



# CERD Green Chronicles

## IT'S A SAFARI, NOT A PICNIC

**Deeksha Sharma**

*Forest Research Institute (Deemed to be) University*

*Dehradun, Uttarakhand – 248006*

*[deekshascorbett@gmail.com](mailto:deekshascorbett@gmail.com)*

It was 5 in the morning when I woke up to my father requesting me to wake up for the nth time and get going. I had always had trouble getting up in the mornings without any extra nudging. I soon realised I was not home but at an equally special place, and even though I was still not willing to get up, I told myself this was for the good. A while later, my father and I headed out of our annexe, all geared up with our binoculars, camera, bird guide, and our backpack loaded with some nit bits, water and dry fruit to get us through to breakfast.

It was still dark outside with a little bit of blue breaking in. As we made our way to our ride, we started to hear the morning chirps around. Our gypsy driver, who had been driving us around for years then, was readying the car for the morning round. It was by this time, that a few other visitors had started to head to their respective rides, who mostly seemed experienced to me by the way they were all packed in layers of dark, dull coloured clothing.



It's very easy to make out if someone's visiting a wildlife reserve for the first time by the way they dress while they are there. We boarded our gypsy, ready to set out 'into the wild'. The grassland ahead was starting to appear by then. As we left from the gate, we decided to check the grassland out first. The grassland of Dhikala is one of the most beautiful places I have ever been. On one side of it is the river Ramganga and its reservoir.

And on the other, a huge span of sal forest that starts abruptly by its edge. As we drove through the road along this transition, we saw a couple of long-tailed shrikes and bush chats perched on long grass blades. We crossed a few other early risers while roaming around the grassland, all of us desperately looking for some leads on the big cat. And just as we were about to leave for the other part of the park, it started. Multiple chital calls alerted all in the vicinity. We, too, started to head towards the river. By this time, the sun was starting to rise, the fog had settled over the river, blocking the sight of any water altogether. A few river terns and cormorants could be seen flying up above the fog against the backdrop of the Himalayan foothills. We stopped for a moment to check whether they were still calling only to realise we had come pretty close to the herd that was. Two more gypsies were already parked at the spot, with the passengers making the minimum amount of noise, waiting for the cat to emerge any time now.



After we had parked our car at a good enough spot, two more gypsies lined up behind ours. Now, it was only a matter of time or so everyone believed. I started to hear giggling and very loud talking all of a sudden. I turned around and saw a big, noisy family with countless kids just having a normal picnic. The kids started to shout with no one telling them not to, the grown up kids wore bright red jackets, pink caps, yellow gloves, and the rest of the colour palette. I gave them a look or two, trying to tell them somehow to tone it down. But they just kept going.



Just as I was about to open my mouth, I heard commotion ahead. As I turned around yet again, I saw the yellow and the black, almost shining as the sunlight hit it. A beautiful female adult, she set out onto the road ahead of us. The people behind us got too excited and loud as they watched her turn to her side and disappear into the grass yet again. They still tried hard to spot her again only to get disappointed. Once again, I tried to tell them to keep it down but no one seemed to care. They had just sighted a tiger. That was all that mattered. I immediately asked my driver to drive us away from there as I could no longer tolerate that or add more to this circus. We finally finished our safari having sighted a herd of 12 elephants grazing in the far end of the grassland, a Pallas's fish eagle feeding its little one and two yellow-throated martens running through the underbrush.

The sun set in Dhikala is a sight to behold, with the sky changing colours every minute and the alarm calls starting to fill the air yet again, announcing that the predator is on the move. We came back to the forest rest house a little after the sunset, had warm tea and called it a day. To many of us who love wildlife and the nature, it is not shocking to get angry in such situations. The very point of these parks and sanctuaries is to give an insight to the common people into the world of wild animals, hoping them to show restraint from such behaviour. It is sad to see that even now, when tourism and conservation are closely linked, such incidents are pretty common. I hope this scenario changes in the coming times with the tourist becoming more considerate and careful with the wildlife than they are now.