

Man who clicks wildlife moments urges patience

Ananya.Dutta@timesgroup.com

Pune: It took 22 days on the trail of the elusive snow leopard in Spiti before wildlife photographer Dhritiman Mukherjee had his first encounter with the animal.

Wildlife photography is all about patience and overcoming disappointment, said Mukherjee. He will be honoured with the Vasundhara Mitra award for photographers at the concluding ceremony of the Kirtloskar Vasundhara International Film Festival (KVIFF) on Friday.

"It was winter and there were days when the temperature dropped to minus 28 degrees celsius at night. I had trekked around those parts for days and one day I spotted fresh paw prints in the snow. I knew the lay of the land and the fact that the animal will be forced to come back the same way so I lay in wait. Six hours later, sure enough I had my shot," Mukherjee told ToI on Thursday.

The next year while shooting an assignment on the coastline in West Bengal, Mukherjee received a phone call from an acquaintance in Ladakh. A snow leopard had made a kill; it was likely that it would stay around for a few days while it devoured it. In a mad dash to the spot, at a height of about 4,500 meters above sea level, Mukherjee risked altitude sickness but he was able to spend a week with the snow leopard.

His photographs of snow leopards, often called the "ghosts of the Himalayas" have brought Mukherjee acclaim, but he has always been on the lookout for capturing species not documented on film. His determination has usually paid off, but he warns budding photographers that they must be prepared for disappointments.

"I made four separate trips because I wanted to shoot the Western Tragopan—the official state bird of Himachal Pra-



Photo courtesy: Dhritiman Mukherjee

Sadanand Godse



Photographer Dhritiman Mukherjee trailed the snow leopard for 22 days to get a shot (top) of the elusive animal in Spiti

“Nature photography must create an emotional connect with viewers to make them interested in conservation or it must be thought-provoking about a situation. For every animal out there, I want to create a voter

Dhritiman Mukherjee |
WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHER

desh, but most of its images were of birds in captivity. It was during my fourth trip that I got lucky. I have made 11 separate trips to shoot the Himalayan brown bear, but have not been successful so far," he said.

To capture migratory ducks in Dibru Saikhowa National Park, Assam Mukherjee wanted to get closer. "I tried getting closer by boat, but they would fly away. I made a raft of banana stems and took cover under the leaves, but even that failed. Eventually I found a spot with

water-hyacinth that the birds used to frequent," Mukherjee said.

Two hours before the birds got there, Mukherjee immersed his tripod stand and himself in the water covering his head with water-hyacinth plants waiting for them to arrive.

A love for mountaineering coupled with the purchase of his first professional camera propelled his interest. His mother's jewellery was pawned and later a portion of the family home was sold off to purchase the expensive equipment.

"Initially, it was the thrill and a sense of adventure that kept me going, but the conservation aspect of photography has taken over," Mukherjee said. He is a recipient of the Carl Zeiss Conservation Award and the Inspire Award from the Royal Bank of Scotland Foundation.