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## Happy herping

- [Sanjay Sondhi](#)



Rescued: The Himalayan Paa Frog. Photo: Sanjay Sondhi

*A night hunt for the Himalayan Paa frog turned out to be exciting as well as rewarding.*

A few weeks ago, I was invited to spend a few days in the jungles with students attending the School of Herpetology. Herpetology is a branch of zoology that deals with the study of amphibians and reptiles. The School of Herpetology is a two-week course for post-graduate students, held in different regions of India, annually. This year, it was the turn of the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun, to host it. As I live in Doon, it was fun for me to join the participants for a few sessions of “herping”.

“Herping” is slang meaning a search for frogs, snakes and lizards!

## Out in the wild

My love for the natural world causes me to spend as much time as I can, to look at the wonderful creatures in the wild. An opportunity to look for Himalayan “herps” was one I could not miss!

The field camp for the School was being held at Dhanaulti, a quaint village, 30 kilometers from Mussoorie. In recent times, Dhanaulti has developed as a hub for tourists from Mussoorie, and this has led to significant local disturbances in the habitat. As I was familiar with the place, I offered to take the participants for a night walk. We were searching for frogs. I knew of a relatively undisturbed Himalayan stream, called the Bhairon *nala*. From a previous visit to the stream, I knew that we should find a large frog called the Stolickza’s Frog (*Nanorana vicina*). This species is also sometimes called the Himalayan Paa Frog. The word “Paa” has its origin in the Nepalese word *Paha*, which means edible frog!

The Himalayan Paa Frog normally lives above 2,000 meters in the Himalayas, in small streams and freshwater habitats. It has been seen all the way up to 4,000 meters in the Himalayas, leaving me wondering about how this cold-blooded creature can manage in freezing temperatures! That night, we spotted many tadpoles in the Bhairon *nala*. And, after a painstaking, long search using our torch lights, we finally managed to find a couple of Paa frogs. They were spotted sitting patiently under a rocky outcrop in the stream, in hope of an insect or two. Instead, they got a large group of excited humans! The frogs promptly dived into the water, disappearing under the rocks, and were lost to sight!

Searching for the frogs at night had not been easy.

The next day, our nocturnal efforts were put into perspective, when we encountered a Paa frog, in a large water tank, in broad daylight. One of the students waded into the tank to catch the frog. How the frog got into the tank remains a mystery, but it was obviously stuck there, and had no hope of finding a mate or getting back to its natural habitat. A discussion followed on whether we should interfere with the natural world. I am always for letting the natural world be, with minimal intervention from humans however well intentioned. The students, however, wanted to rescue the frog and return it to its natural habitat. Eventually, they had their way, as there was no way that the frog could continue its life cycle in an isolated water tank, well away from its brethren, in the stream. I do hope the Himalayan Paa Frog had a happy relocated life!

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