

# The City Forest

**C**hattur, the two year old jackal, was very excited. Today was his first day in school. His twin-sister Chalaki, too, was going with him. Chattur and Chalaki lived with their parents, and their den was surrounded by lush green forest comprising mostly Kikkar trees.

Their school was a clearing under the banyan tree located near the Bistadari Monument, a hunting lodge during the Mughul times. Their teacher Spotty, a wise spotted owl, lived in a hole in the banyan tree.

Soon Chalaki and Chattur reached the school and found their seats. Other students of their class also joined them. They all lived in the forest along the Delhi Ridge. Suddenly there was a flutter of wings and their teacher came down from his hole and sat on a high pedestal in front of them.

"Good morning, children! I am spotty, your teacher," he introduced himself to the students. "Well, children, let's have a quick round of introduction, one by one." Nila was the first one to start, "I am Nila, the nilgai".... "I am Kowha, the crow"... "I am Chalaki, the jackal".... "I am Totaram, the rose ringed parakeet"... "I am Pricky, the porcupine"... "I am Tooktok, the barbet"... "I am Chattur, the jackal"... "I am Sona, the golden oriole"... "I am Koel"... "I am Chintu, the rhesus macaque"... "I am Morni, the peahen"... "I am Gilheriy, the squirrel"... "I am Slimy, the rat snake"... "I am Nevla, the mongoose".

"Thank you, children. The first lesson you must learn is about your own home," informed Spotty.

Koel looked at Morni and whispered, "Don't we know our homes?" "I thought school was fun and game. But this is getting a bit boring."

Morni was a restless child and she was looking for the first opportunity to slip away from the class. She was happy that she found someone like Koel who was equally impatient. "I'm so happy we're in the same class," said

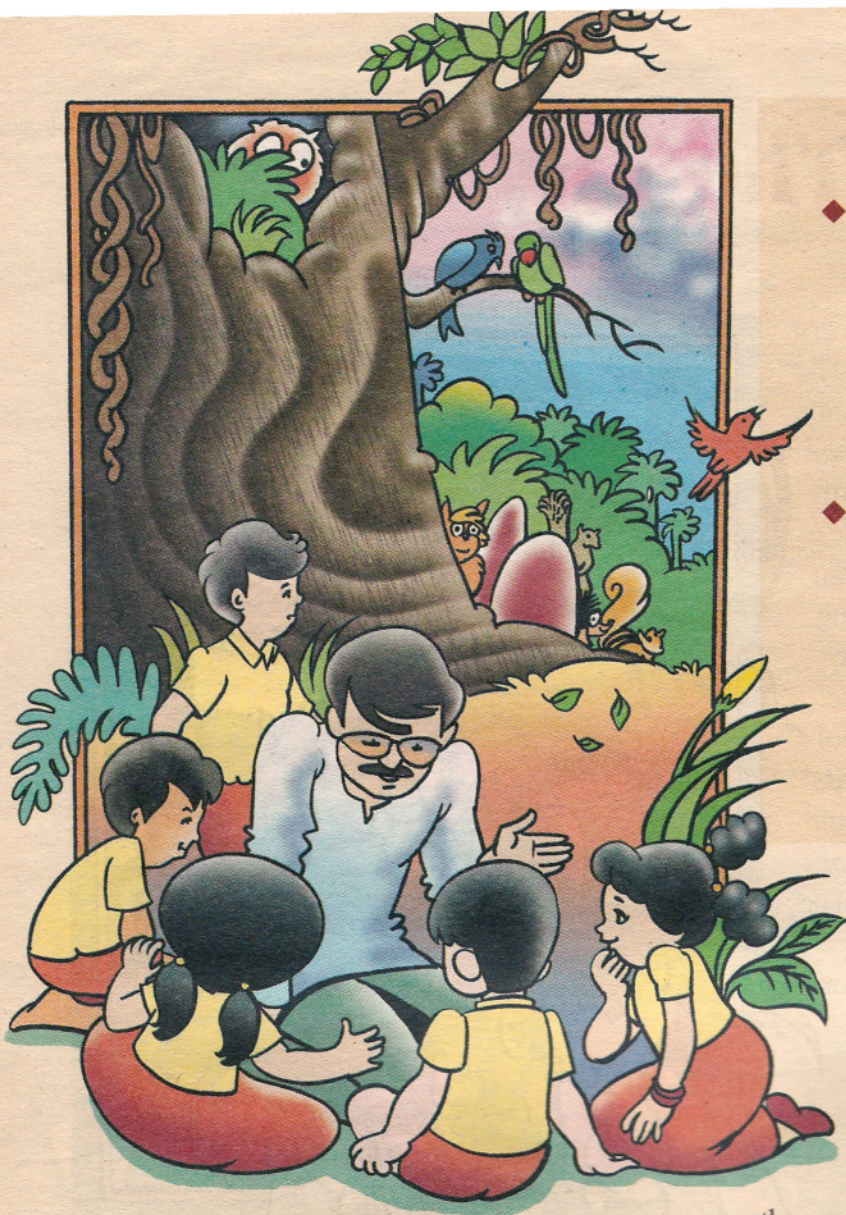


Koel. "Let's wait and hear what this old man has to say. If it is good for nothing, then we'll slowly slip away."

"Children! Do you know that we all live in Delhi Ridge?" informed Spotty. In one chorus, all the students said, "Delhi Ridge? What is it?"

"Delhi Ridge is part of the Aravallis, which are the oldest mountain range in India, originating in Gujarat and culminating in Delhi," informed Spotty. "Records show that in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Emperor Feroz Shah Tuglaq afforested the Delhi Ridge and during the British rule, the Britishers planted around 3,000 Neem and





Babool trees. “Due to exhaustive development, the Ridge has now been reduced to patches. Today, the total area of the Ridge is approximately 7,728 hectares and it has been divided into four zones—the Northern Ridge, the Central Ridge called Dhaula Kuan, the Southern Central Ridge called Vasant Kunj and the Southern Ridge which is the Asola Wild Life Sanctuary. These four parts are surrounded by concrete jungles where human beings live,” said Spotty.

It was Totaram’s turn to speak. “Sir! Humans are crazy, they not only live in concrete jungles but use so many vehicles which are so noisy and let out so much smoke.”

“But in the Ridge, you cannot hear their blaring horns. Do you know why?” asked Spotty.

## The Delhi Ridge

- ◆ *The Gazetteer of Delhi* (1976) has listed 30 species of mammals, roughly 200 species of birds, 14 species of reptiles, 20 species of amphibians and about 200 species of butterflies from Delhi. Most of these are found in Delhi Ridge.
- ◆ Delhi Ridge has played a historical role, too. Even today, a number of monuments of historical importance lay nestled in various parts of the Ridge and includes the Flagstaff Tower, Chauburji-Masjid, Kushk-i-shikar (Pir-Ghaib), Ajitgarh or Mutiny Memorial, and Bhuli Bhatiyari-Ka-Mahal.

“Sir, I’ve heard from my father that the trees around us act as sound insulators and keep the noise away,” said Chalaki.

“Very good!” exclaimed Spotty. “Not only do they act as sound insulators, but help in keeping the temperature low and acts as a barrier to dust storms,” added Spotty.

Suddenly Totaram cried loudly and flew to the nearest tree. Seeing him others, too, ran helter skelter and hid behind trees, bushes and rocks. Spotty was totally surprised and taken back by the commotion. In a few minutes he heard some noises. As he listened carefully, he guessed that they were of human beings and they were coming towards their school. He, too, quietly flew and sat near his hole.

In a few minutes, a young man and some school kids came and sat under the banyan tree. Spotty had seen the young man before and knew that he was Nayan, a regular visitor to the Ridge.

Nayan addressed the children. “Friends, let’s sit here for some time. Can you see this shrub?” he said pointing to a small plant. “This is *Adusa* or *Athathoda vasica*. It has medicinal properties and is used for making cough syrup. There are many such plants in the Ridge which



have some economic value or other.” When Nayan was talking to the children, the young animals were also listening to him from their hiding places.

“In this Nature walk today, you’ve seen a number of plants and birds,” Nayan continued. “But the sad part is that if we don’t save the Delhi Ridge, all this will be lost for ever. These trees and plants around you are not only part of a forest, but they act as a sponge and absorb all the water during the monsoon.

“Later, during the lean period they slowly recharge the water bodies in the Ridge. These water bodies not only provide water to the Ridge but recharge the ground water table which enables us to get water throughout the year,” said Nayan. “Everything in nature is interlinked and man is part of this link. If one of the links breaks, the entire web will collapse, so we will,” concluded Nayan. After sometime Nayan and the children got up and continued their walk.

Slowly, all the animal students gathered around Spotty, who had by then returned to his pedestal.

“Sir, we heard Nayan talking about these forests and saving it. Can you please tell us more about it,” asked Pricky.

“You see, the Delhi Ridge is on prime land and a few

selfish human beings have always eyed it for development,” said Spotty.

“The forest you see today has survived because of long battles fought by a few concerned citizens. Many years ago, a group of college students got together to save the Delhi Ridge forest from encroachments and destruction. During one of the struggles,” Spotty continued, “these well-wishers felt that if the Delhi Ridge has to be saved, then it should get some protection and they took up the matter with various authorities, including the Supreme Court of India. Finally, in 1996, the Delhi Ridge was declared a reserved forest. Today, we must thank our human friends for saving our homes,” concluded Spotty.

It was already late in the afternoon and time for school to close. As the students were leaving for their homes, Koel looked at Morni and said, “School is not just fun and games, but a learning centre. I’m glad that I stayed till the end and I look forward to the lessons tomorrow.” Morni could not help but agree with her before flying off home.

**- By Radha Kamat**

***Courtesy: Kalpavriksh and the National  
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