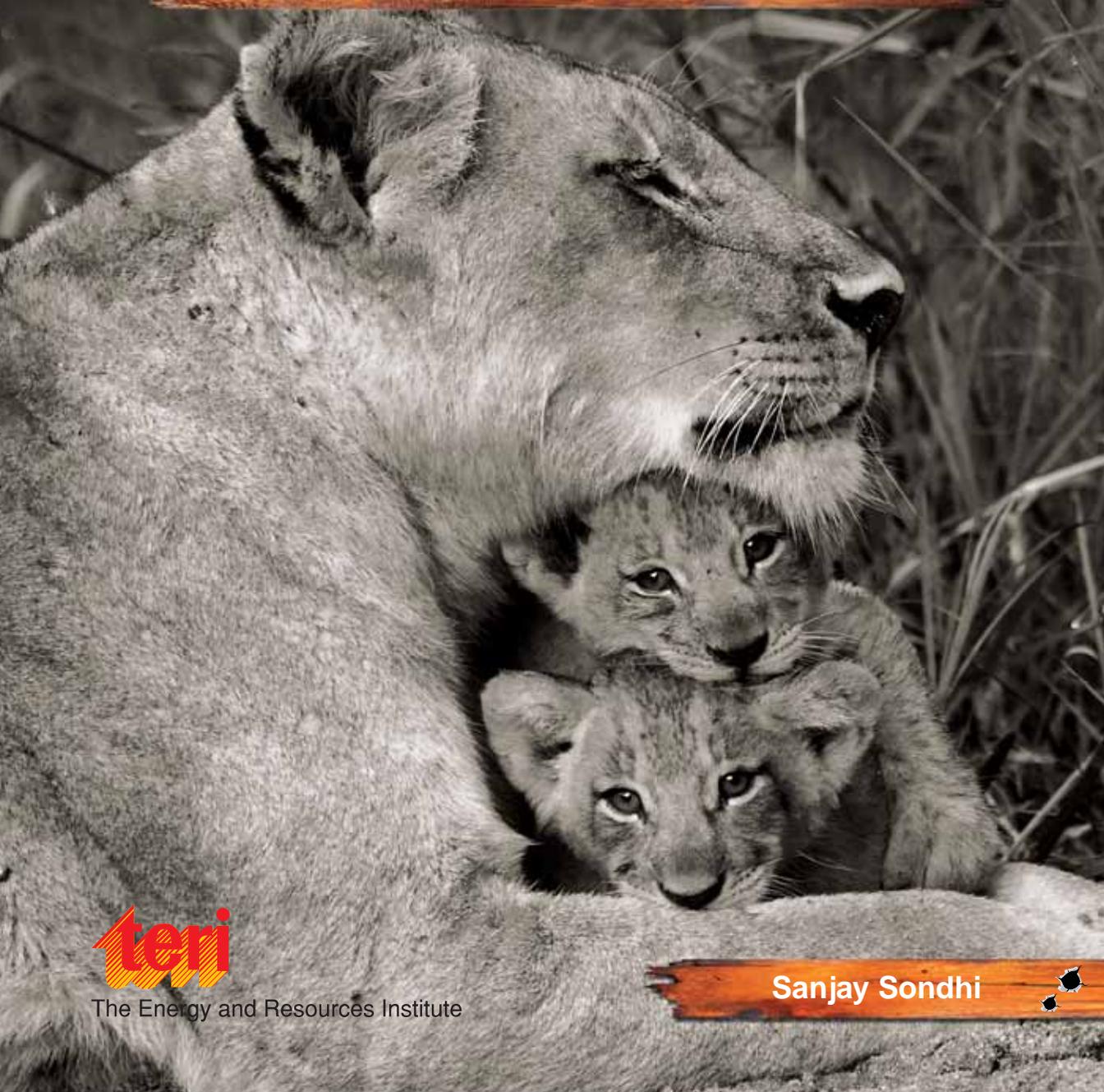


PROTECTED ANIMALS of India



Sanjay Sondhi

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The Energy and Resources Institute

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Author's note

Amazing amphibians, beautiful birds, fascinating fish, incredible insects, marvellous mammals, and wriggly reptiles—all of these belong to the animal kingdom. Even a sneak peek into this extraordinary world is sure to excite and inspire you to discover and uncover more! Like its enchanting members, there are hundreds of facts about the animal kingdom which are equally astonishing. Here are a few examples.

Did you know:

- Some spiders can spin a web that looks like a parachute, which allows them to 'fly' and be carried by the wind up to a height of 30,000 feet?
- In the last 10 years alone, more than 60 new species of amphibians have been found in India? For instance, the Bompou Litter Frog, a new frog species, was discovered in Arunachal Pradesh in 2011.
- Once widespread across the grasslands of India, there are less than 300 Great Indian bustards left in our country today?

Three decades of visiting India's forests and observing their wonderful wildlife have made me fall hopelessly in love with the world of animals.

Unfortunately, clouds of danger are gathering over the horizon. Scientists estimate that as many as one in 10 animal species found today will be extinct by 2050. Not only animals, but their homes also, are being threatened. According to a recent report, India's native forests are vanishing at an alarming rate of 1.7–2.5 per cent every year.

While saving the tiger, our national animal, is generating a lot of attention, there are a lot of other species that, too, deserve to be protected and saved. This book will introduce you to a number of animals that are found in India. What is common is that all of them are being protected so that they do not disappear forever. We shall be examining the threats they face, and will also briefly discuss the steps being taken to save them.

I am thankful to the following reviewers, who checked different sections of the manuscript, and offered valuable suggestions: Dr Dhananjai Mohan (Wildlife Institute of India); Vidya Athreya (wildlife biologist, working on leopards); Dr Krushnamegh Kunte (wildlife biologist specializing in lepidopetra); Dr Karthik Vasudevan (Wildlife Institute of India); Dr H S Sushma (specializing in lion-tailed macaque); Dr Goutam Narayan (Ecosystems-India); and Amod Zambre.

Come, join me in this captivating journey into the world of India's protected animals!

Sanjay Sondhi

Founder Trustee, TITLI TRUST
Dehradun
sanjay.sondhi1@gmail.com



WHY DO WE NEED TO PROTECT OUR ANIMALS?

‘Every time we lose a species we break a life chain which has evolved over 3.5 billion years.’

— Jeffrey McNeely (Chief scientist, IUCN)

Nature is beautiful! Have you ever watched a tiger walking majestically through a forest, or observed a caterpillar in your garden turning itself into a chrysalis and then magically emerging as an adult butterfly? If you have, I am sure you will agree with me that nature is worth preserving for its beauty alone.

The web of life

All forms of life on the Earth are interconnected. Plants, animals, and humans are all part of what is often called the web of life. You must have seen a spider's web. But have you noticed that if you break one strand, it weakens the entire web? Break a few more strands, and chances are, the entire structure will crumble. Nature's web of life is similar to that woven by a spider.

Forests help preserve our water sources, reduce soil erosion, maintain soil fertility, and keep the air clean by absorbing carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen. They are home to various animals, too. Many people—especially those living in nearby areas—depend on forests for firewood and food.



Large cats like tigers and leopards feed on herbivores (animals like deer that feed on plants). Herbivores and birds that love to eat fruits help in dispersing seeds of many plants. Many insects (bees, beetles, flies, and butterflies) help pollinate plants. Pollination, or the transfer of pollen (a powder-like substance), leads to the formation of fruits and seeds. Thus, without pollination, a lot of the food we get directly from plants would not be produced.

However, not all insects are beneficial to man. Some of them are pests. For example, the caterpillar of the pretty moth, the Yellow Underwing *Thyas coronata*, damages crops of lime and oranges, as it feeds on these plants. The good news is that creatures, such as frogs and toads, reptiles, and even birds, feed on many harmful insects, thereby controlling the insect population, while protecting food crops at the same time.

As you can see, the web of life connects various parts of the natural world. Do we dare break this link? Do we even understand the impacts of breaking parts of the web of life?

The reality is we do not understand how our present actions will impact our lives tomorrow. Given this, it is necessary for us to protect our forests and the creatures that live in them.

Benefits to mankind

Nature helps us in many ways. A large part of the food we eat originates from plants pollinated by insects. Many animals provide us with food. For instance, we get honey from honeybees, while fish is a major source of food for coastal communities. Various products made from wood, as well as the paper we write on, come from forests. In many ways, we get inspiration from nature to manufacture new products—a practice known as biomimicry. For example, did you know that Velcro (the strip used as a fastener) was inspired by burrs on a thorny seed sticking to a dog's hair?

Live and let live

Most importantly, we need to ask ourselves: don't animals have a right to live, too? They do, don't you think? In the end, it is up to us to protect the animals left in the world, and find the right balance between development and nature. After all, preserving our forests and animals is nothing but protecting ourselves and safeguarding our future!

GAME: THE WEB OF LIFE

Number of players needed: The more the merrier, but a minimum of 15–20.

Things you will need: a spool of thick string, pieces of paper (cut in the size of labels), safety pins (to pin the labels), a pen or pencil, and scissors.

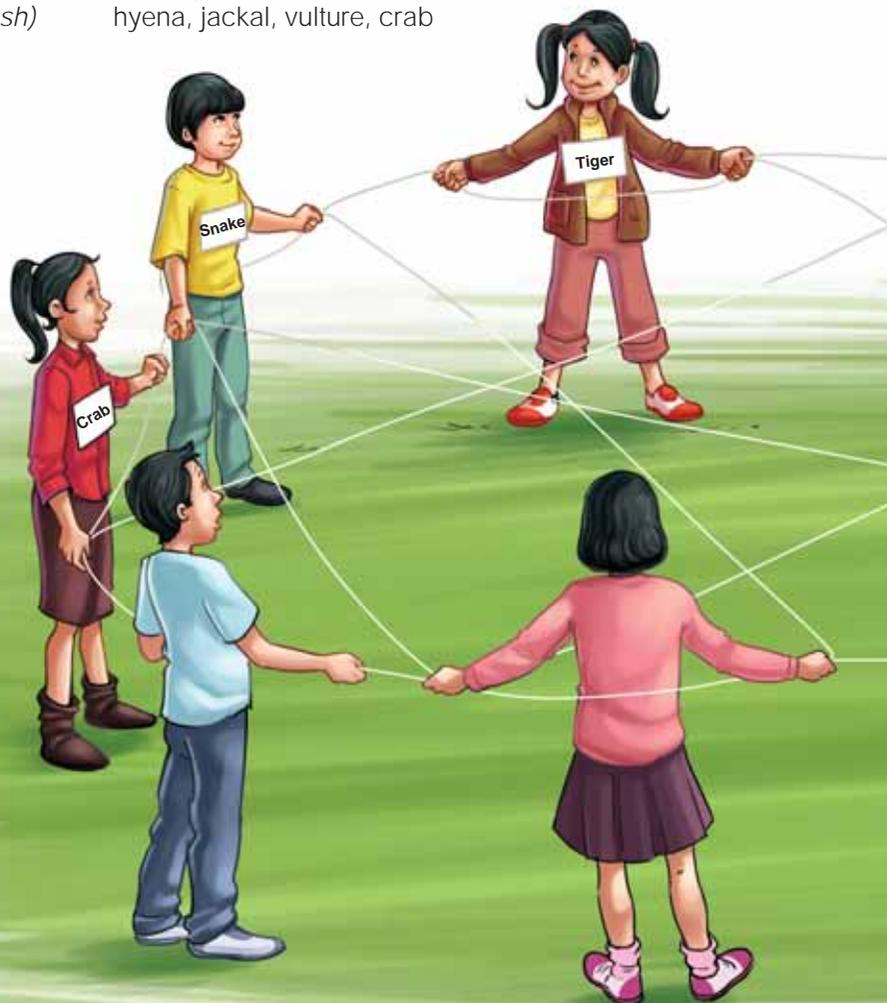
Each player will represent one link in the web of life. The options available to the players to choose from are:

Plants and their parts
Herbivore (plant eater)
Carnivore (flesh eater)

grass, herb, tree, fruit, seed, flower, bark
elephant, deer, rhinoceros, wild ass, wild buffalo
tiger, lion, leopard, jackal, wolf, spider, dragonfly, frog,
lizard, snake

Omnivore (eats both plants and flesh)
Scavenger (feeds on dead flesh)

monkey, bear, panda, fish, bird
hyena, jackal, vulture, crab



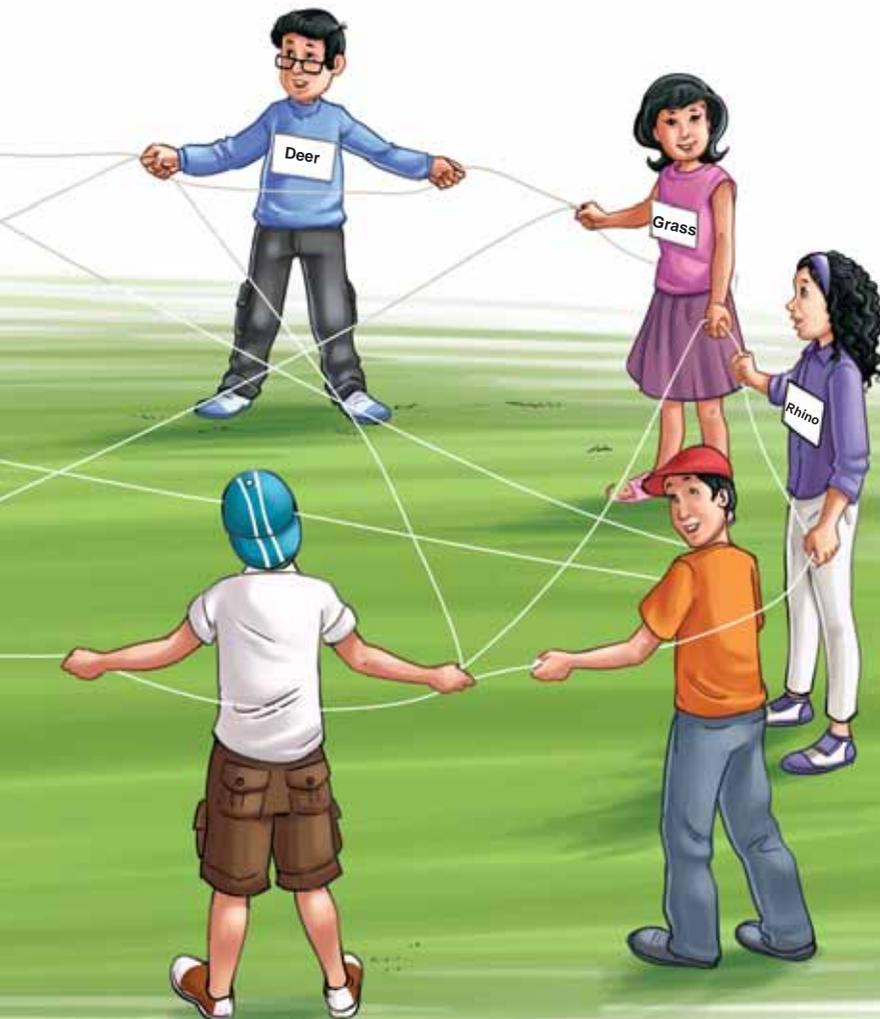
How to play: Every player will write the name of the respective plant or animal s/he has chosen on a label and pin it on.

Now, spread yourselves out to form a circle. Hand the spool of string to the person, who is the 'tiger'. As the tiger preys on the deer, the 'tiger' should pass the string to the 'deer'. Since the 'deer' feeds on grass, the spool should be passed on to the player with the label 'grass'... and so on.

Find links between each player. Multiple links are allowed, but make sure that you are unwinding the spool as you play. When everyone has been handed the spool at least once, stop passing it around.

Make sure the string is taut. Feel the strength in the 'web'. If you push the 'web' down at the centre, it will immediately bounce back. This shows the capacity of an ecosystem (which comprises everything—both living and non-living—that exists in a particular environment) to restore itself when any pressure, man-made or natural, is put on it. This is how strong nature is when the web of life is complete!

Now, break the string at any point. Discuss what this means to all the connected plants and animals. For example, what will happen if there are no deer for the tiger to feed on or if the grass that the deer eats reduces because of cattle grazing? Tear the string at four to five different points at random. Discuss what each break means to nature. At some point, the entire web will collapse!



Isn't the game fun? Do you understand now what the web of life means?

Protected Animals of India



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