

Chirag Roy – a conservation biologist, a comrade, a lover of nature, a friend to wildlife; a husband, a son, a brother to many, an inspiration to all. On March 1, 2016, Chirag Roy passed away, amidst nature, doing what he loved, of a Cobra bite, after he had an allergic reaction to anti-venom – a serum used to fight snake venom.

A naturalist and conservation biologist, Chirag Roy was born in Kolkata, India, and did his schooling in Darjeeling. He acquired his Bachelor's degree in Kolkata, and then pursued a diploma in Forestry. Since then, his unmatched passion for nature and wildlife has been evident in his work. Chirag, although worked in India most of his life, he travelled to Bangladesh frequently to help conserve animals in this country as well. To conservation biologists here, Chirag has been a pivotal source of inspiration. "It's still hard to believe that he's not here. But there is something

Chirag also worked for Eco-tourism, and he also worked at a tiger reserve as a tiger tourism guide. During the monsoon, he would come to Bangladesh and lead an independent team for Eco-tours. He would take people out in the forest, introduce them to the raw wildlife here in our country, and show them the beauty of

the first snake to have a transmitter inserted.

The international volunteer workshop on eco-tourism that is held here was also an idea that Chirag came up with. "In this workshop, volunteers would come from abroad and go into the tropics, for photography and touring. They would pay

As a person, Chirag was soft spoken, laid back, friendly, and always had a smile. "He had the ability to make everyone feel comfortable and easy. Even if you'd meet him for the first time, you would feel like you've known him for years" says Shahriar, "he was an incredibly slow walker though!" remembers Shahriar with a faint smile, packed with fond memories of a good friend. "We would call him 'cluck' -- a local term for a breed of monkeys that are very slow," he laughs a little. "He was allergic to a lot of things. I remember seeing him rash-ridden so many times! We would make fun of him. But we knew and we were scared, that he would never survive a snake bite." Their fears coming true, allergic to anti-venom, that's how he died.

Chirag would visit Bangladesh twice a year but was a consultant to Shahriar at all times. "Even when we discovered the tiger

# A SOUL IRREPLACEABLE

NAZIBA BASHER

PHOTOS: COURTESY



important we can learn from this incident – that anyone can pass away, at any time. It's just extremely sad that he had to go so soon. It hasn't sunk in yet," says Shahriar Caesar Rahman, conservation biologist and Co-founder of Creative Conservation Alliance. Shahriar first met Chirag on Facebook, around the year 2007-8. They got to know each other, and spoke about their interest in wildlife and how they spent their time trying to conserve nature. "His passion was evident even then, in the first few conversations itself," he says. "He worked a lot with snakes, in the field of herpetology, and was a well known naturalist in India."

the animals hidden in the deepest, darkest depths of our forests. "In 2013 we met first when we were just launching the Python Project to help conserve snakes and other reptiles in our country," says Shahriar. "We had some issues with inserting the transmitter in the snakes. Chirag, who has a lot of experience in husbandry and care in captivity, helped us with the work. He gave us a lot of advice and suggestions on how to keep the snakes calm, how to get the work done with local anaesthesia instead of general, and so on." Then Scott Trageser, another conservation biologist from America, Shahriar and Chirag worked on

an amount which would not only accommodate them with food and shelter, but would also contribute to the funding of our project."

In 2014, Shahriar and Chirag travelled to Bandarban together as members of the expedition for the Arakan forest turtle. "We thought the turtles were found just in Myanmar, but Chirag and I discovered them in Bangladesh together and also published a paper on our findings." Chirag's contribution to conservation in Bangladesh is paramount. "He was an integral part of our work, as a friend and as an adviser. He had an experience of 10 years as a naturalist."

pug marks recently, he was the first person to come to my mind. He would always be an inspiration, giving us support, never wanting to be at the centre of the stage. His existence meant a lot to us."

Losing someone like Chirag Roy was a big blow for the conservation of nature and wildlife in this sub-continent. "But we realised that life moves on. I learned from him to love what I do even more. And that is what I will keep with me forever- things he taught me, things he inspired me to do. I think I can speak on everyone's behalf when I say this." May Chirag Roy's irreplaceable soul rest in eternal peace. ■

## REMEMBRANCE

## HERITAGE

Bangladesh is filled with some of the most beautiful structures and architecture and many of them can be found in locations seldom visited by the Dhaka dwellers, or even by those living in the new formed towns and developing cities. One of the most astonishing structures, by far, is the Khan-e-Azam Khan Jahan Ali Mazar, located in Bagerhat.

townships, such as Maruli Kasba, Paigram Kasba and Bara Bazar. He is said to have built a highway from Bagerhat to Chittagong, a 32-kilometre (20 mi) long road from Samantasena to Badkhali, and a road running from Shuvabara to Daulatpur in Khulna.

Khan Jahan Ali He ruled over an area called Khalifatabad (modern day Bagerhat) stretching up to Naldi to the north of Narail. One of the most famous mosques in the world, the Shatgumbaj

Mosque or the Sixty Dome Mosque, a notable architectural monument at Bagerhat was built by him. Of the large number of dighis and ponds excavated by him the most notable are the Khanjali Dighi (1450) near his tomb and Ghoradighi, measuring 230 by 460 metres (750 by 1,500 ft) to the west of Shatgumbaj Mosque. Khan Jahan introduced a new architectural style in his buildings, which is named after him. The Khan Jahan style is seen in a group of

buildings in the greater districts of Khulna, Jessore and Barisal (Wikipedia).

According to Al Haj Fakir Humayun Kabir, the number of worshippers has increased a whole lot. "I think at least a 100 new worshippers come to the shrine every day," he says. "Some come with the hopes of finding a lost one, some come before exams or office interviews, others just like to come and pray here."

The *dighi* outside the mazar is said to be the home to crocodiles, which turn up now and then. People are sometimes seen petting them! "The crocodiles are friendly," says Al Haj Fakir Humayun Kabir. "My great grandmother had fought with the crocodiles here! Anybody and everybody are welcome to come and sit by the pond and watch the crocodiles. This place is open to all."

Visitors may visit the mazar, pray here and also take pictures, as long as they don't disturb the peace and the worshippers. ■

# THE SHRINE BY THE DIGHI



ELITA KARIM

PHOTOS: DARSHAN CHAKMA

Khan Jahan died on 25 October 1459 (27 Dhul Hijjah 863 AH), the year when the mazar was created. The mazar is not only a place of worship, but today the structure stands as a symbol of hope, beauty, a place where many locals come together, enjoy the weather by the *dighi* (pond) or just to be absorbed by the peace and serenity around. The structure is now maintained by the *khadems*. "He lived around the time of the Tuglaq reign," says Al Haj Fakir Humayun Kabir, one of the oldest *khadems* at the mazar. "He would speak of religion, spread the message and wherever he went, he would build a mosque, a *dighi*, do his wadhu and pray. In Bangladesh alone, there are more than 360 mosques and *dighis* built by him." Surely enough, Khan Jahan Ali founded townships, built mosques, madrasahs, roads, highways and bridges, excavated a large number of *dighis* in the districts of greater Jessore and Khulna.

According to common knowledge and also wikipedia, Khan Jahan Ali built three

