

Passionate environmentalist and wildlife filmmaker Shekar Dattatri opens up to Uma Kannan on his hard-hitting documentary film *The Truth about Tigers*

THE TRUTH ABOUT SHEKAR DATTATRI

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Beginnings

When I was 14 years old, naturalist and wildlife photographer the late R A Krishnaswamy saw my interest in photography and lent me his expensive cameras and lenses. This is how I made a start. Some years later, I got an opportunity to assist a documentary filmmaker who was making a film on snakebite. This was my introduction to filmmaking. Subsequently, a few colleagues and I started a company called Eco Media to make films on environmental issues and wildlife. I would not have been able to continue in this profession without the support of my parents, who were always very encouraging and never pressured me to take up a more conventional career.

Three most important environmental concerns

- The increasing destruction of forests and the environment in the name of development.
- The increased levels of air, water and soil pollution that is causing untold harm to all living beings including us humans.
- The climate change crisis that we are facing.

Most memorable moments

Every profession has its share of risks and wildlife filmmaking is no exception. However, my most memorable moments are not the risky ones but the beautiful, astonishing and extraordinary things I've seen in nature. In Bharatpur, Rajasthan, I witnessed adult painted storks filling their beaks with water and flying back to the nest to quench the thirst of their chicks. In Kaziranga, Assam, I saw a mother

Pix: Shekar Dattatri



rhino trying to chase off a tiger that was stalking her calf. In Nagarahole, Karnataka, I saw a touching scene where an elephant family spent the whole day in the sun without food or water guarding the body of a baby elephant that had died.

On The Truth about Tigers

I have just completed a 40 minute documentary called *The Truth about Tigers*, which clearly explains the ecology of the tiger, the reasons for its decline and what we can do to save our national animal. This is the first educational film on tigers and their conservation and I believe that it will answer many of the doubts that people have, and present them with a road map on how to save the tiger. There will soon be several public screenings of the film in Chennai and other places across India.

Save the tiger

India's tigers are being illegally hunted by organised poaching gangs to supply tiger skins, bones and organs to China and other Asian countries. There the skins are used for decorative purposes and the bones and organs are used in traditional medicinal preparations based on superstitious beliefs. No wildlife reserve in India is safe from these

highly skilled tribal poaching gangs, and utmost vigilance is needed to thwart them.

Plans on directing a mainstream film on an environmental theme?

At the moment, I have no plans for making a feature film on an environmental theme. However, I think such films have a tremendous potential if they are made well. *Erin Brokovich* is an outstanding example.

Call for unity

It is time for all citizens to unite to save the environment. The earth doesn't care whether we nurture it or destroy it, but our lives will become intolerable if we don't halt the rapid deterioration of our surroundings. We are truly blessed to live on such a beautiful and bountiful planet. Now let's prove that we deserve it.



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