

+ COVER STORY | DIY | NEAR AND DEAR

# gobar times

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A DOWN TO EARTH SUPPLEMENT FOR THE YOUNG AND CURIOUS

## MOVIE MANIA

A wish-fulfilling edition for all the young film enthusiasts, especially focusing on environment movies—your perfect delight for the approaching summer vacations!





# Scrapbook



This photograph was received as an entry for the Window Lights Mobile Photo Contest organised by Young Environmentalist in June 2021.

Send us your best pics at [young@downtoearth.org.in](mailto:young@downtoearth.org.in)

## Digits speak

Thousands of plant and animal species can become extinct within decades. Such substantial loss of species in a relatively short geological time-period, usually million years, is called mass extinction. Currently, the sixth extinction is going on, which is majorly human-induced. With an unprecedented rate and scale of devastation, this phase is rightly blamed as the Anthropocene Epoch ('Anthro,' meaning human).

STAGE OF EXTINCTION (IN MILLION YEARS AGO)	FIRST EXTINCTION (443 mya)	SECOND EXTINCTION (374 mya)	THIRD EXTINCTION (250 mya)
EXTENT OF SPECIES LOST	85%	75%	95%
REASONS	Rapid warming after Ice Age	Periods of low O <sub>2</sub> and drop in CO <sub>2</sub>	Asteroid collision with Earth
	SIXTH EXTINCTION (present)	FIFTH EXTINCTION (65 mya)	FOURTH EXTINCTION (200 mya)
	ONGOING	76%	80%
	Human-induced climate change	Meteor crash in Mexico	Geological activity in the Atlantic Ocean

Source: The Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, 2019

Compiled by Anubhuti Sharma

Reducing consumption and forming a self-restrained society is the only way we can live with nature harmoniously



**Bhupender Yadav**  
Union Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change

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# THE ANGRY BIRD

An argumentative avian and her exploits—the Jungle Babbler

Gargi Mishra

If there was ever a parliament of birds, then this avian would have delivered the most vociferous speeches. No doubt quirky artists caricatured it in their popular *Angry Birds* game. I'm sure you all must have enjoyed playing this viral pastime and gotten amused by the perpetual furious look on the birds' faces. Recognised as the most argumentative bird, the Jungle Babbler couldn't be named more aptly. Even its genus name *argya* means to argue in Latin.

Observing them for hours babbling in my balcony, I often end up speculating each time their gang falls silent suddenly. Assuming them to be clarifying to me they'd say, "Hey Gargi, don't be puzzled. We do keep quiet, once in a while, particularly when we're doing important stuff. We shall live up to our name quickly and try our best not to tear your eardrums with our lively tooth-and-nail debates. You see, you need to join our cantankerous chirps. That's the best way to thank us for the invaluable company we bestow upon you in your otherwise noiseless jungle. Hehe..."

As a muted listener without a choice, I would like to dutifully tell them, "I can't agree with you more, dear Seven Sisters. You do have all your stealth modes on while making nests or spotting predators." Known as *saath bhai* (seven brothers) in Hindi, Odia, Bengali, Gujarati, and many other Indian regional languages; the Jungle Babbler

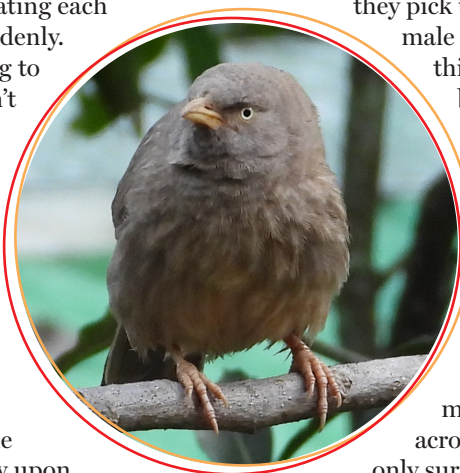
groups are called Seven Sisters in English. As some stealth army commandos they help farmers combat all the notorious pests by feeding upon them—like gram pod borers, grasshoppers, locusts, crickets and their larvae. Hence, rather than being just babblers, when in action, these birds protect us from heavy crops losses.

Further, not just their diet but their appearance also proves to be helpful for our agro-ecosystem. For instance, their dull brown-greyish plumage perfectly camouflages them with the soil where they pick up insects and grains. Both the male and female partners display this identical dress. Their yellow bill, pale-cream eyes, rounded wings, and long tail are other notable features which blend them with their terrestrial background.

In fact, the babblers remain low-flight birds and prefer hopping because their flight is weak. That is also partly why they are non-migratory; but are, however, found across the Indian Subcontinent. It is only surprising why they are categorised as 'jungle' birds when they are well-adapted to our cities and villages.

Interestingly, these socialites often fall prey to brood parasitism (laying one's eggs in another bird's nest) by Common Hawk Cuckoo and Pied Crested Cuckoo. No wonder why these Jungle Blabbers remain our true angry birds!

*The author is an amateur ornithologist and closely follows the avian world.*







A passionate movie buff and avid videographer narrates his journey through the reels on the importance of films in spreading environmental awareness.

**Midhun Vijayan**

Growing up in Perumannur, a small village in Kerala, my childhood was all about ploughing fields, playful cows and calves, and a big pond where I learnt swimming. I was so close to nature that it never occurred to me if the environment—with all its greenery, birds, trees, and grass—can ever be distinctively separate from us. My training, among the lush green coconut and rice fields, confirmed to me that the nature is not just a part of our life but it is our life indeed.

So, when I first read the famous speech by Chief Seattle, the Red Indian tribal leader, in my Literature reader, I didn't take it seriously. The Chief winced in agony about, "...how can you buy or sell the sky? The land? The idea is strange to us..." I assumed that this was some different world that he was referring to and about which

I won't have to worry. But almost 20 years later, when my father's farm was partitioned and the cowshed turned into a storeroom; I slowly began comprehending the alarm raised by the Chief.

I still remember watching *The Lion King*, the first movie that made me introspect about the nature around us. Ironically, its storyline had nothing to do with the environment in particular. But its song *Circle of Life* left me pondering upon the interconnectedness of diverse species in the larger web of life. How, for example, does a graceful deer and a roaring lion—two rival species—live within the same forest premises and in harmony with nature?

A Malayalam short story by Vaikom Muhammad Basheer, translated as *The Rightful Inheritors of the Earth*, again reminded me of this co-dependence of wildlife. So did the novels





and poems of Wendell Berry, an American writer who appositely concluded, “The Earth is what we all have in common.” In spite of this nature-appreciation through books, films, and my upbringing; I was never peculiarly aware of the threats facing our planet.

A stark consciousness of the apocalyptic impact of climate change came from the lovely animated movie *Ice Age: The Meltdown*. Its plot was about the evolving relationship between *Manny*, an insecure mammoth, and *Sid*, an idiosyncratic sloth. But it was the movie’s subtext which highlighted the concerns about melting ice sheets, sea-level rise, and species’ extinction. Plus, the fact that *Manny* and *Sid* were already extinct due to an ancient climatic shift in the earth’s environment left me with a painful poetic reminder of the need to curb global warming.

*Happy Feet*, on a similar note, accurately personalised the threat posed by rising temperatures and their detrimental impact on the

Polar Regions. It showed how the incredible penguins and their way of life is on the verge of extinction due to many nasty human interventions. Carbon emissions, overfishing, plastic pollution, habitat loss, and territorial trespassing are some of them. Nonetheless, *Mumble*, the movie’s protagonist, successfully brought penguins and humans together in the climax to establish the possibility of a harmonious coexistence amongst us. Well deserved, the movie won an Academy Award for the Best Animated Feature in 2006.



Not only have such movies alerted me about the ongoing climate crisis in far off regions, they have also sensitised me to my immediate surroundings. As a child I fondly remember the *Passer domesticus*, a special house sparrow, which regularly visited my window. Its tiny beak and light-brown cover were nowhere to be noticed as more houses mushroomed and my village became densely populated. I could relate my concern with the movie *Over the Hedge*, which summarised the conflict between expanding human settlements and perishing local ecologies. It displayed how the aggressive growth of housing colonies enforced deforestation and caused forest encroachment.

This animated film makes us aware of how we, humans, are claiming and guarding new ‘territories’ after displacing many native species from their natural habitat.

The Oscar-winning *Avatar* is a perfect portrayal of the human desire to control, command, and rule over the entire living world.





# Cover Story



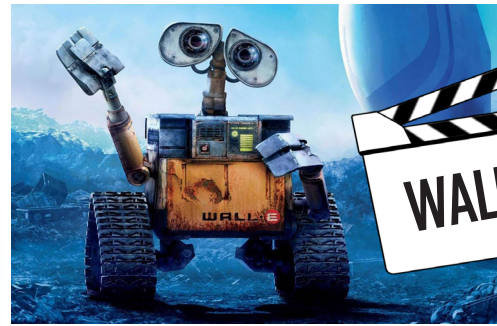
The ultimate result of our prolonged exploitation is the irreparable destruction of the animal and plant kingdom, which the movie's director

artistically captures. There is also

a possibility that the humans, in search of their voracious appetite for mineral reserves, might abandon their Mother Earth to its own sorrow and feast upon other planets.

In fact, *Wall-E* enigmatically projects a glimpse of one of our possible futures. This science-fiction forecasts the life of a

solitary garbage-cleaning robot on a wasteful, deserted, uninhabitable Earth in the year 2805. It supposes how the human race would transform its home planet



into a litter-strewn dump yard, outsource its duty to clean the Earth onto monotonous machines, and thanklessly migrate elsewhere in the universe. The script draws our attention towards the astonishing erosion of human values and the dire fate of our existing biodiversity. Yet its optimistic storytelling maintains our hope when each time the little robot tries to save a last surviving sapling.

The NETFLIX series *Our Planet* is also one such testimony of hope, which encapsulates the most spellbinding and divine moments of our nature at its best. Its every episode documents a different ecosystem and encaptivates the beauty and stunningness of its inhabitant creatures. As it narrates their journey of survival on Earth, we

are only left with abundant gratitude for all that we are blessed with by nature.

As an environmental filmmaker, when I look at the new generation of young environmentalists like you, I am similarly hopeful. Even though we have messed up with nature, I believe, it's not too late. Humans are the most intelligent species on our planet and it's time, we put our money where our mouth is. With nuanced

filmmaking and motivational documentaries upcoming, movies will serve as a very effective medium of mass communication

and boost environmental awareness.

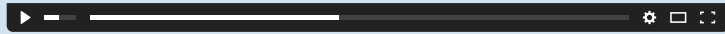
So, let's become a responsible audience and recall the words of the famous Stephen Hawking: "However bad life may seem, there is always something you can do and succeed at. While there's life, there is hope."

*The author is a Video Journalist, Multimedia team, Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi.*





# WATCH OUT!



An incredible list of some must-watch environment movies and series—a perfect visual treat for your summer vacations!

Midhun Vijayan

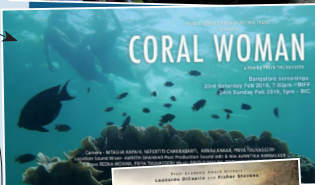
**THE LORAX:** In a treeless world, a 12-year-old boy is looking to impress a girl by searching for a tree. But, for that, he is required to know the story of Lorax, a charming creature.

**OKJA:** The fight of young Mija to rescue Okja, a massive animal and an even bigger friend, from a multinational conglomerate, Mirando Corporation.

**CORAL WOMAN:** A homemaker Uma Mani falls in love with corals. But soon her experiences underwater expose her to the realities of climate change, its impact on corals, and the urgency to protect them.

**BEFORE THE FLOOD:** Actor Leonardo DiCaprio meets world leaders, scientists, and activists to discuss the dangers of climate change and their possible solutions.

**CHASING CORAL:** Divers, photographers, and scientists set out on a voyage to investigate why the coral reefs are dying and what are the underwater mysteries yet to be revealed.



**JALPARI: THE DESERT MERMAID:** The young and free-spirited Shreya observes that her native village has many secrets. Along with her brother, she ventures on a quest where a dull place bereft of water converts into a land of enchantment.



**OUR PLANET:** An extraordinary documentary series on our planet's natural beauty, examining how climate change impacts every living creature.

**OVER THE HEDGE:** When some animals discover a housing development group encroaching upon their forestland, they meet RJ, a crafty raccoon. He fools them into finding food for him from Suburbia.

**THE WORLD'S MOST FAMOUS TIGER:** In her 19 years, Machli defended her cubs from male tigers, attacked crocodiles, and managed to survive with a single eye. Her fierce determination and distinctive appearance are legendary.

**AVATAR:** A story of Pandora and its people who fight against the imperialistic invasion of human beings on their land.





# OIL

THE RISE OF THE OIL PRICES

# WARS

Scientists believe that we must urgently slash the exploitation of oil, gas, and coal, and reduce our consumption of fossil fuels. But as the world is reeling from fuel price spikes, the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine has laid threadbare how nations are still extraordinarily dependent on fossil fuels. Governments are struggling to gather supplies precisely when experts are warning about the irrevocable damages done by fuel emissions to our planet.