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Ritish Suri [00:00:10] Well it's the largest we've been staying here at this spot for about 15 years now. And think the most classic is of course this whole climate change issue. You know what we've noticed is how the pattern in terms of weather is just completely going haywire. Just for this year for instance we've never been, we've just had one span of winter rain and much much later than how you know what it usually would be in the normal years. So just falling sort of levels in the streams, the rivers going down, weather patterns changing so I guide wildlife and boating trips. That's really what my profession is and work wise you just see this year. We had a really nice trip in December which would normally fetch that the circuit that we did would normally you know get us a fabulous species almost about we could touch about 300 species this year. We were struggling. This is just before this rain so this is December and we were struggling for buds.

Ritish Suri [00:01:07] We were struggling which again really it's just the fact that it was just so dry you could be we were we were camping out in a really high altitude meadow at about twenty-seven hundred meters and then in the day this is December you could be in a T-shirt you know the nights are colder but normally if we would go that in December you probably get some of the snow. There was nothing it was dry completely. So those kind of changes is that is what we really observed in the times that we've been here.

Ritish Suri [00:01:38] So the other so you know there's a variety of threats that we look at when we when we sort of speak of.

Ritish Suri [00:01:43] Just I could I could speak pretty well for this area.

Ritish Suri [00:01:46] I've seen this over the years and this is also a protected area. It's it's at a level it's the top level sort of protection that you can get but that only happens in that in that park. You know anything around that area gets degraded every year and you see it it's the pressure of the people staying there and then with that comes things like you know mining the rivers picking up the stone need for wood. So the forests get sort of fairly empty at some bits. So it's essentially essentially largely it's it's what I want you know what we would have done is loss of habitat largely. So even so even if you protect the area that we are trying to which is you know even if you do well it's because Corbett Park but over the years has done well and has had its sort of number of species or number of animals go up. You know what's next? Eventually, they start coming out and then then they come out of this conflict and it gets worse and worse over the years just because the corridors get jammed it's people building it kind of building that is and all of that. So it's essentially I would say it's just loss of habitat. So you'll have pools of these protected areas but no it has to move to your management of animals is going to get very intense at some point might only get to the levels of you know you're managing a live zoo. But what you what you need to do is especially for a park like Corbett you've got a lot of corridors that aren't you know you've seen it you've seen it as you've come along the villages are scattered you know they're not some areas clustered.

Ritish Suri [00:03:10] But a lot of the other ones are scattered really well in lots of sort of pockets in the middle of really nice forest and you feel what you really need I would say you know the need is to sort of definitely protect you know that that those corridors or enhance that space for animals if you would. Now that's the big fight right now.

Ritish Suri [00:03:34] So tourism for us again if tourism done well you know being in proper regulation with proper training is of course. I think it's it's it's very positive. It's a

great tool for conservation it assists in a lot of ways it gets you the right attention you want it gets you the right kind of people but as it goes overboard in some some places you will not do that as it gets overboard it becomes it's then it goes into a complete you know haywire situation and then to control that back becomes difficult because you've you know you've let it out and the money is spinning. And so I mean some of the popular parks even I would say it is Corbett and it is now at a stage where it's really really you know it is definitely overrun. So I said the park keeps safe you know within it because there's a carrying capacity they work with. There's only a limited number of people that can go in. So insides are fine but when you look at the outside that's where it gets affected majorly you know and that can be.

Ritish Suri [00:04:26] That's the big ticket. That's a big challenge. Sorry about that.

James Thull [00:04:30] No no. No, it's fine.

Ritish Suri [00:04:31] But that's a big challenge. So. So that said if you if you don't regulate it at the right time it completely falls over and then to try and pull it back is difficult because you've got you've seen it you've got you've got that that whole row of lodges you know.

Ritish Suri [00:04:44] You know call that Corbett National Park. No. But for a lot of people to come to Corbett National Park that's what they experience and then limited number of Jeeps to go inside. A Lot of them can't even have that experience anymore it's not the finest experience in a lot in a lot of ways.

Ritish Suri [00:05:01] And it got to just sort of you know I don't think national parks are meant for full volume.

Ritish Suri [00:05:05] You know they're not meant to cater to 400 people in a group together. They are just not.. Your experience it will never be good enough so it's really how you how you sort of please and say what kind of people do you really want to get to an area. And if that if that sort of you know if you can if you can gather that right then it obviously falls into a completely different angle and then comes in the pollution then comes in the pressure. So what we'd like for us we've noticed when you first came into this area there must have been about maybe 20 lodges. Now we're talking about over 150 lodges. This is, what, a span of 10 12 years but what comes with that is the killer. You've got a lodge right behind us in this in this part. And they had the sewage that runs through into the stream. That's the same stream we went down in fact some of the Village People drink that water without even knowing what's coming from here. So just stuff is you know this is just unregulated you know 40 rooms in a small plot and it's completely not wildlife at all it's just the usual party scene. They don't worry about this image they just want to find that easy easy way out. And so lots lots of these kind of examples you know. So it does bring in of course it does get to the whole, it's just basically detrimental to the park more than you know. Gaining anything from them. Economically of course, yes, everyone makes them money. And it's happy but it's short term. You know we've had about four years back there was a PI filed against against tiger reserves and there was there's been serious debt there that shut down all the parks for about four months. It had been an off season so people didn't feel the impact and then now there's you know they're fighting it in the courts but eventually will lead to tightening of nooses for everybody around you know you'll have more limited areas you lose access to really some some of the finest places to go and visit and things like that.

Ritish Suri [00:07:01] So that definitely is.

Ritish Suri [00:07:04] Which is why you see you know what happens in the nature which is overpopulated with with tourism in some ways. It's really the greed that people just want to make the money. You know you get investors who come in and make the investment but they don't know what they want to do really. They don't understand the environment. They don't understand eco lodge. They don't have all of these consensually they just want to be another hotel 60 rooms outside a park doing the usual stuff.

Ritish Suri [00:07:28] The fix the fix really has to come from I guess at the policy making level that you know it has to come from, so now, like for example Corbett Park now has abandoned construction. On a five kilometre radius around the park. You can't do anymore.

Ritish Suri [00:07:45] You can't convert land into a commercial use which really means that you can't build a hotel anymore. But for me I'd say that this should have come 10 years back. So it's about that whole sort of vision and it has to come with us if it doesn't come from policy level which means the government it's really they've got to hit it right. And technically again what happens now is when you, when you meet up and you meet with forest officials or if you if you talk to them it's... They're, they're are more effective in that area which is the park. That said if you go inside the park it's perfect. It's not you know it's not in trouble as much as the outside itself. And as it come outside it's civil land. And it's not really their authority. So that has to come from a higher level. It has to come from a state level. But it says that hey that is you've got a certain kind of construction you've got to have leave corridors open. You cannot build whatever you want, you cannot, you know. A great thing in some of the other parks if you've noticed is that there's also a ratio that they work on that if you have X acreage of land there's only that much you can construct. You know you can't just go and build up the whole bloody area which is, which makes sense. I think the key will be to, to have, to have a complete policy change on it and to pay attention. Also I mean we you know what we don't consider it in a lot of these places is that these so there are the economic benefits that we talk about of course you know which are direct sometimes but but a lot of it just this whole issue of like water security like I would say Corbett Park is a sponge that would probably supply water all the way from here to Delhi which is about maybe 250 to 300 kilometers away you know. And of course as human nature it is we don't realize it. The water you know is getting warm and warmer. But we're okay with it right now. It's not boiling straight on and so we accept at some point. But but also to understand how it's going to affect everything else around it. Once you lose these sort of pristine habitats is going to be the concern. It's literally the water wars that you talk about you know that's the whole discussion about. So forget the tiger and forget you know the animals talk about just you know life in general which you said or do you know water is life completely there.

James Thull [00:09:51] So yeah, in The States, in Europe and several places they call it a green space ratio. So you have you can only build you have to have so much green space for every amount that you build to be so.

Ritish Suri [00:10:04] That, you've got that in the cities as well. But India is also you know it is it is definitely got the population pressure and it's definitely a you know a populated sort of overpopulated country. So sometimes we do have if you if you would technically see there would be there would be laws.

Ritish Suri [00:10:23] You know adopted and sort of on paper you know being there but the implementation is another story completely you know. It could go through a lot of classic you know levels of red tape, some corruption and all of that. So like like for example when we when we talk about just dams and the rivers and we talk about fish ladders I mean I'm sure on paper there will be provisions for it. But when it actually does it happen no one really cares because it's just that little sport that no one wants to know they're not going to be spoken about. It's you know the main thing is about the electricity or whatever you generate or the dams or But I'm sure technically on paper if you look at the if you look at the documents it probably will have a provision for it whether it happens or not is the big question.

Ritish Suri [00:11:13] Well definitely implementation is definitely a, it's definitely an issue for our country levels in a lot of in a lot of cases. Sure.

Ritish Suri [00:11:26] So in some ways that's that's that's probably your, I would say it's probably your easiest way to go about doing this, you know, isn't it? I mean in some ways of course there's the policy change and all of that will go through a lot of technical issues. But what's your basic it's about telling people you know where we're going wrong and integration will play a large part of it of a super large part.

Ritish Suri [00:11:49] But again that the trouble again is we might call ourselves a fully educated state, you know, a fully educated country but what does that actually mean?, You know because of education on papers would literally mean can you sign your name? But did you really learn anything or the quality of education is what we need to basically focus on and especially to do with with people who live around here you know villages here, kids here definitely should should be aware of what's going to happen, you know. And I don't, and I don't, as I said as people that we are we always look and say the grass is greener on the other side and all of that which is a choice that is to be left to them. Fair enough.

Ritish Suri [00:12:28] But just to understand an unhealthy thing and some of these kids would have seen it in their lifetime literally you know like to just the water levels and streams you know these kids have seen these streams flow bigger than this, for sure, and it's in their life that they're seeing this whole climate change and the weather pattern the farming in their own houses you know the crop going through a complete sort of change. So I mean definitely awareness is probably going to be your easiest and your biggest tool in some ways, you know, to put it across. And as we were talking earlier I mean I don't see I don't see it going wrong in a lot of ways. It might be a time consuming effort but definitely doesn't go wrong. I mean you know there's every word that whole tracker band thing we were talking about. I mean you go to Delhi to read to someone's house the kids actually telling the dad we don't want to bust any trackers. And the father brings it for the children you know it's it's that whole. It's a classic festivity anyway in the world you want your kids to enjoy it.

Ritish Suri [00:13:22] And it's surprising because it's it's it's the kid actually telling back you know to his parents that hey I don't want to do this anymore because that's what I really think is right. And that makes a change. So I think it's definitely definitely going to play a very big part. It's full of anything that's going to be a big one and it's not a hard thing to do. You know technically you don't have to. It's not super hard to do.

Ritish Suri [00:13:51] So I think I shouldn't speak for a lot of urban India because I don't really live there. So I don't know what to think that but generally everyone in the cities is

aware of it. I'm sure in rural? I don't even think it's an aware effect. You know it's not something that they've read about or had the exposure to at all in schools here.

Ritish Suri [00:14:13] It's, the usual education is here is probably going to be the usual, right. You know that's for school. That's your lesson. Don't ask questions don't deviate from what's happening. You know you're going to get yourself a degree and try and find a job. So these are probably not even mentioned. They don't even understand it. So at home yes they would understand changing weather patterns because of their agriculture and you know their parents or their farms getting affected. But why is it happening or how does it connect? I'm not sure they'll have a clue.

James Thull [00:14:49] It seems like as humans we often will. The knife will be coming to us but until it pokes the skin we don't pay attention.

Ritish Suri [00:14:56] That's what I'm saying, yeah, it's getting warmer but we don't realize it.

James Thull [00:15:00] Yeah, Yeah. I was at a layover on the way here in Beijing and and I understand what Beijing is going through it's it's you know they're building their their industry a lot like you know the West did and before that and I'm not blaming them but the air quality there was atrocious. I mean you couldn't, I mean, from me to that hut you couldn't see from the smog it was it was unbearable.

Ritish Suri [00:15:23] That's like Delhi.

James Thull [00:15:24] Yeah. Delhi. I mean it is pretty. Yeah. Delhi's pretty bad. Yeah it can be.

Ritish Suri [00:15:29] But that's something. So even looking at all these we don't realize it. Yeah. Yeah. So what do we do? We fight. We go and buy ourselves heaters as well because we can afford them now and that looks like the sun to us. And we sit by that heater all day or heat our houses up or whatever we might do.

Ritish Suri [00:15:42] But it's it's it's amazing how we don't think beyond that. As humans that we are I guess we don't really, We don't see that far.

James Thull [00:15:54] Yeah we tend to see what's in front of us here and that's about it.

Ritish Suri [00:15:57] You see your life. You see your life is getting better. You're making more money you can afford and bigger better bigger houses you can afford heating your car and air conditioning.

Ritish Suri [00:16:04] That's what matters to you now.

James Thull [00:16:06] We'll worry about tomorrow, tomorrow, that kind of thing.

Ritish Suri [00:16:09] Which is what we are against, even, because you know like Corbett is really close to Delhi and you get a lot of people visiting from places like Delhi. You know it's in the country so you obviously have a lot more and people can now afford holidays. You know they make the kind of money that they now want to spend on holidays and you see a large part of it, it's, it's again it's really I mean sometimes when you go inside the park and you look at the rubbish it's it's you know it sort of feels in seeing how anyone

when he's traveling in a jeep inside the park would flip anything out of his car looking at you know the surroundings there's nothing there. You know it's not only it looks like a rubbish bin that you sort of contribute to that one. But still every time there's a big weekend you go down in the street it's full of plastic. You pick up beer bottles. We just did some some days back, pick them up. It is, I mean you know it's just basic understanding. So my other thing is I did, it might take a few generations because even if these kids in the city are learning good things at school when they come back home is it the same? It's probably not you know. So they might say okay you know let's. Their school might teach them segregation and all of that. But when they come back home the mom is not practicing it because she's coming from another world. Right. So she is like hey you know it's not my world. I don't worry about this, I pay the guy to do it. That's the approach. Well, that approach has to turn and say hey it is my responsibility at some point at least I can segregate you know forget about paying people to do it for you.

Ritish Suri [00:17:36] So I would say we've noticed some bit of the population is getting better. And I'm talking about. And it's probably the effect that's come from you know on the television and you know other sort of Nat Geo shows and the Discovery Channel and all of that. And you know people are getting more aware but it's a small percentage.

Ritish Suri [00:17:53] The large percentage is still about that you know you bring the group back and they want to see where the swings are and they're like very surprised that there are no swings for the kids and you know what kind of a park is this? You explain to them what a national park is and what does it do. Yeah. So forget, forget you know trying to explain the whole water issue for them. They're not even understanding why, like we've had it is really funny just a meeting starting of the season with the hotel guys and one of the hotel managers put forward a question saying why can't we collar these tigers so it's easy for our guests to see them? And you will let you know why, this isn't, and you work here, you know it's like, you manage this hotel, man. You can't be asking this question. You've got to realize what's happening around you. So I don't I didn't have a big laugh, and just thinking about seeing what quality are we talking about?. I mean what is this quality? I mean what are we really gunning for?

Ritish Suri [00:18:49] It's all national parks that are only our only hope. I mean for a country like India.

Ritish Suri [00:18:55] Let's talk about just Corbett National Park. What is it? It's about 1300 square kilometers. Not a very large area compared to some of the parks that you all have. But this is it. Look around it for the next 200 kilometers and you won't see anything that's happening.

Ritish Suri [00:19:09] So this these are little, little sort of nurseries. You know if you've got to keep any of that save the tiger issues it's only going to happen here. But again the point is that you can't you obviously have to get the most recent, try and reconnect thoughts to each other because otherwise you're gonna have these boards and then you have this sport management issues about you know what's going to happen to this 1300 square kilometers which is not really much you're talking about 40 kilometers by 30 kilometers, you know it's not a large area it's not like we have this vast land but. But these are important.

Ritish Suri [00:19:44] These are this is what it's all about your sort of natural the wonders of the nature you know.

Ritish Suri [00:19:51] And again losing I mean we always talk about something the larger species. Sorry, the dogs are going crazy.

Ritish Suri [00:19:56] We're always talking about larger species you know other tigers and elephants but those are just excuses that you're using right to protect the whole chain down. It's not just about that because everything coexists like anywhere in the world and one day later basically water level and all of that you know little happenings all around the place. So important ways I think massively important to any country. Yeah natural resources to any country but as it might be a tiger reserve that the tiger might be a good excuse.

Ritish Suri [00:20:29] But I guess you know truly it is about who is about drinking water in the next few years. How are you going to deal with that?

Ritish Suri [00:20:37] So definitely super important areas definitely have to be well defended. Well I think.

Ritish Suri [00:20:47] So. So I mean I think that I think the base of of it it is the base of a new conservation is the economics. You know if you can for us people like us really wild areas our people, are sort of, are years of work for us. Right. So it's the interest is is definitely higher in sort of you know trying to preserve these areas definitely higher though. So for me I've always regretted it even if it's been angling. I think if it does if the money's not flowing at some point the interest doesn't build.

Ritish Suri [00:21:25] So the economics have to be definitely involved in this. And if it's not only for me as you know coming to run business it's also for people who live around here.

Ritish Suri [00:21:33] If they were to derive a benefit of a certain kind from the region in any way.. It could be tourism it could be it could be conservation jobs, Forest Department, anything of that sort.

Ritish Suri [00:21:46] But you know there had to be a reason for them to sort of look forward and say OK I need to sort of maintain it, which is your, which is I would say which is your, which is sort of your short term gain on it that hey there's work available and I will get paid if I, you know, keep this alive. And in that of course your long term benefits that people don't realize a lot of times you know your water security or you know clean air and all that of course comes with it. But I would say economics definitely definitely is is trying to keep it alive.

Ritish Suri [00:22:23] Yes. So for us it's a little different because we also you know we chose a lifestyle to come and live here.

Ritish Suri [00:22:29] So for us it's one of the economics, like right now we have shut up places. So it's not like you know giving us any benefit but I think it's for us it's it's life now.

Ritish Suri [00:22:39] You know it's just the pleasure of living in a place like this that keeps it alive for us. But. But I mean definitely. You know for a lot of the people who are in the kind of what we do with them it's definitely a big big benefit to keep it alive for sure. Definitely.

Ritish Suri [00:23:04] As I said, for us, you know the change so for me it started out of school so there was a fair bit of interest personally for me to travel out to it as I guess I like it when I started out.

Ritish Suri [00:23:15] And then it was lucky that I could turn this into a profession for myself. It took a couple of years of of you know being around here learning learning my stuff here. But it done well for me. And now it's a lifestyle really. So for me right now if you say and it's not like I if I turn into it you know instantly for, for me right now it's I see the life. You know I see what it means to to to sort of life.

Ritish Suri [00:23:42] I just sort of see you know why why we should keep this alive. I see the reason for it which is why when you speak about this awareness or when we get some of our guests and their kids come up and you know when they made that connect you know and that understanding comes through it's a lot easier for us to talk about things or explain things. So for us and for me it just basically came gradually it wasn't you know of course as I said lucky to find work you know. Yeah I really enjoy the lifestyle here. So yeah.

Ritish Suri [00:24:18] There's lots of thoughts I'd like to share but sadly I think it's. I mean we've been, we've mentioned it but I think it's. I think there's very little of these kind of spots left. You know it's it's it's sort of we don't have much time on it but I think the I think it's important to do sort of definitely predict what we've got.

Ritish Suri [00:24:39] And it's only for the, for the generations to come and sort of enjoy what they've got more than you know all the benefits that they'll have from it anyway.

Ritish Suri [00:24:47] But yes I said it's it's it's that it's very fragmented. It's that these forests are very small pockets and if you can't do this and if you can't learn from other countries or what we talk about developed countries going through the whole phase. It'd be really sad to see this go as well.