best by pouring water in the mouth and on the head of the injured animal. But the effort was not enough



**Dog bite injury at the hind portion of the Hog Deer.**

to save the animal from death. In the mean time the local crowd gathered in that area surrounding the dead body of the Hog Deer. A few people demanded to slaughter the dead animal for Holi festival. A few others wanted to take different body parts like antlers, hooves, and skin hairs of the dead animal to prepare amulets as superstitious belief of protection from the diseases. Many people gathered for taking images on their mobiles.

However, the boy rescued the carcass from the mob of a 1,000 people and took to his home for safety. Through a messenger the boy informed the field staff of the nearest Pundibari Range under Coochbehar Division. In this way 'hunting' was prevented by that boy because as per Sec 2(16) (c) of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 'hunting' with its grammatical variations and cognate expressions includes - injuring or destroying or taking any part of the body of any wild or captive animal (WWF TRAFFIC 2010). The author as Divisional Forest Officer of the territorial Coochbehar Division went to the village along with his field

staff and found that the Hog Deer had strayed from the Patlakhawa protected forest after crossing almost 30 km distance including vegetable fields, Kaljani River, and road to reach the human habitation of a non forest area.

I extended my thanks to that village boy named Ranjan Roy for his commendable job of compassionate conservation towards a Hog Deer after its death also. Then using that platform, an awareness was created among the villagers regarding the fundamental duty of people towards wildlife conservation as per the Constitution of India. We made them understand the definition of 'animal article', 'wild animal', and 'hunting' as per Sec 2, prohibition of hunting as per the Sec 9 and related 'Penalties' as per the Sec 51 of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 (WWF TRAFFIC 2010).

People were curious to know why it is called a Hog Deer. We informed them that the deer moves through the forests by head hung low like a hog and ducking under the obstacles rather than jumping to move forward (Menon 2014).

People became more curious about the Hog Deer and regarding its preorbital gland situated in front of the orbit or eye socket of the animal. We have communicated that it is somewhat like our lachrymal gland, but used for the secretion of pheromones or other semiochemicals as a mode of communication with other individuals of Hog Deer (Menon 2014). It is also pleasurable for the animal to rub the glands in the twigs of vegetation. The secretion of the gland on the twigs actually marks the territory and also the scent of the secretions attracts partners for mating (Menon 2014). Preorbital glands also harbour microorganisms and biosynthesized secretions by the microorganisms of this gland may protect the skin also (Menon 2014).

Local people were interested to know the difference between antlers of the deer and horns of the Gaur or domestic cattle. With the following comparison in an easy way it is was communicated them. In this way an endangered wild animal Hog Deer after death also contributed to the people and society.

Antlers	Horns
Single Structured.	Two part structured.
Branched.	Unbranched.
Extension of skull and made up of bone mainly apart from nerves and blood vessels.	Inner part made up of bone and outer sheath covering is mainly made up of keratin protein like human nails and hairs.
Shed Annually.	Permanent structure.
Found mainly in male.	Found both in male and female (in a diminutive form).
Used to show dominance against the competitive male and mainly to attract the female for mating.	Used as a tool at the time of fighting and protection.



**The rescuer boy honoured by lady forest guard.**

Coochbehar Division also felicitated the village boy for his contribution towards compassionate conservation. Coochbehar Division facilitated whole day field visit of that rescuer boy in the Patlakhawa protected forest under Pundibari Range. The boy communicated that it was an experience of his life time to sight wild animals like Gaur, Spotted Deer, Hog Deer, and Wild Boar in their natural habitat. The rescuer boy took

the pledge to rescue wild animals in future also. The approach of compassionate conservation of that rescuer boy gave a platform for the forest department in creating awareness among the local people of non forest areas regarding role and duties of them towards wildlife protection and conservation; it also helped to remove the superstitious beliefs from the minds of people regarding the illegal usage of the body

parts of wild animals. It will definitely reduce the intensity of hunting.

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**Citation:** Saha, S.K. (2021). Compassionate conservation. *Zoo's Print* 36(7): 32–36.