

Pune's Exotic Warrior

(1) A male fan-throated lizard displays its colourful dewlap for the mating ritual

(2) Two male lizards face off in a territorial brawl

(3) The female lizards are far less showy. Here, one observes the males from a vantage point

(4) Fights to the finish are rare. Here, a dominant male exults over the lifeless body of a rival in a deadly end game

All pictures by Kunal Shah



Kunal Shah, a final year student of the Symbiosis Centre for Media and Communication, specialising in audio-visual production, is a nature and wildlife enthusiast.

He spent two years, in sun and rain, in the hills surrounding Pune to make a film on the exotic Fan Throated Lizard (*Sarada deccanensis*) – a small but fierce reptile species endemic to India and found only in the savannahs (scrublands and grasslands) of the Deccan Plateau in the Indian sub-continent.

The males have a flap or a fan on their throats, known as a dewlap. During their breeding season in summer, the males develop bright and beautiful colourations of blue, black, orange, and yellow on their fans. Even in their flat, expansive habitats, they find elevations like rocks and twigs to climb up on and make themselves conspicuous. That's when the mating ritual begins. They flap their vibrant fans to attract the females.

The males are fiercely territorial creatures. They are pugnacious warriors of the savannahs and will fight with other males to prove their dominance. If both males are equally matched, or unyielding, it could become a fight to the finish.

However, such fights to the finish are extremely rare!

The film captures the courtship ritual, and the very rare territorial fight between two male lizards. This is the first ever film on this species. Kunal believes that these scrublands with hardly any trees should not be perceived as barren wastelands. There is a lot of biodiversity here, and these habitats should be preserved, he feels.



Kunal Shah

Awards and accolades which the film has won

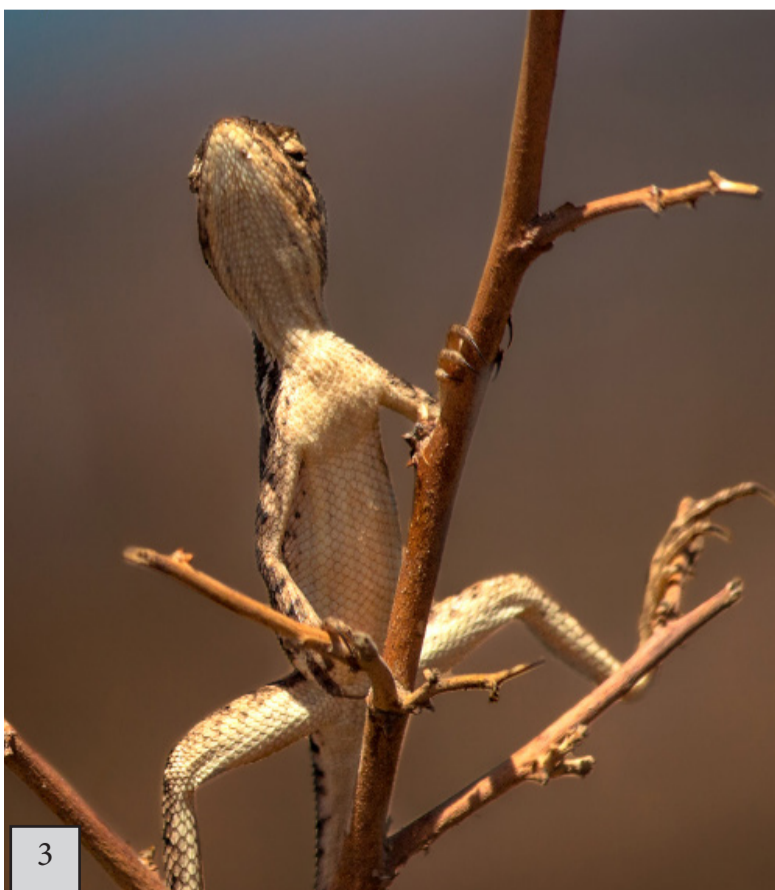
- International Nature Film Festival Gödöllő, Hungary
- Innsbruck Nature Film Festival, Austria
- Ekofilm International Film Festival, Czech Republic
- NatureTrack Film Festival, United States
- NAFCo Film Festival, United States
- Cefalù Film Festival, Italy
- Nature inFocus Film Awards, India
- Flame FirstCut, India
- Tagore International Film Festival, India



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