

REVIEW



Speaking on behalf of the lion-tailed macaque

Some remarkable efforts at protecting endangered species, notably the tiger, have been made over the years by wildlife conservationists. However, what about smaller, less charismatic species that are as threatened but barely get a mention in research and documentation?

This question drove Chennai-based wildlife conservationist, photographer and filmmaker Sabyasachi Patra to make his first film, *A Call in the Rainforest*, documenting the drastic changes in behaviour of the endangered lion-tailed macaque (LTM) due to human activity.

The 18-minute documentary has been shot in the town of Valparai, home to a majority of the LMT population and situated in the evergreen rainforests of the Annamalai Hills in the Indira Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary, Western Ghats.

At a recent screening of his documentary at Alliance Française, Sabyasachi shared his concerns and possible solutions to protecting the species.

The documentary, with its keen attention to detail, records some startling behaviour of the primate. Especially striking is the single, shrill mating cry of the macaque heard in the beginning. "For such a creature to call out so loudly and not receive a response had me taken aback. What if someday, this is the only one remaining?" asks the director.

Sabyasachi also managed to capture several other rare sights that normally escape the layman's eye, such as the shot of a macaque dislodging a honeycomb from a tree.

Ravi Chellam, the former director, Wildlife Conservation Society India, and a panellist at the screening, expressed regret at how fast the LTM numbers seem to be dwindling. "The inherently arboreal primate, feeding mostly on ripe fruits, is forced to turn terrestrial due to felling of trees and widening of roads to make way for the demands of tourism."

Enforcing speed limits was seen as one solution to prevent road kills, especially at night. "Larger animals such as elephants have to wait for hours to let vehicles pass and smaller animals such as toads and frogs fall prey to speeding vehicles," said panellist R. Arumugam, biologist at the Anamalai Tiger Foundation.

Conservation is possible only through optimism grounded in reality. "We look at ecology as external rather than as an integral part of our survival, thus failing to connect with it," said Dr. Chellam.

The documentary manages to not only hold attention but also to enlighten the viewer through a combination of meticulous camerawork and persuasive argument that capture a hard-hitting reality.

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