

#RESEARCH

Hairstylists exposed to toxic air

"At the root of the problem are the products used on clients' hair," says Lesliam Quiros-Alcala, study senior author and associate professor in the Environmental Health and Engineering department at Johns Hopkins University. "Manufacturers of hair-care products need to focus on developing safer options that don't put hairstylists or consumers in harm's way."



Hairstylists, especially those providing services to Black and Latina women, are exposed to high concentrations of harmful airborne chemicals in their workplace, a team of researchers has found. The study in the *Journal of Environmental Exposure Assessment* is the first to report indoor air concentrations of several Volatile Organic Compounds or VOCs in US hair salons, serving this group of women.

This builds on previous research that found Black and Hispanic hairdressers had higher levels of chemicals from hair relaxers, dyes, and other salon products in their bodies compared to office workers but did not specifically measure air concentrations of the chemicals.

The researchers conducted air monitoring to measure 14 VOCs in three salons, serving Black women, three Dominican salons, predominantly serving Latina and Black women, and 10 office spaces not connected to salons, to serve as a comparison group. Most of the spaces tested had some level of the VOCs that the researchers were looking for. However, median VOC concentration were two to 175 times higher in salons than in offices.

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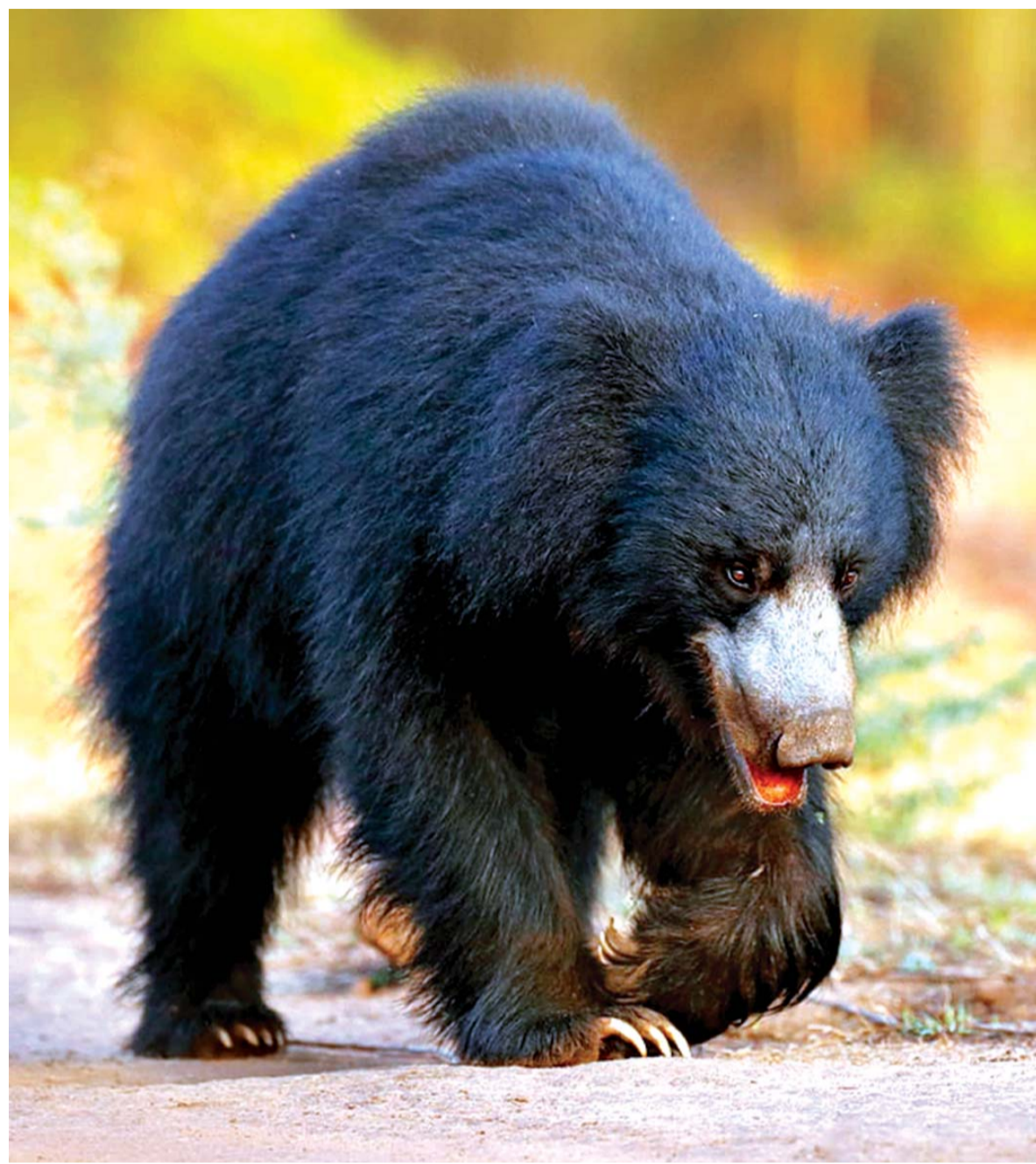


Female hairstylists are vulnerable because they tend to be of reproductive age and work during critical periods before and during pregnancy. Many also tend to use products like chemical relaxers, straighteners, and smoothing products, which may pose particular health risks. Several of the VOCs in these products have been linked in animal studies to neuro-developmental and reproductive effects, potentially posing health risks for these women and

their unborn children. The compounds have also been linked to respiratory and cardiovascular effects, skin irritation, and cancer.

According to Quiros-Alcala, Black and Latina hair-stylists make up about 30% of the prospect of sighting my first *Baloo* or sloth bear (Melursus ursinus) on a trip with other wildlife enthusiasts, to Kumbhalgarh and Todgarh-Raoli wildlife sanctuaries in December 2019. My anticipation grew over the few days of exploring these two sanctuaries in central

Opening doors and windows, when available during chemical-intensive services, can improve the indoor air quality in salons. Manufacturers recommend that salons use fans and air purifiers, masks, and gloves, when providing chemical-intensive services to reduce exposure. "These simple measures have the potential to significantly decrease exposures to VOCs and other chemicals in salon environments," she says.



A sweet tooth and taste for ants and termites takes them out of the sanctuaries.



Anirudh Nair
(A Wildlife Enthusiast and Writer)

As a child who grew up watching *The Jungle Book* television series in the 90s, I always found it difficult to pick a favourite animal character. Mowgli's two best friends were both beloved, *Bagheera*, the cautious yet courageous black panther, and *Baloo*, the clumsy and free-spirited sloth bear with a weakness for honey. Over time, I learnt that I didn't have to pick a favourite, and I could love them both.

These memories sparked, I was palpably excited at the prospect of sighting my first *Baloo* or sloth bear (Melursus ursinus) on a trip with other wildlife enthusiasts, to Kumbhalgarh and Todgarh-Raoli wildlife sanctuaries in December 2019. My anticipation grew over the few days of exploring these two sanctuaries in central



Sloth bear scat, a giveaway to what he had to eat the day before.



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Rajasthan, as I listened to various tales of encounters with sloth bears, and saw tell-tale signs that they had left in the forest.

Panchu-ba, the old caretaker of the Raoli Forest Rest House, narrated his meetings with bears as we sat around a bonfire on our first night in the sanctuary. Gesticulating and swearing wildly, Panchu-ba told us about how a bear had stood on its hind legs to scare him off, when he accidentally chanced upon it, many years ago. When threatened, adult bears, who grow up to six feet in length and weigh more than 100 kgs, use this strategy and display their formidable foreclaws to intimidate an opponent.

The sloth bear, with its distinctive shaggy black coat, is the most common of the four species of bears found in India. Though its shambling gait gives it the appearance of being slow and clumsy, it can climb trees easily, and easily outrun a human.

We paused beside a crushed termite mound along a forest path inside Todgarh-Raoli Wildlife Sanctuary, and wildlife biologist, Dr. Sumit Dookia, explained to us that it was the handiwork of a sloth bear. "These bears are *myrmecophagous*, which means a large part of their diet comprises

ants and termites. Adaptations such as long claws to dig the mounds, and a jaw lacking incisors help them suck the insects up with ease," he explained. Further down the path, we saw fresh bear scat, glittering under the morning sun. A closer examination revealed heads of termites and ants in the droppings, confirming what Dr. Dookia had said moments earlier.

But it's not just termites that sloth bears feed on. These omnivorous animals also eat leaves, flowers, fruits, barks, stems, honey, and carcasses of wild and domestic animals. Trees such as the *amaltas* or Indian laburnum, *Maduca longifolia* or *mahua*, and the fruits of the Indian jujube or *ber* are among their favourites. It is not uncommon for the bears of Kumbhalgarh to leave the precincts of the sanctuary in search of food.

"An adult male recently got stuck in the wire fencing around a farm when out on one such advent-



Todagarh-Raoli and Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary's undulating terrain is ideal habitat for the sloth bear.

ure. We tranquilised it with a dart, treated the injuries on its leg and later released it back into the forest," says Bhera Ram Bishnoi, a forest guard, posted at the Desuri range of Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary.

Bears do not understand the boundaries created by humans, and conflict is inevitable when they stray outside the sanctuary. "A man was blinded by a bear a few years ago, when he had gone to relieve himself by the roadside. This happened during the *meia*, which takes place at the Parusharam Mahadev Temple, located within the sanctuary," Bishnoi tells us.

Chance encounters with the bears are at their highest during the monsoon when the vegetation turns dense. Abhinav Bharti, a forest guard, posted at the Raoli range of the Todgarh-Raoli Wildlife Sanctuary, narrated his experience to us. "Four of us were silently patrolling through a valley. I was walking ahead, tak-

BHALOO

With every bear story I heard, the shadow of a sighting loomed large over me. When locals told us that chances of a sighting were high near Parashuram Mahadev Temple, we didn't think twice before heading in that direction, at 7 P. M. one night. When I heard sudden excitement in our jeep, I knew it had to be bears. The driver focussed the headlights of the jeep towards a pair circling under a large banyan tree. Shaggy and dusty, the mother and cub were rummaging through offerings, left behind by temple devotees. The bears didn't seem to care about the human presence in their midst, even as another jeep lined up. I couldn't come to terms with the ignominy of these wild beings, feeding on scraps left behind by humans, under cover of night. These weren't the free-spirited *Baloo* bears, that I had hoped to see. We decided to just leave them alone, and move on.

Further down the road, we spotted another individual, feeding on *ber* fruits fallen by the roadside. It indulged us watching it for a while before running up a hillock. That's more like it, I thought to myself, a bear surviving on the bare necessities of life.

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BABY BLUES



ZITS



World Pulses Day

The dried seeds of legumes, pulses are among some of the world's most sustainable food sources. Chock-full of nutrients with a high content of protein, pulses make an excellent dietary staple, particularly in places where meat and dairy products are not accessible. These plant-based protein sources offer nutrition, sustainability, and versatility, enriching meals and promoting health and wellness. World Pulses Day is here to draw attention to and raise awareness about the health benefits of this extremely climate-friendly and healthy food!

While We Stayed Rooted To The Spot, The Bear Bolted

Panchu-ba, the old caretaker of the Raoli Forest Rest House, narrated his meetings with bears as we sat around a bonfire on our first night in the sanctuary. Gesticulating and swearing wildly, Panchu-ba told us about how a bear had stood on its hind legs to scare him off, when he accidentally chanced upon it, many years ago. When threatened, adult bears, who grow up to six feet in length and weigh more than 100 kgs, use this strategy and display their formidable foreclaws to intimidate an opponent.



towards her," he said.

Cubs ride on their mother's back until they are about a third of her size. They become independent around the age of two, by which time, they are almost her size. Extremely protective, a female bear will rarely be separated from her cubs. Bishnoi was, therefore, rather surprised when he received a call one morning from a villager, informing him that a 5-6-month-old cub was roaming about alone near a *nullah* in his range. "We reached the spot in the evening and managed to capture the cub with a net. We decided to release it in a nearby forest enclosure, where villagers had seen a bear with two cubs over the previous days. And sure enough, the mother soon arrived to reclaim her baby," he said.

Bears face numerous threats. Heavy vehicles, passing through the sanctuaries near Ranakpur and Desuri, often mow down wildlife, and bears are susceptible as well. Grazing of livestock within the sanctuaries affects their movement, and illegal tree cutting leads to fragmentation of their habitat. In addition, the bears must compete with humans for food resources such as *ber* and *mahua*.

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Sloth bear also eats leaves.

#J'ADORE The Trendiest Vista

As designers gear up to showcase their diaphanous, elegant, and heritage summer collections, get set to exude brilliant charm in the coolest Indian and Indo-inspired looks, yourself!

As the seasons of fashion swings, so does the style mood of fashion connoisseurs and tastemakers alike. In accordance with this change in preferences come a host of new trends, styling tips, and ultra-chic outfit ideas! As designers gear up to showcase their diaphanous, elegant, and heritage summer collections, get set to exude brilliant charm in the coolest Indian and Indo-inspired looks, yourself!

To start off, here's a lowdown of some of the most trending styles in the Indian fashion scene today!

The Neon Revival

Few things spell freshness like neon hues! Adapting these hues to ultra-stylish *lehenga cholis*, embellished masks and jewellery is a fun way to keep the vibrancy alive when donning the latest fashion trends of the season. You can opt for neon yellow, green or pink to add a dash of summer freshness to your kurtis, lehengas, and sarees. Make a stylish statement like no other in neon!



The Turquoise Crush

Need to elevate a simple and elegant Indian outfit with a striking stylish accent? Turquoise hued jewellery spells summer freshness like no other! Give your outfit a vibrant and uber-stylish edge by pairing simple neutral-coloured Indian outfits like a saree, or an *angrakha*, with stand-out turquoise fashion jewellery.



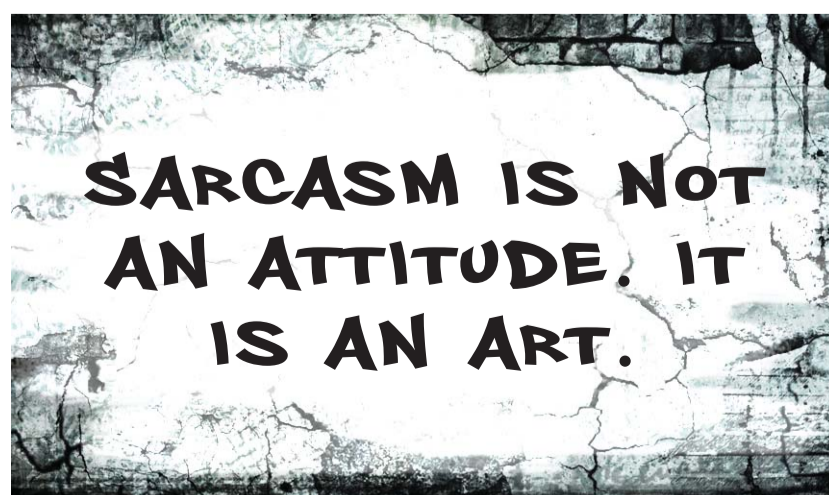
The Saree-Kurta Duo

If you get bored of wearing the same old Indian classic in the same old way, this outfit idea is a winner for you. Combine two of the greatest Indian wear silhouettes in one of the boldest and experimental Indian fashion trends, the *kurta-saree set!* Instead of pairing your kurtis for women with the usual pants, salwar, pajama or churidar, opt for a saree.



Lengthen the *palla* of your saree and lessen the pleated area to reduce bulk underneath, in order to adapt the saree's drape to a kurta length, to effectively execute one of the latest fashion trends of the season.

THE WALL



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman