



Working with local crews can take a production to the next level, writes Icon Films' **Harry Marshall**.

Wild India, Nat Geo Wild

13 February, 2012

Wild India was completed from start to finish in just nine months. For a three-part blue chip natural history series that took into multiple locations and events – many of which were very season specific - this was little short of miraculous.

The only reason we were able to do this was down to Icon's 21 years of experience working in India and critically, working with Indian film teams in the field.

It was truly an Anglo-Indian collaboration and although it would seem obvious to work like this, it's surprising how few Indians are ever used on international wildlife films that are shot in India.

I think this is a wasted opportunity for lots of reasons, the least of which is the long haul travel.

There were three British members of the team working from Bristol. The series director Duncan Chard and his AP Sam Mansfield.

There was also Brendan McGinty, that rare beast – a cameraman equally comfortable shooting wildlife on a long lens as he is filming a fashion event on the catwalk. His job was to bring the fresher more contemporary feel which National Geographic Wild had asked us to brand the series.

In the eight-strong local Indian team we had two principle cameramen: Sandesh Kadur and Sarvanakumar Salem – or Sara for short.

Sara has worked with Icon on a dozen films since 1995 when we made a show called Elephant Men.

He joined as an assistant and is now at the top of his profession and can charge far more for a day of his time shooting stills for commercials in Chennai than we can afford to pay – but natural history is his passion and Sara put everything on hold to be on location across the whole schedule. And this, he told me, makes all the difference.

“Being a local means having many little characteristics that remove the veil of uncertainty a visiting crew has to deal with,” he said.

“Knowing the local language, understanding the customs and dynamics and also familiarity with the lay of the land, all help make life that much easier.”

More practically, Sara and Sandesh’s extraordinary local networks of contacts in the field meant when they heard an event was happening, they could jump on a local flight or just drive and get there immediately in a way a British cameraman would just never be able to.

With characteristic modesty, Sara was also keen to stress the advantages the collaboration brought him and how they both relished working with someone of Brendan McGinty’s flair.

Or as Sara put it: “Familiarity and comfort also bring with it a disadvantage. There is a lack of perspective. What is commonplace for a local can be a source of fascination for the world outside.

“This perspective is however acquired when locals work with international crew in such collaborative assignments. Once that step is past, then the combination of local and visiting talent make a winning team.

“The crew on Secrets of Wild India had this great opportunity to work with a great team and the resulting films speak of the blossoming of such collaboration”.

Harry Marshall is executive producer on Wild India (3x60’), produced by Icon Films for National Geographic Channels

It will tonight (13 Feb) at 8pm on Nat Geo Wild UK