

Who dug up the walnuts?

Last year, we sowed nearly 2,000 seeds of Himalayan Walnut *Juglans regia* in our native nursery. Each seed carried a season's worth of hope. Before sowing, we soaked them in a dung slurry for fifteen days, an effective method to speed up germination and improve survival.

Then came the loooooong wait...

For almost three months, the nursery beds stayed silent beneath the soil. And finally, tiny shoots began to emerge. It felt like the hard-work started to pay off. But that excitement did not last long.

One morning we noticed something strange. Many of the walnut seeds had been dug out from their polybags. Some were half-eaten, others completely damaged. Beds we had carefully prepared now looked disturbed overnight. At first, everyone in the nursery blamed porcupines ("Saiil" - common name). It sounded convincing as porcupines are burrowing animals and are known to love walnut seeds before they germinate. Still, we wanted proof before accusing the poor species.

So, we installed camera traps around different corners of the nursery, especially near the walnut beds. Camera traps revealed that the nursery was far from empty at night. Red Foxes, porcupines, dogs, and even Khalij Pheasants were frequent visitors, quietly moving through the beds after dark. Yet despite all of these nightly appearances, none of the footage captured the actual culprit feeding on the walnuts.



Installing camera-traps with a team member



A Khalij Pheasant paid a visit.

To protect the remaining seeds, we surrounded the whole nursery step with thorny Berberis stems. It helped a little, but the damage continued. What made it more painful was the timing. In the mountains, nursery work moves with the seasons. Once the sowing window passes, there is no easy way to undo the loss.

From collecting or buying the seeds, filling polybags, preparing beds, treating the seeds, watering and guarding them. Months of labour had gone into those walnuts. And now, much of them seemed wasted.

Yet, the biggest mystery remains unsolved. There were no burrows near the beds. No, clear footprints. No evidence in the camera traps.

The porcupine still remains the prime suspect, but without proof, the culprit cannot be named. Somewhere in the nursery, under the silence of the night, something is still visiting the walnut beds. And we are still waiting to catch it.

If you want to know who the real culprit is, stay tuned for the next anecdote. Hopefully, by then we will finally have our culprit.



Porcupine finally appears



A Red Fox tail

Lakshay Tyagi

Himalayan Restoration Project,
Zoo Outreach Organisation, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu,
India.

Citation: Tyagi, L. (2026). Who dug up the walnuts? *Zoo's Print* 41(6): 44–45.



Arpana Trust



Himalayan Bear Project