



Wild Wonders of India!



Amoghavarsha,
Bengaluru

Bengaluru based wildlife photographer and naturalist, Amoghavarsha has travelled extensively throughout India, documenting the country's rich biodiversity and accentuating the process of conservation. Having photographed everything from the thick evergreens of Arunachal to the barren landscapes of

Ladakh, his body of work is a testimony to his story telling abilities. But the difference is that his expertise as a technologist easily comes through, for he uses the new media to help spread the message of conservation. He for one is a firm believer that education is the first step in the process of conservation and regularly conducts workshops and expeditions to spread the message across the board.

"In hindsight, my interest for photography developed over a period of time. As a young boy, I started out with my dad's Click IV camera. But the first real opportunity to make pictures happened with my friend's Nikon Coolpix camera in college. However, the real journey started when I purchased my first camera, a Canon 350D and travelled to the forests as often as I could. I also did a solo backpacking trip

to Assam and Arunachal, and a solo bike trip to Ladakh, Khardungla and Srinagar. Thereafter, I started travelling to the jungles with a lot of naturalist and photographer friends. This triggered an interest in me for the natural world. In fact, this necessitated the need to quit my full time job as a code geek to take to full time photography".

However, the biggest challenge Amoghavarsha faced as a photographer was to effectively communicate the rich biodiversity in a way that is extremely immersive, and that leaves the audience with something to take back. My blog on the stealth of leopards is an attempt to showcase through visuals the extraordinary behavioral pattern of leopards. The Secrets of the King Cobra, was another documentary to tell a story, while shooting around the rainforest of Agumbe in Karnataka. In addition, my recent initiative with Microsoft Research labs using their cutting edge technologies to build a brilliant narrative about Hampi, is a case in point. This interactive platform showcases how the integration of photographs, panoramas, walkthroughs and videos can make a difference to our environment.

But the way I see technology evolving, I feel the need for more interactive experiences that will definitely allow audiences to experience the subject more closely, and also learn from it. In an exclusive, he shares some of his insights and techniques on photography with the readers. Excerpts:

Technique and lighting in the wild

One of the most important prerequisites of wildlife photography is to be a naturalist who not only understands the subject but the environs as well. The beauty and challenge of shooting wildlife is that you don't control anything. Be it the subject, the environment or the lighting. Also in the rain forests, it's safe to assume that you have very little light throughout the day.

Some of the basic techniques of achieving good images in such uncontrolled conditions are:

- a) Being ready with the right settings and being patient at all times
- b) Steady hands and resting on available structures to avoid shake
- c) Shoot in RAW, as that allows you to correct white-balance when you get back (as there's not enough time to change settings when subject is on the move)
- d) Improvise on the scene

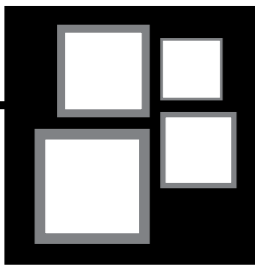
- e) Keep a keen eye on exposure and focus as the subject is dynamic
- f) Using a hide or some cover so the subject is unaware of you
- g) Keeping silent, steady and make no movements
- h) Understanding the light (sunrise and sunset directions, for example)
- i) Using the available light to advantage (like shooting silhouettes when light's from the opposite direction)

Gadgets that matter!

- a) Fast lenses with big aperture for low light shooting
- b) Cameras and lenses that are weather-sealed
- c) Rain and dust covers
- d) Headlamp
- e) Good all-weather bag
- f) Extra batteries and fast memory cards
- g) Bean bags, tripods, monopods depending on the shoot
- h) Hat (to avoid glare while looking at LCD or through camera)

▣ Mathew Thottungal





Deer spotting



Cooling off

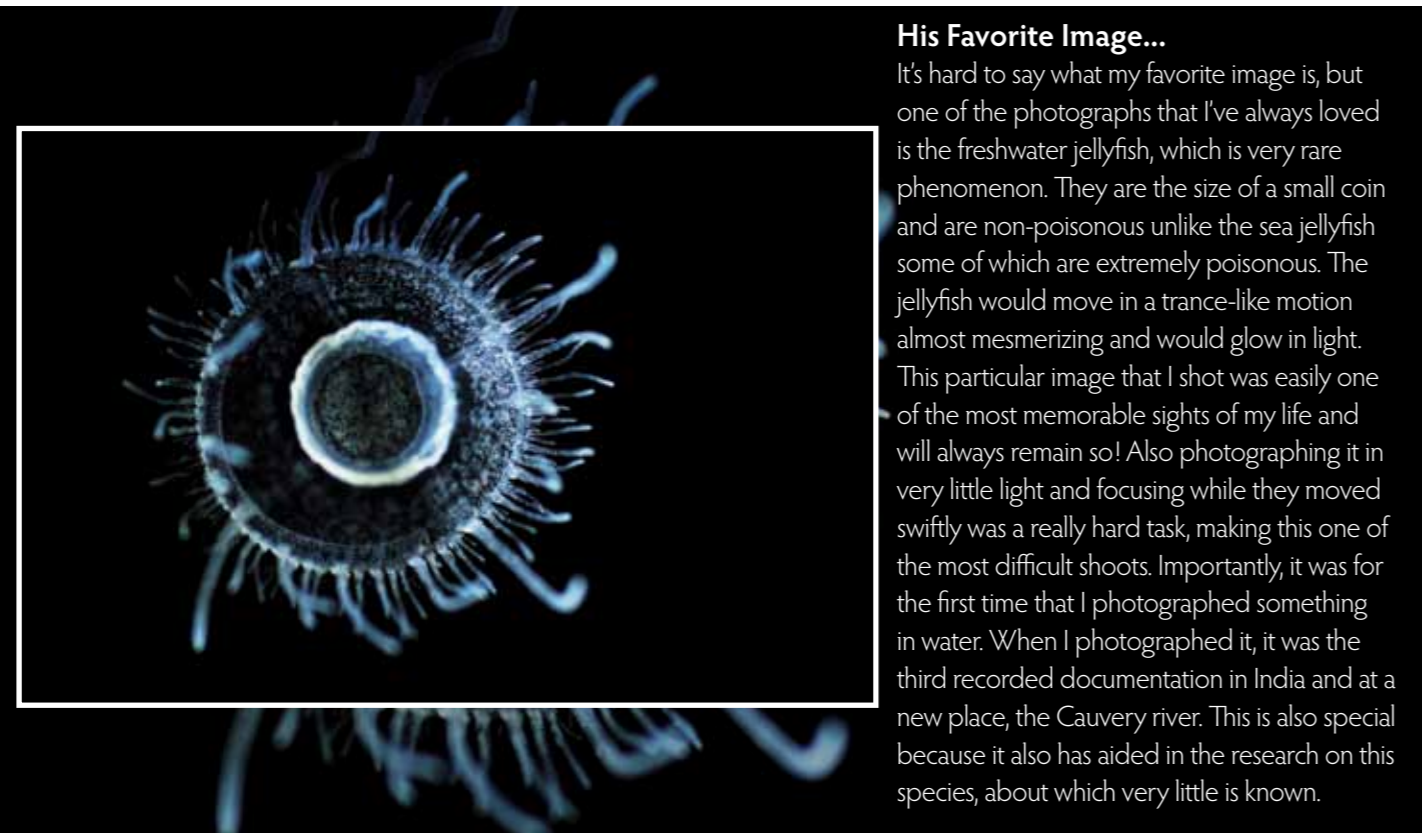
Waiting to fly



All eyes on you



Slithering away



His Favorite Image...
 It's hard to say what my favorite image is, but one of the photographs that I've always loved is the freshwater jellyfish, which is very rare phenomenon. They are the size of a small coin and are non-poisonous unlike the sea jellyfish some of which are extremely poisonous. The jellyfish would move in a trance-like motion almost mesmerizing and would glow in light. This particular image that I shot was easily one of the most memorable sights of my life and will always remain so! Also photographing it in very little light and focusing while they moved swiftly was a really hard task, making this one of the most difficult shoots. Importantly, it was for the first time that I photographed something in water. When I photographed it, it was the third recorded documentation in India and at a new place, the Cauvery river. This is also special because it also has aided in the research on this species, about which very little is known.

Technically most challenging frame...

Almost all photographs in the wild are challenging in one or the other way, but this particular images is the most memorable. The Blue Eyed Frog discovered recently in the Western Ghats is one of the beauties that I've been after for a while. During the last monsoons, I spent quite a few weeks in Agumbe and Sharavati valley trying to photograph the frog. To make things difficult, not only are these frogs found in the thick of the rains but also in the darkness of the night. The only way of tracking these frogs is by their calls. After searching for many days, we finally found one. The rains were still on and it was dark. I used my rain gear to cover my camera, held the camera in one hand and speed-light in another. I wanted to bounce the light off from a different angle and diffuse it for two reasons -one so that there's no direct high-intensity light on the eyes of the frog and also to get softer light on the subject. Thereafter, I used the remote triggering of the Nikon CLS to fire the speed-light remotely. By the time I had captured one frame, the frog jumped to another leaf. Besides, I also wanted a photograph where the back ground was visible and not

completely dark, so I asked one of my friends to hold a small white flex sheet, that I often carry to the field ahead of the speed-light and again remotely triggered the shot to get the required photograph. The constant rain, the darkness, figuring out the right light in these conditions and searching for the species made this particular frame one of the most technically challenging frames.



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