

TO SAVE A KING

On October 25, 2018, my friend Dr. Shilpa Penhayade came across a tiny bundle of feathers. A security guard had saved the resplendent Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher from stray dogs and crows at the District Hospital at Mapusa, Goa... **TEXT BY SAVIO FONSECA & PHOTOS BY AIDEN FONSECA**

We consulted a vet with experience in avian medicine. He suspected neurological trauma – the possible diagnosis was brain damage...

Our first feeding started at 2 p.m. but the bird was not keen. We continued to try feeding it. Stress is a major killer of rescued birds and every moment of physical handling by humans depletes their energy. But the fact that our bird had survived the first twelve hours after the incident was comforting.

GOOD NEWS A second vet visit confirmed that the treatment was working and there was a marked improvement, making it fit for release – 48 hours after being found. We selected Socorro Plateau in a deep-forested gorge that had a rocky stream and a small natural dam. The dam and stream had significant fish diversity. The forest around was dense with many alternative stream sites. At 10 a.m. the next day, we released it near the forest pool. It flew to a nearby tree branch and hid behind large leaves. This confirmed that its earlier symptoms of neuro trauma were well behind it!

THE KING & I I guess I had become attached to the bird and went back to the spot to check. I was half expecting to see feathers scattered on the forest floor. I searched around in silence. I went around the pool and waded downstream to the other pools where the vegetation was thick and the waters were rocky, deep and inaccessible. I waited and watched – there was plenty of life buzzing around – but no King.

A TEAM EFFORT! The entire rescue had been a team effort. Dr. Penhayade for being quick to call for help, Aniza Fonseca for the feeding and assistance, Aiden Fonseca for the photographs, Stray Assist and team for the vet support, and Anne Kettringham and others for the guidance on bringing back the Little King!



KINGFISHERS CRASHING INTO WINDOW PANES

has been a rather common occurrence around Goa. I had heard of five incidents in three years and this seemed to be yet another. We immediately put the bird through our time-tested method for minimising stress – a sprinkle of cold water and inside a dark box for six hours. This almost always works as birds are resilient and survive most ordeals with a few hours of rest and isolation.



Dejected at not finding it, I began to trudge back – until I heard a splash behind me! I waited, but found no movement. As I turned to leave again, another splash! I looked back and to my delight... it was the King with a fish in its bill. The rascal gulped it and then bobbed its head looking into the water for more.

SWEET RELIEF! How did I know it was our King – its breast was discoloured by the dirty brown cocktail of fish juice, blood and Vitamin B12 that we had fed it! The pleasure was overwhelming. I just collapsed on the nearest rock while the water rushed over my feet and a satisfaction swept over me amidst the whispering leaves and swaying branches. It was an ordeal that ended happily for the feathered denizen – and all of us who were involved in its rescue. 🐦



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