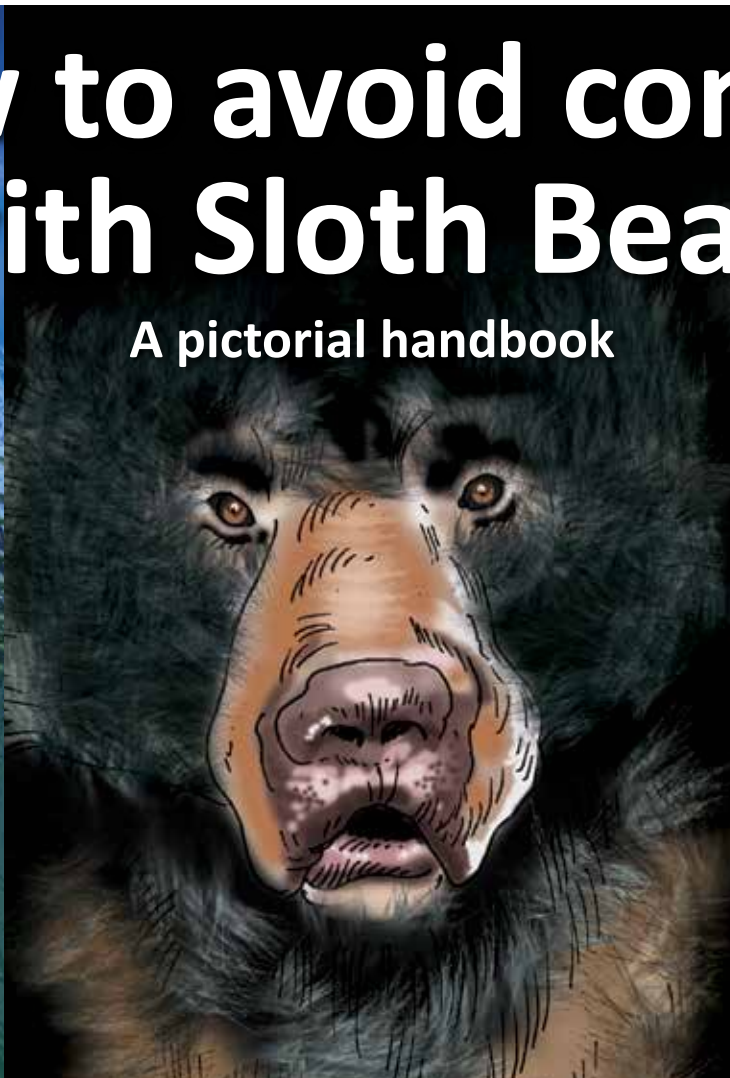


How to avoid conflict with Sloth Bears

A pictorial handbook

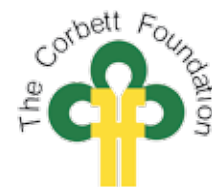


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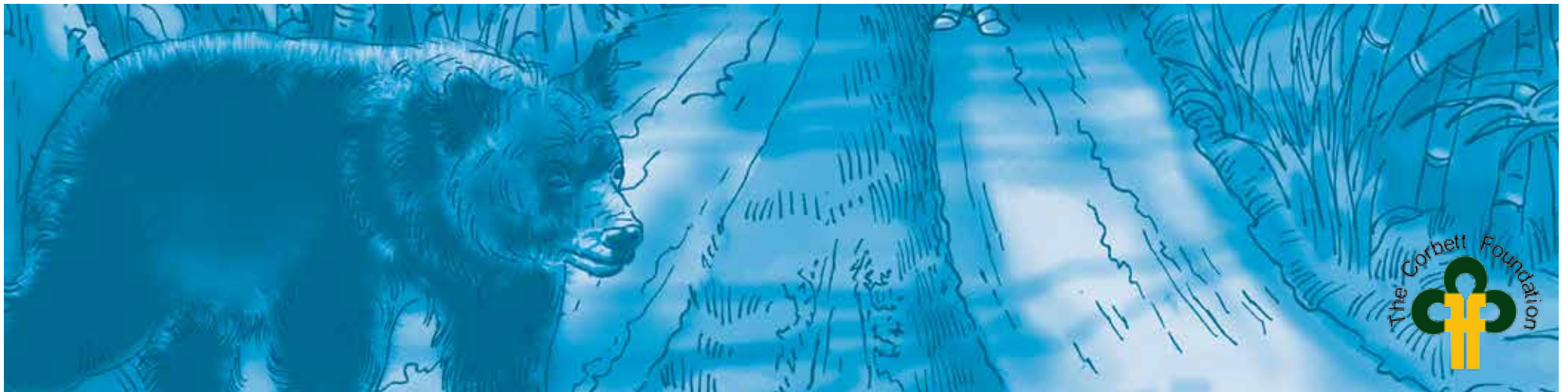


How to avoid conflict with Sloth Bears

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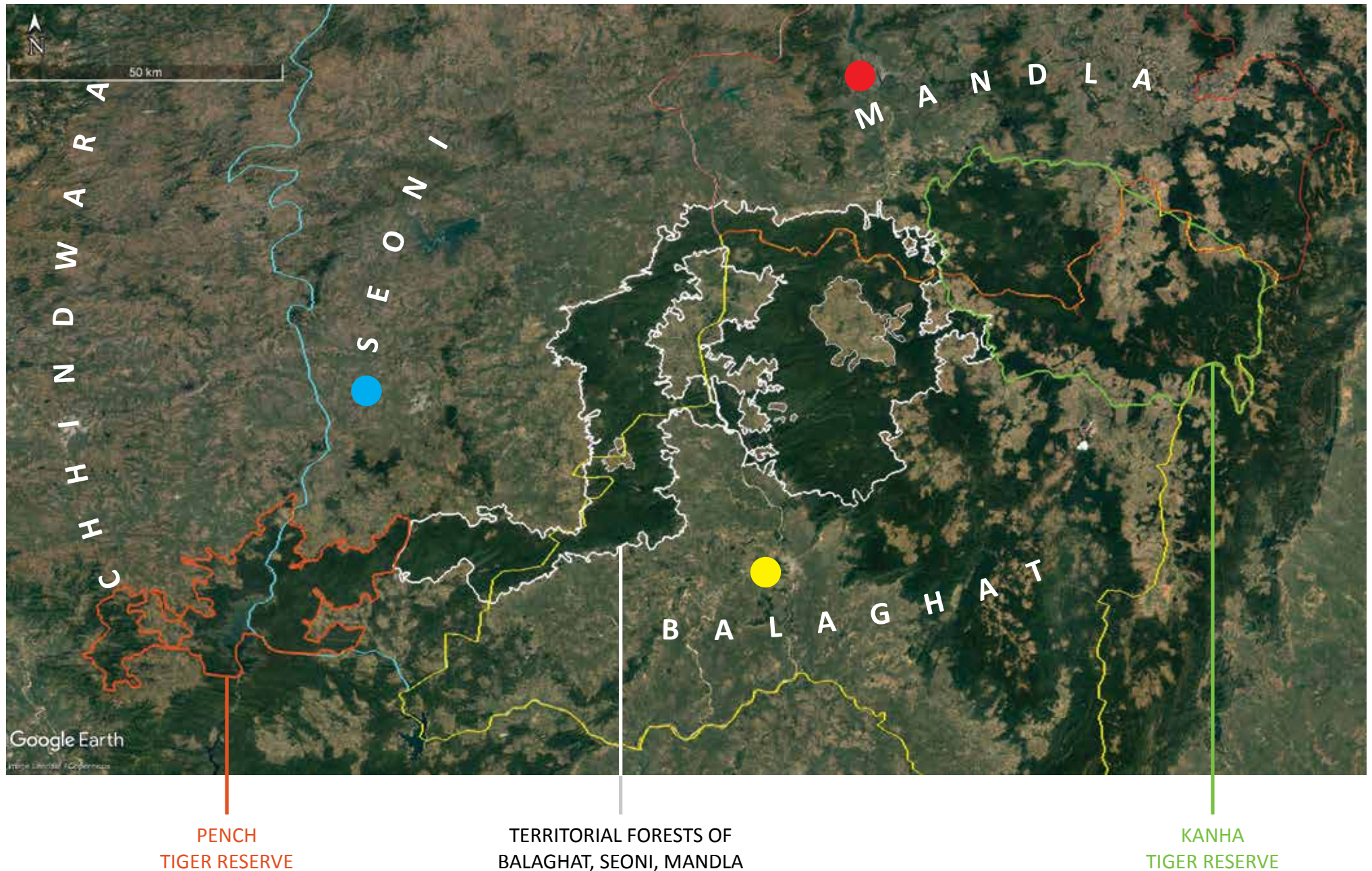
published under the project

Dynamics of Human–Sloth Bear Conflict in the Kanha-Pench Corridor,
Madhya Pradesh, India



This handbook is dedicated to the people who depend on forests for a living, who share their habitat with wildlife, and who strive to co-exist in harmony.

The contents of this handbook are based on the study of human-sloth bear conflict in Balaghat, Seoni, and Mandla districts of Madhya Pradesh, and can be used in other areas of the Satpuda-Maikal landscape, however, the situations in other areas may differ because of different social constructs and ecological factors.



About this handbook

It aims to provide simple steps one must take to prevent encounters with sloth bears through easy-to-understand illustrations. It focuses on:

- Sloth bears and their habitat.
- The common reasons of conflict with sloth bears.
- Ways to prevent encounters with sloth bears while passing through the forest or while engaged in a forest-based activity.
- Ways to protect oneself in case of a close encounter with a sloth bear.
- Some government programmes such as the compensation scheme in case of a casualty and other programmes which may reduce chances of encounters.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to the brave men and women who have encountered sloth bears and shared their experiences with us to better understand the reasons of conflict. We thank DeFries-Bajpai Foundation for the financial aid and the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department for the support. We especially extend our gratitude to Mr. Jitendra Agarwal, PCCF (Wildlife), Dr. Dhiren Bhargav, CCF, Balaghat; Mr. Sanjay Shukla, then CCF, Seoni, and presently the Field Director of Kanha Tiger Reserve; Mr. J S Chauhan, then Field Director of Kanha; and Mr. Shubranjan Sen, Field Director, Pench Tiger Reserve.



About Sloth Bear



The sloth bear, locally called bhaloo or reech, is one of the four bear species of India.

- **Length:** 5 to 6 feet
- **Weight:** 90 to 140 kg
- **Appearance:** They are black or dark brown in colour with a thick shaggy coat more prominent on ears and the neck region. They have a distinct pale white “V” shaped mark on the chest and a long, pale, snout. The feet are short and stout with long, curved claws used for digging. The nose can be voluntarily closed, and they have protrusible lips and modified teeth to feed on ants and termites.
- **Diet:** They are omnivores, feeding on a varied diet of flowers and fruits such as mahua, achar, amaltash, ber, jamun, bel, kasai, kosum, kumbhi, tendu, and umar. They also feed on underground tubers and insects such as ants, termites, and honeycombs built by bees.



Sloth bear is threatened because of merciless killing and habitat destruction.

It is legally protected under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 along with the tiger and the leopard. Hunting and capture of sloth bears is illegal and a punishable offence.

If you come across any illicit activity causing harm to sloth bears or see one in your area, please contact your nearest forest department office!



Sloth Bear Habit and Habitat

Generally, adult sloth bears are solitary in nature. They mostly roam the jungles in the night in search of food and return to their roosting site by morning. This is why we seldom see bears during daytime. Studies have shown that bears which live closer to human settlements are nocturnal in nature than those that live in undisturbed forests.

The only time bears come together is during mating season when male and female bears can be seen together as a pair, or when a female bear has cubs. They usually give birth to one or two cubs that stay with the mother for a year or two. Adult bears are territorial in nature and mark their area by scratching tree barks and by rubbing their body to leave a trace of their scent. Once the cubs become independent, they establish their own territory.

They are found in a variety of habitats, such as evergreen and deciduous forests as well as scrub forests. They prefer rocky areas where they can roost and care of young ones. Areas with a good forest cover and roosting sites such as in central India are generally preferred by bears.

Only about 20,000 sloth bears remain in the wild. Central India is the only hope for its survival alongside humans. In spite of being a frugivore and a peace-loving animal, it is largely misunderstood.

It is said that it spits saliva, locally called phen, on its victims to blind them, however this is not true. Its bones and nails do not bring anyone luck. These are old superstition we should stop believing.

Most attacks occur during **summer**, followed by **monsoon** and **winter**. They mostly take place in **forests** or forest edges when people engage in forest-based activities.



In summer, attacks occur in March during **mahua** collection and in May during **tendu** collection.



In monsoon, attacks occur in July and August during **mushroom** collection.



In winter, attacks occur during **firewood** collection.



When and where?

Early Morning 6:00 AM to 8:00 AM	Day Time 8:00 AM to 10:00 AM	Evening 4:00 PM to 6:00 PM
Open defecation Mahua collection Tendu collection Mushroom collection	Mahua collection Tendu collection Maulain patta Fuelwood	Fuelwood Agriculture work Livestock grazing

Remember! Most bears do not attack on purpose. They attack if:

- they are suddenly alarmed
- they feel threatened
- to protect cubs

This handbook will help you how to avoid encountering bears in the forests.

Attacks by lone bears are common, but mothers with cubs are more likely to attack.



- In summer and winter, **lone bears** were responsible for most attacks.
- In monsoon, most attacks occurred because of a **lone bear** but **mother bears** also attacked to protect their cubs.

Bears do not attack to eat, but only in defence. They retreat as soon as they feel the threat is subdued. If timely care is given, **most bear attacks are not lethal.**

Safety in numbers!

- Our research has found that most attacks occurred when victims were alone.
- Chances of attacks decrease if people are in groups of three and more.
- Men and women must equally go in groups for forest-based activities to avoid sudden confrontations with bears.



Remember! Most attacks can be averted.

- *Do not underestimate distances in forests*
- *Always be alert when passing through forests*
- *Respect wildlife and maintain a safe distance*

Coexistence in harmony

Just as we call this region our home for thousands of years, the bears call the forest their home as well. Sometimes conflict takes place, but we all live a harmonious life together. We both have co-existed for many centuries.

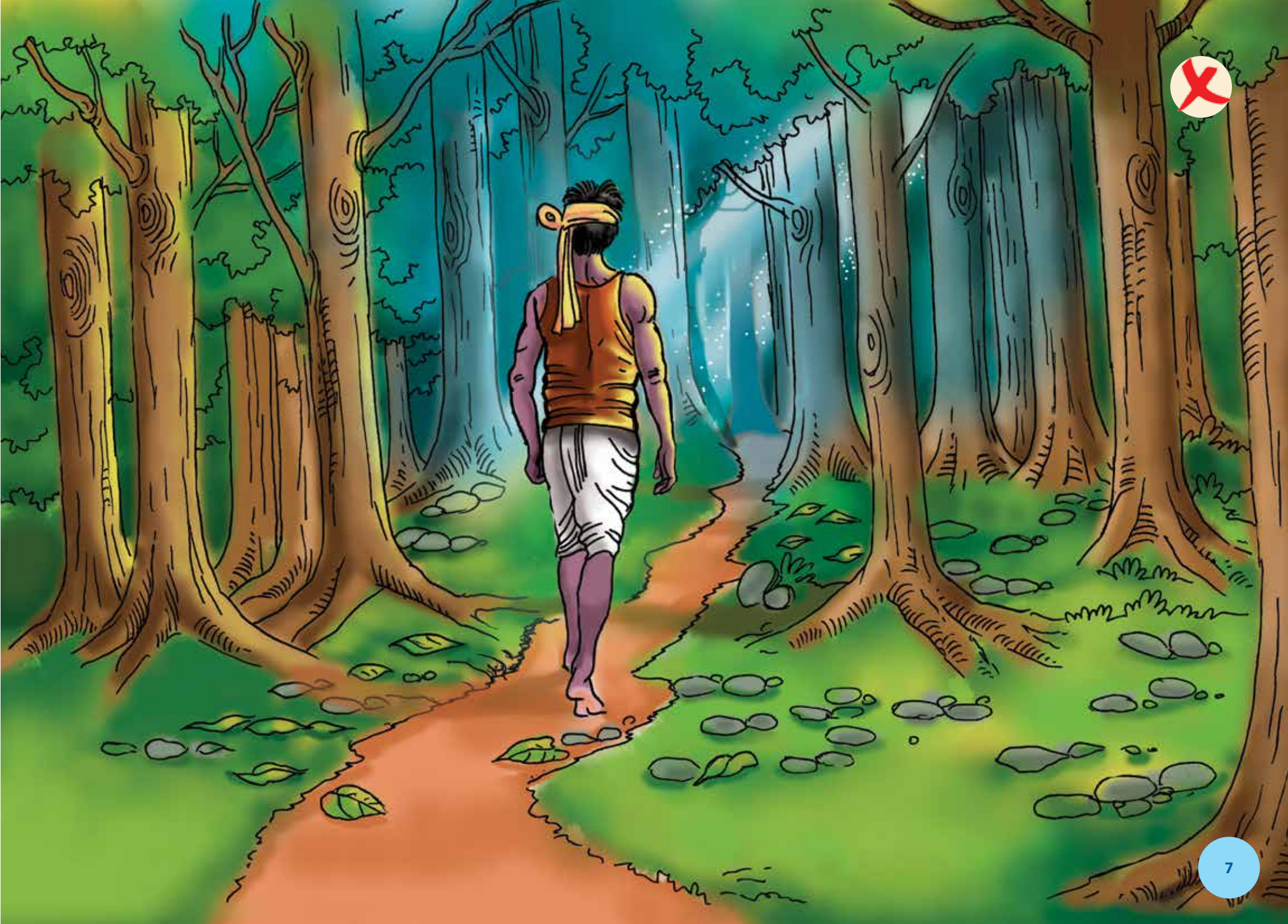
As our neighbours, it is our duty to give them space which in turn helps us avoid conflict. A few changes in our lifestyle will go a long way in reducing tensions and protecting our natural heritage.



1. Avoid walking alone in forests



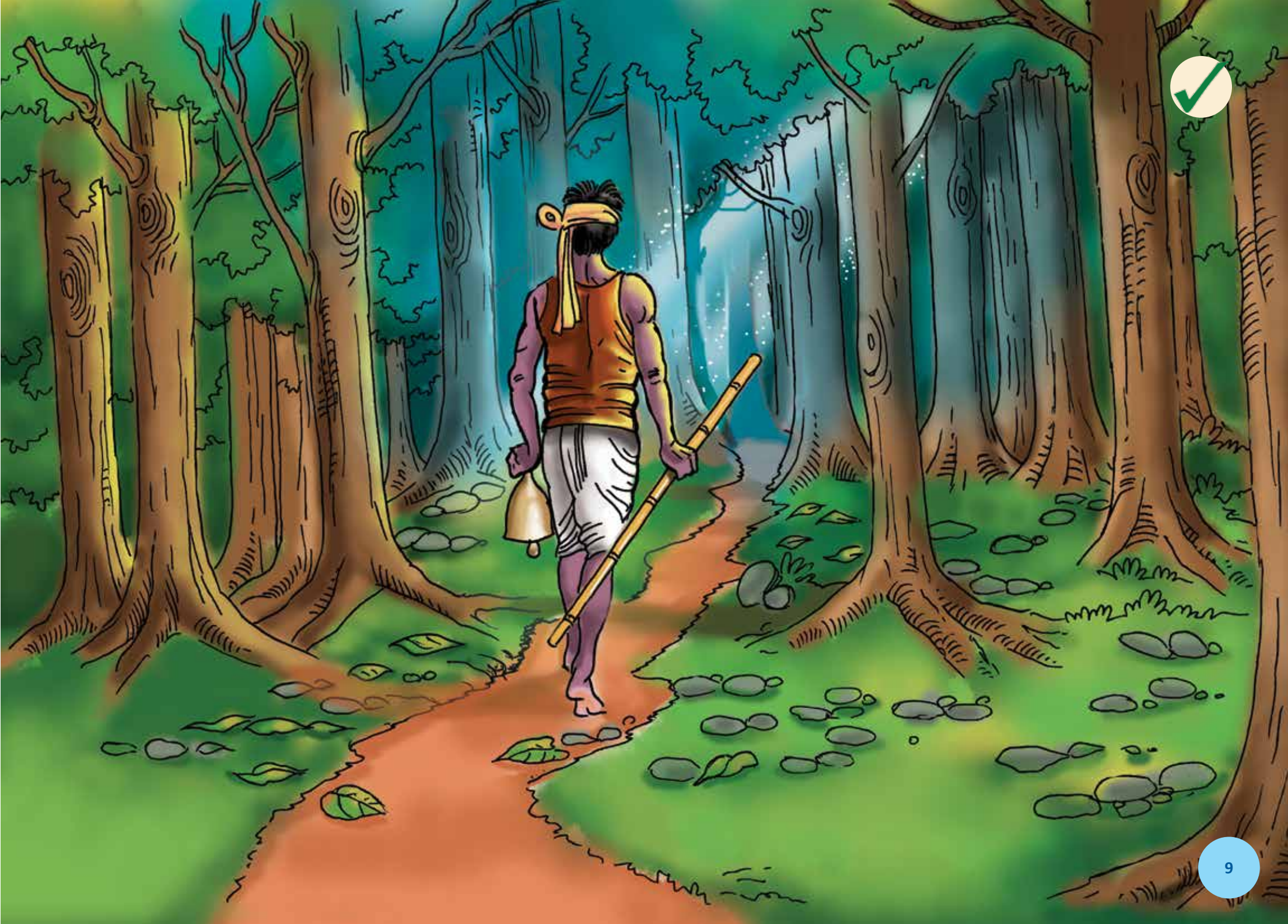
Walking alone quietly does not alert the bear of your approach. If they don't sense your presence and suddenly see you, they are likely to attack in defence.



2. If you have to go alone, carry a bamboo stick and a sound-making instrument with you, such as a bell or a whistle.



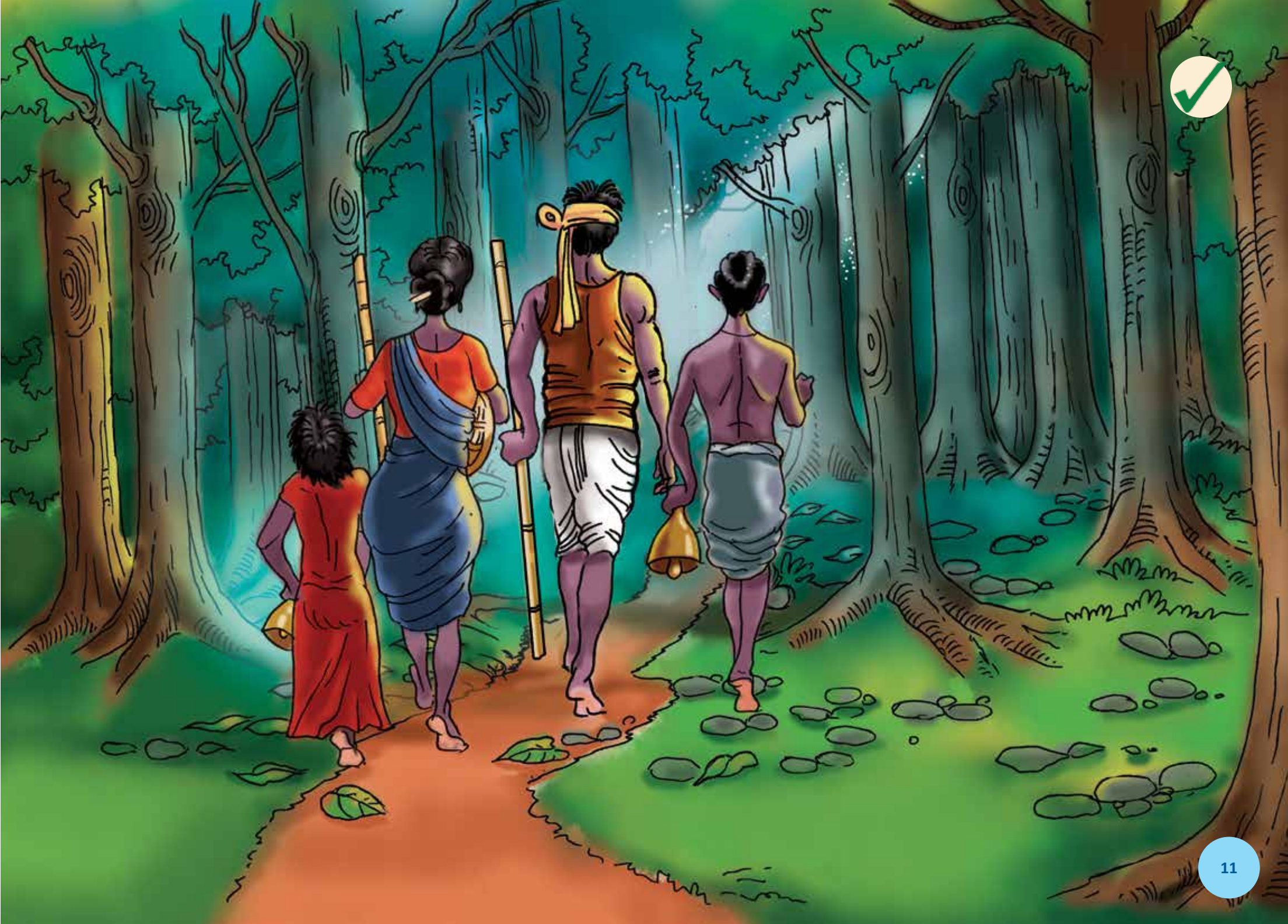
Making a sound while walking in the forest is the best way to alert an animal of your presence. If you have a bamboo stick, scrape it on the ground and beat around the bush or ring a whistle or bell intermittently as you walk.



3. Always prefer to travel as a group or family whenever going to the jungle.



Ensuring that enough sound is made while in a group alerts any animal such as a sloth bear of your approach and gives them sufficient time to move away.



4. Avoid going alone to collect tendu patta.



Tendu patta collection requires one to venture deep in forests. Often tendu grows in places with dense undergrowth which increase chances of suddenly encountering a sloth bear.



5. Always go in groups to collect tendu patta.



Travel in groups and carry a whistle, a bell, or a utensil to make sound. Have someone on the lookout while engaged in tendu patta collection.



6. Avoid collecting mahua flowers in the jungle at night or before sunrise.



Mahua flowers attract animals such as sloth bears, which are nocturnal. This increases the chances of encountering one in the jungle.



7. Collect mahua after sunrise and have someone to watch over your shoulder.



Mornings are safer to venture into forests to collect mahua since most animals retreat during daytime. Having someone to watch over your shoulder is a safer way to engage in gathering fallen flowers.




8. Avoid travelling alone in the night.



If you have to travel alone, ensure that you have a good torch and a bamboo stick for your protection. Make noise as you walk.




9. While walking, if you see a bear crossing the path before it sees you, stop in your way and slowly retreat behind.



If you see the bear before it sees you, it is always wise to be quiet and retreat behind.
Always give right of way to animals.




10. While walking, if the bear sees you, retreat slowly behind, instead of running.



Retain your composure so that the bear does not feel alarmed or threatened.



11. If a bear charges from a distance, try to appear large by flailing your arms in the air and shouting loudly. Then, retreat.



Trying to appear large confuses the bear and is likely to change direction instead of attacking.




12. Being in a group always ensures that the bear is outnumbered and is forced to retreat instead of attacking.



Strength in numbers is key to venturing into forests. Being in a group will stop a bear from charging at you.




13. In an unfortunate incidence when a bear charges at you, use a long stick to keep distance between the bear and you.



If you are carrying a bamboo stick, it will help maintain a distance between you and the bear. This allows you to regain your posture and deter an attack. Most bears retreat soon after charging.



14. If attacked, attain a foetal position by lying on the ground. Press your legs against your stomach and hold your hands over your head to protect important body parts.



Attaining foetal position might not deter the bear from attacking, but it will help you protect yourself from fatal wounds to stomach and head.




15. Remember, a bear is more likely to charge if she has cubs.



A mother bear is very protective of her cubs. You are likely to encounter them during monsoon season, hence be cautious and aware of your surroundings if you're venturing into the forests.




16. Bears attack only when we suddenly surprise them. Bears have weak eyesight and poor hearing ability, hence they do not sense our presence until we are very near.



Making noise is a way of ensuring that a bear that is probably ahead of you is made aware of your approach, giving it plenty of time to move away.




17. If you have to travel alone, inform someone of your time of leaving and the time of reaching destination. Always keep important phone numbers with you.



This will ensure that someone will go on a search if you do not reach your destination on time. It also helps in receiving timely medical care in case of an unfortunate incident.



18. Avoid going for defecation in forests or forest edges, especially before sunrise. Attacks often take place during such hours.



Open defecation has resulted in many attacks in the past. The major reason is that we go singly or choose forest areas before sunrise when bears are returning to roost. Instead, build a toilet at home with the aid of government schemes.



19. Avoid throwing garbage behind your house, especially the discarded mahua flowers which may attract bears.



Discarded mahua flowers have a strong scent. Since bears are attracted to mahua, they may come close to your house to feed on the flowers.



20. Keeping the surroundings clean is the key to deterring wildlife from visiting your homes. It also helps keep snakes away.



If you have to discard organic waste such as mahua flowers, dig a hole and burry it with soil to avoid the scent from getting out, or discard it far from the village area.



21. If you hear of an attack by a sloth bear, rush the victim to the hospital immediately and inform the Forest Department.

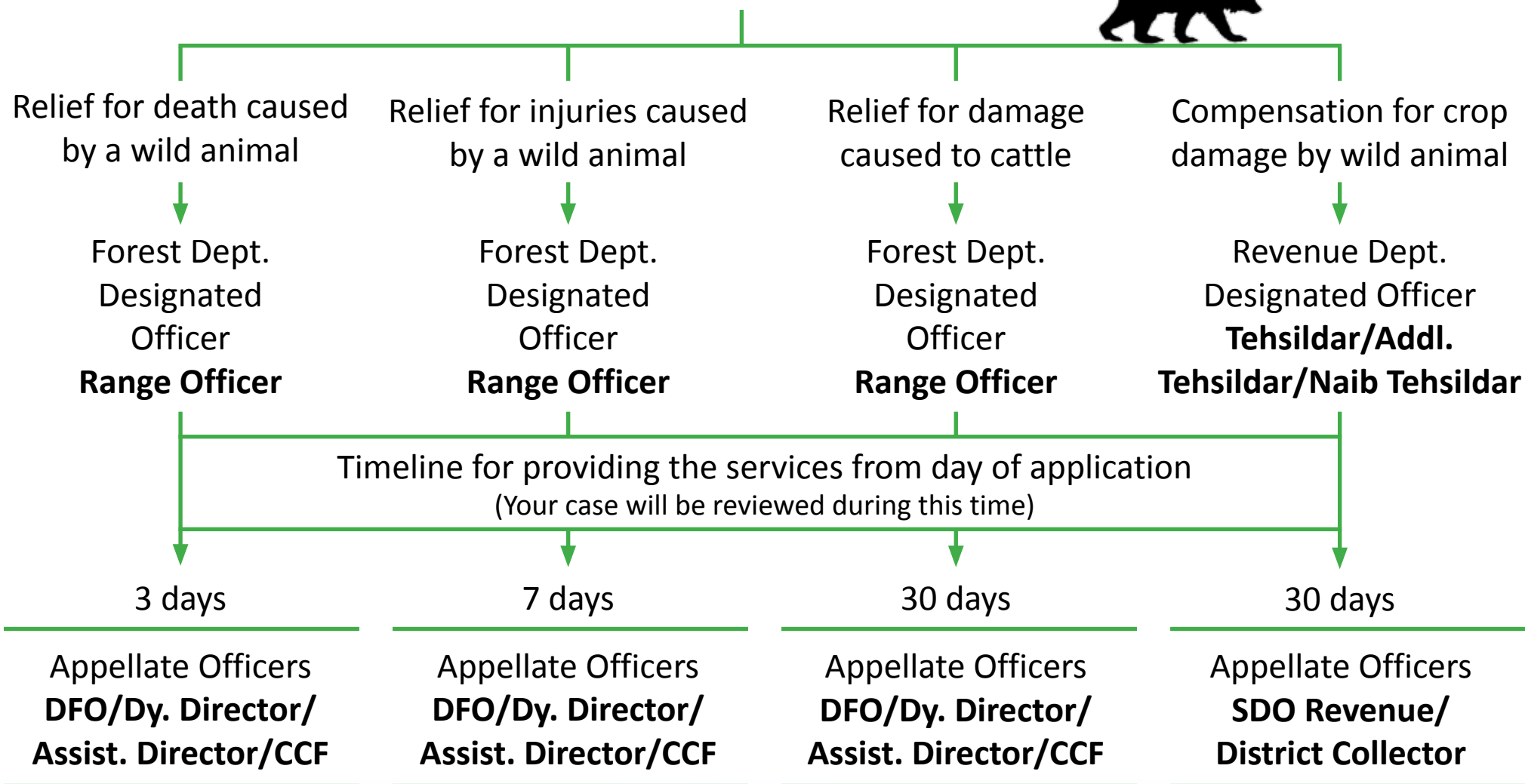


It is very important for the victim to receive medical help in case of an attack. Ensure that your community has contact details of someone with a vehicle. Keep contact details of nearest Forest Department staff such as Forest Guard and Range Officer handy.



Under the **Madhya Pradesh Lok Sewaon Ke Pradan Ki Guarantee Adhiniyam, 2010**

a victim can apply for compensation for:



In 2016, the compensation amount was increased for loss of human life from Rs 1,50,000 to Rs 4,00,000, and up to Rs 30,000 in case of an injury resulting from a confrontation.

Please contact the Range Officer who is in charge of the forest area of your village for more information.



Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana

provides LPG connection to BPL families.

- Registered under the woman member of family
- BPL certificate by Panchayat Pradhan, BPL ration card, Aadhar or Voter ID, and a passport-size photograph
- KYC form to be submitted to nearest LPG outlet
- Need savings bank account at a nationalised bank
- Gov. provides financial support for first LPG connection
- EMI facility for cost of stove and refill

Contact the nearest LPG outlet for more information.

LPG gas is good for health but also reduces reliance on fuelwood. It will also decrease chances of encounters with bears.



Ensure that your cattle are back home before evening to avoid going to forest to herd them back in darkness.

Also remember...

Bear attacks are rare, but it is important that we are careful when passing through the forest.



Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin)

provides for individual household latrine in villages.

- A photograph, bank a/c details and copy of the first page of bank passbook, and Aadhar no. or Aadhar enrolment slip is required
- Incentive for one toilet provided by government
- Construction material is provided by the gov.
- Construction activities to be taken up by the beneficiary with the support from village agencies
- Can access revolving fund to meet the additional cost of improved toilets with bathing facility

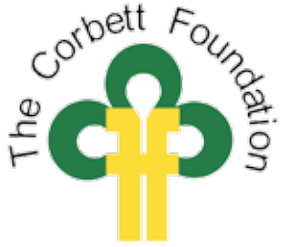
Contact your Gram Panchayat for more information.

The objective is to reduce open defecation and promote cleanliness. This will also reduce the chances of encounters with bears.



*Be confident!
Ensure your
safety and help
others in need.*

Inform the Forest Department if you see a bear in the forest or around your village so that they are aware of the bear's movements.



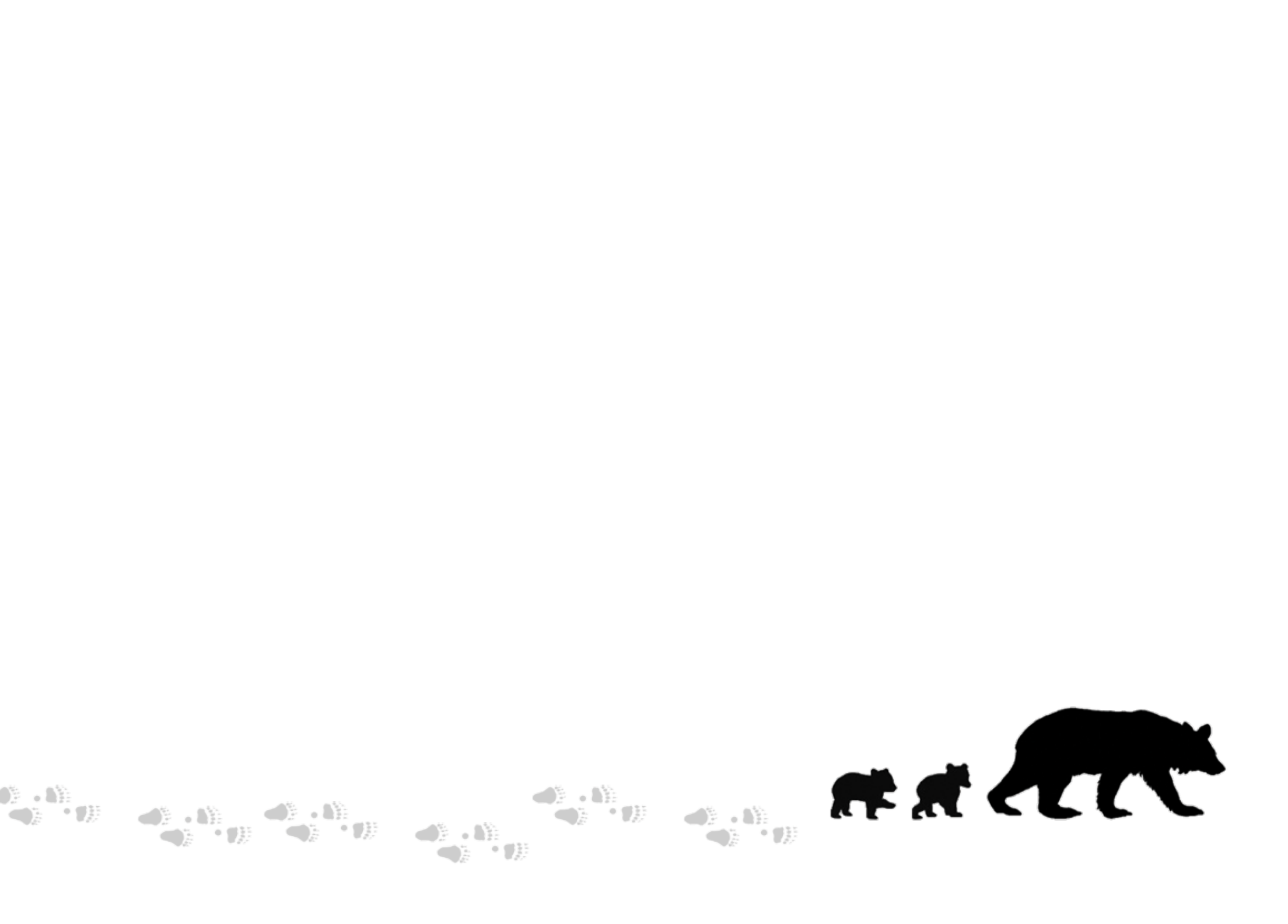
Established in 1994 by Mr. Dilip D. Khatau, The Corbett Foundation (TCF) is dedicated to mitigating human-wildlife conflict situations, and conservation of wildlife and natural resources with a strong component of local community participation. TCF adopts a holistic and a multi-dimensional approach to provide solutions to address socio-economic and socio-ecological issues. TCF has an outreach of over 400 villages with over 50000 people and 200,000 livestock across important wildlife habitats in India, namely Corbett Tiger Reserve (Uttarakhand), Kanha, Pench, and Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserves (Madhya Pradesh), Kaziranga Tiger Reserve (Assam), and around the Greater Rann of Kutch (Gujarat).

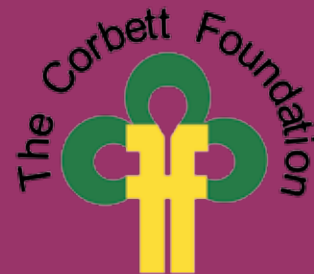
In addition to the above areas, TCF lays more emphasis on taking up conservation work in critical wildlife landscapes of the Kanha-Pench Corridor and the Bandhavgarh-Sanjay Dubri Corridor, both in Madhya Pradesh. TCF has primarily six verticles: conservation-oriented ecological research, human health, veterinary health, alternative livelihoods, awareness and sustainable rural development in critical wilderness areas for a harmonious coexistence between human beings and wildlife.

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