

## Nature at work (<http://indulge.newindianexpress.com/nature-at-work/section/62053>)

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(<http://indulge.newindianexpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/mountains.jpg>)

**With Bengaluru-based Felis Creations playing a key role in Planet Earth II, BBC's natural history documentary series, we talk to the team about production, challenges and their most memorable moments**

MARCH 2006 was a wild year. Literally. BBC's Planet Earth premiered and changed forever how the world looked at the animal kingdom and natural history. Its surreal shots and revolutionary camera work brought Ethiopia's Erta Ale (the longest continually erupting volcano), Mexico's Cave of Swallows (Earth's deepest pit cave freefall drop), the Antarctic and the Arctic disconcertingly up close on our television screens. In fact, in a year's time, the documentary series had viewers from more than 130 countries. Now the broadcasting giant is ready with round two, Planet Earth II—a BBC Studios Natural History Unit production, co-produced with BBC America, ZDF, Tencent and France Télévisions. Bristol-based Tom Hugh-Jones, series producer, tells us, "Both filming techniques and our understanding of the natural world have moved on significantly since Planet Earth." Shot over three years, in high definition using 4K technology, it covers 40 countries and was executed over 117 filming trips, with a total of 2,089 shooting days. It also has Sir David Attenborough's inimitable narration, his second time playing this role. Talking about the improved viewing experience, Hugh-Jones says, "If you want people to connect emotionally, it's better for viewers to feel like they're down there, within the action, seeing things from the animal's point of view. These kind of sensibilities have been used in movies for years, and we are applying them in the natural world."



**Home team**



(<http://indulge.newindianexpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/1.jpg>) But we have another reason to be excited by the film (Island, the first episode of six, was released five days ago in the UK, to coincide with the series' 10th anniversary). A total of five sequences (included in Mountains, Grasslands and Cities) were shot in India, in collaboration with Bengaluru-based Felis Creations, the only production house from the country to bag a commission. In fact, the trailer—which has garnered six million plus (and counting) views—had showcased the langur shots from Jodhpur, which were shot by Sandesh Kadur from the Felis team. “In January 2014, Dr Chadden Hunter, a primatologist (and BBC producer), came

to India on holiday. I was shooting in Kaziranga for another documentary, and he joined me during the shoot. I took him around, showing him the tallest grassland in the world,” reminisces the filmmaker and photographer. Recalling how Hunter thought the locale made for a fantastic opening shot, a perfect contrast to the prairies, the 39-year-old adds, “The grasslands can even hide an elephant, hence the name elephant grassland. It was the first of the India sequences to be shot—over a period of four months, from November 2014 to March 2015.” The Felis team included



field assistant, Nitye Sood, and production head, Adarsh NC. They shot for over two years and also provided back-end support for shoot logistics. “It is the only pure, natural history film of our times. While everyone is talking of depletion and degradation of resources, Planet Earth II is an important tool to boost conservation on a magnum scale,” says Adarsh. From getting permissions to shoot in protected areas—like Ladakh (which comes under External Affairs, Home Affairs and the Principal Chief Conservator of Forest) and Mumbai (at the Sanjay Gandhi National Park)—to shooting atop narrow walls and housing colonies in Jodhpur and Jaipur, Felis Creations took care of everything. “It was worth all the effort considering we are the only production company from India, and we were working on a documentary that would be narrated by Sir Attenborough. What more could we have asked for?” smiles Adarsh.

## Animal visits



The most important Indian habitat to be showcased, and possibly the most difficult, is the Ladakh region. While Kadur did the recce, Bristol-based Justin Anderson, the producer behind the Mountains episode, and the one who shot the sequence with the snow leopards, says he had to go back thrice (between 2013 and 2016, in December and February), to finish the shoot, with temperatures often touching sub-zero levels. “The Hemis National Park reports frequent snow leopard sightings, so it’s considered the snow leopard capital of the world,” shares Anderson, adding, “The community-focussed conservation projects have been hugely successful because the local people really value the cats.” The third sequence is a new addition to the Planet

Earth series—how some animals are managing to survive in a new habitat, our cities. “The Jodhpur sequence, from the old city area of Brahmapuri, is the opening for the Cities episode,” says Kadur, revealing that they shot the langurs (in April this year) to showcase how certain wild animals have adapted to the growth of cities and have become an integral part of the urban landscape. “It was a challenging experience because we had to shoot atop buildings, treading narrow parapet walls, capturing them against the backdrop of blue houses.” Felis finds With attention paid to every little detail, what makes Planet Earth II extraordinarily special is its mind-blowing shots. The key technology: gyrostabilised cameras that allowed the crew to put them on helicopters and zoom in on animals from kilometres above. The shooting procedure has also added to the visual tapestry. “You will feel like a part of the landscape because it has been shot using wide angles, filming at a high frame rate that shows every tiny movement, so you get an immersive experience,” says Kadur. Anderson also credits the people involved. “From Wangchuk Kalon, who managed our logistics and camp set up, to Jigmet Takpa of the forestry department, who allowed us to stay in the park, everyone added to the experience. We were also reliant on a great ground crew—snow leopard spotters, wildlife guards, porters and cooks. It was just the best, most dedicated team I’ve ever worked with,” he says. After the first episode was aired, BBC News reported that “an average of 9.2 million watched racer snakes, penguins and Komodo dragons”. The BBC Natural History Unit team is now waiting for the broadcasting schedule to be finalised for other countries.

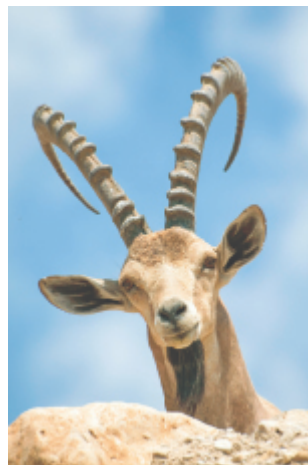
## MEMORABLE SHOT

The egrets at Kaziranga National Park. "Filming in December was tough, as the grass is the tallest then. It's nearly 15 ft high and very thick. We felt like midgets amidst them. It was difficult to manoeuvre, but we had to find locations where animals had used the tracks, so we could fix our camera traps. One day, we were filming three egrets (which we believed were perched on a rock) when suddenly they started floating above the grassland. Before we could figure it out, an elephant walked out with the birds on its head. It was our first good shot."

## CLOSE CALL

Jodhpur langurs. "We wanted to shoot the sequence when the bachelor troop of langurs would start fights, trying to displace the dominant male, take away his family and instate a new leader. Getting familiar with male langurs and shooting with them wasn't tough. They were comfortable

with the camera and were okay when we got close to them. But it was difficult to shoot the females, one of whom we had named Grouch. On the day when the male langurs began fighting for leadership (around 20-25 of them were chasing each other and jumping across roofs), we were shooting at 200 frames per second, which meant it was extremely slow motion. My leg was on the edge of a parapet wall, and I was looking through the view finder, trying to frame it right, when Grouch suddenly appeared and grabbed my foot. She was about to bite me. I froze and looked down. She looked up, and for a few seconds our eyes locked. Then she abruptly let go of my foot and went away!"



## THE LONG WAIT

Tiger at Kaziranga. "The shot of the tiger is a very important one. It shows how these royal beasts survive in the tall grasslands. Though the team had been shooting in Kaziranga since November 2014, we couldn't get a good shot till the middle of February, 2015. Apart from the camera traps, this time we went all out with the traditional camera hide, putting up hut-like structures using grass from the habitat. We spent nearly five days, sitting inside them from dawn to dusk. Finally, our model appeared, unaware of our presence. He approached a rhino carcass that was lying a few feet from our hide and we captured it feasting. In fact, it was the low angle shot of the beast captured on the camera trap that is the most memorable of all. It is just a five-second shot, but we spent 500 man hours to get it."

## Gadget check

**Panasonic Lumix GH4:** Quicker AF, four times the resolution of an HD camera. Rs 6,00,000\*.

**VariCam 35:** HDR ready, records simultaneous 4K/2K/Proxy. Rs 40,00,000\*.

**Red Camera:** Captures over 9X pixels than HD. Rs 9,65,000\*.

**Canon 550D:** Up to 3.7 frames per second, DIGIC 4. Rs 30,000\*.

**Canon 5D Mark III:** Full-frame CMOS Sensor, DIGIC 5+ processor. Rs 2,50,000\*.

Ronin Rig: Auto configuration. Rs 1,30,000

\* \*\*approximate pricing

*Mountains will premiere in the UK this Sunday.*