

Crushed and Forgotten

Before joining the Himalayan Restoration Project in Chamba, I carried a quiet excitement about working in the mountains. I imagined days shaped by unfamiliar plants, new people, and the richness of Himalayan biodiversity—an experience that felt deeply personal to me as a botanist. But on my very first day in the field, that picture began to fracture. During what was meant to be a routine roadkill survey, I came across dead amphibians and reptiles scattered along the roadside. Then I saw a Russet Sparrow. Its small, still body lay among them, and something inside me shifted. Since childhood, I have been fond of sparrows—watching them, leaving out food and water whenever I could—and seeing one lifeless on the road felt deeply heart-wrenching. What I had imagined as a scientific exercise suddenly became heavy, intimate, and unsettling.

As the weeks passed, Mondays no longer brought anticipation but a quiet weight. Each roadkill survey with Amrin revealed more lives lost—reptiles, birds, amphibians—silent witnesses to the way roads slice through living landscapes. Seeing wildlife this way does something to you. It dulls the beauty of the mountains and replaces it with a persistent ache, a sense of helplessness mixed with responsibility. These were not rare accidents; they were patterns, repeating themselves day after day.



Not every encounter ended in loss. Once, we rescued a Russell's Viper from the roadside, carefully guiding it back into cover. Another day, I noticed a shrew that was still alive, slowly attempting to cross the road—small, fragile, yet determined. Just then, a speeding Alto appeared out of nowhere. In a split second, the shrew was thrown into the air and landed lifeless on the asphalt, taking its final breath right in front of me. I stood frozen, painfully aware that moments earlier I might have saved it. That realization still weighs heavily on me. Experiences like these sometimes leave behind a deep numbness—a quiet grief that words struggle to carry.

Gradually, my understanding of the Himalaya began to change. Beyond their breathtaking beauty lies a quieter story of conflict, vulnerability, and resilience. These mountains are not untouched; they are negotiated every day by people, vehicles, and wildlife trying to coexist. What troubled me most was how preventable many of these deaths felt. A slower vehicle, a moment of attention, a simple reminder that these roads are shared spaces could mean the difference between life and death.

Witnessing wildlife loss demands more than documentation; it calls for change. Careless driving through ecologically sensitive areas is not merely a traffic issue—it is an ecological one. If we truly value these landscapes, we must move through them with care, awareness, and respect. The mountains are alive, and the lives that cross their roads deserve our attention.

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