

Obituary

Dr. A. J. T. Johnsingh (1945 – 2024)

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Dr. A. J. T. Johnsingh, a distinguished conservationist and wildlife biologist and a senior member of the Asian Elephant Specialist Group, IUCN SSC passed away this month, leaving behind a rich legacy of impact on the field of wildlife conservation in India and beyond. His relentless dedication and pioneering contributions have significantly shaped the discourse and practice of wildlife preservation.

Dr. Johnsingh's work is characterised in my view through three very unique characteristics. One is his being a polymath when it came to natural sciences. He studied the elephant for a while, before he settled on the wild dog or dhole for his doctoral studies and then went back to being an expert on elephant ecology, behaviour, and habitat conservation. He has conducted seminal pieces of research on the mountain goral, sambhar, gaur and tiger and has been very involved in the conservation of these species as well as the mahseer.

The second aspect of Johnsingh's work was his ability and penchant to walk India's wilds regularly and thoroughly. He would not be contented to drive through the forests, preferring to walk through them, to study the terrain, vegetation and animals that were at the focus of his study. He was meticulous in writing and in disseminating his texts to a wide set of conservationists and researchers and his finely documented words with exhortations to conserve what was left of India's natural wonders would constantly hit our email boxes. These walks of his were not restricted to India and he contributed very valuable to the conservation of Vietnam, Myanmar and Indonesia through several trips there.

The third aspect of his work was his being an exemplary, if tough, teacher. A mentor to many aspiring conservationists, Dr. Johnsingh was at home with a crowd of eager greenhorns around him while he interpreted nature as he walked. He was a taskmaster if one did not remember what he taught, or if one did not write enough about the field.

Dr. Johnsingh leaves behind a bereft community of elephant and other mammal scientists and conservationists and a pool of students who now no longer have his wisdom to rely on. However, his contribution to Indian ecology, documentation of natural history and conservation will never be forgotten. Rest in peace my friend and senior colleague, Dr. A. J. T. Johnsingh.

