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KIDS



Current Conservation carries the latest in research news from natural and social science facets of conservation, such as conservation biology, environmental history, anthropology, sociology, ecological economics and landscape ecology.

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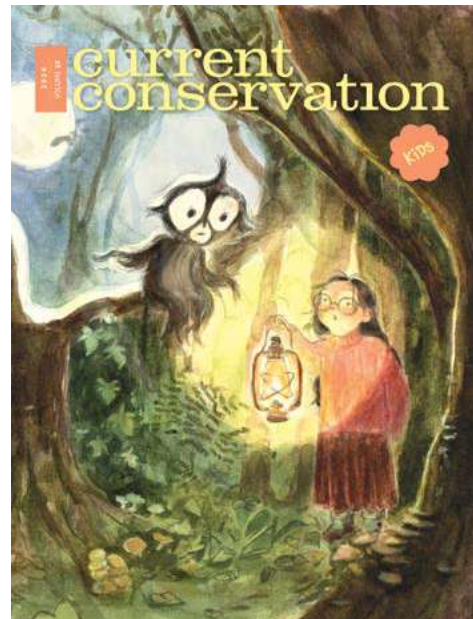
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As the saying goes, “a picture is worth a thousand words”. Here at CC Kids, we have always used pictures to bring our stories to life, but this year we are proud to experiment with two new ways to tell stories with images. Dewey Pretorious’ colourful ‘Prehistoric water world’ is the first of these—not only in the sense of occurring earlier in the magazine, but also in the sense of being our first-ever art submission in the Emerging Voices category. The second is Shruti Pawar’s ‘Eyes in the cornfield’, the winner of our inaugural wordless story contest.

Of course, all our issues are bursting with art, so you will also find beautiful illustrations to ‘paint a picture’ of a wide selection of species, including insects (such as fireflies and cotton stainers), birds (such as storks), and primates (such as gibbons, leaf monkeys, and, of course, humans!). We’ve also got some pieces that look at the ‘big picture’ in conservation, including Erica Chester’s ‘And the award goes to...’. Thanks to all these great submissions, we think this issue is ‘as pretty as a picture’—and we hope you agree!

– Caitlin Kight and Payal Bal

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And the award goes to...

Author Erica Chester | Illustrator Habib Ali

Welcome to all creatures,
All you animals, great and small
Gary, please move down the back
Giraffes are rather tall

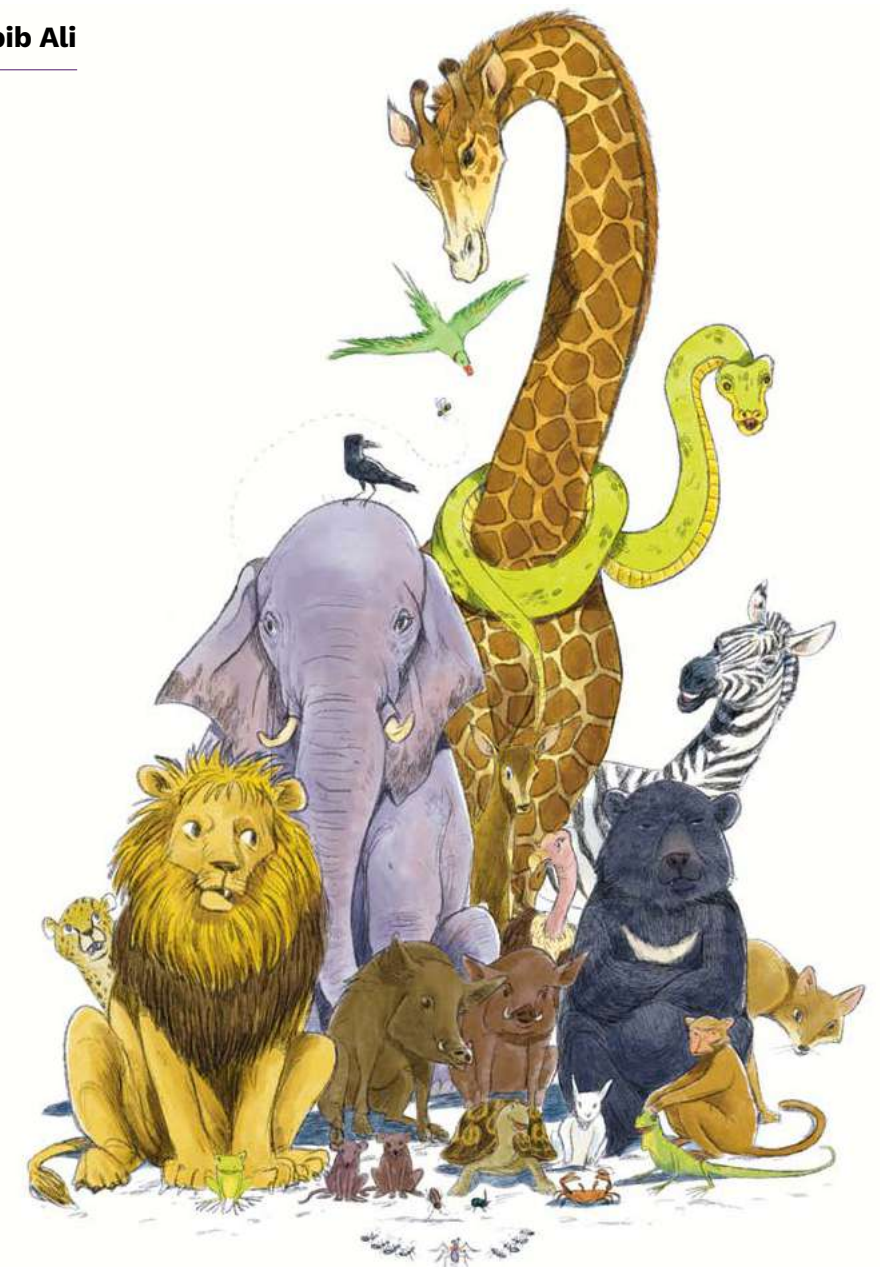
Mikey, Moxie, all you mice
Could you move up the front
Lions, away from the zebras!
This is not a hunt!

In fact, we’re here to celebrate
The hard work done this year
Not a single one of you
Should be sitting there in fear

So, once again, welcome
to this special event
It’s so good to see you all
Not sure where the year went

As we’re all aware
around our great animal nation
We’ve been busy holding
A conservation conversation

And tonight, we’ve arrived
At our great culmination
With our prestigious award
In creature conservation



'Conservationist of the Year'
For 2025 is up for grabs
Who has won this impressive prize
The worms, the crows, the crabs?

Well, first let's name third place
It goes to—Bertie Bee
For most prolific pollinator
Our judges all agree

That without you, Bertie
Many plants would die
You're always busy pollinating
You're really a great guy!

The second place goes to
The fabulous Freddy Frog
A lifelong eco warrior
He works just like a dog

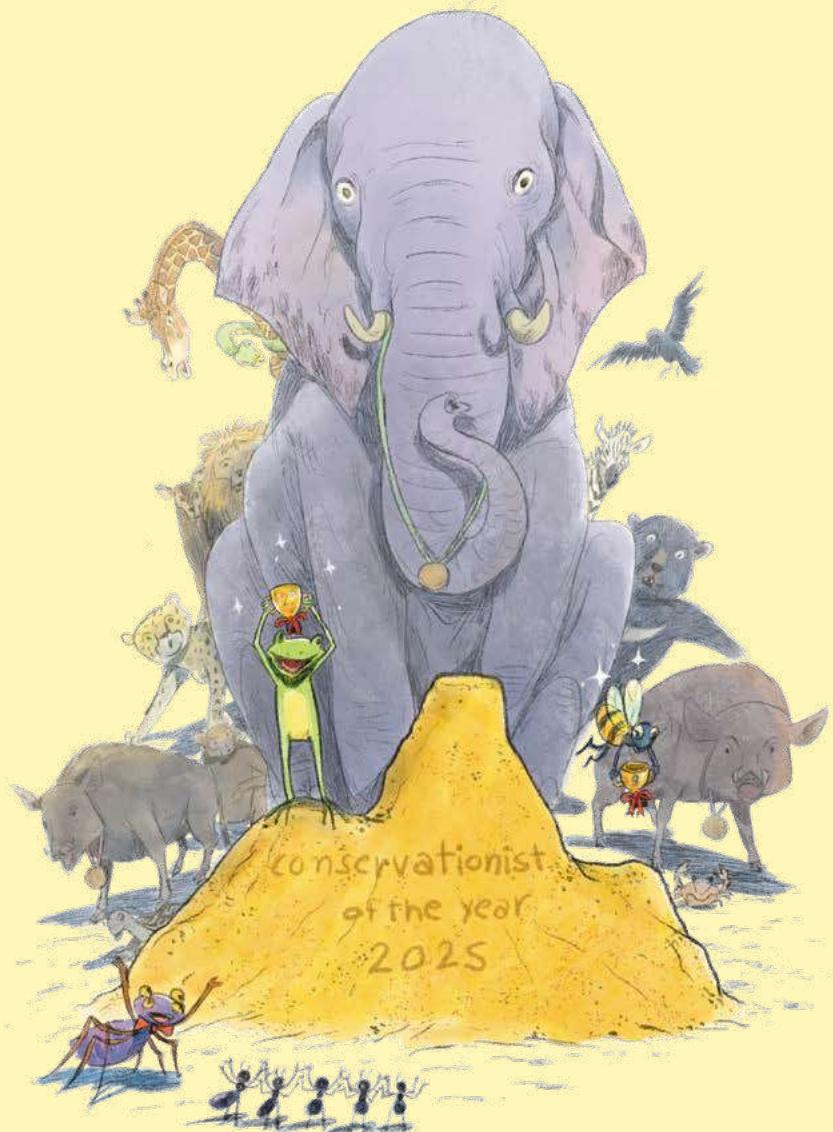
As a tiny tadpole
He munched on pond algae
Keeping oxygen levels right
And waterways clean, you see

Now, as an older fella, he
Controls insect populations
He also croaks to scientists
About water contaminations

Just before we announce
Our winner for '25
Let's call out some other
Commendations helping us thrive

Ellie Elephant for helping out
Smaller animals in a drought
Using your tusks to dig for water
You helped Belle and her daughter

Belle and Bindi are two boars
Who disperse seeds on grassy floors
Now, if only they could also try
To tread more lightly as they go by



Fin the Fish poops in the sea
helping lower acidity
Speaking of poop, it's rather super
Our winner is a pooper trooper

So without any more ado
Let's name our winner now for you
Our champion is a kind of bug
In fact, you all know him as Doug

Yes, Doug, The Dung Beetle
Is this year's winner
In conservation,
he's no beginner

He cleans up after all of you
He shuffles by rolling up poo
Once it's in a nice round ball
He even buries it and all

No matter how stinky you are
He cleans it up. He's such a star!
So, come on down, you've earned this. True!
Uh, no need to roll that ball with you!

.....
Erica Chester is an animal lover, writer and teacher from Sydney, Australia. She loves going on nature walks, birdwatching and learning through nature.

Habib Ali is an illustrator who specialises in creating art for children's literature, and has trained at the Riyaaz Academy for Illustrators in Bhopal, India. He loves sketching, travelling, and sketching his travels.



Gibbons:

The Singing, Swinging apes

Author **Jennifer B. Aitken** | Illustrator **Divya Gaur**

The first rays of the sun feel warm on my fur. The early morning light starts to filter through the leaves at the tops of the trees in the forest canopy. The night before, I had fallen asleep with my legs curled up to my chest and my arms crossed over my knees. My bed was the fork between two big branches in a very tall tree. I reach my long arms above my head to stretch and grasp the branch extending above me. Where is my family? Every day, my mother, father, younger brother, and I travel through the forest together. When the sun starts to set, we find our own beds for the night.

"Oooooooooooooo-aahk...wak...
wak...wak...wak...wick-u...
wick-u...wick-u..."

That's my dad!
He's letting us know where he is.



"Oooooooooooooo...wup...wup...
wup...wy..wy..wy..wy.."

There's mom! Mom and dad like to sing together in the morning. When a mom and dad gibbon sing together, it's called a **duet**. I try my best to imitate my mom's voice.

"Oooooooooooooo...wup...wup..."

She taught me how to sing. When we sing together, all the other gibbons in the forest know where our family is. I hear the sound of leaves rustling and branches creaking. I catch a glimpse of shiny black fur overhead as my dad makes his way over to me.

On the branch below, my mom sits with my brother clinging to her belly with his dark eyes looking up at me. His fur is a creamy tan colour and blends in perfectly with my mom's. Their colours match, so predators can't see him while my mom carries him around. In about a year, his fur will turn black like my dad's and mine. Once I grow up, my fur will turn back to a creamy tan colour to match my mom and the other adult girls. My brother's fur will stay black.

"wick-u...wick-u...wick-u..."

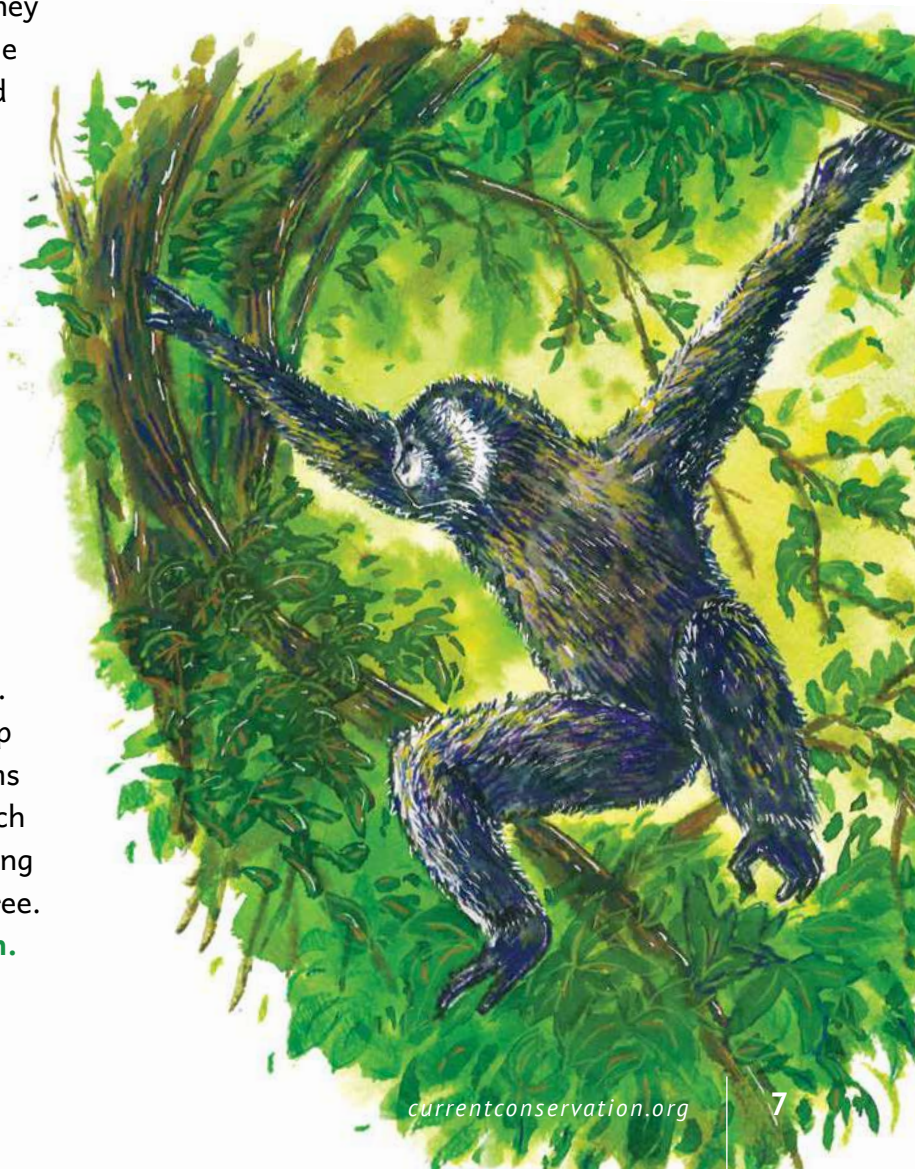
My brother is just learning how to sing, but he likes to practice! The song of another gibbon family echoes ours as they announce their territory and greet the day. Singing takes a lot of energy, and my empty stomach tells me it's time for breakfast. My hand grips the branch above me a little tighter. I stretch my curled up legs and push off the branch to start my swing. I move through the trees the same way you climb across monkey bars, even though I am not really a monkey. I'm part of the ape family. My ape cousins, the orangutans, live in the trees with me here in Southeast Asia.

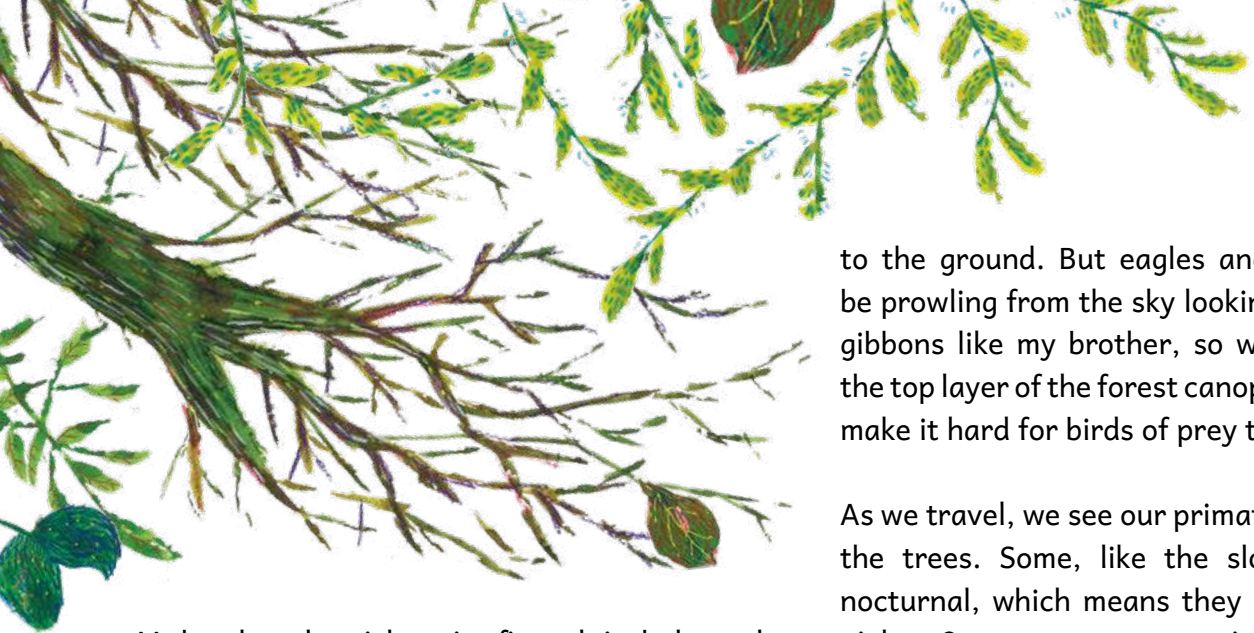
With my right hand, I grab one branch while my left reaches for the next one. Apes like me do not have tails to help balance on branches, but my strong arms help me dangle from the trees. I stretch my long arms as far as I can to swing from branch to branch and tree to tree. The way we move is called **brachiation**.

I spend most of my life up in the trees, so I have learned to move very fast and travel very far without ever having to touch the ground.

My favourite foods

With one final swing, I fly through the air grabbing the branch of a new tree where I will find my breakfast. I am lucky to live in a place where so many yummy fruits grow on trees, but these figs are one of my favourites. I slowly swing through the branches, looking carefully at the colours of the fruits until I find a bunch of sweet, ripe, purplish black figs. Dangling from a branch with one arm, I use my other hand to pick the sweet figs and start eating.





My brother also picks a ripe fig and sits balanced on a branch to eat his food. My dad sits down next to him and starts using his long fingers to inspect my brother's fur while he eats. We call this **grooming**. My dad is removing bugs and parasites from my brother's fur. Grooming is a way that we take care of each other.

Now that I'm full from snacking on a variety of fruits in nearby trees, I'm ready to play! I tag my brother with my hand and then nudge him with my foot, daring him to chase me. I take off, flying and swinging through the trees. I can hear him crashing through the leaves behind me. He is still young, but has already learned to brachiate very fast!

Daily log

My parents join in as they chase us through the trees. My mom catches up to my brother and grabs his foot as he swings by. She pulls him down to a bundle of branches where they wrestle. My whole family likes to play! We spend most of our days in the trees in our territory. We eat, we play, we groom each other, and we rest.

We also have to watch out for danger and predators. Being high up in the trees keeps us safe from big cats like tigers that stay closer

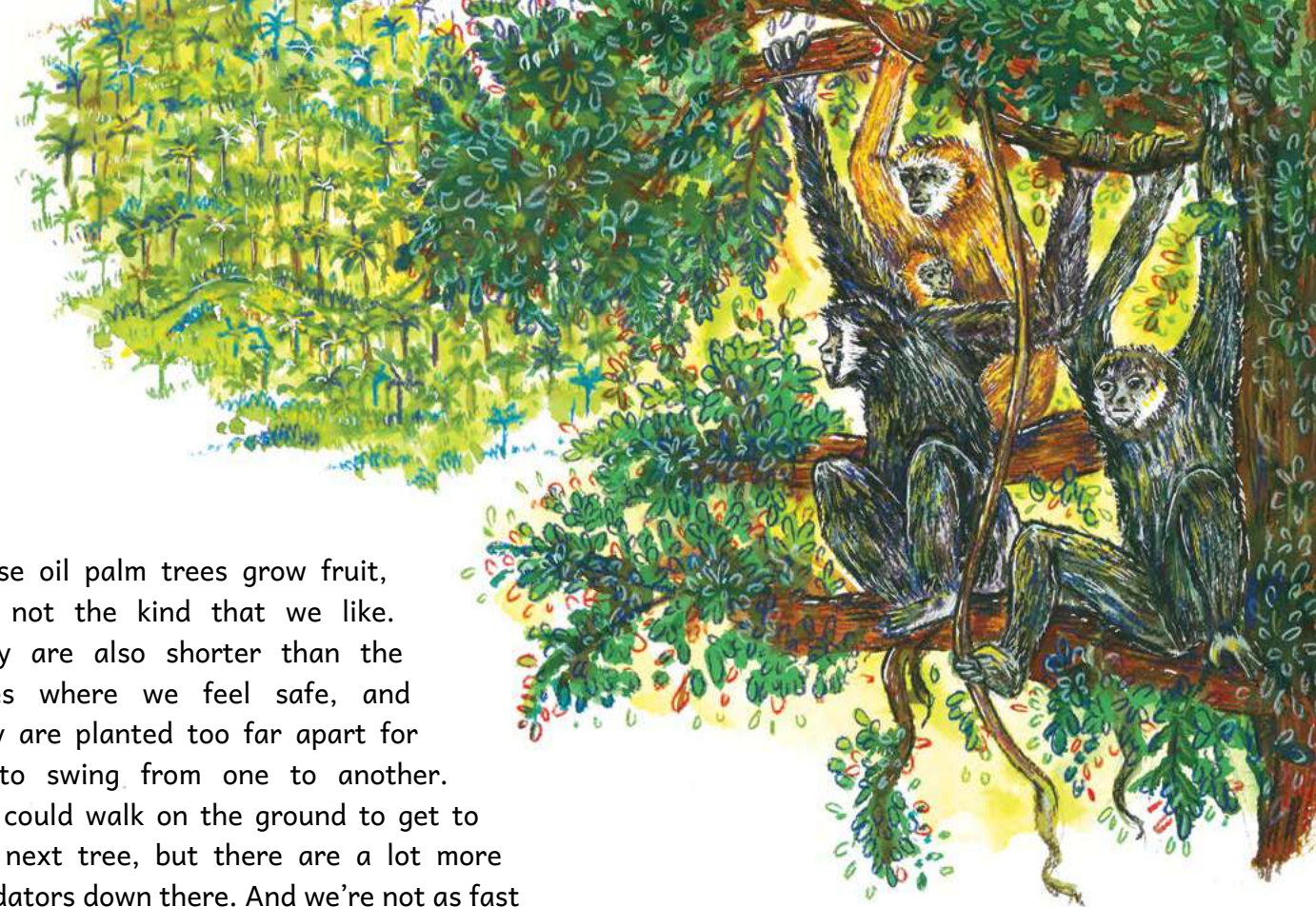
to the ground. But eagles and hawks may be prowling from the sky looking for smaller gibbons like my brother, so we stay under the top layer of the forest canopy. The leaves make it hard for birds of prey to see us.

As we travel, we see our primate relatives in the trees. Some, like the slow loris, are nocturnal, which means they are awake at night. Our orangutan cousins are active during the day, like us. We sometimes fight with our relatives over the best food since we like a lot of the same things. But most of the time, we stay away from each other and continue on our way, swinging through the trees.

We travel all around our territory every day and, as we travel, we have an important job to do in the forest. Just like every other animal, sometimes we have to poop. The seeds from all the fruits we eat drop to the forest floor in our poop and find a place to start growing a brand new tree. Since we are always on the move, we are also spreading these seeds all around the forest so new trees can continue growing.

Tree troubles

One day, we were travelling towards the sun rising in the sky. The branches opened up to a place where there were no more tall trees. On this end of our territory we had seen another kind of primate, but they did not live in the trees like us. They stayed on the ground and only had fur on their heads. When they first arrived, they cut down some of our favourite fruit trees and started growing new ones called oil palm trees.



These oil palm trees grow fruit, but not the kind that we like. They are also shorter than the trees where we feel safe, and they are planted too far apart for us to swing from one to another. We could walk on the ground to get to the next tree, but there are a lot more predators down there. And we're not as fast at walking as we are at swinging. This new kind of planted oil palm forest makes it hard to find fruits to eat or safe places to rest. The first time we got to this part of our territory, we realised we would have to go in a different direction to find food and safety.

Today, we are chasing each other through our territory, but this time we are moving in the direction of the setting sun. My father is winning the race, but I see him starting to slow down. The branches once again open up and the primates without fur are here, too. I think they are called 'humans'. In this part of our territory, the humans have also planted new oil palm trees. But here, by the setting sun, these humans left a lot of our favourite fruit trees growing nearby. We can still find food and move safely through the branches without having to walk on the ground. I feel safe here.

As the sun continues to set, I look for the branch that will be my bed for the night.

I settle in and look around at the oil palm trees nearby. There are two humans moving by the trees. They are hiding and chasing each other around the trees and playing. I start to fall asleep as I watch them play and realise maybe we are not so different from one another.

.....
The singing, swinging apes in this story are northern white-cheeked gibbon (Hylobates leucogenys), a species that lives in parts of Southeast Asia.
.....

Jennifer B. Aitken is a graduate student with Miami University of Ohio's Project Dragonfly. She is a full-time educator and lifelong nature lover with a passion for primate conservation.

Divya Gaur is an illustrator and book cover designer. Her desk is always messy and her hair is messier. If she's not on Instagram, she's probably eating dosa.



Fun fact:
Hargilas can
grow up to
5 feet tall!

THE HARGILA ARMY

Author and illustrator **Devaki Pratap**

Meet the greater adjutant, a large stork known locally as *hargila* (bone swallower) in Assamese. True to its name, the *hargila* is a scavenger, feeding on animal remains, and thus playing an important role in keeping the environment clean.

From 1994 to 2016, the greater adjutant was listed as Endangered on the IUCN Red List. Its absence from Assam's skies had a variety of reasons. Being scavengers, the birds were seen as unlucky by local communities, and their nesting colonies were considered smelly and messy. To drive them away, people began attacking them with stones and cutting down their nesting trees, which led to a decline in their population.

Fortunately, these storks found a champion in Dr. Purnima Devi Barman, a wildlife biologist from Assam. She noticed the species' dwindling numbers and decided to lead the conservation efforts to bring them back from the brink from extinction. She formed the Hargila Army—a group of local women empowered to protect nests and change the negative perception about the storks.

Through school awareness programmes, street rallies, and community workshops, the Hargila Army worked to replace fear with pride. Their most creative step came when they began weaving *hargila* motifs into traditional Assamese clothing like *gamosas* (handwoven stole) and *mekhela chadors* (women's traditional attire). This initiative not only employed local women, but also turned the *hargila* into a cultural symbol!

Over the next 15 years, these efforts produced remarkable results: the greater adjutant population increased eightfold. The *hargila* won the hearts of the local people and reclaimed its place in Assam's skies once again.

Devaki Pratap is a contemporary art student based in Bengaluru. As a freelance illustrator, she experiments with mixed mediums and styles, moving between traditional and digital art.



Chronicles of the cotton stainer

By *D. Cingulatus*

Insect narrator, Misunderstood icon

(Actual) Author and illustrator **Neha Ayub**



6:45 AM: Rise and stain

The sun is up and the rays are warm on my wings. This means it's time to stretch my six little legs and scurry up the cotton plant. You might be wondering what I do for breakfast. Well, I dig my needle-mouth into the soft cotton seed and succckk. Yum!

Before you question my dining choices, no I do NOT eat the cotton. That all-white fluffy ball? Not my cup of tea. It's the seeds I'm interested in. Fibrous, nutty, and full of plant power that will keep me energised for the adventures that await my day.

But they call me the 'cotton stainer'. *Dysdercus cingulatus* to be precise. Dramatic, right? Sounds like I've spoiled someone's fresh laundry.

Ugh, how do I explain this? What really happens is quite different from what you've been told about me. Here's what I actually do: after I sip all the goodness from the cotton seed, I leave some of my—how shall I put it—bug business behind. If you don't clean the cotton properly during processing, that gooey yellow liquid will stain the cotton. I don't do it on purpose. This is survival.



9:01 AM: Bright red family

No, I'm not alone out here.

There are also the nymphs, our little ones that scurry all over leaves in bright red packs. Big energy balls, but wingless as of now. Soon they'll grow up, sprout their wings and it'll finally be their turn to get their pilot licence.

We always stick together. Do you think it's easy being at the bottom of the food chain? Birds, ants, wasps, you name it—they all want a taste of the stainer. Imagine being preyed on and still getting blamed for staining your food. You'd want to pick a different struggle. And yet, we're here. Playing our own little role in maintaining the food chain.

12:30 PM: Pest control

Pest control? More like a fancy term for mass assassination. Giant, poison rains sprayed from cans and planes. You might think they're protection for cotton plants. But here's the deal: when you blast the field with chemicals, you don't just get us. The leaves curl up into scared fists, the soil grows sour and the wildflowers vanish. Even the farmers suffer from the toxins. Did you know that cotton occupies third place for the most pesticide use in India?

They think "No bugs, no stains!" But ever wondered why that cotton looks a little extra clean? So unnaturally perfect? Maybe the stains we leave behind are signs. They tell you stories of where your cotton really comes from. That they were grown with care, not chemically treated.

Want better protection? Plant some flowers. Mix the crops. Let the good bugs do their job! We understand nature's balance better than you think.

5:00 PM: A history lesson

You think I'm modern trouble?

Haha! Our ancestors have been around since before cotton became a crop. We've been around for so long that even scientists relied on our poop stains to study insect coloration and natural dyes! Not so useless are we?

Yes, we snack and we stain. But we're also small traces of what is forgotten, in a world full of chemicals and pesticides.



.....

Neha Ayub is a writer and self-taught artist working at the intersection of language and visual art. Through her work, she loves to explore the quiet nuances of everyday life.

LALIAN AND THE MEMORY KEEPER

Author **Suchita Sinha** | Illustrator **Rishita Loitongbam**

In the mist-wrapped hills of Mizoram, in northeastern India, where clouds rolled down into forests like tired travellers, people spoke in hushed voices of a strange creature. A spirit with the face of a child and eyes that contained oceans. They called it the Forest Spirit Munla.

Most had never seen him, and those who had had only caught a glimpse of those eyes. They said the eyes were shiny black, circled with a white outline—as if drawn by a child with chalk. Munla's eyes had an expression of eternal astonishment, as if seeing the world for the first time, or of having seen far more and holding it all inside.

The spirit walked around at night, in such hushed steps that no one would know even if it was right behind them. They said it didn't jump—it glided between treetops, as if floating. Those who saw it either fell to the ground and mumbled a soft prayer, or ran as fast as they possibly could. No one dared to say Munla's name aloud, except for one.

Her name was Lalian, a nine-year-old Mizo girl with unmissable eyes, shaped like perfect almonds and hidden behind thick glasses. She was always covered in dirt from climbing anything even remotely climbable. Her dark hair, tangled like the vines on trees, often carried bits of the forest. With bubbling excitement, she listened closely to

every story the villagers told about Munla. Then she would run home and tell her grandmother everything, who smiled as she pumped air into the earthen *chula* (stove).

"I will see it one day, Amma. I will ask him where all the animals went," Lalian would say every day. It was no secret that the animals who once roamed the periphery of the village had slowly started to disappear. Lalian had heard over the radio about people, called poachers, taking them away. The only logical solution according to her was to speak to the forest spirit directly.

Lalian would try to stay awake each night, waiting for Munla, so she could ask for the whereabouts of the poachers and talk to them. They would obviously release the animals. *It must be a misunderstanding that they had taken them*, she thought. Slowly, her eyes would grow heavy with sleep, and she would wonder when the forest spirit would come to meet her.

And finally, it happened—on a full moon night.



Nocturnal spirit

Lalian stood on her grandmother's porch, looking into the forest as she often did. The night was still. No frogs. No crickets. Nothing. Just silence.

That's when she saw it. The Forest Spirit.

Its slender body moved slowly from one treetop to another. It looked like it was flying, its fur brushing the leaves like feathers. Lalian didn't think twice—she quietly followed.

She walked through the moss-covered trees, going deeper and deeper into the forest. The moonlight faded as the canopy thickened.

She slipped once. Maybe twice. She couldn't remember. Her eyes were fixed on the forest spirit gliding above. At times, as the forest grew denser around her, she thought she had lost Munla—but then, soundlessly, it peered out from behind leaves. As if guiding her, as if saying, "You aren't alone."

The secret grove

After walking for what felt like an eternity, her rush of excitement began to fade. Tired, confused, and a little afraid, she crossed a creaking natural bridge fashioned from the living roots of trees and entered a clearing. A grove.

She was sure the spirit was gone. "Hello? Anyone here?" she called out.

As if on cue, there was a movement in the shadows. The spirit slowly lowered itself from a tree in front of her. Lalian stared in amazement.

Munla stepped into the moonlight. Its body was covered in deep bluish-brown fur. It was on all fours, a long tail swishing slowly behind it.

Then she saw its face. A round, haggard face covered in ashy fur. And the eyes. The same eyes from the stories. They looked sad, almost filled to the brim with something. *What were they filled with?* she wondered.

"Memories," came the answer.

Lalian gasped. The spirit hadn't spoken—but she had heard it. *How?* she thought.

"You and I are connected, Lalian. Through this," it said, gently touching the soil and raising its hand toward the trees. "And so are they."

Suddenly, as if a fog had lifted, Lalian saw what she had only dreamed of.



In the clearing behind the forest spirit lay a red panda, perched on a root, its eyes bright with thought. A hornbill, its beak glowing golden. A pangolin curled up and humming softly. Even a clouded leopard, shy but watching closely, its eyes reflecting stars.

They weren't afraid. They were waiting.

Lalian pinched herself. But this wasn't a dream.

"What is this place?" she asked.

"This is the Grove of the Forgotten. Where the endangered dream, and the hunted find peace. Where stars listen," said Munla. His lips didn't move but his eyes spoke somehow.

Lalian looked at all the faces of the creatures—the ones who were lost, the ones they were still losing. And she sobbed.

It felt like a sudden sadness had engulfed her—a sadness not of this life. The sadness of her ancestors, of these creatures. As if the forest itself was calling to her.

"Why me?" she whispered.

What could she do? She looked at her small hands and clenched her tiny fists. She thought about fighting off poachers. She would protect these creatures. She had to.

But the spirit smiled gently.

"You don't have to fight for us, Lalian," its eyes said.

She looked deep into them.
"Why me?" she asked again.

And the eyes answered: "You are the first human to witness this. Because you followed, not to take, but to know. You carry the seed of our story. You carry these memories, so we are never forgotten."

As if on cue, the animals began to leave. One by one, they walked deeper into the forest. The spirit stepped into the shadows. They vanished, like mist at dawn.

The last to leave was the pangolin. It paused by Lalian's feet, tapped them gently. And disappeared.

The return

Lalian walked out of the forest as the first rays of sun lit the hills.

No one believed her, of course.

Not the schoolmaster.
Not the forest officer.
Not even her mother.

But her grandmother smiled.
"Ah. So you met him," she said.

"You know him? He's a forest spirit! Everyone was right!" Lalian couldn't stop mumbling.

Still smiling, her grandmother opened an old, illustrated book *The Mammals of the Northeast*. She flipped the pages slowly. Then stopped. As if knowing exactly which page to stop at, a habit developed over years.

A pair of white outlined eyes stared back at Lalian from the page.

The page read, "Phayre's leaf monkey: Known for its expressive, wide-rimmed eyes and elusive nature, this endangered monkey is most active at night and glides silently through the upper canopy."

She read it again. And again. And again. And then she understood. Why her grandmother always smiled at the name Munla. She always knew.

It wasn't a spirit after all. Just an endangered creature. Carrying the memories and sorrows of its forest friends in its eyes.

Lalian never tried to find the grove again. Instead, she drew it. Painted it. Wrote about it.

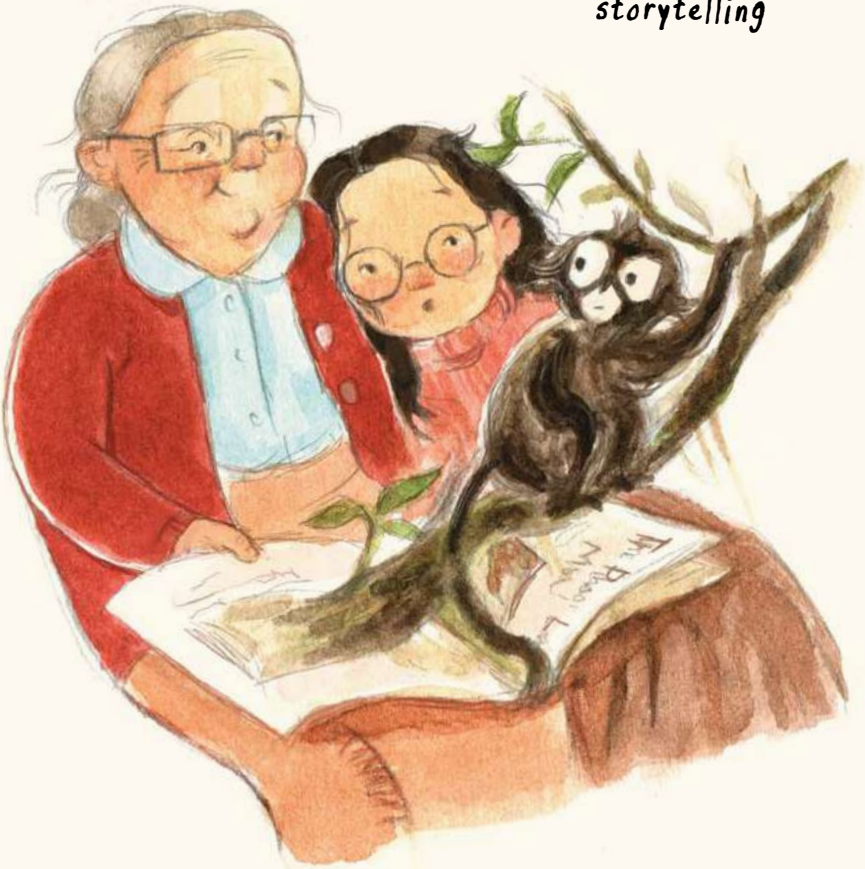
In school. In books. In competitions.

She wrote about animals with starlight in their eyes and a forest that remembered.

And slowly, people began to listen.

A wetland was protected.
A poacher's trap was removed.
A girl in another village started a rescue centre for hornbills.

Lalian's stories spread like seeds in the wind.



Years later

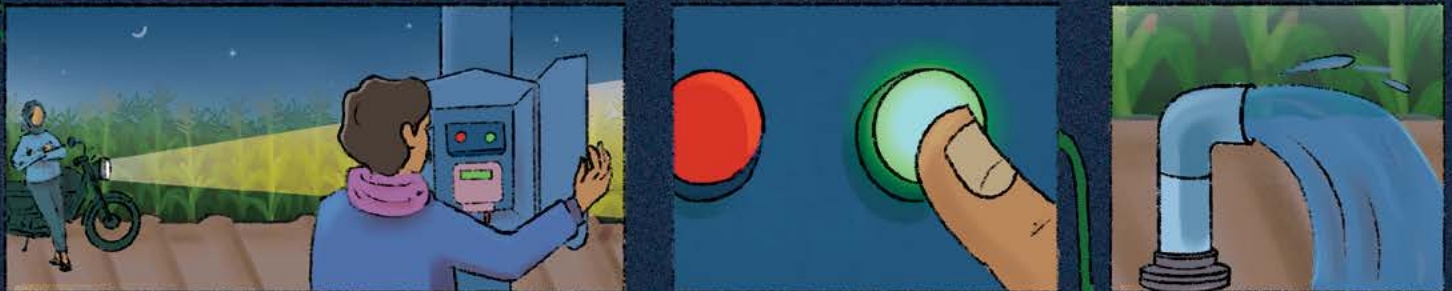
When Lalian was grown and her name was known, a small child once asked her, "Did the Phayre's leaf monkey give you magic?"

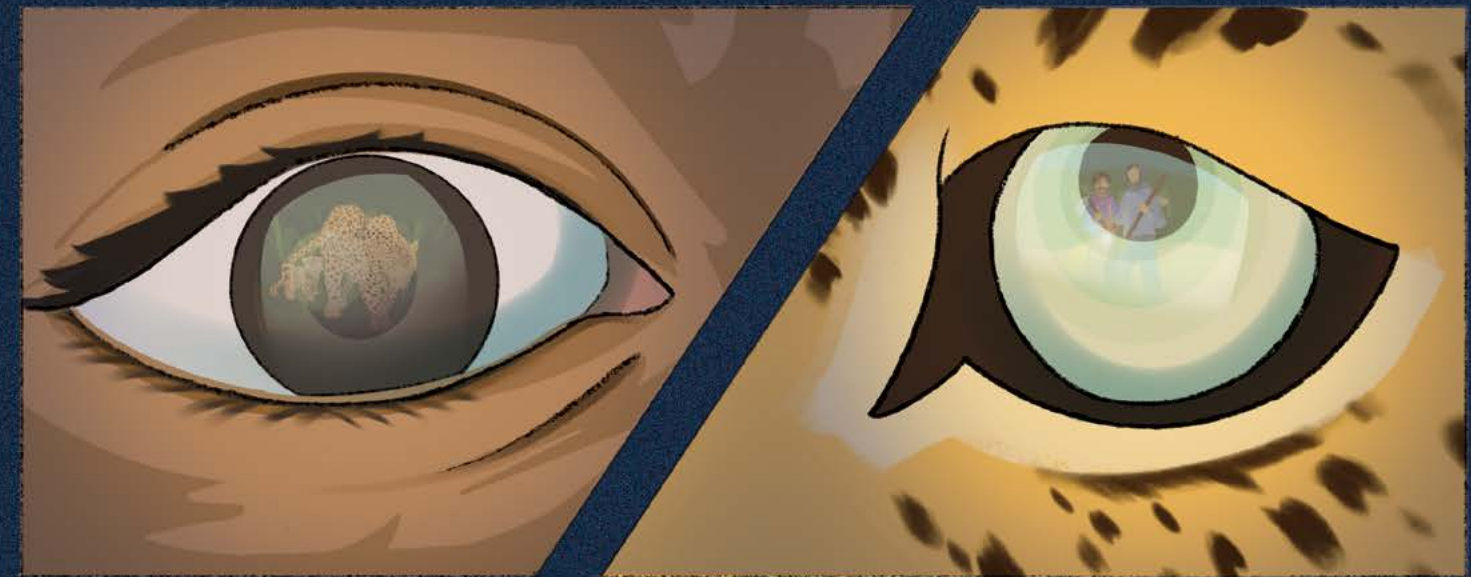
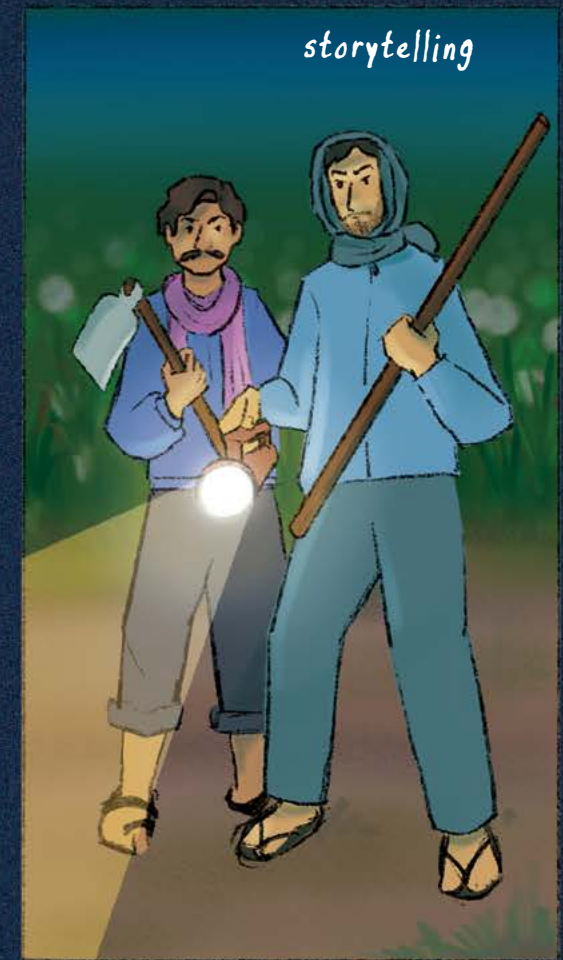
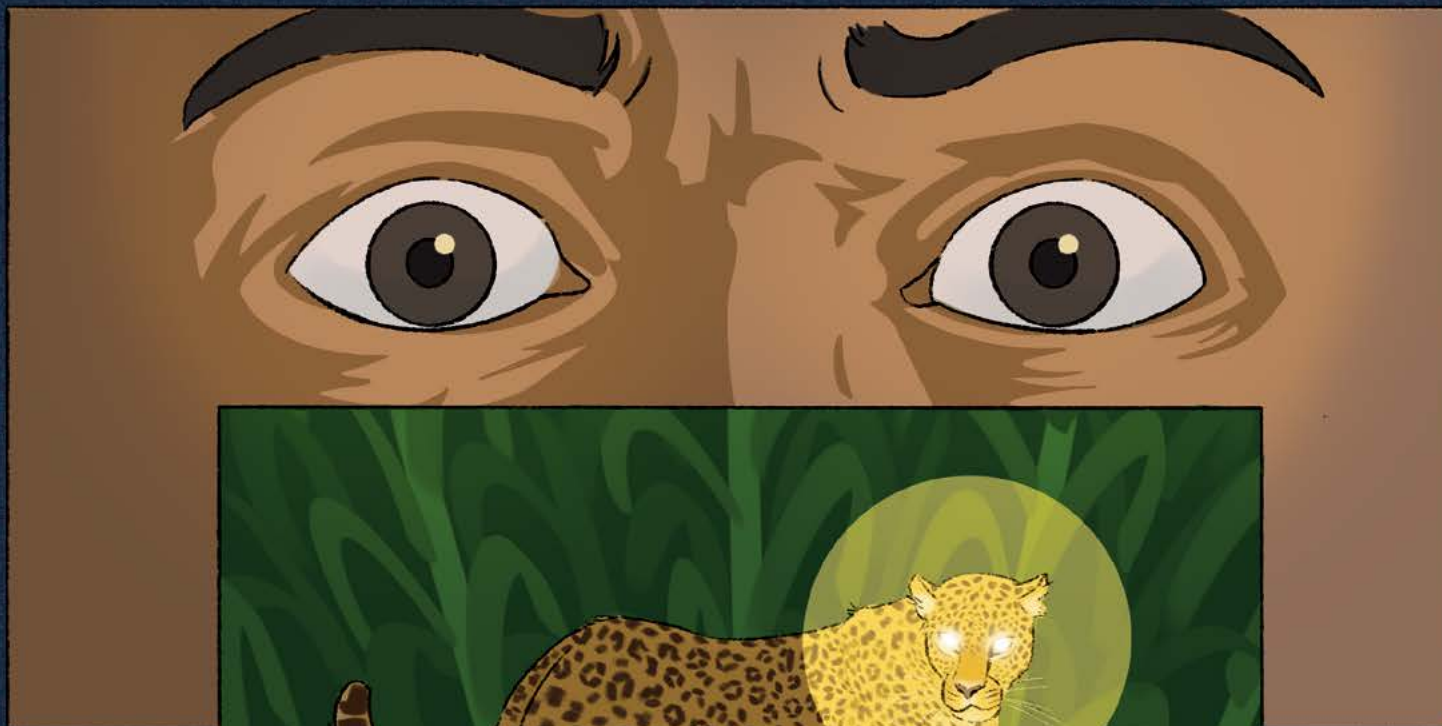
She smiled.
"No," she replied. "The monkey didn't give me magic. It gave me something much more important—a memory to hold onto."

And far away, in the forest where trees whispered together in fog, a pale figure leapt between the branches—its eyes shining like two orbs containing oceans.

.....
Suchita Sinha is a heritage professional, architect, artist, and storyteller, born to two wildlife scientists. She blends nature into art and design to create and share stories that truly matter.

Rishita Loitongbam is an illustrator based in Imphal, India. She mostly lives in her head and likes to journal and draw things she doesn't want to forget.







Shruti Pawar is a maker who loves stories in all forms. She researches, designs, writes, and draws, often reflecting on the ties between people, place, and nature.

This story was the winning entry to our **2025 Wordless Story Contest**.

Set in a village near Shruti's hometown Sangamner in Maharashtra, India, it reflects the reality of farmers living in close proximity to wildlife. It offers a look at their shared struggle for survival when pushed to the very edge.

Fireflies OF INDIA

Author and illustrator **Amolika**

spotlight

Asymmetricata humeralis

Fireflies have been around for over 100 million years, since dinosaurs walked the Earth! In India, these magical beetles are known by many names—*jugnu*, *jonaki*, *kalve* and more. They can be found lighting up wetlands, forests, grasslands, and even city parks at night.

Abcondita chinensis

Seasonal light show

During the pre-monsoon season (late May to June), fireflies put on their famous light displays to find mates. Each of the five species found in India has its own flashing pattern. The males signal, and the females reply with twinkling flashes of their own.

In parts of Asia, North America, and Europe, seasonal firefly displays attract tourists.

Sclerotia aquatilis

In danger

Fireflies are slowly losing their habitat, as more and more natural spaces are being built upon. Bright city lights make it harder for them to see each other's signals and find mates. In India, increased firefly tourism leading to an influx of visitors to ecologically sensitive areas, alongside the usage of pesticides are also responsible for dwindling firefly populations.

Asymmetricata ovalis

What can we do?

With the rapid decline of fireflies, conservation efforts can help restore their populations. Reducing the use of artificial lights at night is one way to help fireflies communicate. Another is to keep our gardens and lawns natural and messy, while limiting the use of pesticides.

Abcondita perplexa

Amolika is a student of visual communication, and an aspiring illustrator and designer. Their practice draws inspiration from the intersections of the natural world, fantasy, and queer-trans lives.

The guardian of the lagoon

Author **Francesca Larosa** | Illustrator **Chandrima Chatterjee**

On a typical Monday in May, the *Vaporetto of the Imagination* is charting the Venice lagoon. The morning air is cool and peaceful and the surrounding environment appears pristine: it is difficult to encounter anyone at this hour. The *Vaporetto*, however, is on a mission. Equipped with state-of-the-art sensors, underwater microphones, probes, and cameras, the large vessel monitors and records the richness of the Venetian landscape, today threatened by pollution and changes in water, air, and soil conditions.

Located in northeastern Italy, the lagoon is an enclosed bay of the Adriatic Sea. This fragile ecosystem, in which the city of Venice is situated, is constantly shaped and influenced by natural and artificial elements. Water and land meet here, creating a rich habitat spanning 550 square kilometres—that's larger than some countries, including Andorra, Palau, Barbados, and the Maldives. But by its very

nature, the lagoon is at risk because of two dangers that are related to one another: subsidence and eustatism. What terrifying names, what complicated words!

Subsidence is the gradual sinking of an area of land or the seabed. **Eustatism**, on the other hand, relates to worldwide changes in sea level (which is currently increasing due to the melting of glaciers, for example). These two 'cousins' interact with one another at an incredibly slow pace. Thankfully so! It takes geological eras—a very long time—for them to achieve their aim and erase the lagoon from the map.

However, human activity—with its industries, buildings, and heavy carbon footprint—has accelerated the effects of subsidence and eustatism, making their mission easier. It is humanity that has caused the pollution of these waters: the fish and birds of this place can no longer find food in abundance. The plant life too is under great strain due to the discharge from boats and is slowly fading.



And all of this is happening at a particularly difficult time: when climate change, which is resulting in higher temperatures and warmer seas, is making everything even more complicated. What a mess! What can be done? How can we return to a healthier natural environment? How can we restore biodiversity and avoid further degradation of our planet?

A mysterious captain

The *Vaporetto of the Imagination* was not originally born to be the guardian of the Venice lagoon. At the time of its construction, it wandered through the waterways of Venice, ferrying busy passengers to and from their occupations. Then one day, it retired: too old to continue in public service, yet strong enough to take on a new profession. The city council declared it “fit to monitor the surrounding environment”, and from that day forward it has faced the horizon, brimming with instruments.

At its helm is a mysterious captain—always wearing a sailor’s cap, she speaks very little and she feasts with the lagoon’s wild plants. Every day, she sails the *Vaporetto* between faraway islands, looking for clues about what is changing in the lagoon. Those who have seen her piloting the *Vaporetto* say they caught glimpses of shimmering reflections in her hair, like fish scales. Who knows? Perhaps it is true! The captain builds, calibrates, and repairs every on-board device when needed. Her mission is clear: to understand where the lagoon suffers the most and to alert the scientists and engineers who can help preserve it.

As the *Vaporetto* traverses vast stretches of water, it records the sounds made by animals (and plants!). The analysis of the frequency and intensity of these sounds helps determine whether a particular species is disappearing or in need of support. The underwater cameras follow marine life in the shallows and observe the speed of interactions between different fish species, along with their habits and rhythms. The sensors constantly monitor the temperature of both water and air, as well as the presence of pollutants and materials that may contaminate this delicate habitat. The captain never loses track of a single instrument and compiles a detailed report each day, transmitting it to headquarters—even from afar.

A never-ending mission

The conservation and restoration of the lagoon’s habitat begins with its protection. The instruments carried by the *Vaporetto of the Imagination* across the waters, even to the most remote islands, can detect the earliest warning signs of danger and suggest where and how urgent intervention is needed. This is how scientists, for example, discovered the complete disappearance of certain native species and the arrival of “alien plants” that tend to become dominant.

Monitoring by the *Vaporetto* has provided scientists with two crucial insights: native species are highly sensitive to the salt concentration in the water, and the rising external temperatures—caused by climate change—make survival even harder for them.

Each day, researchers receive the data the captain processes from the *Vaporetto*. Punctually, at 8 PM every evening, a report filled with figures, notes, and recommendations arrives in their hands.

Then one day—no different from the rest, yet somehow special—they ask her: where does the name *Vaporetto of the Imagination* come from?

Further Reading

Bertolini, C. and J. da Mosto. 2021. Restoring for the climate: a review of coastal wetland restoration research in the last 30 years. *Restoration Ecology* 29(7): e13438. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rec.13438>.

Proença, V., L. J. Martin, H. M. Pereira, M. Fernandez, L. McRae, J. Belnap, M. Böhm et al. 2017. Global biodiversity monitoring: from data sources to essential biodiversity variables. *Biological Conservation* 213: 256–263. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2016.07.014>.

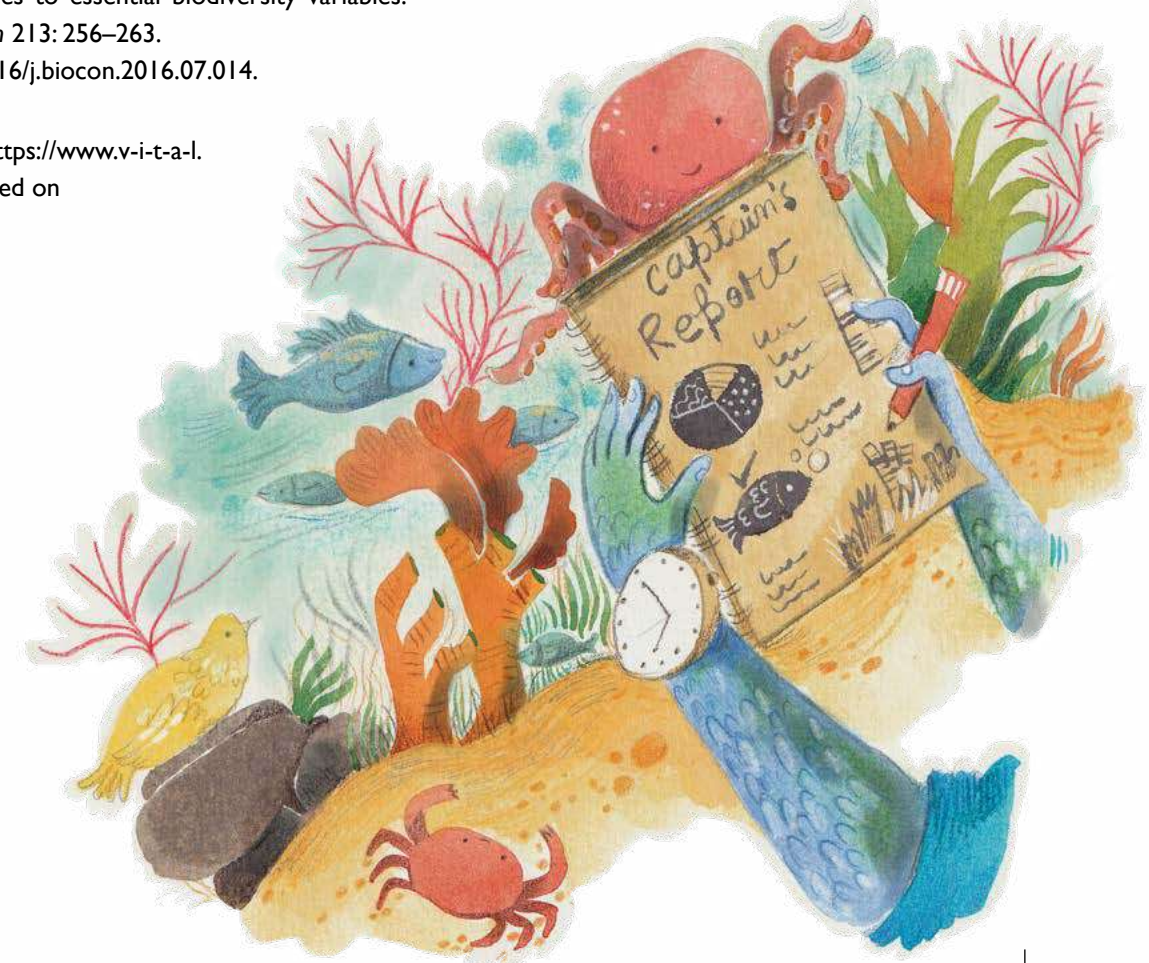
The Vital Project. <https://www.v-i-t-a-l.org/en/about>. Accessed on June 19, 2025.

The captain smiles and replies, “Because the lagoon we dream of—clean, bright, and full of singing birds and swimming fish—is not on any map. But if we imagine it, as we must, we can make it real.”

And so the *Vaporetto* puffs along, brave and proud, toward the furthest island, carrying hope and imagination on every wave.

Francesca Larosa is a Marie Skłodowska-Curie fellow at KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Sweden. She works on the climate trade-off of artificial intelligence in her project LIBRA.

Chandrima Chatterjee is an independent illustrator and artist based in New Delhi. An editor in her past life, she loves to tell heart-warming stories through her artworks.





Prehistoric water world

Written and illustrated by **Dewey Pretorius**

This picture was inspired by an episode of 'Life on Our Planet', narrated by Morgan Freeman. It's about a super old ocean, way before dinosaurs! There's a cute pill millipede-looking thing called a Trilobite crawling on the seafloor with lots of little legs. A big scary Anomalocaris with huge eyes and grabby arms is swimming above it, maybe looking for lunch! The Arandaspis looks like a fish wearing armour, and in

the front and way in the back there are giant squid called a Cameroceras—it's super long and twisty like a cone. Some Ammonoids with curly shells and tentacles are floating around like pretty balloons. And there's a huge Dunkleosteus shark with sharp jaws ready to chomp! It's like an ancient underwater zoo! How sad that these creatures are extinct. Now we get to steward our environment wisely.

Dewey Pretorius is an eight-year-old South African nature enthusiast and explorer, who loves capturing the beauty of animals, plants, and the outdoors through art.

Where art meets nature:

A daily drawing challenge

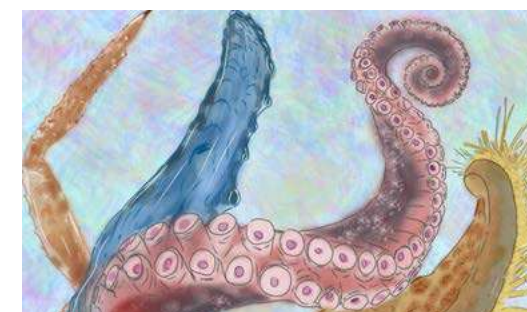
Author **Labonie Roy**

Do you love drawing nature? So do these amazing artists, who drew every single day for a whole month!

This year, we once again hosted CC Inktober, our own nature-themed version of Inktober—a month-long drawing challenge originally created by artist Jake Parker to help people practise drawing everyday, experiment creatively and share their work online. For #CCInktober2025, we put together a list of 31 drawing prompts based on the wonders of the natural world. Artists from across our community took on the challenge, and for every day in October, they drew an artwork based on our prompts!

The idea is simple: make a little art every day, stretch your imagination, and discover new things about nature as you observe and create.

We're incredibly grateful to everyone who took part—your creativity made this challenge truly special!



Legs by Srinidhi Himani



Hatch by Viola Ruzzier



Mysterious by Siva Sakthi A.



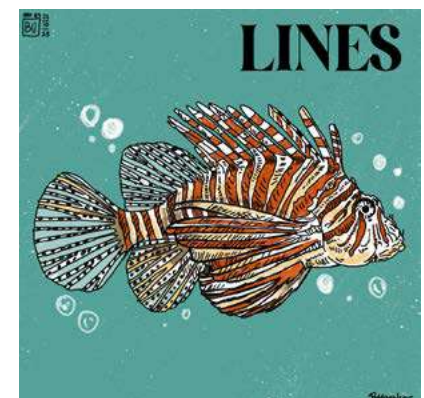
Rainforest by Claudia Libbi



Layers by Anna Shuttlewood



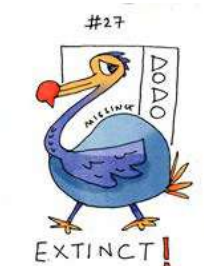
Pollinator by Toshi Singh



Lines by Vaibhav Salgaonkar



Hatch by Shruti Kabo



Extinct by Priyanshi Khatri

Make your own daily drawing calendar!

You don't have to wait until October to practise daily drawing! By making a drawing calendar using our prompt list, you can start any month of the year:

- 1. Cut out the calendar below.
- 2. On the dotted line, write the name of the month you want to use for your daily drawing practice.
- 3. Check which day of the week that month begins on, and starting in the first row, write the dates along with the matching prompts from the list as shown in this example. Fill in these details for each day of the month.
- 4. Pin up your Daily Drawing Calendar somewhere you'll see it every day, and you're ready to begin!
- 5. Using a blank notebook or sheets of paper, and your favourite drawing materials, make a drawing everyday inspired by the day's prompt.



DAILY DRAWING PROMPT LIST

1. Underwater

2. Dark

3. Mutualism

4. Layers

5. Transparent

6. Concrete

7. Teeth

8. Pollinator

9. Song

10. Wings

11. Tiny

12. Hidden

13. Roots

14. Build

15. Tail

16. Web
17. Tidal

18. Territory

19. Rainforest

20. Iridescent

21. Burrow

22. Fire

23. Hatch

24. Lines

25. Capture

26. Legs

27. Extinct

28. Flock

29. Mysterious

30. Shell

31. Rewild

current
conservation

current
conservation

MY DAILY DRAWING CALENDAR: _____

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
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SUNDAY

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