

Captions:

BISHNOIS

Ecologists since the 15th century

A photographic essay by

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Photo 01 - During their main festivals, each Bishnoi family has to offer wheat or millet in order to feed gazelles, black antelopes, peacocks and pigeons living around the sacred temples. Since the 15th century they have shared their harvest as well as water with wildlife.



Photo 02 - The Bishnois – here represented by a priest, always dressed in orange – have been feeding, every morning and every evening, wild animals for over five centuries. Some deer are even handfed.



Photo 03 - Just after bottle feeding them milk, Danu Ram Bishnoi embraces two wild fawns like his own children. He saved them four days ago from a dog attack but couldn't save their mother.



Photo 04 - Rana Ram has planted 22 000 trees in last 38 years. Every morning and evening, he feeds wild gazelles and birds near his house in Akel Khori, a little village in the Thar Desert.



Photo 05 - Ganga Ram Bishnoi was murdered while trying to save a gazelle from poachers in 2000 and was buried near the gazelle he couldn't rescue. His family prays twice a week on his grave. In 2001, he was posthumously awarded the first Amrita Devi Bishnoi National Award for Wild Life Conservation by the President of India.



Photo 06 - Lalu Ram Bishnoi brings an orphan fawn near the gazelle herd to try to find a step mother. Adoptions do happen sometimes, but this is seldom.



Photo 07 - Rajender Bishnoi saved a gazelle fawn from dogs two days ago. He took it home and takes care of its broken leg. His nephews Vikram and Amandeep are regularly visiting.



Photo 08 - Vishudha Nand, a Bishnoi priest, takes care of a wounded peacock. A noise made him rush out of the temple, but he arrived too late: wild dogs had badly bitten the peacock and it died 20 minutes later.



Photo 09 - Bishnois waiting for the police near a dead gazelle, which was killed by poachers. In Rajasthan, wild gazelles are protected: 3 years in jail for a car accident, and more time for poaching.



Photo 10 - Bishnois families take care of orphan fawns. The gazelle becomes part of the family but will be sent back to the desert in a few months.



Photo 11 - Dilsukh Bishnoi (4 months) is on top form. His mother, Guddi Devi Bishnoi, like every Bishnoi woman since the 15th century, has got 30 days of rest after the birth, to take care of baby. It was the prophet's first rule in 1485 AD.



Photo 12 - A woman waters a tree in her courtyard near Abohar in Punjab. The courtyard and the walls are covered with cow mud and cleaned twice a day. The mud is refreshed twice a year.



Photo 13 - Khejarli temple's priest, Heera Nand Bishnoi, explains near a painting what happened here in 1730 AD when Amrita Devi and 362 Bishnois sacrificed themselves for trees. An artist is sculpting a stone fresco for the new temple still under construction.



Photo 14 - In the harsh desert, Hajari Ram plants a Khejari tree. From now on, he will share his own water with the tree up to two years. That's about the time it needs to grow old alone.



Photo 15 - Rana Ram Bishnoi, who planted over 22 000 trees, teaches his grandson, Manish, how to take care and water young trees.



Photo 16 - Bishnois allow deer onto their land for a snack. They share 10% of their harvest with wildlife, and consider deers and trees as members of their family that deserve love and protection.



Photo 17 - The night before Mukam festival begins, small havans (holy fires) are lit near the main marble temple, where their guru died and was buried in 1536 AD.



Photo 18 - Twice a year Mukam becomes a place of worship and socio-religious gatherings. Up to 500 000 pilgrims come to the place where their guru founded the community and died in 1536 AD.



Photo 19 - During Jamba festival, pilgrims take sand from the lower area to enlarge the pond and build huge sand dunes near the temple as their guru told them : "build dunes to break the wind".



Photo 20 - During Mukam festival, Bishnois takes sand from the lower area and build huge dunes near the temple as their guru told them: “build dunes to break the wind and save biodiversity”.



Photo 21 - For many years, Khamu Ram Bishnoi has been fighting against the plastic bag pollution that affects the holy dunes at Mukam, Bishnoi's place of birth. To honor the prophet, Bishnoi pilgrims build huge dunes near the temples, but for the last 15 years they have used plastic bags, which are then thrown away once used.



Photo 22 - Khamu Ram discovered the Parisian dustbin en 2008: Invited to a sustainable development forum in France, he discovered the Parisian public dustbin while visiting Paris with his friend, the photographer Franck Vogel. He decided to bring the idea home and to build the first Bishnoi dustbin.



Photo 23 - It is inside Jodhpur bazaar, during Franck Vogel's film shooting “Rajasthan, the soul of a prophet” (2010), that Khamu Ram supervised his first dustbin manufacturing, based on his sketches done in Parisian streets and Metro.



Photo 24 - Then he started a long journey trying to convince his community that collecting plastic should be part of the 29 Bishnoi principles.



Photo 25 - A used jute bag has replaced the plastic bag used for the Parisian dustbin. Khamu Ram also added a sticker explaining in Hindi what a dustbin is for and how to use it.