

GOOD EARTH

Baby's day out

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Falling out of its nest, the baby squirrel had no idea how it could get back.

PHOTO: HARSHAD KARANDIKAR.



OUT OF THE NEST: It's a strange world out there!

I was busy shooting pictures of an interesting gecko, when I heard a `plop' behind me. My friend and I turned around to investigate, and found two tiny squirrel eyes looking intently at us, wondering at the rather dramatic change in scenery.

After getting a few shots of the gecko for identification, we turned our attention to the squirrel. It was a juvenile, with all the colouration of an adult, without the trademark bushy tail. In its place was a skinny one, which made it amply clear that despite its cute looks, it belonged to the rodent family. The squirrel, understandably, was quite afraid of us, and it tried its best to burrow out of sight. After a while it calmed down a bit and decided that we were not going to harm it, after all.

Reunion

It looked quite happy and fine and was in a playful mood, but its rightful place was its nest, which we had to find. The little fellow's mom had decided that the gap between the tin roof and the walls of a ruined church was a fine little place to raise her brood, what with the tin providing

sufficient heating during the cold winter days. This roof, however, was a good 15 feet above the ground, with a flat rock wall leading up to it. Our little fellow didn't yet have the climbing skills of the adults of his species, and our attempts to make him climb the wall were quite unsuccessful.

Then, I had an idea. I took out my tripod, elongated it as much as I could and coaxed him on to the top, and clambered up the wall a few feet. Holding the tripod in one hand, I raised it, and realised happily that it was of perfect height. The little fellow still had no clue about what was going on, and peered down, frightened, from the top. It refused, despite being inches from its nest, to leap across into it. With one hand holding on to the wall, to ensure that I didn't land unceremoniously on to mother earth, I swung the tripod so that it hit the rocky wall with a sharp blow, taking care that the squirrel didn't get hurt in the process. Jolted out of what had begun to look like a nice enough perch, the young squirrel took a smart leap and went straight where we had intended it to - its nest.

The sweet sounds of a squirrel reunion were music to my ears, as I tried to clean off centuries of dust, which was transferred from the church walls to my clothes, packed up my tripod, and ambled off.

What can I do?

Locate animal orphanages and rescue centres in your city, and report injured birds and animals to them as soon as possible. You could also make a list of these centres and distribute them in your locality, to increase awareness.

In collaboration with Kalpavriksh Environmental Action Group