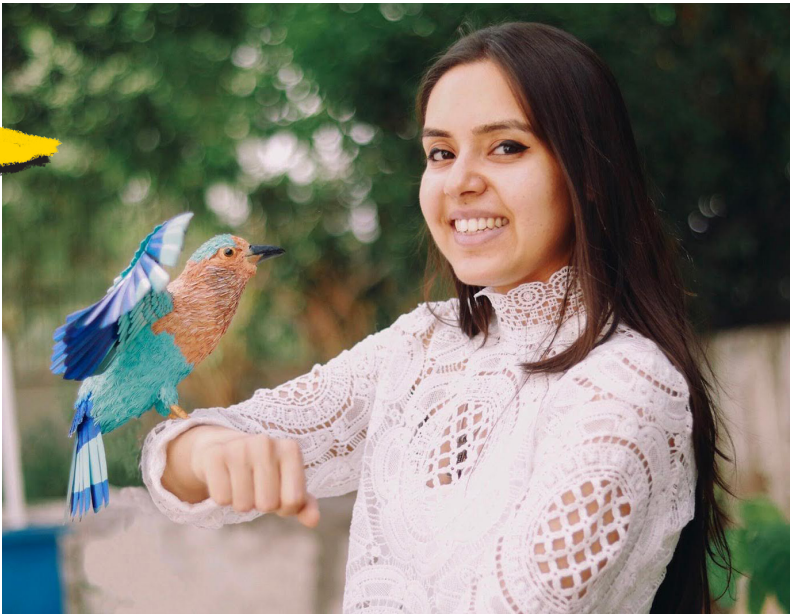


*Hi, I'm Niharika Rajput!
I'm a creative conservationist
and National Geographic
Explorer from India.*



Here I am with my sculpture of the Indian Roller bird. It lives in the forests and cities of my home country, India. Photo: Isha Thorat

Finding My Passions

I grew up in different places around India because my father was in the military. Military bases can be safe places for wildlife. They are safe because they protect the habitats of the animals that live around them. In my garden, I observed creatures like ladybirds, ladybugs, and fireflies. I also liked building sculptures of what I saw. One day I saw a White-Throated Kingfisher for the first time. It was so colorful. I was in awe.

Later, I moved to the city. I lost my connection with nature. Then, I renewed my love for birds after seeing a flock of Red-billed Blue Magpies. I wanted to combine my two loves: sculptures and birds. **I decided to sculpt birds!**



I started my company Paper Chirrup to sell my sculptures. Sometimes I donate my sculptures to schools and museums. I do this to teach others about nature. I take pictures of my sculptures to sell them online. I use the money I raise to host workshops and events. These events, like bird festivals, teach others about protecting nature. I work with scientists all over the world to study and protect creatures by making art.



I closely observed the Shola bird to make a realistic sculpture of it. You can see one of my sculptures in the photo above! Photo: Niharika Rajput



Shola birds live high up in the Shola Forest canopy. They also live down low in the grasslands. I am using binoculars to observe the Shola birds in the canopy. Photo: Tsetan Angmo

Asking Questions

One day my friend and fellow National Geographic Explorer, Dr. V.V. Robin, told me about the Shola birds.

“Shola” means evergreen! They live in the Western Ghats, a mountain range in India. Their habitat is in danger. Pine, Wattle and Eucalyptus plants have taken over. Humans are also cutting down trees. Both of these cause harm to the grasslands. These birds are struggling to find places to live. I asked myself, **how can my art help spread awareness about the Shola birds’ disappearing habitat?**

Being Observant

I wanted to create sculptures to help people learn more about Shola birds. To create realistic sculptures of them, I practiced using my observation skills. Observing the birds allows me to understand what they look like. It helps me notice their behaviors. I see what their relationship with other animals is like. I learn what habitats they live in. I’m always working to make my observation skills better with each new project I do.

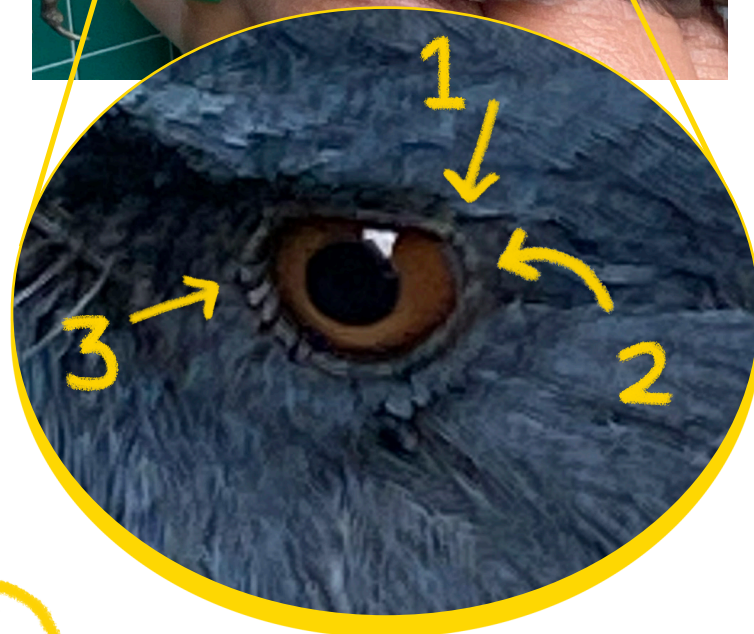
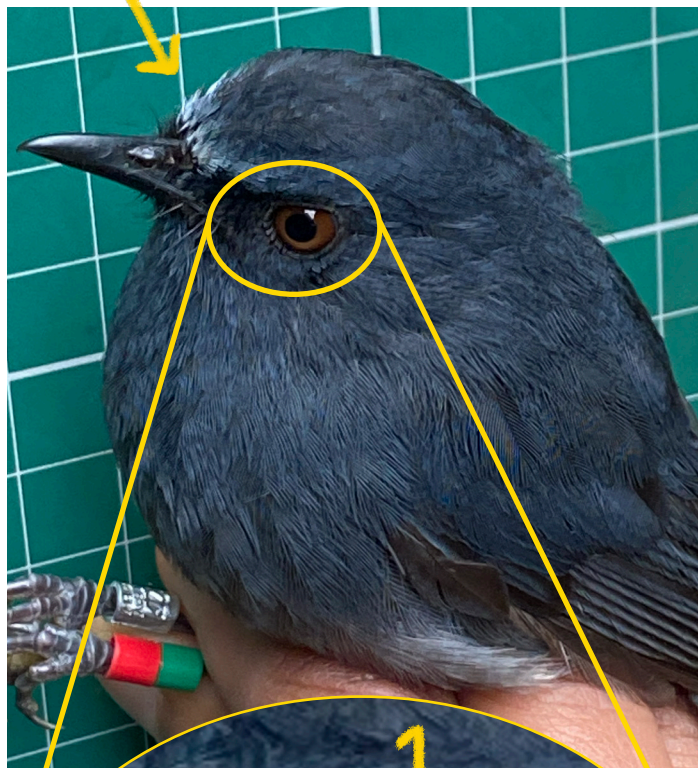
Dr. V.V. Robin and I spent time in the Bombay Shola Forest studying the Shola birds. Other researchers helped me safely observe Shola birds up close. I also used my binoculars to see high up into the canopy of the forest. By looking closely, I could observe the texture and color of the feathers. I could see the shape of the eyes and eye sockets. I noticed the length and shape of the beak.

My observations even led me to discover something new about the Shola birds. As I was creating my sculptures, I realized that the orbital ring around the eye sockets had a unique shape. It had an extra mark. I told Dr. V.V. Robin and the other researchers about this. They said this was new information! This information helped researchers learn that other types of Shola birds also have an extra mark. **I learned that new discoveries can be made by using my observation skills to look closely at details.**

Creating Change

Creating art is a useful way to learn about issues in nature. Sharing your art is a helpful way to teach others about these issues. My sculptures spark curiosity. They want to know about my artistic process. They want to learn about the birds I create. When I focused on my passions, I was able to create change in our world. **Even if it’s as small as a Shola bird’s eye!**

Here is a photo of the Shola bird. You can see the extra mark around the eye socket! Photo: Niharika Rajput



Just like the White Bellied Sholakilli!