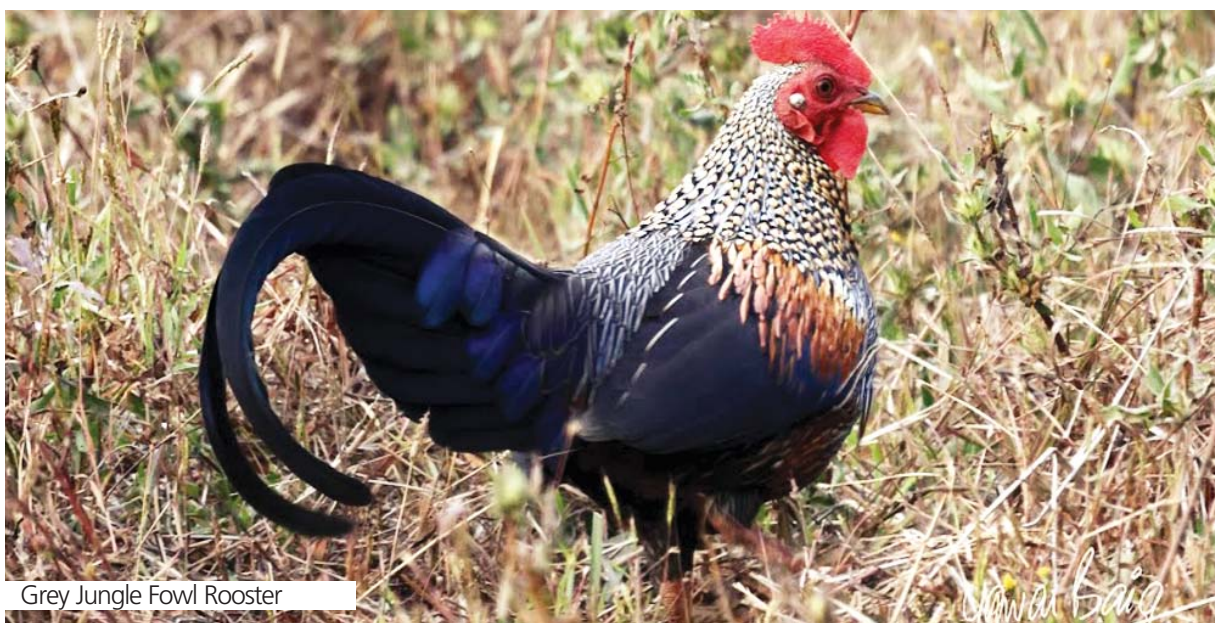




Celebrating Positivity, One Smile at a Time

Are you a glass-half-full or glass-half-empty person? If you're a natural optimist in life, you might consider yourself a glass-half-full. Others might feel challenging to be positive. Optimist Day, first celebrated in 2019 in Croatia, is the perfect excuse to embrace positivity, whether you're a natural optimist or a bit more sceptical. The festival, created by Somersby Cider, brought people together in Zagreb to enjoy summer sunshine, bright yellow balloons, and cheerful toasts with fellow dreamers. It's a day to focus on the good, celebrate life's small joys, and inject a little fun-fuelled optimism into everyday life. Optimist Day reminds us that positivity is contagious and worth celebrating.



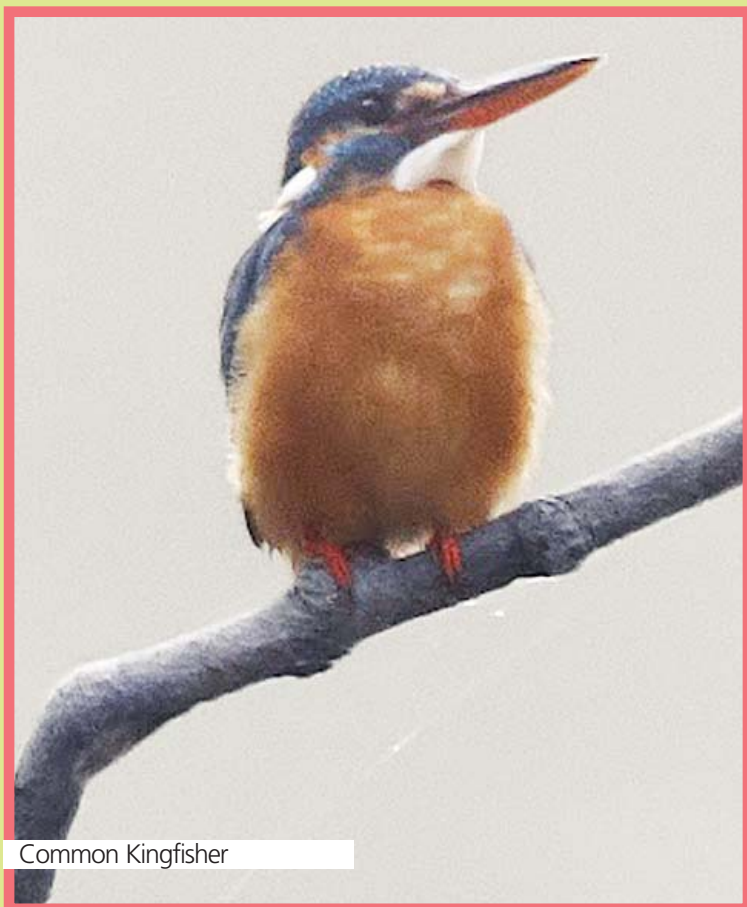
Grey Jungle Fowl Rooster

Coming Home To The Bulbul, the Crow Pheasant, and the scream of the Peacock

PART:2



Red-naped or Indian Black Ibis



Common Kingfisher



Tiger, 2 year-old scratchy nose

Incidentally, this is why I am against trophy hunting where the best of the species gets killed, for no reason other than that it is so magnificent. This takes the best genes out of the breeding pool, reducing the quality of the species over time. We have seen this happen with animal after animal, all victims to mankind's insatiable egos. Another record mentions a cast antler from the Khandesh district measuring 52 inches, on the main beam. Chital antlers are slender and also three pointed and sweep backwards over the shoulders and curve upwards. The record for Chital antlers is 41 inches. Chital are among the most beautiful deer in the world and have been exported all over the world and you can see them in parks in America and Europe and elsewhere.



Old warrior, Broken horn, Blind eye



Black winged Stilts



Mirza Yawar Baig
Naturalist and Wildlife Conservationist

Sambar shed their antlers primarily in March and April, while Chital shed theirs between March and July. That is how we were able to see two magnificent Sambar and Chital stags with their racks intact. Sambar are the largest deer in India. Only males have antlers that typically feature three tines (points) on each beam. Sambar antlers are large,

rugged, and can reach lengths of up to 110 cm (43 inches). The record for Sambar antlers in India is an animal that was shot in Bhopal which had antlers with a main beam of 50.5 inches. Incidentally, this is why I am against trophy hunting where the best of the species gets killed, for no reason other than that it is so magnificent. This takes the best genes out of the breeding pool, reducing the quality of the species over time. We have seen this happen with animal after animal, all victims to mankind's insatiable egos. Another record mentions a cast antler from the Khandesh district measuring 52 inches, on the main beam. Chital antlers are slender and also three pointed and sweep backwards over the shoulders and curve upwards. The record for Chital antlers is 41 inches. Chital are among the most beautiful deer in the world and have



Great Egret and two Black winged Stilts

been exported all over the world and you can see them in parks in America and Europe and elsewhere.

Both Sambar and Chital are on the menu for tigers and leopards and are well aware of this status and so are very skittish in forests where there are tigers and leopards. That makes them the most reliable informers about the movements of these two apex predators. Especially Sambar because Chital sometimes tend to get too high-strung and nervous and will sound their high-pitched bark even at shadows. But Sambar will not call until they can see the tiger or leopard and so their deep 'belling' is a totally reliable signal that the tiger is on the move and has been seen. The jungle talks to those who understand its language.

The Langur sentinel, from his perch on the highest tree, calls first, then Chital and finally Sambar and

we head in that direction. As we round a bend, we see, off to the right, a tiger on a low tree. He climbed up there for reasons he refused to disclose, but when he heard our Gypsy, he jumped down and started for the road. It was a two-year-old male cub who, our guide informed us, had got separated from his mother and two other siblings. Not too alarming a situation but one which he needs to correct soon. Tiger cubs are totally dependent on their mother for protection from other tigers, leopards, hyenas, wolves and almost anything else, all of whom firmly believe that the only good tiger is a dead tiger. And that the best thing about a cub is how easy it is to kill. Full grown Bengal tigers stand 3.5 feet at the shoulder, measure 10-11 feet from the tip of the nose to the tip of the tail and weigh between 180-280 kilograms of liquid steel, otherwise called muscle.

#HOME

Some big specimens can go up to 300 kilograms. Not easy to kill, to say the least. But cubs are vulnerable and need constant protection. Tiger cubs also need their mother to teach them everything to do with jungle lore and how to hunt. For up to and sometimes more than two years, they can't hunt for themselves and their mother hunts and brings the kill to them or calls them to the kill depending on how big they are. That is another reason why hunting tigers is such an evil thing, because if you shoot the mother and she has cubs, you have effectively wiped out the entire family.

We moved forward slowly to keep the dust down. The cub came



into the road and walked along it, following us. If we waited too long and he got close, he would veer off into the undergrowth by the roadside. We would hurry forward, and he would come back into the road. The problem with moving and stopping was the dust, which was so heavy that every time we stopped, I couldn't see the tiger, thanks to the cloud of red dust that would cover him and us. We had several minutes of this follow the leader game when the tiger came to a signal tree. There, he reared up on his hind legs and hugged the tree, smelled the calling cards of other tigers who had been in the area, rubbed his face against the bark of the tree to leave his scent, and then, scored it



Tiger Umred.



Black winged Stilts



Sparring Gaur bulls

with his razor-sharp claws. Mature tigers also spray urine on signal trees to mark their territory and demonstrate dominance.

Eventually, the tiger wandered off into the jungle. We proceeded onwards and took a long detour along the boundary of the fields belonging to a village adjacent to the park. In that open area to my great delight, I spotted a Chinkara (Gazella bennettii), the Indian gazelle. It is a small, graceful antelope native to South Asia's arid plains, deserts, and dry forests, known for its speed, shy nature, and ability to survive without much water. It has a reddish-buff coat, distinctive black and white facial stripes, and lives alone or in very small family groups. I was thrilled to see the Chinkara, which is so shy and elusive, that it is a very difficult animal to spot.

We came upon a small family herd of Gaur (Indian bison, Bos

gaurus), grazing in a forest clearing. One of the big cubs was chewing on a Chital bone, remnants of a tiger kill. They do this when they feel the need for a calcium supplement. Two young bulls were sparring, not a serious fight, but the needle-sharp points of the horns can still do damage. At a small water seepage, along came an old bull. A veteran warrior with one horn tip broken off and blind in the right eye. As he lowered his head to drink, he was joined by a Blue Bull male and they drank in companionable silence. A Grey Mongoose, one of a pair, watched us in open curiosity, torn between his need to discover who we were and following his mate who decided to leave him behind and disappeared in the bush.

As the day drew to a close, we came upon another clearing, literally teaming with Grey Jungle Fowl roosters. Just one or two hens, but

some marvelous, flamboyant roosters. Eventually and reluctantly, we headed back to the gate, bodies pleasantly sore with being banged around in the Gypsies, driven over atrocious roads by drivers who could easily win the Dakkar Rally and do their best to prove that to you every day.

I was returning to the Indian jungle after almost eight years of having been away in America and elsewhere. For me, it was coming home. The calls of the Red-vented Bulbul, the Crow Pheasant, the Rufus Treepie, the Did-you-do-it of the Red-wattled Lapwing, the Kok-kow-Kow-Kok of the Grey Jungle fowl and the scream of the Peacock, signaling the coming of nightfall, were all music to my ears. Music long unheard and yearned for.

We stopped for tea beside a lake and I spotted a Great Egret, Black-

winged Stilts, Little Egret, Common Kingfisher and Pied Kingfisher and an Asian Open-billed Stork, standing off to one side, refusing to socialize with common folk.

Later in the night, after a very welcome shower to wash off half the earth that was sticking to me, as I sat outside my room at the resort, I heard the hoot of Spotted Owlets, the call of the Nightjar which sits in the middle of pathways lying in wait for flying insects. He comes off his perch on the ground like a rocket of doom for the insect, catching it in mid-flight and comes back to his seat on the ground. Finally, as I was about to retire, I heard the bark of the Chital, signaling that the tiger was on the move. His day begins when mine ends.

Concluded.

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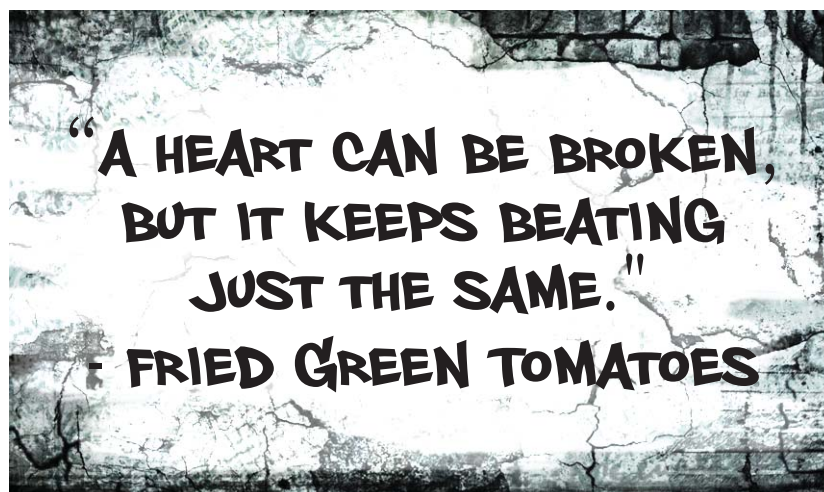


Sparring Gaur bulls, friendly fight

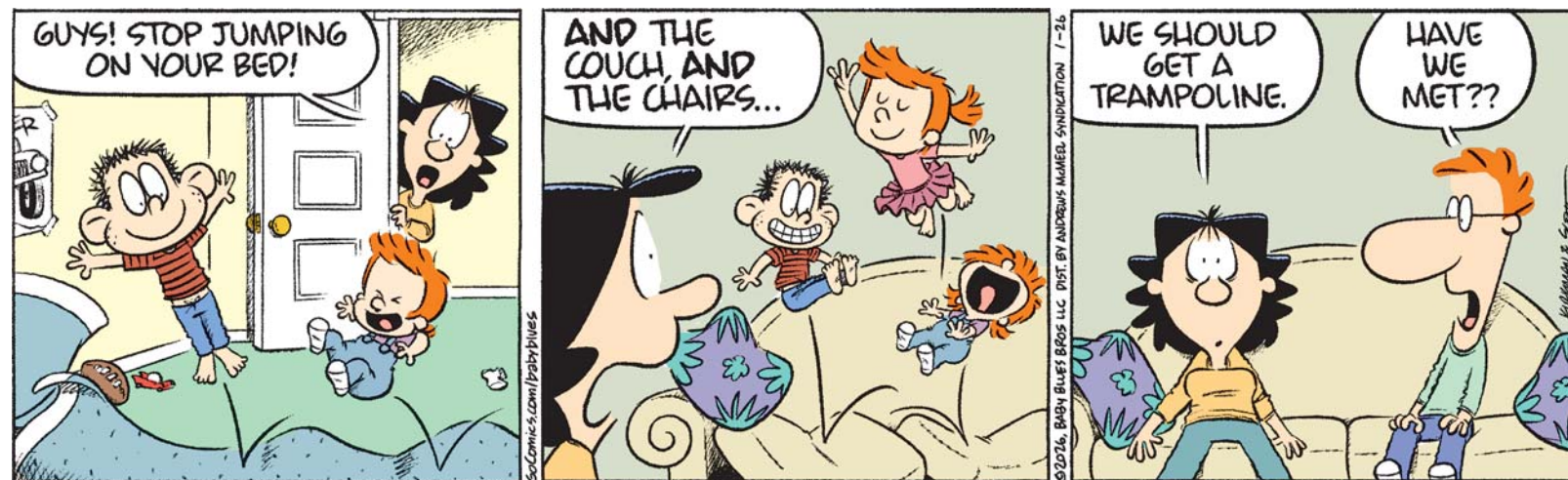


Grey Jungle Fowl Rooster

THE WALL

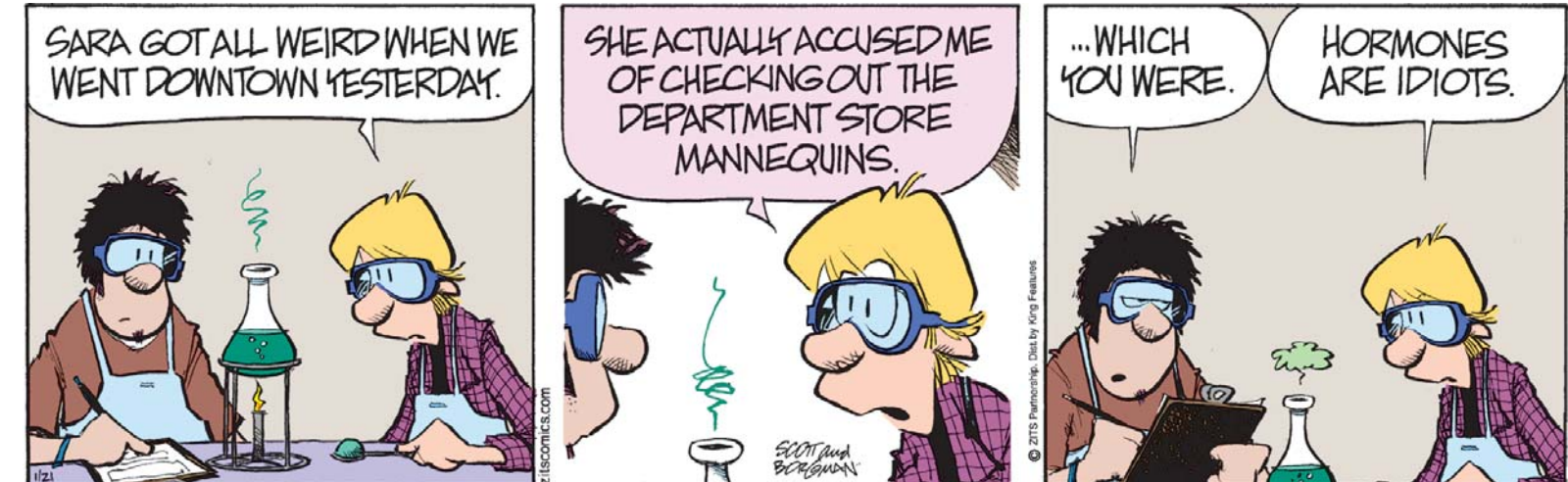


BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman