

THE ONE WOMAN ARMY

THE PROTECTOR: Srilekha Venkat is a 27-year-old Chennai girl who quit Chartered Accountancy in order to study the man-animal conflict. She wants to understand why animals like the elephant and wild boars plunder crops. She also works to spread awareness about conservation - going house to house, teaching locals, freeing captive birds,



cleaning the forests and doing all of this alone! **HER STORY:** Srilekha aims to focus on common people to help wildlife conservation. She believes, "If there is one force in our country that can think, act immediately and make a huge lasting impact - it would be common people like you and me."

Srilekha's most promising ventures have been the forest cleaning drive, her regular visits to the villages and the freeing of captive birds. For the cleaning drive Srilekha assembled a bunch of working professionals who wanted to contribute but did not know how and asked them to play rag-pickers of the forest. During this drive, they managed to free the forest of 50-60 bags of garbage!

Srilekha regularly goes to the villages and



Garbage collected after half a day of forest cleaning

gives talks. She shows the villagers pictures of their own farm and asks them to recognise the birds in them. She says, "The kids are excellent. They are enthralled to see their own farm on the laptop. Often, many of them recognise species even I cannot recognise." One day, she along with the village kids landed up in the local market and bought 800-900 Munias. They then went to

the outskirts and set them free. Seeing them fly away to wilderness was a wonderful sight!

YAISTERS ACT: Go ahead and free some birds, but make sure they will survive in the wild. **SHRILEKHA'S TIPS:** "If you free lovebirds, they will not survive, but Munias, Finch, Robins, Flycatchers, will. Also, you must free them at the outskirts, or they will just get caught again."

Srilekha Venkat, Chennai, Tamil Nadu

The UN International Year of Forests celebrates "People for forests" - the role of people who help conserve our forests. Across the country, **Priyanka Talreja** and **Moeena Halim** found individuals who truly act upon the words "save the forest" - watch over them, protect them, grow them. ya! kicks off a year-long series on forests with their amazing, inspiring stories

Narendra Singh, Corbett, Uttarakhand



DUTY CALLS

THE PROTECTOR: Narendra Singh, Divisional Forest Officer, Uttarakhand, is in charge of the state's forest area, including the Corbett Tiger Reserve and the Rajaji National Park. His job is to protect the forest - from making sure there's enough water for the animals to drink to patrolling the area.

Be it poachers or people stealing seeds or flowers, no one is allowed to break the forest's rules. Not under Singh's

watch!

HIS STORY: In his 30 years with the Indian Forest Service, Singh has helped nab several wood smugglers and poachers. While in the Meerut division (forests of Hastinapur) Singh and his team managed to stop several trucks and smugglers trying to drive off with sheesham and sandalwood from the banks of the Ganges. At Corbett and Rajaji, he encounters poachers aplenty. "It is a very organised crime," he says.

"Professionals from Nepal, China and so on get hold of the locals to do the job for them. Almost every animal living in the area is in demand - tigers, four types of deer (sambar, spotted deer, hog and black buck), elephants, birds and so on," he clarifies. To deal with poachers, officials take preventive measures, including special intelligence information that keeps them updated about

the poachers' intentions. Poachers who are caught are punished according to the Indian Forests Act (1927) or the Wildlife Protection Act (1972). Singh's wish-list for the Year of the Forests includes, "well-equipped commandos as forest guards who can match up to the smugglers and poachers."



31 per cent of the earth's surface is covered with nearly 26 different types of forests. How and why should that matter to us? Together, we will explore this issue as we kick-off a year-long series to celebrate the UN International Year of Forests. Look for this logo throughout the year to peek into the exciting world of forests and participate in the celebrations.

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