

Saved by father from leopard, teenager lives to tell the tale

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Mumbai: Vinod Hadal, an 18-year-old youth, had a narrow escape from death on Tuesday. Early morning, a leopard tried to drag him into the Borivli national park, but the youngster's cries for help alerted his father, who chased the animal away. This was the sixth leopard attack on the national park's periphery since July 2012.

According to the police, Hadal had entered the forest at 6.30pm to relieve himself, when a leopard crept out from the bushes and attacked him. Hadal and his family live in Maroshpada, a cluster of hutments in Aarey Milk Colony that flank the national park. No wall separates the dwellings from the wildlife habitat.

"The area has tall bushes and the boy was crouching. The leopard slinked out and leapt at him," said an officer from Aarey police station. Hadal immediately let out a scream, hearing which his father ran towards the youth. "His father was close by; he ran to his son's rescue," the officer said.

Showing acute perspicacity, the father lifted a tree branch and drove the leopard away. "On seeing another human, the leopard withdrew and fled into the forest," said G T Chavan, deputy conservator of forests. Following the attack, Hadal was rushed to Bhagwati hospital. "Fortunately, he is conscious and the injuries are minor. He is wounded around the neck, arms and head," said Chavan.

Most residents of Maro-



1 Vinod Ramji Hadal steps into the forest at 6.30am to relieve himself



2 Hadal screams for help as a leopard creeps out of the bushes and attacks him



3 Hearing the cries, Hadal's dad rushes with a branch and drives away the animal

Sandeep takke



Vinod (left) suffered injuries on neck and arms in the leopard attack near his home

PAST CASES

Dec 5, 2012 | Anthony Fernandes (55) was attacked by a leopard near the Bhandup water filtration plant and dragged half a kilometre into the forest. The next day, his body was discovered with the left portion below the waist eaten

Nov 17 | As her mother watched, two-year-old Usha Yadav was hauled into the forest by a leopard from outside their hut at Sapachapada in Bhandup (West). Her body was recovered a day later

Nov 5 | The body of an unidentified man (aged around 65) was found half eaten in the jungle close to a durgah in Mulund

Nov 2 | A 50-year-old woman resident of Aarey Milk Colony was pulled into the forest by a leopard as she went to relieve herself. She was discovered dead the next morning

shipada step into the forest to attend nature's call. Around two months ago, a 50-year-old woman had entered the national park for the same reason when she was attacked and killed by a leopard. According to the residents, the forest department had placed a cage in the area after that incident, but it was removed later. While residents claim the absence of a boundary wall puts

them at risk, forest officials argue against the presence of the hutments.

"Crouching people are targeted by leopards since they mistake the humans for small animals. Cases in the past proved this," said Chavan. "People have to be careful if they go into the forest to relieve themselves. The bushes should be cleared and the area lit well. Else, such attacks will increase."

Environmentalists worried over the sixth leopard attack in seven months. "There has to be a barrier to separate the animal territory from human habitation. The forest is reducing due to encroachments and construction," said City Forest Initiative's Krishna Tiwari, who works with people living close to the national park to raise awareness about prevention of leopard attacks.