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In Memoriam

SUNJOY MONGA

(7 March 1962–28 May 2025)

• Naturalist • Conservationist • Author • Wildlife Photographer • Mentor



With deep sorrow and immense respect, we bid farewell to Sunjoy Monga, one of India's most influential naturalists and conservation storytellers. A man of vision, passion, and enduring curiosity, Sunjoy leaves behind a legacy that has not only enriched our understanding of nature but also inspired generations to protect it.

A Life Rooted in Wonder

Sunjoy's love for the natural world began early. He started birdwatching at the age of six, drawn to the rhythms of birdsong and the quiet mysteries of the wilderness. What began as a childhood passion blossomed into a lifetime of work that brought the beauty, urgency, and complexity of nature into the sphere of national conversation.

A Prolific Voice for Indian Wildlife

Across more than three decades, Sunjoy authored 20 works that continue to serve as vital resources for enthusiasts, students, and professionals alike. His books — *Wildlife Reserves of India* (2002), *Jungle! The Forests of India* (2017), *Birds of Mumbai Region* (2016), and *Flow: India Through Water* (2018) — beautifully married science and storytelling, ecology and emotion. His coffee table book *City Forest* took the reader on a journey through Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Mumbai — a forest very dear to his heart. He also contributed to *Lonely Planet: India* (13th ed.) with a column on birding in Mumbai. In fact, Sunjoy's name was synonymous with Mumbai's birdlife. No journalist would write a bird article without consulting him first.

A Communicator Across Mediums

A gifted wildlife photographer, Sunjoy won the second prize in the 1991 *BBC-British Gas International Photographer of the Year* competition. His photographs were widely used by institutions and agencies across India. He served as consultant and cameraman for Channel 4's documentary series *Wild India* and as the Indian consultant for Sir David Attenborough's BBC production, *The Trials of Life*. His ability to convey nature's drama through both visual and literary mediums made him a powerful conservation communicator.

Conservation Leadership & Public Service

At various stages in his life, Sunjoy was an Honorary Warden of Sanjay Gandhi National Park, a member of the Executive Committee of the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), and co-editor of its iconic magazine *Hornbill*. He was also the Associate Editor of *Sanctuary Asia* and *Cub* magazines, and a regular contributor to *Hindustan Times*, *Times of India*, *Mid-Day*, as well as Hindi and Marathi newspapers.

He was part of the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Environment Improvement Society and the Maharashtra Nature Park Society. He collaborated with WWF-India, CRY, and large corporate houses

and public sector organizations such as Godrej, Piramal, ONGC, USV, HSBC, Deutsche Bank, Nihilent, and Tata Chemicals. He was on the Tumbhi Advisory Panel, and when Prince Charles visited Mumbai, it was Sunjoy who guided him through the Vikhroli mangroves on behalf of Godrej.

Wings That Took Flight

In the early 1980's Sunjoy accompanied Rishad Naoroji to study the Crested Serpent-Eagle *Spilornis cheela* in the Rajpipla forest in Gujarat, one of early raptor studies in India, which resulted in a paper in the *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*. In 2005, Sunjoy founded the *India Bird Races*, now known as *Wings – The Nature Awareness Programme*, supported by HSBC since its inception. What began as a city-based birding event has now expanded to become one of India's largest citizen-led biodiversity movements, held in over 14 cities and several pan-state formats.

In 2007, he launched the *Young Rangers* programme, fostering environmental awareness among students from over 50 schools across Mumbai.

A Mentor, Guide, and Friend

Sunjoy was a mentor to hundreds of students across India – guiding them in natural sciences, writing, photography, and environmental leadership. He worked closely with former RBI Governor Dr Raghuram Rajan and served on advisory panels for Piramal, USV, and Godrej for many years.

His humility, clarity of thought, and boundless energy made him not just a mentor, but a lifelong inspiration to many.

A Man of Depth and Curiosity

Sunjoy's love for nature extended into his personal life. His collection of over 500 owl figurines from across the world reflected both his fascination with symbolism and his sense of whimsy. Each owl told a story, and collectively, they told his – of wisdom, mystery, and a love for the unusual and the beautiful.

Family, Courage & Legacy

In December 1990, Sunjoy married his companion for life, Jyoti and in September 2001, he became a proud father to Yuhina, whom he adored deeply.

In 2016, he was diagnosed with blood cancer, a battle he faced with quiet resilience. Even while undergoing treatment, he continued to teach, write, photograph, and inspire. His strength, love for his family, and commitment to his work never faltered. He remained, always, a student of nature – and a teacher to us all.

Farewell to a Force of Nature

Sunjoy Monga was more than a naturalist – he was a force of nature. A gentle disrupter. A lover of silence and song. A steward of the earth who made us stop, look, and truly see. Friends will remember his boundless enthusiasm and energy to spot and identify every bird, even pick out faint bird calls. Lately, his debilitating illness did not permit him to walk 100 m without stopping to rest but that never deterred him.

He leaves behind not only a body of work, but a movement – a million small awakenings in the hearts of those he touched. His presence will be felt in every rustling leaf, every dawn chorus, every child who picks up binoculars with wide-eyed wonder. He will be deeply missed. And eternally remembered.

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