

PHOTO STORY

“Memoirs from a summer morning....the Carnal Bliss”

I was on a trip to the Joypur forest (of West Bengal, India) one lazy summer weekend. Being an avid insect lover and specializing in insect photography with photo-story, I always look for my subjects in every possible nook and corners of the forest greens. Not necessarily they are found only in the greens, they even amaze me in the browns and blacks with their surprise presence. The month of June seems to be sweltering as I struggle to beat the heat and get my gear ready.

That morning I was on my search as usual...geared up to capture the best, I moved from greens to the deep...towards the dry spikes that had lost their gloss but was infested with mosquitoes which took more of my attention. As I moved ahead, they felt happy welcoming me in swarms but then suddenly among the dry bushes; some movement caught my expert eyes. I ignored the welcoming gesture of the black mosquitoes and readied my lens. What followed, left me in awe of nature...

A couple of signal flies caught my attention...these little creatures are known for their colored and shaded composite eyes but more for their elaborate heavy mouths. Having read about them, my knowledge had already created in me an inquisitive eye but what I was about to witness would leave me with lovely memories for life.

The signal flies are famous for their courtship behavior and mating style. The couple in front of my lens kept dancing around and occasionally came close to each other. Zooming in I observe what can be best described as a loving gentle kiss...their ornate mouths close in on each other as the male tries to woo his mate and dance around for a couple of minutes more. The wings flap at an unimaginable speed that my lenses miss to capture them. The extreme flapping of wings signaling their mates I suppose must have helped the biologists coin the name Signal Fly.

Once the female is convinced of the partner with the signals which only she can understand, she positions herself and lets the male ride her. The human world fails to decipher the love that gets enacted in front of my lens. The male positioned himself but first kissed the female comforting her to the best of his ability (missed that shot as I was unable to reach to such close focusing distance by crawling). Courtship over, the mating thus begins...

Not sure if they could observe me following them, they kept moving themselves on different branches occasionally. The oppressive hot weather had ensured that they have enough dry twigs and branches to play around. As the sun rose and I got wet with sweat, I was determined not to lose their sight even for few seconds and kept trying my focus on subject.

The mating couple posed a great challenge to me as I had to crawl inside the bushes with my gear to reach within my focal length with a presentable background...the dry spikes scratched across my face and the mosquitoes played truant. My skin burned and I could taste salt on my lips but nonetheless I kept chasing them.

Around 35 to 40 minutes later, the mating seemed complete. But they would not let each other go till the male planted a final parting kiss and then it was over...quite unexpectedly in the insect world, such demonstration of courtship is highly uncommon. I just lay there quiet for some time trying to absorb what I just witnessed.

As a photographer, my work as I see them now, of that morning gives me immense satisfaction with the series captured vividly through the lens. As I now go through the shots and slides and recapitulate the morning, I seem to have enriched myself with the knowledge and feel proud that I was allowed to witness such a natural act.

John Muir has rightly said: In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks.

Who can feel this more than me...thank you Nature...