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## PUBLICITY NOTES

### NATURAL WORLD - THE MOUNTAINS OF THE MONSOON

In *The Mountains of the Monsoon* for the BBC 2 flagship **Natural World** series, filmmaker Harry Marshall goes back to his roots and with wildlife photographer Sandesh Kadur, and spent a year documenting the changing seasons and distinct places that make up The Western Ghats. Born in nearby Bangalore, Harry grew up and went to school in the Western Ghats. Sandesh - also from Bangalore, had spent the last ten years travelling around and taking photographs documenting the flora, fauna and the people contained in some of the world's most beautiful but little known landscapes.

The Western Ghats snake 1,600 kilometres down from Gujarat in the north, along India's Western Coast to the tip of the subcontinent. These ancient mountains may only rise on average to 1200 metres but they do for Southern India what the Himalayas do for the North of the country, they keep a dry land from drought. All of peninsula India's major rivers rise in the Western Ghats and because it is a largely montane area that receives between 2,000 and 8,000 mm of rainfall annually the *Mountains of the Monsoon* are the water source for an estimated 300 million human souls. Without these so called Beneficent Mountains, Dravidian India would quite literally dry up. Yet surprisingly little is known about these life-giving mountains. The area's beauty and variety remains a loosely guarded secret even in India, - but many of its extraordinary inhabitants are still so mysterious they are waiting to be discovered and named.

On his journey through one of India's last wildernesses, Sandesh Kadur shows how The Western Ghats are not just essential to the life of India, but reveals the unique life they contain. Today only 10 percent of the Ghats' original jungles, rainforests and high altitude grasslands remain, but in terms of richness and the sheer number of endemic species - varieties of plant and animal life found here and nowhere else on earth - makes these mountains a global *hot spot*, an area of outstanding biodiversity (see table).

Sandesh explains how in Sanskrit, the word Ghat means *step* and how the Western Ghats rise like a staircase from the dusty plains of the deep South. The feet of the mountains are ringed in jungles - home to the most iconic of India's wildlife. - tigers and elephants - made familiar by Rudyard Kipling's Jungle Books. This is an exotic yet simultaneously well-known world. As the mountains rise however, dry parched vegetation gives way to dark lush forests and reveals the second of the three distinct habitats Sandesh Kadur sets out to explore.

Here in the last remaining rainforests, strange monkeys including the Lion Tailed Macaque feed high in the canopy on jackfruit while below, the world's largest venomous snake the King Cobra slithers (all 18 feet when fully grown) through the leaf litter. This is an altogether less known world of unclassified new species including for the first time on film, the almost absurd-looking Purple Frog. Here the atmosphere is filled with bizarre calls, heady smells, heat and humidity.

But it was in the third of the discrete Worlds of the Western Ghats that Sandesh saw with his own eyes, the most amazing of all the creatures he would encounter.

Far, far above the jungles and high above the rainforests' uppermost tree line is an area of spectacular open grassland with endless panoramic views. In the folds of this unique landscape, sheltered from the wind, grow stunted little forests known locally as *sholas*. This is the last and most secretive world in the Mountains of the Monsoon and it was here where ten years ago, Sandesh's chance sighting of an all grey cat - a cat he had never seen before and could not identify from any book, record or photograph, began an almost obsessive quest to see if a new feline - a carnivore - could also be added to the growing list of new species that these Mountains relinquish to science each year. The local tribal people of the area found nothing surprising in Sandesh's description. They know his mystery cat as the Pogeyan - literally the Smoke Cat. The cat which they say 'comes and goes as the mists' which engulf the high grasslands in minutes.

In **The Mountains of the Monsoon** Sandesh Kadur's hunt for his own Cat in the Ghat is told through an unfolding journey into a little known world. Here in the Western Ghats, despite all the pressures from Modern India and a massive loss of so much of its natural heritage, mysteries and new species have survived into the 21<sup>st</sup> century to be resolved and named. Could the pogeyan be one more?

### Western Ghat Facts

Age: Formed approx 150 million years ago  
 Area: 160,000 sq km (4.8% of India)  
 Length: 1,600km N - S  
 Average Elevation: 1,200m  
 Highest Elevation: 2,695m Anamudi  
 Lowest Elevation: 300m  
 Average Rainfall: 2,500mm per yr  
 Maximum Rainfall: 9,000mm per yr

Listed as one of the global **biodiversity hotspots**, the region comprises less than 5% of the total land area of India but contains an estimated 25% of the country's non marine vertebrate animals. It is home to at least **325 globally endangered species** and many of the species are **endemic** (see table below)

Group	Total Number of Species	Number of Endemic species	% of Endemic Species
Mammals	120	12	10
Birds	508	13	3
Reptiles	161	99	61
Amphibians	138	110	80
Fish	225	123	55
Dragonflies & Damselflies	178	70	39
Butterflies	330	37	11
Flowering Plants	4500	1720	38

**Flagship species:** Asian elephant, Indian tiger, Lion-tailed macaque, Nilgiri tahr

**Newly discovered Frog in 2003:**

*Nasikabatrachus sahyadrensis* -

*Nasikabatrachus* is a combination of Sanskrit and Latin and translates at 'frog with a nose'

The first discovery of a new frog family for nearly 80 yrs

The frog lives a reclusive lifestyle spending 50 weeks of the year underground in a burrow emerging only at the beginning of the monsoon season to breed.

Dark purple in colour it has a small head and pointy snout.

### Species Referred To In The Film

Tiger:	<i>Panthera tigris</i>
Wild dog / Dhole	<i>Cuon alpinus</i>
Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>
Elephant	<i>Elephas maximus</i>
Sloth Bear	<i>Melursus ursinus</i>
Barking Deer	<i>Muntiacus muntjak</i>
Lion Tailed macaque	<i>Macaca silenus</i>
Indian Scimitar Babbler	<i>Pomatorhinus horsfieldii</i>
Purple Frog	<i>Nasikabatrachus sahyadrensi</i>
Pogeyan	<i>Felis pogeyanensis kadurii</i>
Nilgiri tahr	<i>Nilgiritragus hylocrius</i>
Shield tail snake	
Sambar	<i>Cervus unicolor</i>
Black-capped chidkadee	<i>Poecile atricapillus</i>
Mouse Deer	<i>Moschiola meminna</i>
Leopard cat	<i>Prionailurus bengalensis</i>
Jungle cat	<i>Felis chaus</i>

### Production Credits

Production Company (for the BBC):	Icon Films
Produced, Directed & scripted by:	Harry Marshall
Executive Editor (for BBC):	Tim Martin
Executive Producer (for Icon Films):	Laura Marshall
Cameras:	Sandesh Kadur, Alphonse Roy, Robin Smith
Assistant Producer	S.U. Saravanakumar
Editor:	Darren Flaxstone
Music:	Sam Mills and Susheela Raman
Narrator:	Susheela Raman

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Tim Martin, Commissioning Editor for BBC Two Natural World says, "Icon Films continue to bring surprising new wildlife stories from India. This new film is a beautifully crafted natural history film, but also casts light on the growing conflict between development and conservation that impacts all India's animals."

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If you would like any further information, including publicity stills for possible features or previews or to arrange an interview with Producer Harry Marshall please don't hesitate to contact:

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**Mountains of the Monsoon premieres on Friday 16<sup>th</sup> January 2009 at 8pm on BBC2 as part of the Natural World strand**