

Meaningful ways an urbanite can contribute to wildlife conservation- Part 1

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Are you passionate about wildlife? Are you often in awe of colossal mammals, drab-coloured birds, loud amphibians and outlandish insects? And how often have you also felt helpless that you do not know what you can do to help with the conservation of species. Well, here are some ways for us urbanites on how we can do our small part in conservation.

1. Donate your time, volunteer with wildlife research and conservation organizations

There are many research organizations, NGOs and trusts who work in the field of wildlife conservation and research. Often, they are in on the lookout for enthusiastic individuals who could visit and invest their time and energy in their on-going projects. If you are passionate about the cause and don't care about the money (because you won't receive any), then put aside a week (working professional) to a month or more (if you are student) for volunteering. Don't let your summers go to waste next year.

2. Contribute to citizen science projects

A number of citizen science projects have been launched in the recent past, namely, National Centre for Biological Science's MigrantWatch, SeasonWatch, Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education's Mapping Trees, Behaviour Watch@Home, The Cornell Lab of Ornithology's eBird, Great Backyard Bird Count, and Nature Forever Society's Common Bird Monitoring of India Citizen Sparrow. These projects count on the contributions made by responsible citizens who are keen on providing inputs to wildlife studies. Next time, you go bird watching, make sure you take notes on bird behaviour, habitat, and minute observations, make a checklist of sightings, and contribute to projects seeking such information.

3. Participate in local and national issues pertaining to wildlife conservation

Actively take part in public discourses promoting biodiversity conservation. Keep abreast with the latest happenings and activities of National Green Tribunal, National Biodiversity Authority, Ministry of Environment and Forests, and your local Municipal Corporation. Protest, file petitions, and speak out against acts of blatant misuse of power that gravely affect the environment. At the local level, you must have heard about citizen groups who have managed to stall projects that were environmentally destructive. Strive to become an active citizen! One such example is that of the Save Aarey Milk Colony group, who forced the government to rethink their decision to cut down over 2000+ trees to make place for a metro car shed. From organizing rallies, tree-walks, exhibitions, hug-a-tree initiative, the group filed a petition against the construction of metro shed, mapped trees in the area, and sought legal help to stop the cutting of trees. However recent months have not been looking good for the Aarey forest.

4. Travel sustainably

Many of you love travelling; with quite a few interested in visiting national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. But don't limit your travel to just "seeing nature and wildlife". Make your trip as sustainable as possible. For example, always carry your trash with you when you travel, dispose of it responsibly; opt for home-stays with locals; go for public transport and carpooling, respect local customs and lifestyles; be sensitive to privacy issues when photographing people; do not indulge in unethical practices. Drive cautiously on highways that pass through forests (to avoid road kills), drive on designated paths in protected areas, and avoid off-roading in sensitive ecosystems, as you may damage micro-habitats. And you can always go that extra mile and arrange for clean-up drives during treks and the likes.