

## **My Journey into the Wild – What I Learned from Wildlife**

If someone had told me a few years ago that I would be talking about wildlife like it's my best friend, I probably would've laughed. Back then, I thought wild animals were just something you saw in textbooks or on National Geographic. But somewhere along the way, that changed. And today, Wildlife has become more than just a favourite topic for me. It is part of who I am. I grew up in a small town called Vitla. It's surrounded by nature of green hills, ponds, forests, and so many birds that I've lost count. As a kid, I was always curious. I used to follow ants, build little shelters for frogs during the rains, and collect feathers fallen on the ground. But I didn't know that all this was the beginning of something deeper. The first time I really felt connected to wildlife was during a trip to Kalenji Male forest with my cousins when I was in tenth standard. We went early in the morning, and the forest was still waking up. Birds chirped like they were gossiping, monkeys swung above us like gymnasts, and everything smelled fresh like the earth was breathing. Suddenly, we saw a Malabar giant squirrel. It was bright and beautiful, with maroon and orange fur. It just sat there on a branch, watching us as we watched it. That moment made me realize: animals are not just creatures in the background they're observing us too. They live, feel, fear, and survive just like we do. After that, I started spending more time in nature. Every Sunday, I would grab my camera and go to nearby forests or lakes. Sometimes I'd go alone, sometimes with cousins. At first, they thought I was weird. "Why are you taking pictures of snakes and bugs?" they would ask. But slowly, some of them started joining me. And that felt good like I was helping them see what I saw. One thing I've noticed is that wildlife teaches your patience. You can't expect animals to pose for you like models. Sometimes you have to sit in the same spot for hours, without moving, without making a sound. I remember once waiting three hours just to see an otter family come out near a lake bank. But when they did, it was totally worth it. The babies were tumbling around, and the mother was teaching them how to fish. It was like watching a nature documentary, but live and I was the lucky one who got to see it. Of course, not everything about wildlife is fun and exciting. There's also a lot of sadness. One day, near Ukkuda, I saw a beautiful king cobra lying dead by the road. Someone had probably hit it with a vehicle. That image stayed with me for days. It made me angry and helpless at the same time. That's when I realized if people knew more about these animals, maybe they would be more careful. That's also when I decided that just watching wildlife wasn't enough. I had to speak for them too. I started learning about local wildlife rescue groups. I met a guy named Ramesh Anna, who had been rescuing snakes for over 15 years. I shadowed him on a few rescues. One time, he gently removed a rat snake from a house where people were panicking. He calmly explained to them that the snake was non-venomous and just looking for a cool place to rest. Watching him handle the situation with care for both the people and the animal taught me so much. I realized that fear mostly comes from not understanding. That's when I began talking to neighbours kids during wildlife week. I would carry pictures and stories and tell them how every animal even the scariest ones plays a role. For example, without snakes, we'd be overrun by rats. Without frogs, mosquito numbers would shoot up. Even the vultures, which people find ugly, are super important they clean up dead animals and stop diseases from spreading. As I learned more, I also started seeing how much damage we humans are causing. Forests are being cut for roads, mining, and buildings. Plastic waste is everywhere. Rivers are drying up or getting polluted. Animals are being forced to move closer to human settlements, which leads to conflict. A leopard entering a village is not a monster it's a desperate creature that lost its home. But we often react with fear and violence instead of understanding. I've also

seen hope, though. I once visited the Sandalwood plantations in Ukkuda, and there I met a team of forest guards who were so passionate about protecting the land and trees. They track animals, stop illegal activities, and even rescue injured ones. Most of them don't get much credit, but they work hard. One guard told me, "We are the voice for those who can't speak." That hit me deeply. It reminded me of why I started caring in the first place. Another unforgettable moment was releasing a rescued barn owl back into the wild. It had been found stuck in a net and injured. After treatment, when we opened the box and it flew into the sky, I felt something shift in me. That owl got a second chance. And I was a part of that. Sometimes I wonder what animals would say if they could talk. Would they be angry with us? Would they ask why we are destroying their homes? Or would they be kind and hopeful? Maybe they'd say, "It's not too late." That's what I believe. It's not too late. Wildlife has given me a lot but not just knowledge, but purpose. It helped me grow from a curious boy into someone who wants to make a difference. I may not be a scientist or a big conservationist, but I'm doing what I can. Taking photos. Telling stories. Talking to people.

And through all of this, I've learned some big lessons:

1. Everything is connected – If one species disappears, it affects many others.
2. Respect is key – Animals don't bother us unless we bother them.
3. Change begins with awareness – The more we know, the better choices we make.
4. Small steps matter – Even saving one animal, one tree, one patch of land can help.
5. We are part of nature, not separate from it – The forest is not "out there." It's in our air, our water, our future.

Sometimes, when I lie down under the stars after a long day in the field, I close my eyes and listen. The sound of crickets, the hoot of an owl, the rustle of leaves it's like a song. And in that song, I hear the heartbeat of the wild. I feel lucky to understand it. So if you're reading this and thinking, "What can I do?" start small. Visit a local forest. Learn about the animals around you. Reduce your plastic use. Talk to others. Because every voice matters. And every step counts. This is my journey into the wild.