

## A session with Sriram Murali – all about night skies and fireflies.

Sriram Murali, a firefly specialist, Dark Earth advocator, filmmaker, National Geographic explorer, former Google data analyst, and one of the most impactful storytellers, we came across. His journey of advocating on dark Earth, stars, and light pollution started in 2011 when he saw sky full of stars in Yosemite National Park, California.

During COVID, in search of a perfect place to star gaze in his home town Pollachi, he came across a huge population of fireflies; that’s when he got curious and interested in fireflies. He co-founded Wild and Dark Earth (WiDE), an NGO that works for conservation of nocturnal species in India. His session with us was about, what he calls the love of his life—stars and fireflies—the search for the former lead to the discovery of the latter. What a coincidence that both produce their own light, stars through nuclear fusion and fireflies through a process called bioluminescence and both of them are affected by light pollution! Sriram talked about the ecology and lifecycle of fireflies and how they depend on spring rain. He showed us numerous videos, in one such video, firefly larva was eating a leech that really fascinated all of us, in other video thousands of fireflies were synchronizing, something that felt surreal, none of us had seen something like that before.

To solve the problem of light pollution from core, he is working with policy makers to come up with policies that would bring on ground change, he shared his experience of discussing light pollution at an environment conclave by Kerala State Pollution Control Board, where government is willing to bring policy change.

His session on light pollution, gave us a new perspective of how we connect light pollution to wildlife and conservation. He shared one of his experiences where he discovered fireflies in the middle of New York city, fireflies glow in dark but its presences in the middle a city is self-explaining the damage we have done to nature. One of his phrases,

“naturally dark space is wild space” will be the one of the takeaways from his sessions as none of the protected area is protected from light pollution.

Sriram introduced us to “Lost in Light”, a short film on how light pollution effect night sky, the movie received massive response and got featured in several of film festivals bringing light to the issue of light pollution. His other movies include “Saving the dark”, “Minmini” and “In Search of the starts”. He is keen in educating children and communities. Sriram shared his experience of having a session with children studying Vedic scriptures where he talked about light pollution, inspired them, and he was too amazed by the depth of their knowledge about nature.

We RHATC fellows are delighted and inspired by meeting Sriram Murali, who gave up his job as Google’s data analyst the same job people in India dream of, who’s humbleness, innocence, love, and dedication for fireflies was so evident in his interaction with us. Sriram Murali is an example that people from different field can contribute to conservation and bring much needed change, all that is needed is “will”.



RHATC fellows with Sriram Murali. © Trisa Bhattacharjee.

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