Must-see Malabar pitviper

Read about a snake that can morph into an incredible four colours!

By Sanjay Sondhi

Rom Whitaker, better known Someshwara ghat. Because of heavily, So I was prepared, with ate my food at a local dhaba Pitviper Trimerisurus malabar-

in Shimoga district of Karnata- is often called the Cherrapunji he year was 2005. I was ka, the area is best known for of South India. visiting the Agumbe the research being carried out It was the month of August I spent 5 days and nights wan-Rainforest Research on the King Cobra. Agumbe, is when I landed up at Agumbe, dering around the reserved for-Station, established by situated on the crest of the and I knew it would be raining est at Agumbe, mostly alone! I



as India's Snake Man. Located the heavy rainfall it receives, it ian and reptilian fauna.

fauna, which refers to amphib-

In the wild

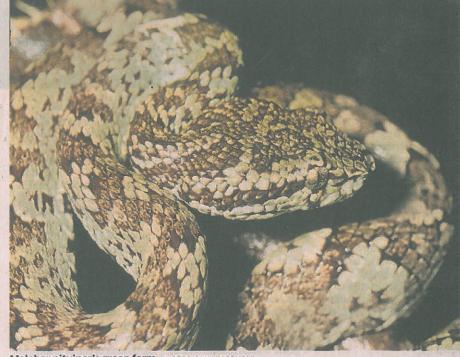
appropriate rain gear, for my-among local folks, who thought self and more importantly, my I was crazy to be wandering camera! It was my plan to around in the forest alone, at spend a few days searching for night, looking for frogs, lizards interesting "herps" in the area. and snakes! I didn't disagree "Herps" is slang for herpeto- with them entirely - anyone who does this must have a streak of madness, right! Or a real passion for the wild!

Among the many interesting sightings that I had at Agumbe, one creature that intrigued me was the snake - the Malabar icus. This pitviper was extremely common during the time I visited. I was not surprised, because this pitviper is supposed to be quite common during the monsoon, and not so common in other sea-



The Malabar pitviper is a noc- and its bite, while not fatal, **Colour changes** turnal snake. It is venomous, can cause a great deal of pain. The snake is supposed to have outlage helps them to hunt suc-

PREY, HENCE CAMOUFLAGE HELPS THEM **HUNT SUCCESS-**



and swelling.

It is normally found on bush- orange, but I have never seen is not clearly understood. Do es, lower branches of trees this. The reasons for the colour seasons, temperature and huand on the ground. The morphs of the Malabar pitviper midity play a role in colour snake's venom is primarily still remain unexplained. It has morphs of reptiles? What meant for hunting its prey, been observed that the green about genetic variation? and unless you alarm or forms are more likely to be Or are there other factors threaten the snake, it is un-seen amidst green foliage, that we are yet to understand likely to bite humans.

about the Malabar pitviper is branches or on the ground. snakes? Mysteries like these in that the snake appears in nu-Hence, it does seem that the nature keep me ever interestmerous colours. During my snake's colour determines what ed, and curious. What is Mothvisit, I spotted three of the micro-habitatit prefers. Chooser Nature going to throw up colour forms (or morphs, as ing a terrain that has a colour next! they are called) - green, yel-similar to the snake, helps to (The series is coordinated by low and brown.

a fourth colour form, which is cessfully. Yet this phenomenon while the brown form is more that causes such a significant Now the interesting thing likely to be seen on brown variation in the colours of camouflage it. Pitvipers mostly

ambush their prev, hence cam-

Kalpavriksh)

Malabar pitviper's yellow form.

Bangalore