

Mumbai Urban Wildlife Project Needs Your Help!

Greetings!

Javed Ahmed, here. Most of you who follow me on Twitter (Hello! 🙌😊) know me as @curiocritters.

For years, I have been running projects in India, discovering more about our rich wildlife and how plants and animals interact and cohabit with people. Since 2020 we've gratefully received support from Caledonian Conservation Ltd, but we could achieve so much more – and I'm asking for your help.

I am a Wildlife Biologist, based out of India, Mumbai, deeply passionate about wildlife research, conservation, and conservation education - the latter two being particularly close to my heart, since, to quote the legendary Senegalese conservationist Baba Dioum, "In the end we will conserve only what we love; we will love only what we understand; and we will understand only what we are taught."

Conservation, and conservation education are particularly important right now, especially since few people realise that by conserving nature, we also ensure our own survival. It's as simple as that. Everything that we use in our day to day lives - essentials we do not even stop to think about - like the water quenching our thirst, the air filling our lungs, to the delicious food and drink we enjoy - all have their source in nature - in the forests, and other great ecosystems of our planet Earth - the ultimate gene bank of everything.

To this effect - because we can only conserve what we know, I discover new lifeforms, and bring them to light, sort of like a real-life, modern day Pokémon master, reminding everyone that our planet is home to countless fascinating species, many of which still remain undiscovered, even as we speed into a golden age of scientific, and technological progress.

And all of these species serve to improve our quality of life, every single day, one way or another - from butterflies, and bees which pollinate our food, the trees which purify the air we breathe, to harmless, and largely misunderstood creatures like spiders, which provide essential, and more importantly, free, pest control services.

We need wildlife to survive. More than it needs us.

Some of my most famous wildlife discoveries (there are way too many to list here, and space is a constraint) include a new species of spider I named after the city of Mumbai (*Dictis mumbaiensis*), the place I call home, and one which is very near and dear to my heart (that's right! Mumbai has a species named after her! Bet you did not know that!), the 'Harry Potter' franchise inspired Sorting Hat Spider (*Eriovoxia gryffindori*), which got me a place in TIME Magazine (<https://time.com/4598911/sorting-hat-spider-harry-potter-jk-rowling/>), National Geographic (<https://natgeotraveller.in/new-spider-species-in-karnataka-resembles-sorting-hat-from-harry-potter/>), the BBC (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-38325099>), including BBC Radio (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p04lgdl4>), among others, and a dainty ladybug mimicing orb spider, *Paraplectana rajashree* (this one's a real stunner), named after naturalist Rajashree Khalap, to celebrate, and honor women in STEM.

My most recent wildlife discovery was an owlet moth (*Bastilla simillima*), which was not only a new record for the city of Mumbai, but also a first for state of Maharashtra (Times of India's 'Mumbai

Mirror' carried the news of this important discovery, which you can read here: <https://m.timesofindia.com/in-a-first-for-maharashtra-rare-owlet-moth-discovered-near-chembur/articleshow/89537421.cms>).

What makes this discovery particularly interesting, however, is the fact that it was made right inside of my house, when the moth I 'discovered' flew indoors, attracted to the artificial lights illuminating our concrete domiciles, as insects are often prone to, late last year, in August 2021, as a pandemic weary Mumbai slowly emerged from the grips of the dreaded second wave of the Delta plus variant of COVID-19.

After I photographed the moth and released it back outside, I proceeded to identify it, and soon realised that I was staring yet another exciting new wildlife discovery in the face, which I proceeded to report in a peer reviewed science journal (and not just any science journal - the official science journal of the Maharashtra State Forest Department - link: <https://www.elafoundation.org/ela/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/EJFW-10-3.pdf> | pages 980-982).

Perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of this chance discovery made in the heart of a large, and populated apartment complex grid, in urban Mumbai, is that it showcases how wildlife still manages to survive in our great cities – in our parks, gardens and other urban green spaces, and more importantly, how much of it still remains to be discovered!

Important wildlife discoveries are not only made in exotic, remote locations - your own backyard, or garden is probably chock filled with wildlife you did not even know existed.

And all it takes is a little curiosity to explore this secret world, should you want to, hidden in plain sight, yet so often overlooked, as we so often go about our lives, either uncaring, or blissfully unaware.

On that note, we have been working diligently to document, record, report, and conserve the urban biodiversity of Mumbai City, as early as 2015.

We have only been financially supported (thank you Caledonian Conservation Ltd), only since 2020.

Before that, all our research was entirely privately funded.

Yet, inspite of limited resources, we managed to draw attention to some of the most fascinating species to share our planet with us, which would have otherwise gone unnoticed, or remained undiscovered. We did it all as a labour of love.

And while Caledonian Conservation Ltd has been a good friend to our wildlife research endeavours, it's becoming increasingly difficult to manage expenses, to the point where I have had to sell personal effects (including my Macbook) to cover costs.

So I will get straight to it. Our little urban wildlife research project is in jeopardy. While Caledonian Conservation Ltd's generous support is a huge help, we are almost always one step away from poverty row.

And therefore, I make this appeal to you - please consider supporting our research, thorough a small donation, to keep this show on the road.

We are currently working towards a pocket guide to Butterflies of Urban Mumbai, and we could really use a hand, right now.

What's in it for you, you ask?

Well, other than the fact that you would be supporting scientific research, we will personally thank all our generous donors by sending every single one of them an exclusive photograph featuring the urban wildlife of Mumbai. A small peek, if you will, into the lives of the many wonderful creatures which call this great city their home. Every single one of these photographs will be different, and exclusive to each donor. They will never be reproduced anywhere, except by the persons who receive them, should they choose to. And we will email both, an original, unedited copy of the photograph, as well as an edited version, ready to be printed out, and grace your study wall, or perhaps recline majestically on your work desk.

Every photograph will be beautiful, and more importantly, unique, showcasing a different aspect of urban biodiversity.

And every single photograph will be taken right here, in Mumbai, as we work hard to document the wildlife of India's financial capital.

But wait, there's more! Donors will also be acknowledged by name, in our field guide. A few, select donors will receive a physical copy of our book absolutely free of charge (subject to us opting for a limited print run - this would depend entirely on our publisher). And every single donor receives an e-book version of our field guide, without fail.

If you would like to help, please feel free to reach out to me, either through my Twitter DMs, or write to me at curiocritters@gmail.com.

Don't be shy to reach out, ask questions, or inquire about our research. I am always happy to discuss our ongoing projects, and talk about natural history, wildlife research, and conservation.

And please do share this document to spread the word, will you?

It would mean the world to me.

Gratefully obliged,

Javed Ahmed

Project Leader
Mumbai. Maharashtra. India.
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