

TATA

REVIEW

July-September 2018



TATA PEOPLE

The man who speaks to birds



Nature trails with Uday

Starting out at 6.30 am, Uday, an expert trekker, leads a group of 10-15 guests on a nature trail on foot. On some days he ends up leading four to six groups.

For Uday, who believes in living in harmony with nature and its inhabitants, respecting the bionetwork of the birds, beasts and insects is important. He always briefs his guests on jungle decorum before they set out.

“I tell them not to make noise, to walk carefully, and never use the camera flash. Since we are in their environment, it is important that we respect nature. We cannot frighten the animals and birds,” he says.

It also falls to Uday to keep his guests safe. “I warn them not to panic if they spot an elephant or insects. If you see an elephant, then it is best to run zig-zag, to ensure that the elephant is unable to chase you.”

He reveals that the elephant and the wild boar are the only two animals that are intelligent enough to break through the electric fence that keeps other animals out, “The elephants hear the vibrations and realise that the fence has been electrified. They throw a log over the fence and use it to get into the estate. The wild boars dig tunnels to enter the estate.”

Uday also leads coffee trails, where he customises his tours based on the interest of the guests. He is just as knowledgeable about the history of the plantation and its activities as he is about birds.

MD Uday can imitate the unique calls of 30 to 35 species of birds and is at home with the 300 avian species that abound the forests in and around Tata Coffee’s Plantation Trails in Coorg. Cynthia Rodrigues finds out more

Ahush falls over the group out on a leisurely morning stroll. A bird call rings out and everyone waits in silence to hear a responding call. It is moments like this one that set MD Uday apart. A naturalist at Tata Coffee’s Plantation Trails in Coorg, Karnataka, he can imitate the unique calls of 30 to 35 species of birds, often appearing to ‘speak’ to them.

In addition, he can identify 135 of the 300 avian species that inhabit the area by their calls alone. These birds include the serpent eagle, wagtail, moorhen, the Malabar grey hornbill, a rare white-bellied woodpecker, scarlet minivet, magpie robin, ashy wood swallow, the vernal hanging parrot and, the white-cheeked barbet, among others.

He can also explain the botanical names of each plant on the trails in English and Kannada.

And he does all of it without receiving any formal training as a naturalist. Everything he knows, he has learned in the natural environment.

BORN NATURALIST

Born in Coorg district in a village called Valanoor, close to the river Cauvery, Mr Uday’s initiation into nature began early. His home was very close to a reserve forest, and Mr Uday would often accompany his friends on bird watching trips into in the jungle, eager to add to their collection of bird feathers.

Mr Uday caught the birdwatching bug from one of those friends, who knew a lot about birds and their behaviour patterns; it was from him that Mr Uday learned the local names of the birds they spotted. The learning spurred in him the desire to spend a lifetime working closely with nature.

After completing his education, Mr Uday joined the department of forests as a temporary forest watcher. “I used to patrol the forest area to make sure that no poachers entered. I was also called to help whenever there was a forest fire,” he says.

He used the stint to add to his knowledge of the jungle and its inhabitants. It was here that he learned the English and scientific names of all the birds and trees he had begun to identify.

The experience helped Uday brush up on all that he had learned as a child and helped him land a job as a guide at a wildlife resort. This included spending four months at the Bannerghatta National Park near Bengaluru and Dandeli Wildlife Sanctuary in the Uttara Kannada district of Karnataka as part of his training and helped him expand his knowledge about birds, animals and even insects.

These stints helped Uday evolve as a naturalist and primed him for his current position as a birdwatching naturalist for Tata Coffee, a role that he has been enjoying since 2010.

LIFELONG LEARNER

Despite being blessed with a sensory perception of exotic species, plants and wildlife, Uday is eager to learn more. Even today, he writes down what he sees and reads about birds and wild animals. He is now planning to take up photographing birds.

He has also taken the initiative of looking after the gardens around the bungalows on the plantation. “I talk to the gardener about what to plant. This way, I get to learn more,” he says.

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