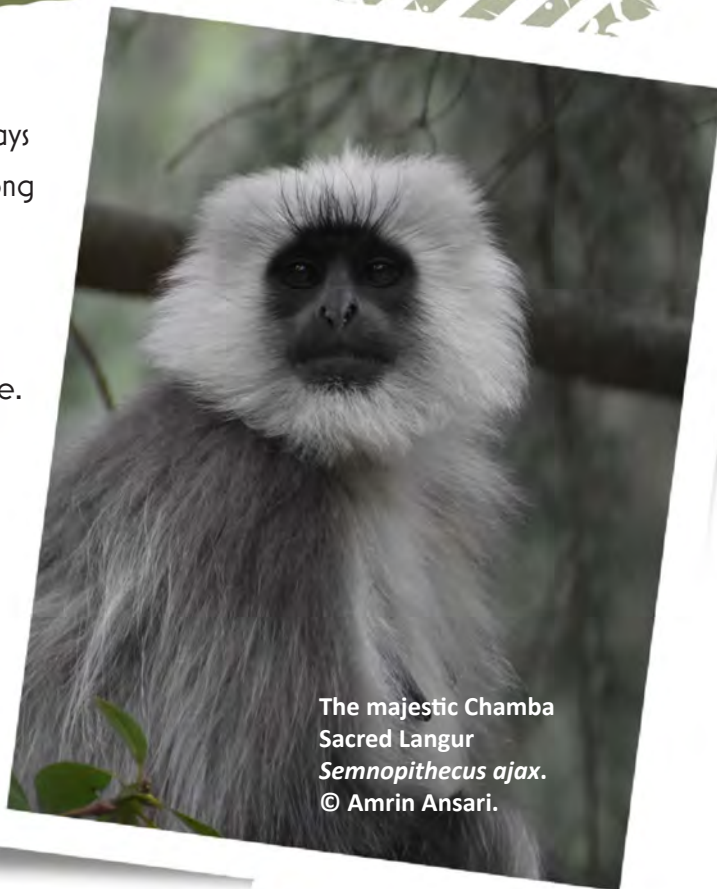


One Month of Working in Chamba

Human-wildlife negative interactions have always caught my attention since a young age. I belong to West Bengal, a state where these negative interactions regularly pop up in the daily news. Hence, the spark for understanding these interactions and their mitigation has been in me. I was thrilled when I got an internship to work on the Human-Black Bear interactions in the western Himalayan landscape in Chamba, Himachal Pradesh.

To begin with, I was surprised because Chamba is not what I imagined at all. I had the notion that the place would be a small, secluded, and quiet valley. But, the honking trail of cars jammed in heavy traffic in the middle of the crowded city gave me a reality check of the exploding human population that is taking over the remotest places, building shelters, and calling them home.

The mighty river Ravi flowing through the heart of the town, the picturesque landscapes of snow-capped mountain ranges, and the melodious song of the Himalayan Whistling Thrush are enough to make someone fall in love with this place. Despite being densely populated and the city core densely planted with non-native plant species like Chir pine *Pinus roxburghii*, Silky oak *Grevillea robusta*, *Eucalyptus*, etc, the Chamba valley is home to a wide variety of native plants like Ban Oak



The majestic Chamba Sacred Langur
Semnopithecus ajax.
© Amrin Ansari.



Ravi River
flowing through
Chamba town.

HLP-HRP Update


Quercus leucotricophora, Himalayan Cherry *Prunus cerasoides*, Indian Spruce *Picea smithiana*, Deodar *Cedrus deodara*, *Pyrus pashia*, etc. Having a rich cultural significance, amazing food, and being home to the kindest and warmest people, Chamba is a very welcoming place for comfort seeking geeks like me.

My visit to the Khajjiar-Kalatop Wildlife Sanctuary allowed me to see a group of the majestic Chamba Sacred Langurs *Semnopithecus ajax* who were on the move while foraging. Sadly, what I also noticed was the unending traffic of tourist cars and enormous dumps of plastic waste inside the sanctuary which are not a good sign for wildlife or ecosystem health.

As part of my internship, I devote 40% of my time to work in the nursery. Our team has successfully managed to sow 930 seeds of *Melia azedarach* and 200 seeds of Walnut *Juglans regia*. We have also grafted about 161 saplings of *Morus serrata*. Approximately, 3,400 Ban Oak *Quercus leucotricophora* have also been collected and put for pre-sowing treatment in the nursery until they begin to sprout. On 21 March, we successfully inaugurated the Himalayan Restoration Project (HRP) by planting 12 native saplings near the campus of Rajkiya Varist Madhyamik Vidyalaya, Randoh with the participation of the village pradhan, school faculty, and a few members from the local communities.

With the help of the forest department, we successfully managed to set up six camera traps at three different locations to get an understanding of the local fauna with special emphasis on the movement of mammals. Unfortunately, one of the traps got stolen so we had to take down the one adjacent to it. The remaining traps are actively working and are being regularly monitored.


To date, our team has managed to organize four meetings with the local women self-help groups where we try to understand their problems regarding




Himalayan Bulbul *Pycnonotus leucogenys*. © Amrin Ansari.



Chirping beauties on *Pyrus pashia*



Rufous Sibia *Heterophasia capistrata*. © Amrin Ansari.



Green-backed Tit *Parus monticolus*. © Amrin Ansari.



Meeting with the WSHGs.



Team members interacting with the participants.
© Sanjay Molur.

the impact of climate change and wildlife on their agricultural practices. We learned that crop raiding by wild fauna is the main driving factor behind human-wildlife negative interactions in this landscape. Their livelihoods are at stake because of crop depredation which is mostly caused by Rhesus macaques *Macaca mulatta*, Chamba Sacred Langurs *Semnopithecus ajax*, and Asiatic Black Bears *Ursus thibetanus laniger*. Porcupines are rare nocturnal rodents in the agricultural grounds but they do not contribute to any significant crop damage. But the non-human primates impart damage throughout the year



Planting grafts of *Morus serrata*.
© Sanjay Molur.



HRP Nursery at Dugli. © Amrin Ansari.



Planting on the campus of Mehla nursery. © Sanjay Molur.

while Black bears mostly raid maize crops during monsoon. We noticed a troop of macaques feeding on a crop field bearing mature mustard plants in Saun village while conducting a meeting. Apart from that, the sight of macaques feeding on anthropogenic food from garbage dumps is visible throughout this region. In the following months, I aim to study the perception of the local communities regarding Black Bears in detail and try to work a way towards mitigation.



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Setting up of traps.

Trisa explaining the setup.
© Amrin Ansari.



Camera trap workshop with the Forest Department.
© Sanjay Molur.



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