

# Birds of prey find safe haven in arms of this city engineer

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**RAPTOR RESCUE** 25-year-old works with veterinary doctors and animal help groups to care for predatory birds with injuries to their wings or muscles

green  
heroes



AVIAN CARE

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**MUMBAI:** A teenaged Gavin Desouza would often spend his school vacations exploring the wildlife in Goa's scenic Nerul village. Under his uncle's watch, Desouza would rescue birds and snakes and spend countless afternoons staring at crocodiles in the beautiful Mandovi river.

It was this love for the wild that made Desouza, 25, work for the good of animals back home in Mumbai. Coupled with a keen interest in falconry, the ancient sport in which birds of prey are trained to hunt, Desouza began rescuing injured birds and rehabilitating them.

The Marol resident works alone after little financial assistance from his family and rescues between 15 and 20 birds of prey each month.

And with help from the Bombay Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (BSPCA) and a few veterinary doctors, he has now learnt to rehabilitate the birds at home.

"When I was growing up, I noticed that many people would release raptors without proper care. These birds feed on other animals and need time to recuperate from an injury before they can resume hunting. After reading extensively on falconry and speaking to a number of experts, I began spending a lot of time rescuing them," said Desouza.

He is pursuing a master's degree in computer science, and has to divide his time between studies and rescue work. He usu-



### BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Raptors or 'birds of prey' are birds that hunt their prey with the help of their good vision and sharp claws

However, raptors often fall ill after killing and eating poisoned prey such as rats and mice

Many raptors also end up injuring themselves and even get electrocuted on electricity grid lines and utility poles. Dehydration is another cause of sickness, especially during summer

Eagles, kites, buzzards, owls, shikra, vultures, falcons and true hawks are some of the common types of raptors that are found in the state

Spotted owlets, barn owls, black shouldered kites, white-eyed buzzards and shikras are raptors commonly found in Mumbai.

■ Gavin Desouza with the Eurasian Eagle Owl that he is currently nursing back to health. HT PHOTO

ally gets calls for raptor rescue from office buildings, housing societies and commercial establishments that have tall trees on their premises.

Presently, D'souza is tending to a Eurasian Eagle Owl that was rescued by the BSPCA. To help the bird recover faster, Desouza is building a flight pen for the owl at his uncle's farm in Karjat, where the bird can exercise its injured wings and build its muscles. "The flight pen will be made of GI pipes and plastic coated steel. It should help the owl."

According to Percy Avari, a vet who works with the BSPCA and teaches at Bombay Veterinary College, Desouza is doing a good job of caring for birds of prey, which are a difficult to handle. "Gavin has always sought help from experts when he is not able to treat birds with serious injuries to their wings or muscles. Most importantly, he dedicates a lot of time to these birds to help them eat while recovering and by providing them shelter that is quiet and dark, which is a necessity," said Dr Avari.

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GAVIN DESOUSA, bird rescuer