

Hospital in Delhi gives birds new flight

December 2 2016, by Alexandre Marchand

Across from the Red Fort of the Mughal emperors in the heart of Old Delhi, a small hospital run by followers of the Jain faith looks after birds battered by harsh life in the Indian capital.

Up to 4,000 birds are treated in the three-storey 'Charity Birds Hospital' next to a Jain temple for anything from broken wings and legs to eye infections and stomach problems.

Jainism is an ancient Indian religion—followed by less than one percent of India's 1.25 billion people—that preaches non-violence and love for all creatures, great and small.

Followers believe that all living beings are interdependent and that all have an obligations to help others.

Jains also follow a strict vegetarian diet, and some monks and nuns cover their mouths with fabric to prevent them from accidentally swallowing an insect.

"You can easily find private clinics, or ones run by the government or NGOs, (for dogs and cats). But for the birds there is nothing," the hospital's vet Dr Dheeraj Kumar Singh told AFP, standing in a narrow corridor surrounded by cages filled with parrots, crows and parakeets.

Built in 1957, the hospital is funded through donations from the Jain community and visitors.

From the cacophony of rickshaws, motorbikes, bicycles, cars and trucks on the roads to the stray dogs and cats that also call the city home—Delhi can be a dangerous place for a bird.

Between 30 and 40 sick or wounded birds are brought to the hospital every day by good Samaritans.

"Many people find birds on the streets during their morning walk in the park, at their office," said Dr Singh.

A few minutes later, the door opened and in walked a man gently holding a bloodied kite in his arms.

"He was flying over our street, diving to catch food when he got caught in a kite string. When he fell he got hurt and he started to bleed," said Manesh, 29, who has previously brought other [birds](#) to the hospital.

The vet sets to work untangling the kite's wing from the string. Once cleaned and bandaged, the bird is put in a cage to recover.

But while under the care of the Jains the bird of prey, which usually eats small mammals like mice, will also have to follow a vegetarian diet—cubes of paneer cheese.

Once recovered, the kite will be taken to the roof of the hospital and released, taking flight and disappearing into the sky.

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