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EXPLORERS

JUN / JUL 2019

INTO THE POLES

with Ole Jørgen Liodden

ORCAS

By Jorge Cazenave

CONTENTS

EDITOR'S DEN

Welcome to PT Explorers
By Cynthia Bandurek **004**

FOUNDERS' NOTE

By Hermis Haridas &
Nisha Purushothaman **006**

COVER STORY

Into The Vanishing Poles
with Ole Jørgen Liodden **008**

CONSERVATION STORY

Grassland conservation in Argentina
By Victoria Reynal & Nicolas Lucas **036**

THE SPECIES

Orcas - Valdes Peninsula,
By Jorge Cazenave **060**

CUB'S CORNER

By Disha Mundra
Diya Shajid
Mayank Mundra
Debasish Mohapatra **082**

HER VIEWS & VISUALS

By Cynthia Bandurek **110**

THROUGH THE LENS

Creative Nature Photography
By Amartya Mukherjee **124**

TRAVELOGUE

Masai Mara Adventures
By Athira Mohan Krishnan **146**

TIPS & TRICKS

Photography Techniques
By Lisl Moolman **162**

WILD ARTS SHOWCASE

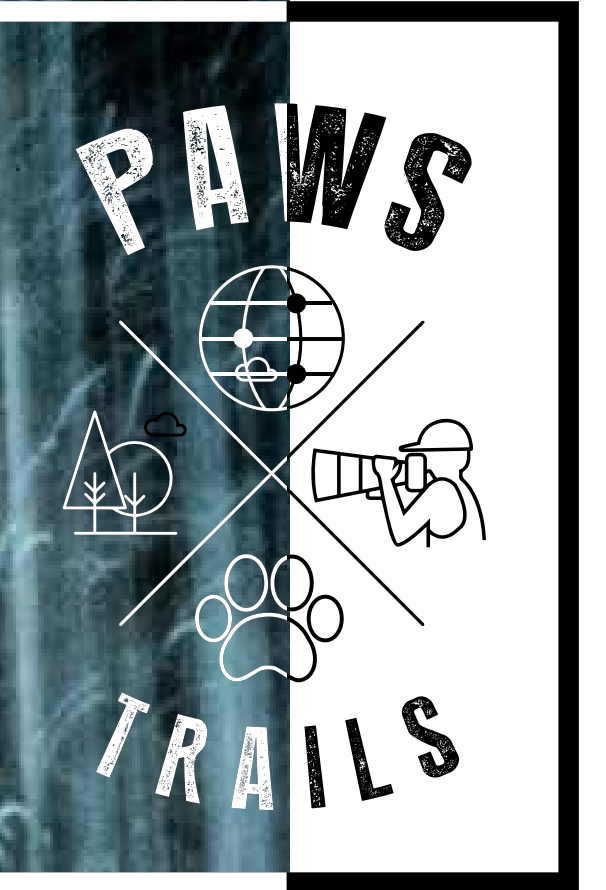
Gabriel Hermida-
Argentinian Artist **176**

YOUR GALLERY

192

124

Creative Nature Photography
with Amartya Mukherjee



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Cynthia Bandurek
Contributing Editor
South America

PT Explorers continues to expand its coverage, highlight environmental issues and the effort of people around the world engaged in giving this planet an opportunity to recover from environmental damage.

In this issue we publish several articles from Argentina, my country, where in 2018 six new National Parks were created. There is still a lot to do and the threats to nature are huge but creation of six new protected areas in these times gives us hope.

Victoria Reynal and Nicolas Lucas tell us about an ecosystem often underestimated due to the apparent lack of complexity. Nevertheless, the grasslands of Argentina, support great biodiversity, both flora and fauna. The article is illustrated by Dario Podestá's amazing photographs.

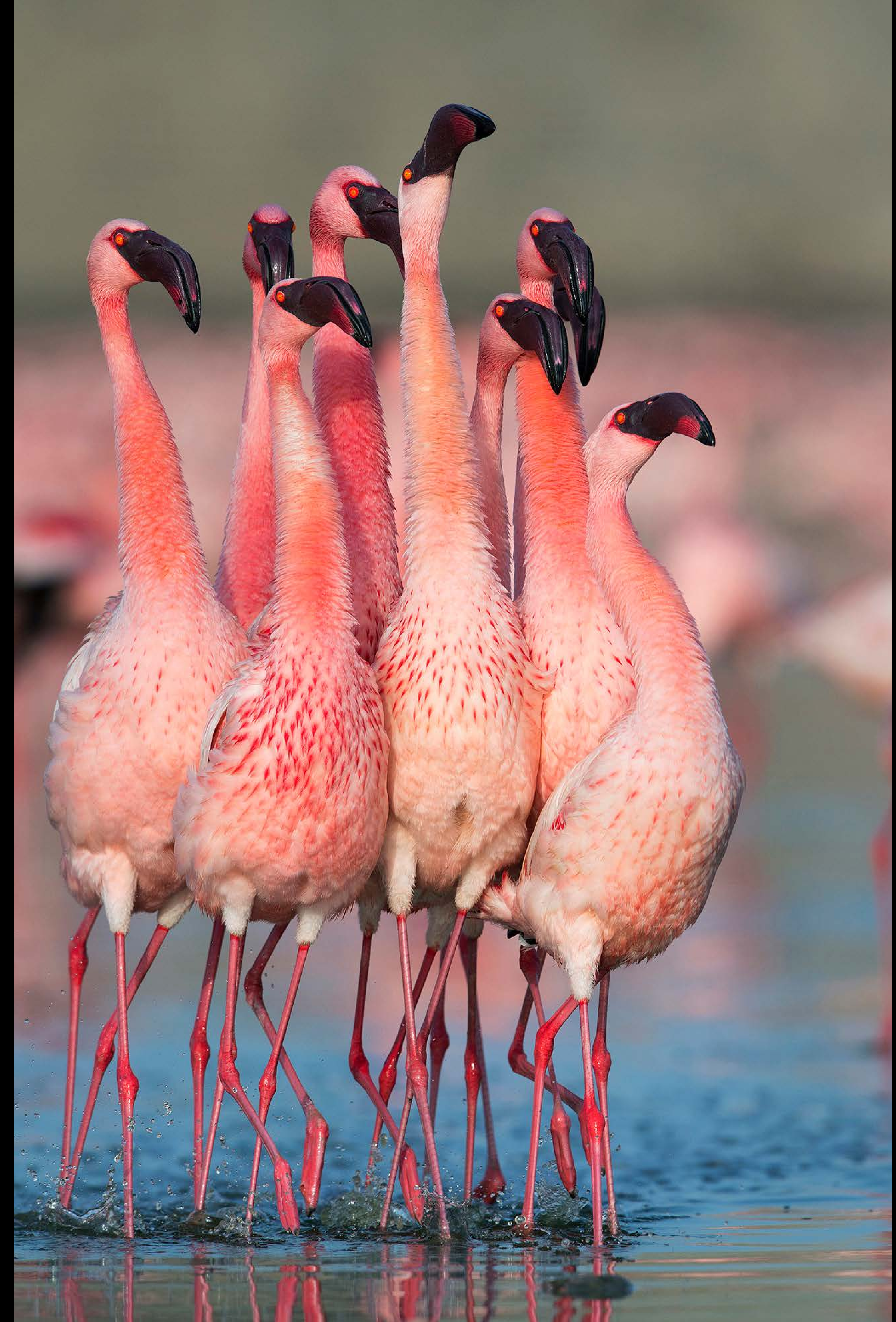
Jorge Cazenave speaks about a special behavior developed only by some groups of orcas: intentional stranding hunting technique, in Peninsula de Valdes, Argentina.

Argentinian wildlife artist, Gabriel Hermida chronicles his journey on growing as an artist and also how his work allows us to raise awareness about the natural world and the importance of each living being.

Look out for the interview with Norwegian photographer Ole with amazing photographs and a fresh perspective on the challenges faced by Polar Bears.

From India we are joined by gifted photographer Amartya Mukherjee with an insightful article on introducing creativity in nature photography. His stunning images are sure to tempt you to try this craft.

We hope to continue bringing the stories around the world closer to you, as well as to show the beauty of mother nature portrayed through the works of gifted nature photographers.



PHOTOGRAPHY DIRECTOR'S CHOICE



Hira Punjabi
Lesser Flamingo
(*Phoeniconaias minor*)

FOUNDERS' NOTE

The PawsTrails weekend workshops on bird photography was started in Dubai with an aim to encourage more and more people to spend time with nature and experience first-hand the joys of spending time with wildlife. We have always believed that the way to protect nature is by encouraging people to experience it and thereby fall in love with nature. We are seeing this process working, firsthand now. We have a great percentage of recurring participants, and what is more encouraging is the number of new people who sign up after seeing and getting inspired by the photographs.

This is making us see the enormous power of art and photography. This power if channeled in the right way can be the best way to bring people closer to nature. We at PawsTrails have put our collective thoughts together on harnessing the power of this great opportunity. We see it as a win-win: bring people closer to nature, while at the same time contributing to the development of photography & art. The more the number of passionate nature photographers and artists, the more the number of photographs and artistic creations reaching the common public, leading to more awareness on nature and conservation.

To this end, PawsTrails is planning on bringing a more formal structure around the workshops that we run. The finer details are still being worked out, but expect some good news from us soon!

Community photography is inspiring and you can do your bit for nature. Why not join PawsTrails for one of our many programs or partner with us in some of our many endeavors.

www.pawstrails.com

Hermis Haridas & Nisha Purushothaman

Founders - PT Explorers



COVER STORY

Into The Vanishing Poles

with Ole Jørgen Liodden





Ole J Liodden of Norway is a pro wildlife photographer, author, expedition leader and conservationist. His photographic work has touched people internationally and he has received a dozen of international photo awards. He was previously been a Canon Ambassador (2008-2010) and Nikon Ambassador (2010-2012) in Norway, and since 2012 he's been the Japan Photo ProAmbassador in Norway. In 2015 he was one of Nikon's D5 beta testers.

Before Ole became a full-time photographer (in 2003) he earned Master degrees from the University in Ås (Norway) in Natural Resource Management, Resource Economics and Environmental Politics. He has also studied Wildlife Management, Ornithology and Mammalogy at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF). Ole has always been interested in environmental conservation and resource management, and now he uses his photography as a tool to get more interest in environmental issues in the Arctic and also marine ecosystems.

Ole J Liodden was chosen as one of the photographers for the Wild Wonders of Europe project - the world's largest communication project regarding nature and environmental conservation in Europe. In 2015 Ole J Liodden was the founder of Penguin World and in 2016 he started the Polar Bears & Humans project. He is also one of the founders of WildPhoto Travel, a world-leading photo expedition company with ship expeditions to the Polar regions (Svalbard and Antarctica). His experience as a photo guide and expedition leader has led him to destinations such as Svalbard (40 times), Antarctica, Alaska, Africa, New Zealand, Russia Far East and the Galapagos.

In the past 10 years, Ole has published eight books on nature and photography.

www.oleliodden.com

[instagram.com/ojlwildphoto/](https://www.instagram.com/ojlwildphoto/)

[facebook.com/WildPhotoTravel/](https://www.facebook.com/WildPhotoTravel/)







© Ole Jørgen Liodden

Thank you for joining us in the 17th edition of PT Explorers! Ole, it is a pleasure to have you here. Can you tell us a bit about yourself?

I'm a photographer, expedition leader, author and conservationist based in Norway. I started as a full-time photographer in 2003, mainly

photographing wildlife, but since 2005 I have also been one of the founders of an expedition company now named WildPhoto Travel, with photo expeditions

to Svalbard, Antarctica, Greenland and Alaska. I'm also a family man with five children.

PT EXPLORERS JUN/JUL 2017



How did your photography journey begin?

I started my photographic company in 1998 as a side business, but after five years I decided to follow my dream as a full-time photographer. In the beginning I earned most of my money on publishing photographic books, but after a few years I became more and more involved in arranging and leading photographic expeditions to Polar regions.

Can you name a few challenges you face in the conservation field?

As a conservationist it has been challenging to create awareness about certain topics. I've worked four years with a project called Polar Bears & Humans, where I have collected information about the high level of polar bear hunting and tried to prove that the Canadian hunting management is not sustainable, and the international trade in polar bear skin should be banned.

At the moment, most conservation organizations only focus about climate change issues - which of course is important - but nobody seems to care about the 800-1000 polar bears killed every year. That makes me frustrated!

What are your principles and how do you bring them into your work?

My main principle is to try to reveal the true information about what is happening, even if it's not supporting what I initially thought was the main problem. For me it was difficult to accept that climate change last 15-20 years has not been the main problem for polar

bears in areas with hunting, like Canada, Alaska and Greenland. The main problem has been and still will be for the next 10-15 years the unsustainable hunting and killing of the strongest and healthiest bears with the best fur quality. I needed at least one year to digest and accept this information, but I still wanted to get the statistics and information out to the public about the current threat to polar bears.

You have an amazing collection of photographs. Do you have any advice or photography tips that you can give to our readers?

My main advice in photography is to learn how to use your equipment, learn the photographic techniques and then take the pictures you want - not what you think other people want. I also encourage photographers to not just copy other photographers or images but try to find your own path based on your own interests, background and history.

How would you like to see your work make an impact on over the next five years?

I've just published a conservation book named "Polar Bears & Humans", and I've already had a few meetings with governmental wildlife managers for changing the laws and regulations. I'm working with a few magazines to get the information out, and I also hope to make a documentary film about polar bear management. I hope the information I've collected and the images I've taken will work as a wakeup call for governments, organizations and other people to







© Ole Jørgen Liodden

stop the International trade in polar bear products and secondly ban polar bear trophy hunting. I hope to see an awakening about unsustainable hunting and actions to change the laws in the next 2-3 years. I will continue to talk to decision-makers, have presentations and make articles about this topic, and hopefully more people will be engaged, and we will have a successful campaign to give polar bears better protection. We will see if it will be successful or not.

Do you have any meaningful or special moments that you'd like to share from your expeditions?

For me it's always great to be up in the Arctic, in the drifting sea ice where

the polar bears, seals and arctic birds are found. The silence, fresh air and wilderness is just breathtaking, and I wish more people could experience it. This habitat is melting, and we have to protect it before it is too late!

Let's chat about your upcoming expeditions. What does a typical trip out to Svalbard or Antarctica with you look like?

In Svalbard we use a small ice-strengthened ship, so we can travel northeast to the main polar bear areas. We only allow 12 photographers on board which makes the expedition much more interesting and better for photographers who like more space and small crowds.

Our main target for these expeditions are polar bears, whales, seals, arctic birds and of course the great landscape with glaciers and sea ice. The light in the Arctic is also magic, so it's a dream area for photographers! An Antarctica expedition is similar, but we need a bigger and stronger ship (about 74 guests), and we do more landings than in Svalbard. We try to enter land early in the morning and late in the evening to get the best light conditions. Antarctica is really great, but we have decided that September 2019 will be our last photo expedition to Antarctica, since bigger ships will enter the market soon, and I'm afraid it will soon be crowded around the best areas in Antarctica.

Can you share any tips/advice to readers who would like to venture out into Svalbard?

If you want to photograph polar bears, you have to book your trip with an expedition ship to the northern and eastern areas of Svalbard to maximize your chances of great photo opportunities. From the ship or a zodiac, you can photograph polar bears safe and without disturbing them. I recommend you do some research and find a serious tour operator with great experience. Make sure you join a 'photographers only' expedition, otherwise you will waste your money on a normal tourist trip.





Of the countless photographs you have taken, do you have an all-time favourite?

My most successful image is “Living on thin ice” which was a category winning image in the Wildlife Photographer of the year 2012. The polar bear on the ice

floe in its fragile environment, was an emotional moment for me. I had thought about that kind of image for years, and suddenly all things came together.

Was there ever a time where you felt like you were in danger on your expedition?

Do you mind giving some more information for those who are in such scenarios?

The main danger in the Arctic for me in Svalbard is not polar bears but glacier ice. Even at a distance of 300-500 meter

from a glacier wall it can be dangerous if the glacier front is collapsing. I’ve experienced such a collapse once while in a zodiac, but at about 500 meter we were safe, but it was a scary experience. So always keep safe distance from active glacier fronts.



Are you partial to any specific type of equipment in your photography trips? Is there any particular reason why?

My main equipment on photo expeditions to Svalbard or other destinations is my 600mm long lens. Birds and mammals might not be close to the ship or zodiac, and a long lens is great for capturing some action. Secondly, I always bring a wide angle, like 14-24mm or 24-70mm to include the landscape and environment around the wildlife in my photographs.

If you could change one thing about the world, what would it be and why? How do you think we as a community can work closer towards that?

If people cared more about each other and nature, and not only about how to maximize our own private benefits and consumption, I think the world would be better. To move towards this situation, I think we must start early with the children and educate them more about respect, awareness and values, instead of only rating them how good or bad they are at school. Adults are more difficult to reform...

Finally, how do you think wildlife photographers can make a difference when it comes to conservation?

Conservation is about raising awareness about species, nature and our environment and inspire people to take actions to protect and enjoy it. I think photography is one of the most powerful tools to help people connect to nature and wildlife, and feel responsibility to love and protect what surrounds us.





Svalbard Autumn Light

September 3-13, 2019



©Ole J. Liødden

Polar Bear photography expedition for nature lovers focusing on a great light. Join us for an unforgettable experience! Email us: pawsintouch@gmail.com



Antarctica Expedition

November 1-14, 2019



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We invite you to join us for an unforgettable experience on a 14 days photography tour to the Antarctic Peninsula in November 2019. Email us: pawsintouch@gmail.com



CONSERVATION

GRASSLAND CONSERVATION IN ARGENTINA

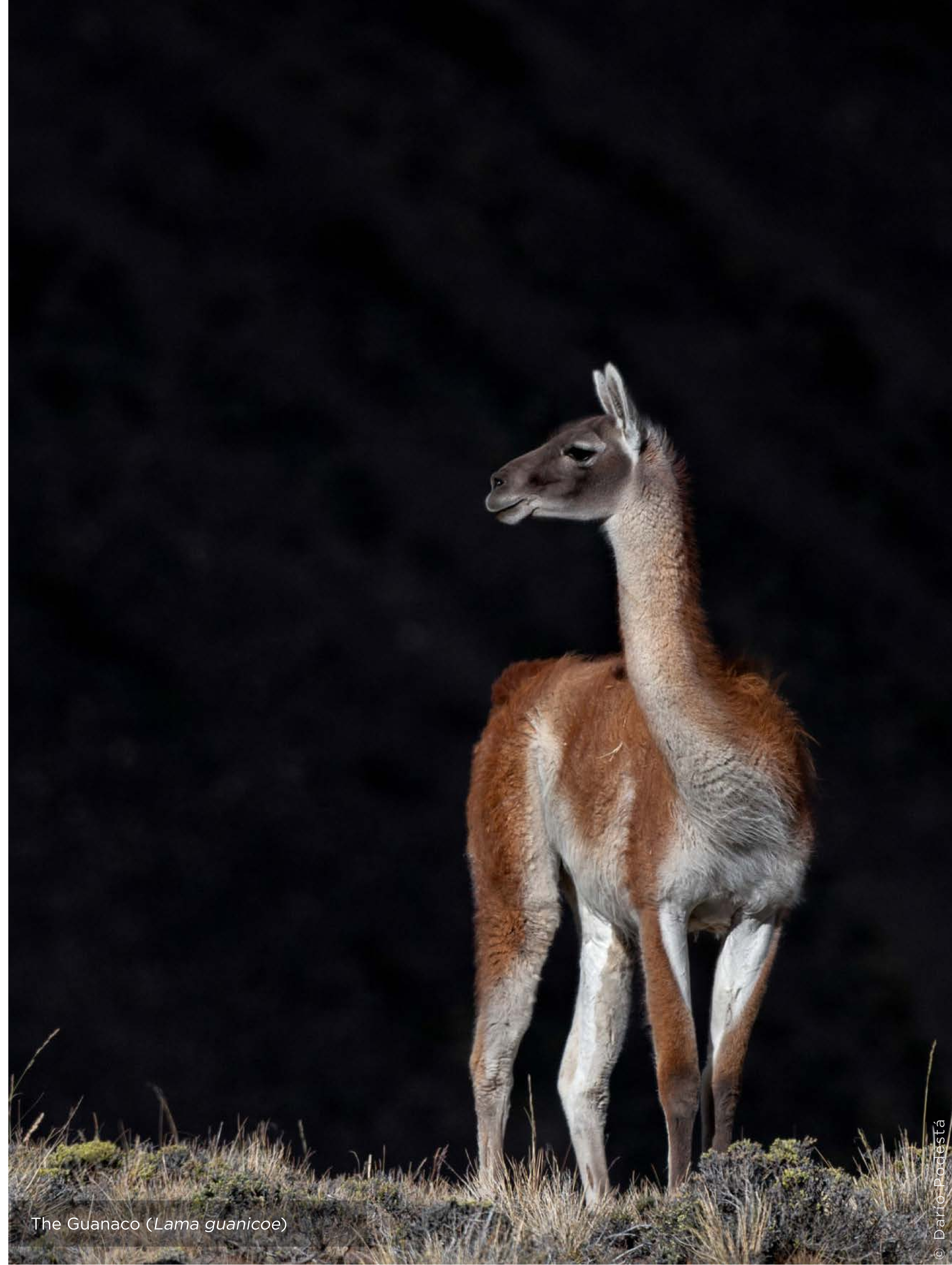
By Victoria Reynal and Nicolas Lucas
Photos by: Darío Podestá



W

Victoria Reynal works for the Argentine National Parks Administration, and is an independent environmental journalist. She has worked as an independent consultant for different Non-Governmental Organizations, and for different government agencies.

Nicolas J. Lucas has worked on local, national and global environmental policy over the last thirty years as civil society leader, government decision-maker, journalist and writer. He currently heads the environment department of Argentina's Secretary of Agriculture.



The Guanaco (*Lama guanicoe*)



Puma (*Puma concolor*)

During his voyage on HMS Beagle in 1833, Charles Darwin had a chance to visit two emblematic grasslands of South America: the Pampas, and the Patagonia steppe. An acute observer and a sensitive spirit, many of the descriptions he made of these places hold true today.

Of Patagonia, he said: “The glories of the vegetation of the Tropics rise before my mind at the present time more vividly than anything else; though the sense of sublimity, which the great deserts of Patagonia and the forest-clad mountains of Tierra del Fuego excited in me, has left an indelible impression on my mind”. Patagonia has always been, and remains, a sublime landscape.

Regarding the Pampas, he had a different observation: “Few countries have undergone more remarkable changes, since the year 1535, when the first colonist of La Plata landed with seventy-two

horses. The countless herds of horses, cattle, and sheep not only have altered the whole aspect of the vegetation, but they have almost banished the guanaco, deer, and ostrich” and “I doubt whether any case is on record of an invasion on so grand a scale of one plant [the cardoon] over the aborigines”. The Pampas have been for a long time now a dynamic, highly productive landscape. But there is more to the Pampas than that.

One hundred and thirty years after Darwin, another English naturalist and writer, Gerald Durrell, completed the picture: “In Buenos Aires I met an Englishman who had spent his whole life in Argentina, and when he learnt that my wife and I intended to go out into the pampa to look for animals he stared at us in genuine astonishment. ‘But, my dear chap, you won’t find anything there... absolutely nothing but grass punctuated by cows.’ Now, as a rough description of

the pampa this is not wide of the mark except that life on this vast plain does not consist entirely of cows and gauchos. ... Under the hot blue sky it does seem to be a dead landscape, but under the shimmering cloak of grass, and in the small forests of dry, brittle thistle-stalks the amount of life is extraordinary.” (Gerald Durrell, *Encounters With Animals*, 1963).

So there is more to Argentina’s grasslands than meets the eye.

According to the World Resources Institute, Argentina has more than 1.4 million km² of grasslands, which makes it one of the 10 countries in the world with the highest amount of grassland areas. Of the country’s 18 ecoregions, three of them contain grasslands: the Pampas, the Patagonia steppe and the high steppes or *Puna*.

Discovering Argentina’s grasslands

The Argentine Pampas cover an area of about 391,330 km². Their terrain is relatively flat, with a slight incline toward the Atlantic Ocean. Their soils are among the most fertile in the world. This helps explain why the Pampas’ biome has been greatly changed by human intervention. It is estimated that 60% of the Pampas have been converted to other land uses, while the remainder has been grazed by cattle for more than 300 years.

Agriculture and livestock production evolved from an extensive, low productivity system at the beginning of the 20th century, to a more intensive, high input system today. Agriculture

and cattle production in the Pampas rely increasingly on technology, are more productive and present new environmental challenges. Before, erosion was a big problem, as well as the use of DDT, whereas now the use of DDT has been prohibited, but pesticides are widely and increasingly used, and a tradition of monoculture prevails.

800,000 km² of the southern cone of the American continent are made up of drylands, known as Patagonia. The Patagonian steppe has been identified as a vulnerable ecoregion and as a conservation priority in Latin America. One of its distinguishing characteristics are the high plateaus, which decline in altitude toward the east. In the northern and central regions, volcanic geofoms are a key landscape component. This landscape is a complex combination of the effect of volcanoes, the Andes and fluvio-glacial activity. There are numerous lakes and glacier-fed rivers that run eastward from the Andes into the Atlantic Ocean, and in the southern tip of the continent, into the Pacific Ocean as well. The Patagonian grasslands have rich soils with plenty of fine materials and organic matter. Temperatures are between 3 °C and 12 °C on average, and rain levels are between 200 mm and 300 mm per year.

In Patagonia, sheep farming is a long standing and extensively spread economic activity, a source of a proud culture – and has environmental pressures as well on vegetation and soils. The sheep graze in confined areas where they feed on certain preferred species, putting pressure on them, affecting soil cover and thus increasing the likelihood of wind and



© Darfo Podestà

Patagonian Mara (*Dolichotis patagonum*)



Pampas Deer (*Ozotoceros bezoarticus*)

water erosion, in some cases leading to desertification.

In the last decades, the amount of sheep has been decreasing, partly due to the deterioration of the steppes' productivity caused by overgrazing. The rangelands' carrying capacity has been overestimated, the animals have been inadequately distributed and the grazing has often been year-long, without giving the soil time to rest.

The high steppes, known as the Puna, are a 92,900 km² plain, located above the 3,000 m, northwest of Argentina. Its terrain is relatively flat, with occasional mountains which form closed basins, characteristic of this ecoregion. Some of these basins have lagoons, which vary in size depending on precipitation. When those lagoons dry out, salt flats take their place. Precipitations are low, and decrease from the northeast to the southwest.

Despite the adverse natural conditions, the Puna has had settlers raising cattle, mainly the Llama (*Lama glama*), which is well adapted, and sheep. The Llama provides fiber and meat. However, cattle raising is not large scale, and it is distributed among small producers, which makes regulating the activity quite challenging.

The aborigines were the first to domesticate the Llama in this area, they used it for transportation and from it they obtained meat, milk, wool and leather. Nowadays, there still are groups of aborigines that raise Llama and trade its products.

The grasslands' fascinating biodiversity

As Durrell pointed out, the Pampas possess a rich biodiversity, especially of plant species, which include around 1,600 vascular plants, of which 374 are grass species. There is also a high diversity of animals: 69 species of mammals, more than 400 bird species, 31 reptiles, 23 amphibians and 49 species of fish. At least 26 of the bird species are threatened. Some of the most noticeable Pampas' native animal species are the Pampas Deer (*Ozotoceros bezoarticus*), the Rhea (*Rhea americana*), the Inambu (*Nothura maculosa*), and the Puma (*Puma concolor*). These animals have been affected by habitat change due to the expansion of the agricultural frontier.

Patagonia's vegetation is also diverse, even though many people might believe the region to be a desert. Patagonia has semi deserts and humid prairies, with an interesting variety of plant species. The plant diversity responds to the variety of precipitations, topography, temperature and soils. Nevertheless, the majority of Patagonia has low precipitations. There are grasses, shrubs, tussock and bushes. The Guanaco (*Lama guanicoe*), the Patagonian Mara (*Dolichotis patagonum*), the Chinchillón (*Lagidium viscacia*), reptiles like snakes, and frogs, and fish are some representatives of the native fauna. The bird diversity is modest, but it includes renown species like the Ruddy-headed Goose (*Chloephaga rubidiceps*) and the Hooded Grebe (*Podiceps gallardoi*), both of which are endangered, and the charismatic Andean Condor (*Vultur gryphus*). There is an ongoing debate in the Patagonian steppe around



Patagonian Mara (*Dolichotis patagonum*)

© Dario Podestá

Guanaco populations, their size and whether they compete or not with sheep ranching.

In the Puna ecoregion, the low temperatures and the scarce rainfall have created a steppe vegetation, mostly made up of bushes, that don't cover the soil completely. There is grass in the so called vegas, which are depressions where runoff water is accumulated. The fauna adapted to the environment by developing insulating hair, displacement capacity, low need for drinking water and few nutritional limitations. Fauna diversity is modest, and includes the Vicuña (*Vicugna vicugna*), the Guanaco, the Lesser Rhea (*Rhea pennata*), the Andean cat (*Leopardus jacobita*), the Andean Flamingo (*Phoenicoparrus andinus*) and different species of ducks, among others. Despite the low biodiversity, in some places there is a great concentration of individuals, especially birds, in humid

environments, such as the Pozuelos Lagoon National Park.

Much of the wildlife has been affected by hunting. A well-known case was that of the Vicuña, which was in quite serious danger, until national authorities established a strict regulation regarding its hunting and trade. The species recovered, and now populates the Puna. Vicuña are the smallest wild camelids, and the wild herbivore with the most biomass in high altitude steppes. It is well adapted to altitude and low-quality pastures, and it has the world's finest animal fiber, highly in demand around the world, which makes it a key resource for the region.

Big, small - look after them all

Continental Argentina covers 2.8 million km², of which more than 80% is privately owned, according to the Argentine Wildlife Foundation. As shown by the



Rhea - Ñandú (*Rhea americana*)

National Agricultural Census of 2002 (the last one available), around 175 million hectares of Argentina are dedicated to agricultural activities, which is approximately 62% of the whole country. There are more than 300,000 farms, small, mid-sized and large.

The landholdings' size varies according to each ecoregion. The Pampas' landholdings size average 500 hectares. The Puna's landholdings are closer to the 400 hectares, whereas Patagonia's landholdings average some 7,000 hectares.

In Patagonia, almost all of the land is in private hands - less than 1% is owned by the government. Most of these privately-owned lands are used for cattle ranching.

As a consequence, it is crucial to work with private owners in order to promote an environmentally sound production.

Conservation lands, parks, preserves; legal tools to protect lands

The Argentine government has established a National Biodiversity Strategy and one of its targets by 2020 is to achieve 13% of protected lands in all of its territory, with at least 4% in each ecoregion, a level still below the Aichi Biodiversity Targets of at least 17% of terrestrial areas and 10% of each ecoregion conserved in protected areas by 2020.

Argentina currently has around 437 protected areas (including national, provincial and municipal), which sum up more than 331,782 km², and represent

nearly 12% of the total area of the country. In this respect, Argentina is doing quite well regarding the objectives it set for itself, but it is still distant from the percentage recommended by the Aichi Targets.

The Pampas have 9,957 km² of protected lands, approximately 2.5% of the whole ecoregion. So there is still work to be done if Argentina is to accomplish its goals and if it is to measure itself against the Aichi Targets, regarding the Pampas. Conversely, 23.2% of the Puna is protected; more than 20,000 km². Lastly, the Patagonia steppe has the highest amount of protected lands, near 60,000 km², or 11,2% of the ecoregion protected.

Argentinian approach to conservation

More than 70% of Argentinians are very much or quite interested in the environment, according to a poll done by the Argentine Wildlife Foundation in 2014. And 82% of the population is very much or quite concerned about the environment. Even though people see themselves as highly interested and concerned about the environment, they see other people, the government and private companies much less interested and preoccupied. Furthermore, more than 80% of the population consider the environmental situation in Argentina to be negative or not so good.

Social involvement in environmental issues has been increasing these last few years, as well as the amount of Non-Governmental Organizations, and initiatives to care for the environment. However, there is still plenty of room for

Chinchillón (*Lagidium viscacia*)





Guanaco (*Lama guanicoe*)



Hooded Grebe (*Podiceps gallardo*)

progress: 73% of the people interviewed didn't participate in activities to look after the environment during 2014. There is, apparently, a need for "a little less conversation, and a little more action".

What role do NGOs have?

There are a number of NGOs that support the conservation of grasslands in Argentina. Either through education, research, the donation of lands to create protected areas, the development of measures to make economic activities less harmful to the environment, lobbying government agencies, and installing topics in the media, these organizations are very important players.

The Argentina Wildlife Foundation (FVSA), for example, helped create and donated the first national park in the Buenos Aires province to the national government. This park was created to protect the Pampas ecoregion and the Pampas deer. Furthermore, FVSA promotes the development of private reserves in Argentina, which are privately owned lands that are managed with sustainable standards. These private reserves are grouped together in a Network of Wildlife Refuges, coordinated by the foundation, to complement the job done by the national and provincial governments. The Network now has 20 private reserves in 12 provinces, which protect 198,144 hectares. In addition, the FVSA promotes sustainable livestock production in the Pampas, mainly by developing and distributing good practice guidelines.

Another interesting regional NGO

initiative is Alianza del Pastizal, led by Birdlife International, which works to promote grassland conservation in South America. The Argentine NGO Aves Argentinas is part of this alliance, which works to make livestock production more sustainable, by developing standards to evaluate and certify the so called "grasslands' meat". This certified meat is already being sold in supermarkets.

The North American non-profit Conservation Land Trust has bought large amounts of territory to create protected lands in the Patagonia steppes' grasslands. One of the success stories is that of El Rincón, a property which Douglas Tompkins (founder of Conservation Land Trust) bought in the early 90s and then donated to the national government. When he bought it, the area's grasslands were quite deteriorated due to overgrazing. Nowadays, after the removal of the cattle, the signs of improvement are encouraging.

The Nature Conservancy is yet another of the NGOs working to promote sustainable agriculture in the Pampas and the Patagonia steppes. To do so, it bought Fortín Chacabuco, a 5,200 hectare property, which functions as a sustainable grasslands demonstration site. Local communities, children, ranchers, producers, conservation leaders, scientists and government officials receive education at the Fortín, and almost 20 research projects are held there.

In addition, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) works to promote the creation of protected areas in Patagonia,



© Darío Podestá

Meseta del Lago Buenos Aires, Santa Cruz

as well as the proper management of these areas; it also strives to encourage private owners to adopt environmentally friendly practices in their properties. The WCS also monitors wildlife to measure the effectiveness of their work.

Accomplishments

As we've mentioned before, three of Argentina's 18 ecoregions contain grasslands: the Pampas, the Patagonia steppe and the high steppes or Puna. All of them have been affected by human intervention. However, there a number of noteworthy achievements as well as ongoing initiatives to protect them. To begin with, there is useful available information regarding the state of Argentina's grasslands, which is crucial for their conservation and management. Furthermore, the three ecoregions that contain grasslands are currently protected in some degree. In addition, the

concepts and approaches of production and land conservation are becoming increasingly compatible. Examples of this are OVIS XXI, a network of more than 160 producers, which works to increase cattle productivity while regenerating grasslands, it is the Argentine hub of the Savory Institute; CREA Environment, an association of agricultural producers, which studies the impact of agriculture on the environment.

Yet another example that shows that production and conservation are becoming more compatible is the Fundación Producir Conservando (Produce While Conserving Foundation), that has been working to promote a more "conservation friendly" agricultural production for the last 20 years. Other interesting initiatives come from the public sector. This year, the Ministry of Agriculture launched a national plan to manage soil degradation problems

and to organize soil information using technological tools in order to find solutions that are both profitable and environmentally sustainable.

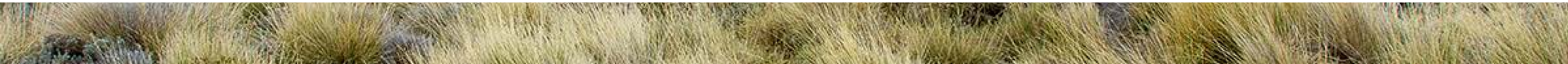
Additionally, the Secretary of Environment leads a national plan to fight desertification and land degradation, through education, public policy, and science and technology, among other measures.

Along Argentina's history, its grasslands have been viewed as "deserts", later on as "a sea of grass", and in the early 20th century as the "world's barn".

Now, we are finally starting to acknowledge that the grasslands are a crucial biome that needs to be looked after. There is still a long way to go, but we seem to be rightly headed.

LINKS

- Fundación Vida Silvestre Argentina (FVSA)**
<https://www.vidasilvestre.org.ar/>
- The Nature Conservancy - Argentina**
<https://www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/latin-america/argentina/>
- Fundación Producir Conservando**
<http://www.producirconservando.org.ar/>
- CREA**
<https://www.crea.org.ar/>
- OVIS XXI**
<http://www.ovis21.com/>
- Wildlife Conservation Society**
<https://argentina.wcs.org/es-es/>
- Conservation Land Trust**
<http://www.theconservationlandtrust.org/>
- Alianza del Pastizal**
<http://www.alianzadelpastizal.org/>
- Argentina National Parks Administration**
<https://www.parquesnacionales.gob.ar/>
- Biodiversity Information System (managed by Argentina's National Parks Administration)**
<https://sib.gob.ar///#!>





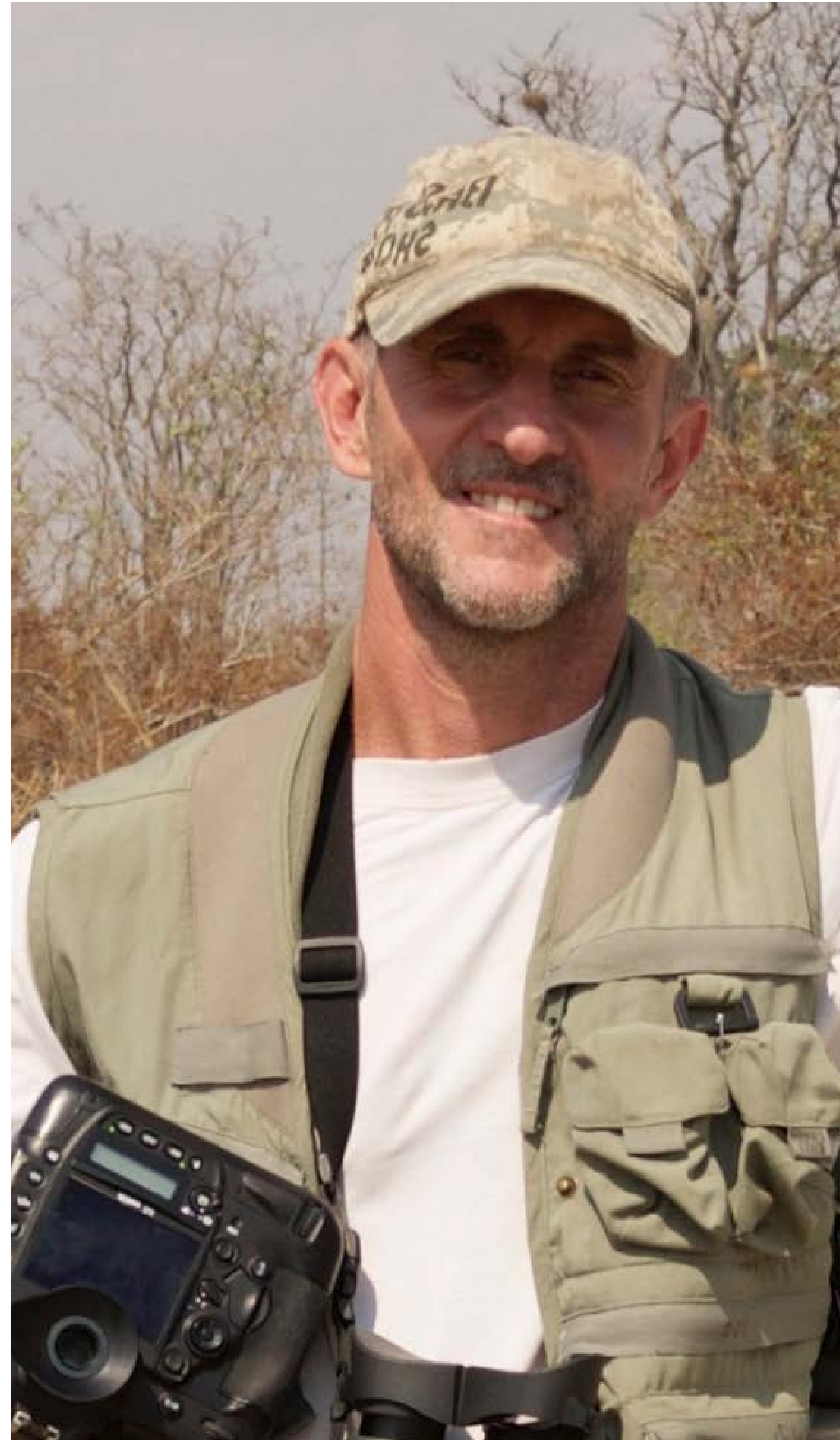
Puma (*Puma concolor*)



SPECIES

Orcas – Valdes Peninsula, Argentina

By Jorge Cazenave



Jorge is a wildlife photographer, naturalist and expedition guide. He's made innumerable trips throughout the world, focusing on wildlife and horseback rides. He has been in the travel industry for over 30 years and has worked as fixer for BBC, Nat Geo and ZED among others.

His photography has been published in several scientific and commercial publications around the world, such as Quercus (Spain) and Patagon Journal (Chile).

www.pnor.org

Punta Norte Orca Research is a non-government organization, which is dedicated to identifying and studying the orca pods that live in the Valdes Peninsula area (Latitude 42 29 South, and Longitude 63 55 West), and specifically in its Northern tip. The Peninsula is part of the Atlantic coast of Patagonia, in the province of Chubut, Argentina. It is a provincial protected area and was declared World Natural heritage area by UNESCO in 1999.

The Orca (*Orcinus orca*), also known as Killer Whale, is the largest of the dolphin species, and finds its home in every ocean in the world.

Male Orca grow to a maximum length of approximately 9.8 meters (32 feet)

and weigh 3,600 kg to 5,400 kg (8 - 11 tons). Female orca are smaller and grow to a maximum length of approximately 8.5 meters (28 feet) and a weight of 1,400 kg to 2,700 kg (3 to 5 tons). Orca calves, at birth, are approximately 2.4 meters (8 feet) long and weigh about 180 kg (400 pounds).

Orca are sexually dimorphic, which means they have a different body shape and size for the two sexes. These differences start to appear at around 10 - 15 years of age. One distinguishing feature is the dorsal fin, which in mature adult males may reach almost 2 meters (6 feet), and is often triangular in shape. The dorsal fin on females typically only grows to an average of 1 meter (3 feet), and is curved in shape, more like that of a dolphin's fin. One of the amazing characteristics





of the Orca, and other dolphins is that menopausal females stay in the pod and are an important part of them.

The Orcas of Valdes are famous for their intentional stranding hunting technique, filmed and photographed by pretty much every documentary production company, and wildlife photographer.

Punta Norte Orca Research's main objective is data gathering through notes and activity reports, and at the same time, photographing the individuals that are sighted in the area. With their identification we also organize the pods in family groups.

In order to identify the individuals, we need to photograph very specific parts of the bodies, from both left and right, in the correct angles, and in the case of the caudal fin, top and bottom. Orca have a white patch behind their eyes (eyepatch), one behind their dorsal fin, called saddle patch, and we also photograph the dorsal and caudal fins. On top of that, they tend to have lots of scars, which help to identify each individual. When we ID an individual, we also record, if it was seen alone, or in company of others, their behavior, tide, wind speed and direction. When we can, we get a clear photo of their under belly to also know their gender, as there is no dimorphism in their first years.

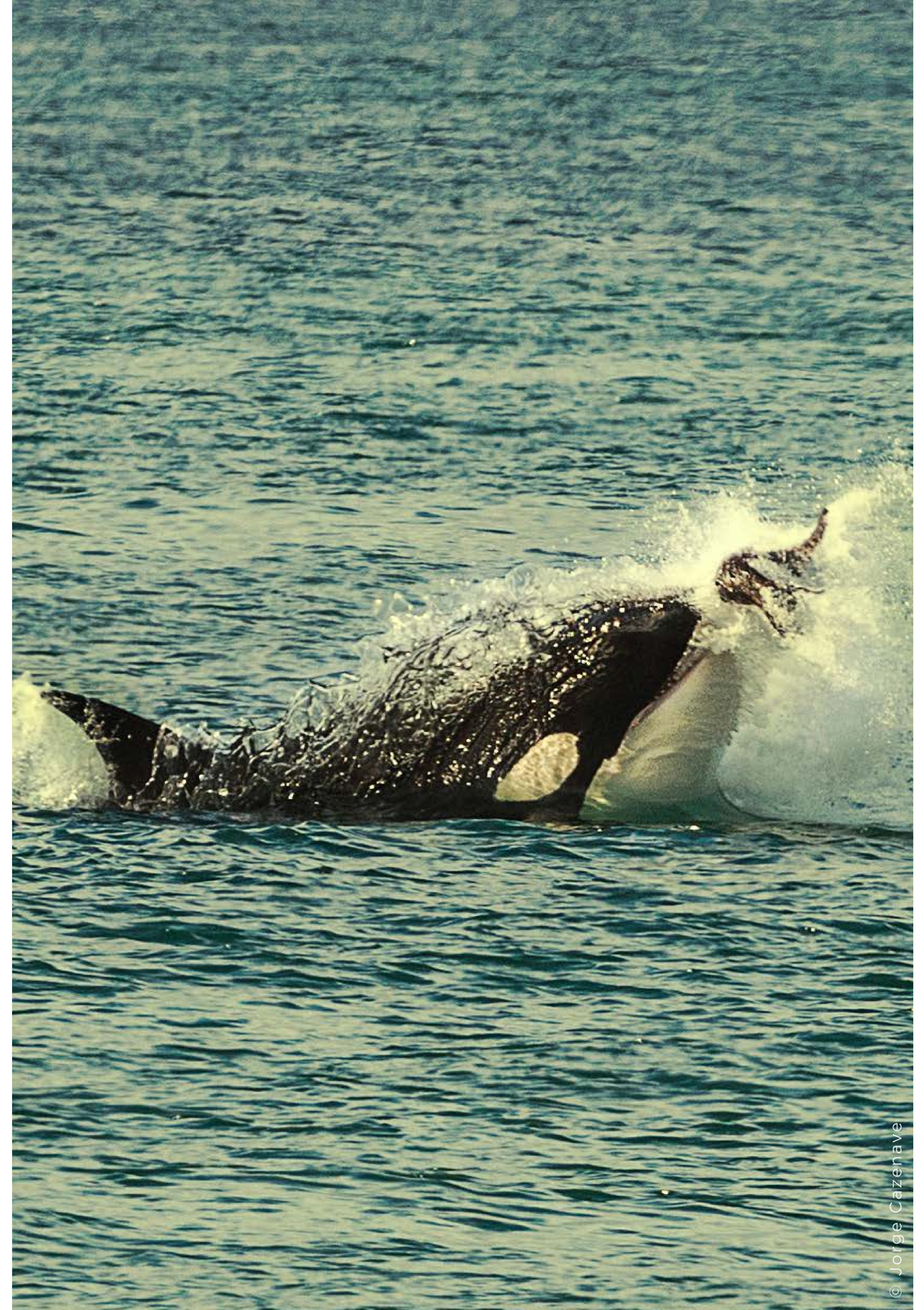
Orca pods live in matriarchal groups. The oldest female is the dominant one, usually leading its daughters and sons (and grandchildren). Usually the males stay with their mothers, even as adults. The pods are very small (4-10 individuals) and probably all relatives. We have identified less than 30 individuals, since

we started working in 2004. This does not mean that that this is the number of orca in the area, but the number that approaches the coast, patrolling the sea lion and elephant seal colonies. 15 of them are capable of hunting by stranding, and some of the juveniles are already training with "dry" strandings or getting very close to the beach, rubbing their bellies in the pebbles. This year, we have documented the youngest strander, at the age of four, and it appears that the young are becoming proficient in the technique at early ages, as we are now observing young animals, on the shore.

A long standing theory which stated that the hunting technique was only passed from one generation to the other by the mothers, has been challenged this year also. A sub-adult male, that was only spotted once in the area a few months ago, started practicing with a group which consists of three siblings, two brothers and a sister, with a four year old calf (their mother disappeared a few years ago) and became a strander itself (first group with 100% stranders!!).

Within these family groups, there are animals that do not strand. Although we have no explanation for this, we believe that they might refrain from it, due to a dangerous and/or unsuccessful experience. We have also observed stranders, refrain from stranding for several years, and while we cannot offer an explanation for this, probably a "scary" experience has been the cause.

The orca population of Punta Norte is the only group of orca in the world that perform this hunting technique. Similar behavior has been observed



© Jorge Cazenave





© Jorge Cazenave

in the Malvinas/Falklands and in the Crozet islands, but these are “milder” or less spectacular, because unlike in Punta Norte, the orca do not have most of their bodies out of the water. Most of the animals are seen all year around, although sometimes they do not show up in the area for a long time. Of course we see them closer to shore, when they have more chances of hunting sea lion and elephant seal pups. These intelligent animals take into account the tides, usually hunting in high tide in some areas and in low tide in others. Wind direction and speed is also considered, and they tend not to hunt with North or NE winds, and heavy seas, because these create big waves, and a lot of noise in the shore. This makes it harder for them to locate their prey, which they find by hearing and not echo location. Having said this, they do make exceptions, and sometimes hunt

in unfavorable conditions, and in some occasions, during the seasons where finding a prey is harder.

Sometimes, we see one of the family groups in the area, but it is not uncommon to see the three groups together, whether hunting together or not. An interesting fact about these orca is that they approach the sea lion colonies, sometimes in tight formation, with two stranders in the center, flanked by two non stranders in the training stage. When the stranders hit the beach and grab the sea lion pups straight off the beach, the other two, are ready to catch the pups, who in panic get into the water.

Another behavior we observe is food sharing. When one of them returns to sea from a successful hunt, it carries the sea lion pup in its mouth, and offers it

to other individuals in the group. While tearing it apart, they also share it with others. Sometimes, before killing the sea lion, the hunter lets it go, so the juveniles can capture it in the water, therefore training them to become successful hunters. There is no doubt that these incredibly intelligent apex predators are extremely successful due to their culture, training, teaching and strong social bonds.

With so much to say about the Orca, there is something to say about us, the members of Punta Norte Orca Research. We are led by a biologist (Ingrid Visser), who lives in New Zealand, a pro photographer from the USA (Gretchen Freund), a local expert in orca behavior (Juan Copello), a professional and multilingual tour guide- former park supervisor, and Jorge Cazenave,

(enthusiast nature photographer). All of us pay our own way to Punta Norte, our camera equipment, and additional expenses, and we love to do it. Apart from our own photos, a lot of pro and amateur photographers donate their photos for ID purposes, and this makes our lives easier.

The team, or at least part of it, is in Punta Norte, usually during March and April, when the orca hunts for sea lion pups (*Otaria flavescens*), and from October to December, when they usually hunt elephant seal pups (*Mirounga leonina*). These are the orca “high” seasons, when they approach the coast with more regularity.

Our days usually starts before sunrise, and ends after sunset. Early March and early November are the toughest months





for us, because the days are long and usually hot. Patagonia is also known for its high speed winds, and we get hit by them almost every day. We sit in the sun, wind and rain, and so does our camera gear.

The assistance of the Punta Norte Park Rangers is invaluable for us, not only when we are in the field, supporting us with information, regarding the spotting, counting of individuals and photographs, but also crucial when we are not there. Through their information and photos, we are able to gather data about the different pods, 365 days a year. In the last few years, with the ease of

access to digital cameras, we have started receiving images from other parts of Peninsula Valdes, and also from other coastal areas of Argentina. This is very important, because we have no other way of knowing what “our” orca are doing when they are not in the Punta Norte area. Because of this, we now know that they sometimes gather inside the gulfs, to hunt different species of dolphins, they also go after Southern Right Whales, capture different species of fish, and penguins. Every year, we prepare an ID catalogue and every orca gets an ID number. Since the population is very small, all of them have names.

For several years, the children of the different schools in the Peninsula, have named the “new” orca, voting from a list of suggested names. Both the catalogue and the naming are very important because in this way, we try to show the local communities that these are “their” orca.

We also disperse information through our website, www.pnor.org, our Facebook and Instagram. During the peak months, we get a lot of information requests, and sometimes, we are asked to forecast the presence of orca. Of course, we do not give any forecasts, as they consistently show us that they arrive, and leave the

area, deciding in “their own” way. As an example, in 2017, they were present for several days in March, and left the area on April 11, only to be seen again in May. This year, they did not show up in March, and only arrived in early April, with consistent presence in the area, even as this article is written, in late June.

We are proud and lucky to have the chance to witness one of the most spectacular predations on earth and invite you to visit Valdes Peninsula and Punta Norte, *The Punta Norte Orca Research team*.



With the May 6, 2019 release of the United National Scientific Report, “Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystems” alarm has been raised amongst conservation bodies and the public around the world.

Not only have one million species of animals been acknowledged as facing risk of extinction, but Australians are personally facing the loss of one of their most beloved and iconic marsupials: the *Phascolarctos cinereus*, more commonly known as the Koala.

Whilst this beloved animal has only been labelled as “vulnerable” on the IUCN Red List, it’s already been deemed “functionally extinct” by the Australian Koala Foundation (AKF), an Australian NGO familiar with the behaviours, habitat and devastation experienced by the Koala in recent years.

The AKF released studies that focused on koala populations throughout Australia, with findings revealing an estimated remaining population of merely 80,000 in total.

The cause for these dwindling numbers can be attributed to deforestation, disease (an alarmingly high number of Koalas



© Jason Gines

Australia’s Koala

By Nadia DW
Photos By Jason Gines



© Jason Gines

suffer from a strain of Chlamydia not so different from that suffered by humans and environmental stressors brought on by climate change. Koalas are characteristically sensitive animals, so environmental changes in their ecosystem are keenly felt, resulting in an inability to adapt quickly enough.

In order to curb these alarming statistics and the cause of the Koala’s demise, The Koala Protection Act (KPA) has been created by the AKF in the hopes of being ratified and enacted by the appropriate legislative bodies. Suggested parameters

within include championing reservations and protecting existing habitats. However, none of the existing political parties have shown any intention of following through with the act, let alone acknowledging it, despite the KPA being readily available for ratification since 2016.

Deborah Tabart, the chief executive of the AKF stated, “Unlike some of my younger conservation colleagues, I have seen the Koala betrayed before. I have heard many empty promises from members of Government pretending to protect the Koala. Look where we are now. The Koala



© Jason Gines

Protection Act will work and it is ready to go.”

Tabart continues with her reprimand of the government’s inaction stating, “I know the Australian public are concerned for the safety of Koalas and are tired of seeing dead Koalas on our roads. It is time for the Government to respect the Koala and protect its habitat.”

The current federal government’s

inactivity proves even more negligent as out of the 128 electorates within Australia, Koalas have become extinct in 41 electorates.

What will it take for the Australian government to turn the tide in order to save this vulnerable species?

Zoos are not the answer and relocation can be fraught with risk. In the Queensland Government’s attempt to

relocate 180 koalas to East Coomera, half of the subjects died due to the sensitive nature of the animals.

Instead, what is needed is a commitment to protect the existing habitats of existing koalas. Over development in metropolitan areas has led to an influx in housing and amenities as new suburbs spring up where dense forestry once dominated. This begs the question of how we are to balance the needs of our growing nation with the needs of the wildlife

whose welfare we are charged to ensure. Progress or preservation? That is the question.

The solution? Dedication to a future were both of us have a future, humans and koalas alike.

Nadia DW is an environmental advocate and holds a double degree (Bachelors of Law/Arts) from Monash University. She currently works as an advertising creative in Melbourne, Australia.



© Jason Gines



CUB'S CORNER

Wild Trails

By Disha Mundra,
Diya Sajid,
Mayank Mundra,
Debasish Mohapatra

CUB'S CORNER

CUB'S CORNER



Disha 16 years old has developed passion for photography and writing from her early age.

She loves wildlife photography and wants to work and contribute towards wildlife conservation.

<https://www.instagram.com/dishaphotography1305/>

A majestic experience into the wild

This trip has given me an experience of a life time. Living amongst the wilderness really made me more understanding and made me realise the beauty that lies within mother nature. It was quite fascinating and unbelievable to see and capture the diverse wildlife at such a close proximity. Each day got more exciting as I started to understand them.

Through this trip I was able to interact with really great people: Nisha Purushothaman and Hermis Haridas. They encouraged me and gave me a totally new perspective on photography. I understood the technicalities of photography and how to frame a beautiful picture. Though this process, I learnt how to look out for the unexpected, be patient and to persevere. The most memorable moments were seeing the big cats for the first time, but capturing the mother and the cub



cheetah after the rain was one of my best experiences. I was really touched by the mother and cub element coupled with the after effects of rain.

Another awe-inspiring moment was capturing the silhouette of a giraffe with

a backdrop of the dramatic hues of the sky during sunrise.

It was an all in one experience and I am eagerly looking forward to more such journeys!





Diya Shajid is a 15-year old student, trying to follow her dreams of being a wildlife photographer. She grew up admiring her father's journey from an amateur to a well-known photographer.

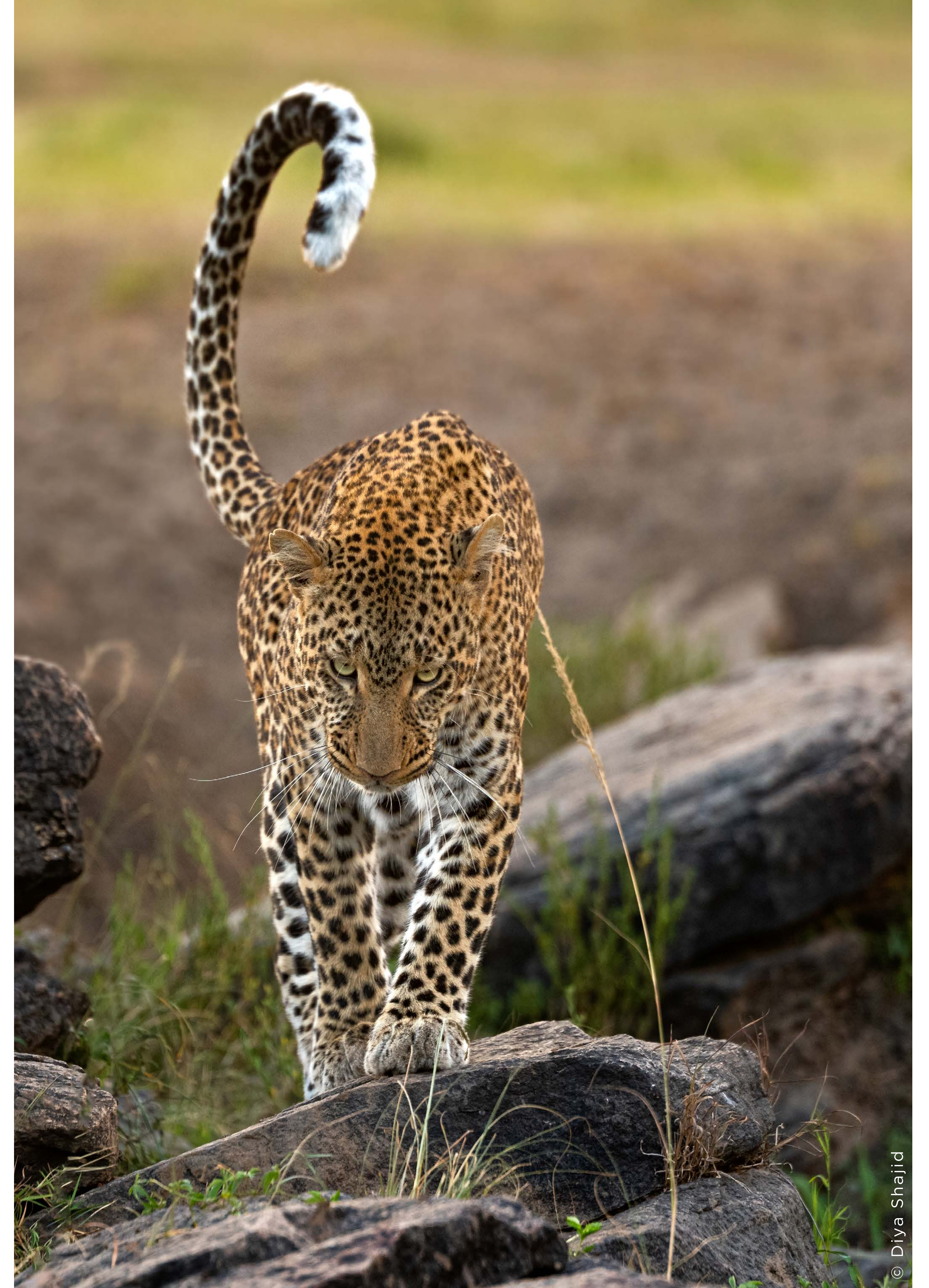
She started experimenting with a camera at a young age and slowly improved her photography. Diya now has her sights set firmly on future endeavours in wildlife photography.



This year's travel to Masai Mara has been quite the experience. Since I had visited Kenya twice before, I was not expecting much out of it but Mara has once again proven me wrong. You would expect Mara to stay the same and expect to get the same images every time one visits Mara, but that is completely incorrect. Mara always has something to offer you no matter what time of the year.

This time around, we were expecting rain and beautiful weather however due to the delay in climate change, we spent the days in the scorching heat. I feel like this time trip has definitely upped my game in regards to photography as I have learnt various new techniques and methods that has helped me improve my shots. We were very lucky in the first few days of the adventure since our sightings were incredibly good but then our luck turned in the next few days and the sightings went completely dry.

The highlight of the trip would be the breathtaking dusks and dawns. As we drove through the burnt grass with ash and dust on our faces, looking at lions laying on the grass like the majestic animals they are, I thought to myself that I am extremely privileged to have the opportunity to see this side of nature. This trip provided me with much awareness with regards to animal and nature conservancy. My dream is to now share the information that I possess and inform other people about the natural events that take place through the passionate medium of wildlife photography.



© Diya Shajid









Mayank, a creative mind at the age of 11 is fascinated with photography and wants to travel around the world to create awareness on wildlife.

He loves watching wildlife and natural life videos.



My Masai Mara experience

My experience in Masai Mara was pretty fun and interesting.

It was my first time there. I was amazed to see lot of animals up close including leopards, cheetahs and lion prides.

My favorite part of the trip was when we saw the five musketeers (five cheetah brothers who are very active).

I was bursting with excitement and got good pictures of leopards and elephants. On one occasion a leopard cub was under our car and the mother was next to me, just a few centimeters away, which was an unbelievable moment for me.

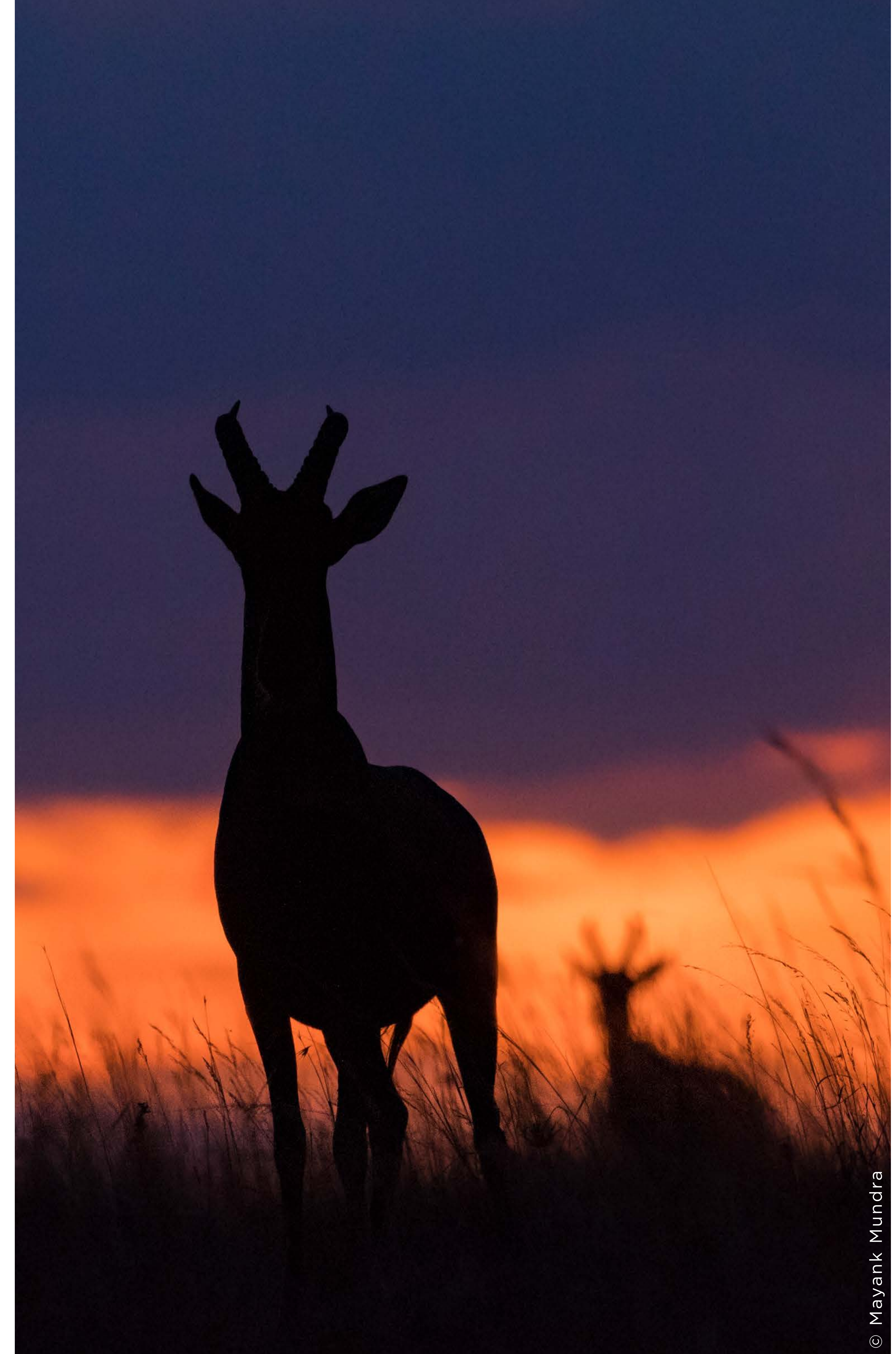
During this trip I had a great learning experience and interaction with Ms. Nisha and Mr. Hermis, who were our photographic guides.

After the trip I think I became much better at photography as my technical knowledge improved. They also taught me how to do post processing.

Another cool experience was that we had to stay in tents in the forest. We usually stay in hotels, but this time we were in a tent and it was fascinating.

I truly think this was an amazing experience of my life.

I really look forward to doing more such trips.



© Mayank Mundra







Debasish Mohapatra, at the age of 10 did his first trip to Masai Mara along with his parents. He was mesmerised with the beauty he witnessed during his 6 days that he never imagined.

He loves experimenting with his camera to make creative photos.



At Masai Mara we checked in at Malaika Bush camp in time for a hearty lunch.

Then I grabbed my camera and went on the first game drive. In the bush I saw a lot of animals - lions, cheetahs, giraffes, zebras, hyenas, deer, elephants and hippos.

After returning from the drive I first transferred my photos to the storage device before having dinner.

After a good night's sleep, I woke up early to start the next morning's drive. We started from the camp around 5:30AM. The sunrise was beautiful, and the animals looked radiant in the golden light.

Breakfast was had in the bush and we used to return to the camp for lunch and rest.

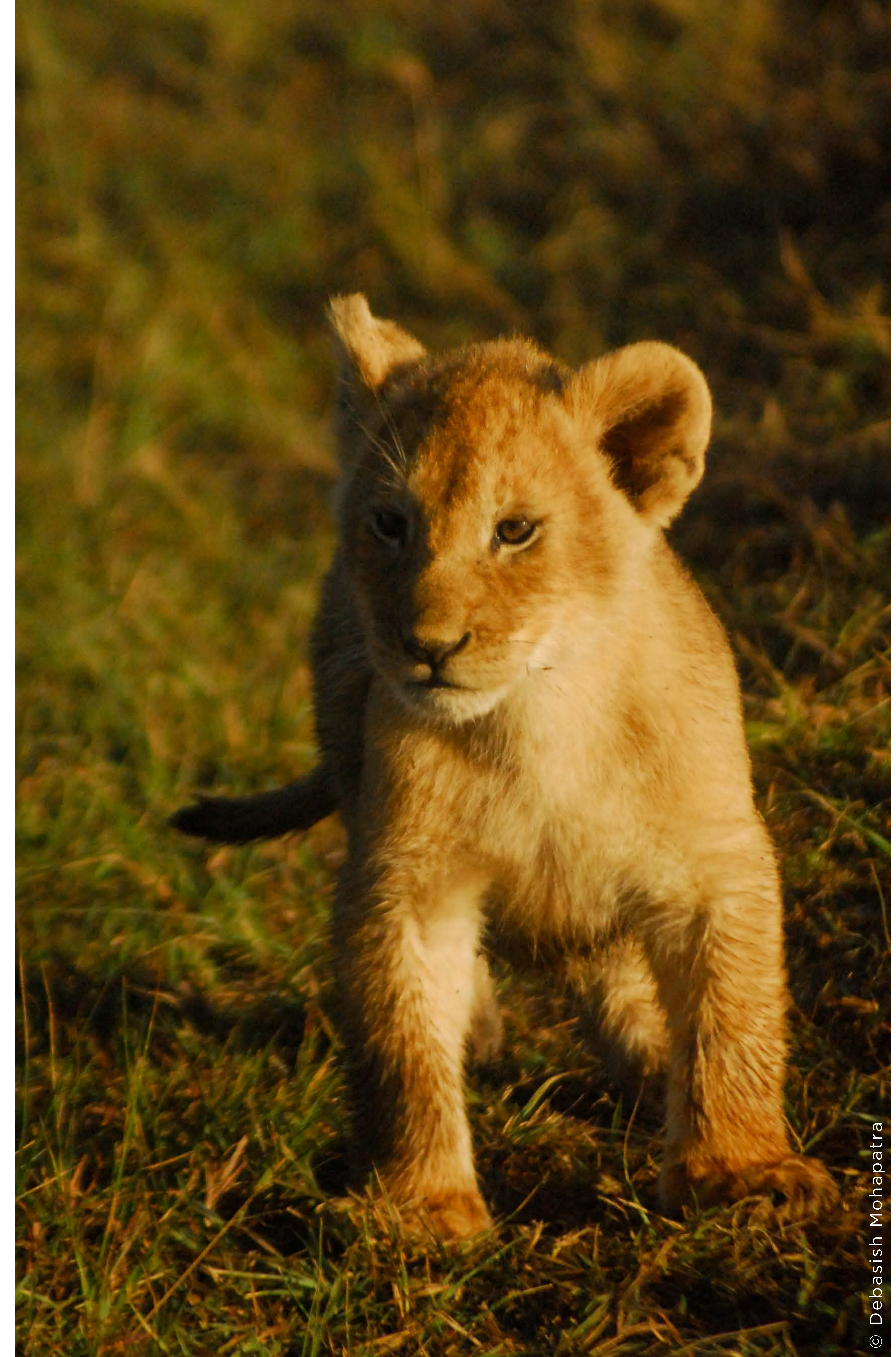
The sunsets during our evening safaris were equally majestic and were the best part of my time in the bush.

The highlight of the trip for me was when we sighted a new-born leopard cub. My guide said it was very tough to sight such a small cub that close.

I was also able to learn photography a bit more in detail from my mentors.

This trip touched my heart and I hope that this majestic place and its beautiful animals are there forever.

I will be going back to Masai Mara in near future soon.



© Debasish Mohapatra









Beetle (*Stolas festiva*)

**Her Views
& Visuals**
By Cynthia Bandurek



Cynthia Bandurek is an Argentinian Biologist (Ecology), Field Naturalist, Nature photographer and wildlife artist.

Cynthia is PT Explorers' Contributing Editor for South America

<https://cynthiabandurek.com>
https://www.instagram.com/cynthiabandurek_artphotography/

Her Views and Visuals



Jumping spider (Salticidae)



How did your interest for wildlife arise?

I think the interest in wildlife is innate in me. Since I can remember, I felt attracted to nature and I was concerned about the impact we as humans produce in the environment. Even as a child, I read several books about environmental conservation. I decided to study Ecology first and then have a career as a naturalist. Being a naturalist led me to get involved in several conservation projects, as it also allowed me to work for more than 11 years in the Museum of Natural Sciences of Buenos Aires, becoming involved in environmental education projects and interpretation trail design.

My passion was so strong that I never had doubts about what my personal and professional paths would be.

How do you describe your journey as a photographer and a person?

I discovered photography while studying for the naturalist career. At first it was a tool for registering the species that I was to study, but I immediately fell in love with it. I began to study to be a self-taught photographer, and little by little photography became a fundamental part of my life, and an effective tool to transmit my values about nature and the importance of every creature in this magnificent world.

Art in relation with the natural world has always been part of me. As a child I spent hours painting and drawing animals as a self-taught artist. Art runs through my veins as a family legacy. My grandfather



Metallic Green Bee (*Augochloropsis* sp.)



Pavo real (*Automeris naranja*)

and his brother were recognized artists. Having knowledge in artistic and compositional matters made learning photography easy, as it was about learning the technique. Discovering photography was an important event in my life; with it I found the perfect way to use and spread my scientific knowledge in favor of mother nature, it allowed me to touch the minds of people that often remain oblivious to this natural universe. The small natural world caught my attention, which led me to specialize in macro photography, because through the lens we can perceive an entirely different universe, that our own biology prevents us.

What is your view on Nature

Conservation? How can we, as wildlife photographers, help to protect our Mother Nature?

Almost all my life is about nature and almost everything is about leaving an effective message about the value of life. Photography, as an artistic expression has a big impact in the viewers. The famous principle of pictorial superiority "A picture is worth a thousand words". And if we add a message, transmitted with sensitivity and passion, the power is even bigger.

In September of 2017 I self-published my first book (***The World of Small, an Approach to the Universe of Arthropods from an Artistic, Visual and Evolutionary***

Perspective) that unites scientific knowledge and photography, in this specific case about the universe of arthropods. There is particular focus and thought given to counteract the negative connotation that involves the arthropods, when a feeling of fear and uncertainty prevails for the unknown.

Can you give our readers the best macro photography tips? Do you have any recommendation on settings or gear for macro photography?

The complexity of macro photography, especially of living beings like arthropods is because all the variables are on the limits. There is no depth of field, there is no light, the possibility of trepidation is

big, the distance of focus is short, and of course in most cases the animal doesn't stop moving. I think the best way is to have control of all the parameters of the camera, the only ones we can control... nature has its own rules.

I would recommend...

- First, be patient. You will really need it.
- Spend time in the field practicing.
- Learn about behavior of animals.
- Use manual mode of the camera (Controlling the opening of the diaphragm, the shutter speed and ISO, and especially its consequent DOF)
- Use the manual focus mode. Trying to focus by varying your distance to the subject.
- Use flash with a diffuser in manual



Wasp (Hymenoptera)

mode too to have control of the scene light.

- Approach the subject carefully and slowly.
- Pay attention not only to the subject but also to the background and always think of composition.
- And always be respectful of nature.

What plans do you have in the future related to Wildlife Photography?

This year I am invited to talk about Macro Photography and Conservation in two events in Argentina. One of them in the International Nature Photographer Meeting, in Formosa Province (August) and the other in the Nature Photography Congress in Buenos Aires City (September).

I am thinking of a new project, probably a book about the vegetal world, but again with an artistic point of view. Using the conjunction of artistic techniques of photography and scientific knowledge.

In July, I will be in Ecuador, traveling in its forests: Choco and Amazonas, photographing its biodiversity.

Tell us something about the gears you use and how it helped in your photographic journey?

I use a Canon 6d, a Canon 100mm 2.8 macro, flashes, Raynox lenses and extender tubes and a handmade diffuser.

But I think you must take advantage of the equipment you have and try to do the best with it.

Ball Bug (*Crustacea*)



Crab spider (*Thomisidae*)



THROUGH THE LENS

CREATIVE NATURE PHOTOGRAPHY

By Amartya Mukherjee



© Amartya Mukherjee

THROUGH THE LENS



Amartya Mukherjee, a Bangalore-based chartered accountant, is an award-winning photographer and a regularly published writer, whose initial grounding in image-making was in the pictorial and street photography genre of Kolkata. Subsequently, with the move to the digital medium just over a decade ago, he ventured into extensive outdoor photography, with a focus on natural history. In the course of visiting over 25 countries with his camera, he has explored several of the iconic wildernesses of Asia, Africa and the Arctic.

Amartya's photographic work has been awarded multiple times in various contests in India and abroad and his images and articles have been regularly featured over 50 times in leading global and Indian publications/ websites. Through his creative work, Amartya strives to engender a love and awareness for our planet's wonderful natural and cultural heritages, some of which alas are fast disappearing.

https://www.facebook.com/amartya.mukherjee.7/photos_all

For well over a hundred years now, painting has been evolving from a literal, descriptive visual medium to a realm of ideas and pure art. A multitude of movements - from the impressionists such as Claude Monet and Auguste Renoir to mind-bogglingly prolific and versatile originality of Pablo Picasso to the hallucinatory, surreal genius of Salvador Dali to the abstract expressionism of Jackson Pollack - have helped develop this art into a multi-arrayed domain of competing themes and styles.

Perhaps, it is time for us outdoor photographers to also unleash nature photography from the literal to the figurative and explore different versions of the principles of realism versus abstractions, of seeing versus imagining, of reproduction versus creation.

As I grow older, the way I dream of and design my images keeps evolving. My visual dictionary expands and my experience helps in appreciating the original ideas from the masters of the creative worlds - from photography to painting to cinema to music to books. Like the proverbial kid in a candy store, I love trying to gulp down everything that the artistic masters have to offer.

I have had help in my creative journey as a photographer, without which I might not have managed to expand by photographic bandwidth and perhaps may have continued for a longer time with my erstwhile style of straightforward visual documentation.

The inspiring time spent with Madhu Sarkar's innovative table top creations in

his photo-studio back in my days in Kolkata ten years ago, exposed me to the pictorial genre of art salons and the thought-provoking realms of surreal photography. More recently, spending time with the hugely knowledgeable yet refreshingly humble Jonathan Scott in his second home, namely, the Masai Mara, provided me a renewed impetus to rediscover the joy of applying in-field creative techniques in my work with wildlife. I am ever thankful to these mentors and to my myriad photographic friends with whom I have shot in various stimulating locations, from the rainforests of Rwanda to the frozen seas of Svalbard. Most intriguingly, however, I am grateful to the creative visual masters across genres such as Art Wolfe, Frans Lanting, Raghu Rai, Steve McCurry, Sebastiao Salgado et al, whose work I have long admired from afar. Earlier, I had seen their awe-inspiring pictures in books and galleries and nowadays study them in the virtual world through the internet. I have been, in a sense, in an informal distant-learning programme from all these masters on how to take one's photography to the next level, a bit like Eklavya in the Mahabharata who, by worshipping the statue of the great guru Dronacharya, learnt the art of archery.

As one evolves as a photographic artist, the basic tools of image-making become a given: these include a sound working knowledge of one's camera equipment including flashlights, lenses and tripods; of understanding the photographic possibilities of various lighting conditions; of leveraging prior knowledge about one's intended photo-subject; of having adequate post-processing and image

organization workflow competencies in software such as Adobe Lightroom and so on.

The next level in the creative journey, however, is more about how to spark one's imagination and translate one's visual ideas and aspirations into duly designed pictures. By designing pictures, in the context of nature photography, I am certainly not talking of elaborate post-processing using Photoshop – far from it! Designing pictures is more about expanding one's ability to “see” what others perhaps may not; designing pictures means having the ability to create compelling compositions in-camera by understanding how points of view, choice of lenses, angles of shooting, interpretations of light, action, lines, shapes, patterns, colours, shutter speeds, aperture and other factors inter-play with one another and impact the image design. This leads to gradually developing one's own distinctive style, which of course, will evolve as well!

I have gradually realised that one of the ways to create one's own pictures is to design images like a line or a small stanza from a poem, to express a thought or feeling. In my childhood I loved reciting poems and based on some enthusiastic attempts at writing rhymes, I had, at the age of ten, been gifted a notebook for writing poems by a kind-hearted neighbour. That notebook later gave way to a diary. Some publications in newspapers and magazines followed. And some heartbreaks. And my attempts at what I thought was poetry filled the pages as I grew up.

Later when I discovered film photography thanks to my late father, and then the more affordable digital photography, my written poetry gave way to attempts at visual poetry. My poetry diary and my film photographs have long gone missing – perhaps forever. But music and poetry, visual or written, can still help me find myself and lose myself at the same time. They help catalyse creative thoughts and provide the sparks that urge me to try and tell stories or express my thoughts and feelings through my pictures.

A surreal sunset in the Masai Mara can therefore, without warning, remind me of a lyrical stanza from a song by Rabindranath Tagore or make me want to recollect some half-forgotten verse by T S Eliot. A twinkling night sky above Mount Kilimanjaro or in the high Himalayas can sub-consciously take me back though time and space to the immortal quatrains of Omar Khayyam, or suddenly transform into a Vincent Van Gogh painting. And it is this type of inspiring inputs from other art sources that help keep the creative juices flowing.

As I try to go up the path of visual exploration, I am often confronted with creative compositional choices. With experience I have realised I am getting more and more predisposed to leave out more than I include in my compositions. I have got more inclined towards designing suggestive abstracts, or trying to capture the drama of emotion or motion in context of my photographic subject, be it in a landscape, wildlife or human interest visual. Increasingly, I endeavour to go beyond simply creating pretty pictures or action images, which, by the way, I must

emphatically state that I still enjoy and continue to make whenever suitable opportunities present themselves.

A key learning for me has been the internalization of the fact that how we see is often more important than simply what we see. While the latter, that is, gaining proper access to one's intended subject, be it a unique cultural event or a special natural history moment, remains sine qua non, consciously honing this craft of “seeing” certainly helps in differentiating how various photographers will make pictures under similar circumstances. For example, the abstract is often more compelling than the obvious – a back-lit, side-lit or spot-lit photograph is at times more visually arresting than a ‘perfectly’ front-lit image; a wide-angle close-up of an animal in its natural habitat sometimes tells the story better than a frame-filling telephoto portrait; a slow-shutter-pan is often a more interesting depiction of a moving subject than using fast shutter speed to freeze the rhythm of nature.

Even after clicking tens of thousands of images in over twenty-five countries, I still enjoy experimenting and learning new things about visual art and understanding light still feel kicked about going to the outdoors to try and create something interesting with my camera ... still get excited and humbled in equal measure to see my work awarded or featured in mainstream publications or hung on a buyer's drawing room wall ...still love immersing myself in nature and art at the the same time ... still relish succumbing to a relentless streak of contagious creativity and self-discovery. This is a never-ending inward journey of healing, connecting and

communicating. A journey that helps put our day-to-day superfluous and transient triumphs and defeats in perspective. A journey that attempts to seek the very soul of a photograph, which helps me discover the essence of my own soul.

The muse may be different for different shutterbugs, but the art we can create as photographers through pictorial poetry is capable of transcending genres, boundaries, languages and cultures. And thereby enable us to visually share our unique inward journeys with the outside world.



This low angle, ground level shot helps put forth a different perspective of the galloping kiang (Tibetan Wild Ass) in their natural habitat near Tso Kar (lake), Ladakh at an altitude of over 15,000 feet. The multiple layers in the composition help add to the painting like effect, including the lower border of the grass that I included in the frame to take the weight of the composition. Getting the drama of the wildlife action captured in context of the animal's habitat, instead of going for a tight frame, often adds to the story telling impact that a still image has.



© Amartya Mukherjee

Star Trails over the night sky in Ladakh; I had used a tripod, ballhead and a remote release for this 12-minute exposure. Vincent Van Gogh's immortal creation "The Starry Night", continues to influence creative souls from singers to painters. It certainly served to inspire me to try and paint my photograph with the light of the stars as they traced their motion across the night skies. We must be willing to experiment to expand our visual vocabulary in order to evolve our nature photography from documentation to art.



© Amartya Mukherjee

To my mind, this tree seemed to awaken at the murmurings of the birds as they returned with flapping wings, caressed by the fading light and powdered by the dust of distant lands. The bent tree seemed to be welcoming the returning birds, like the way our loved ones greet us upon returning home, in mutual celebration. Creative nature photography is often about telling stories or conveying emotions, and this is one such example from the wilderness of eastern India.



© Amartya Mukherjee

I intentionally shot this elephant herd at Kaziranga, Assam at a slower shutter speed to create a distinctive image - to capture the movement of the trunk amidst the dust while freezing the tiny eyes of world's biggest land animal. The dust and the motion adds to the drama and helps visually arrest the viewer. Sadly, though, this lumbering giant is under threat in north-eastern India from habitat degradation, fragmentation and railway accidents, as age-old elephant corridors are getting disrupted by human intrusions.



© Amartya Mukherjee

I made this image in a breath-taking fjord in Svalbard, an Arctic archipelago. After some exploration and carefully deciding on the composition, I used my tripod to create a long exposure and used multiple filters to try and compellingly capture what I saw through my eyes and my mind's eyes - the haunting tranquility of a pristine Arctic fjord, depicted in a surreal manner to add to the 'out of the world' feel of this spectacular Arctic destination.



© Amartya Mukherjee

This exposure image of a waterfall was just long enough to give a silky feel to the falling water, but not so long as to make it look artificial. This picture was made with the help of Lee's Grad ND filter & Gitzo tripod, on one of the many unnamed and unspoilt islands in the Svalbard archipelago, north of the Arctic circle. After landing at this island in our rubber zodiac, we had climbed with our tripod, cameras and lenses up over a ridge and then crawled and walked over the tundra in search of the endemic Svalbard reindeer. After a productive time with those animals amidst a snowfall, we photographed this picturesque waterfall, which luckily had not frozen over yet.



© Amartya Mukherjee

I often yearn to create in-field visual art amidst what I experience in nature. And minimalism in composition in terms of elements and colour selection et al often helps achieve a creative fulfilment. The tyre tracks of our jeep stretching over the cracked, surreal salt-pan right up to the horizon seemed symbolic of the journey of life, and I accordingly composed this picture, with the white skull of the wild ass serving as the foreground interest between the tyre tracks. The skull, of course, is symbolic of death - at an individual level and at a specie level i.e. extinction. I loved the texture of the parched earth, and to get a sense of the huge expanse with a large depth of field I used my wide angle 16-35mm, stopping it down to F16. The composition, though, was finally more about my depth of feeling rather than depth of field!



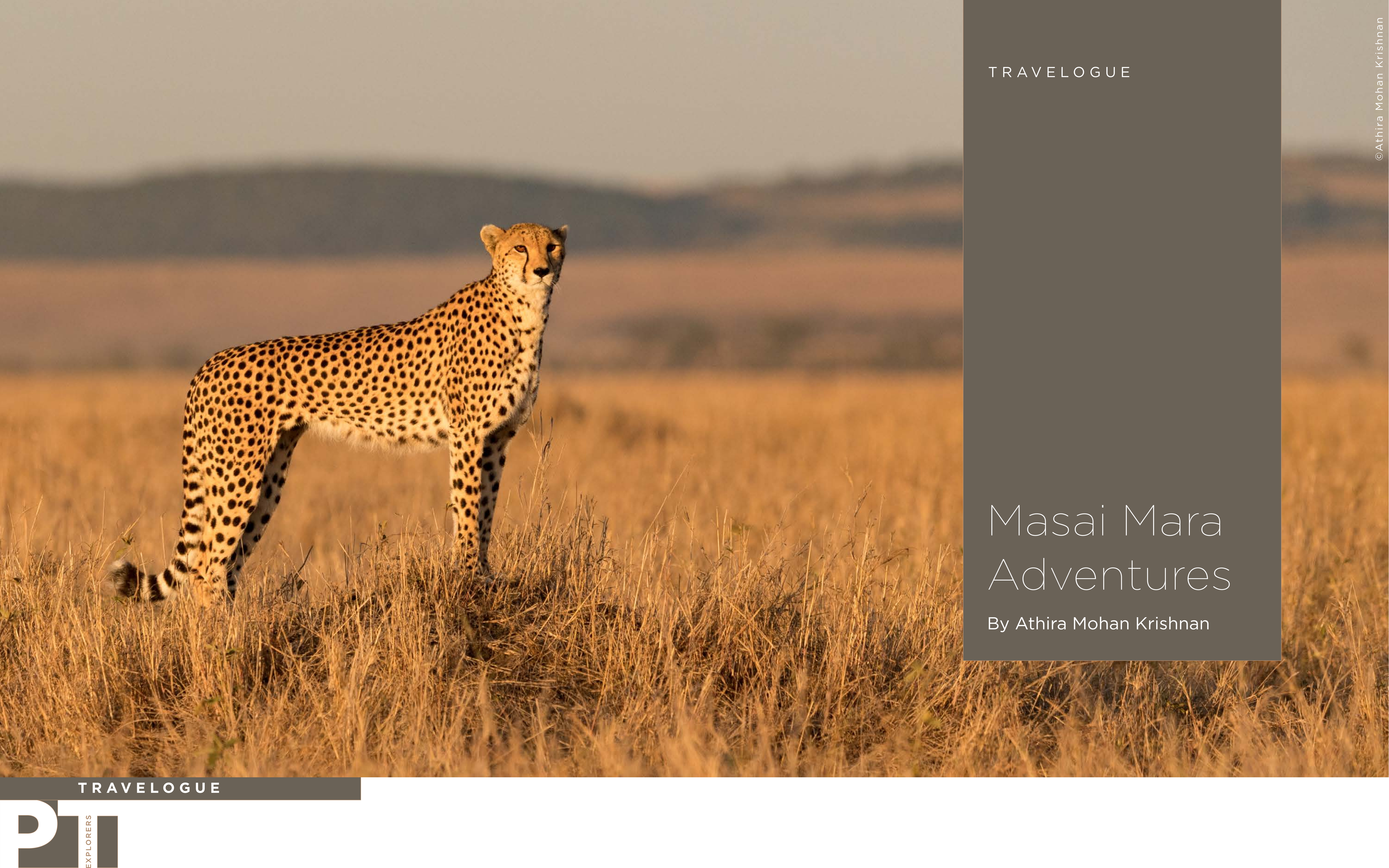
© Amartya Mukherjee

The endless plains at the Masai Mara, a veritable mecca for nature lovers, with its open horizons offer fantastic sunrise and sunset photo opportunities to the creative art photographer. After I decided to create this silhouette, I waited for the other secretary bird to fly in to join its mate on the treetop to add some action to this surreal scene. New innovations by camera manufacturers, such as highlight weighted metering, a Nikon improvement on the spot metering, which allows highlights not to get over exposed, allows the image-maker to focus more on the aesthetic aspects while designing the image without getting caught up in the technicalities.



© Amartya Mukherjee

Animals walking across a ridge on the endless horizons of the savannah in places such as the Masai Mara and the Serengeti provide an ideal moment to make silhouettes. And if the photographer can get right onto the ground level and get the sky between animal's belly and the grass, one can craft a moodier picture, of the untrammelled freedom of untamed Africa against the vast expanse of the tropical skies, a timeless scene that will hopefully be available for our future generations.



TRAVELOGUE

Masai Mara Adventures

By Athira Mohan Krishnan

©Athira Mohan Krishnan

TRAVELOGUE





Born and brought up in the Warm Heart of Africa, Malawi, Athira Mohan Krishnan is a wildlife & travel lover with the aspiration of building her photography skills.

She is a freelance social media consultant & manager for brands across the UAE and India, volunteers time for Paws Trails Explorers, and has an interest in food photography.

facebook.com/thisgirlfrommalawi
thisgirlfrommalawi.com
instagram.com/thisgirlfrommalawi
instagram.com/thefoodshutterbug

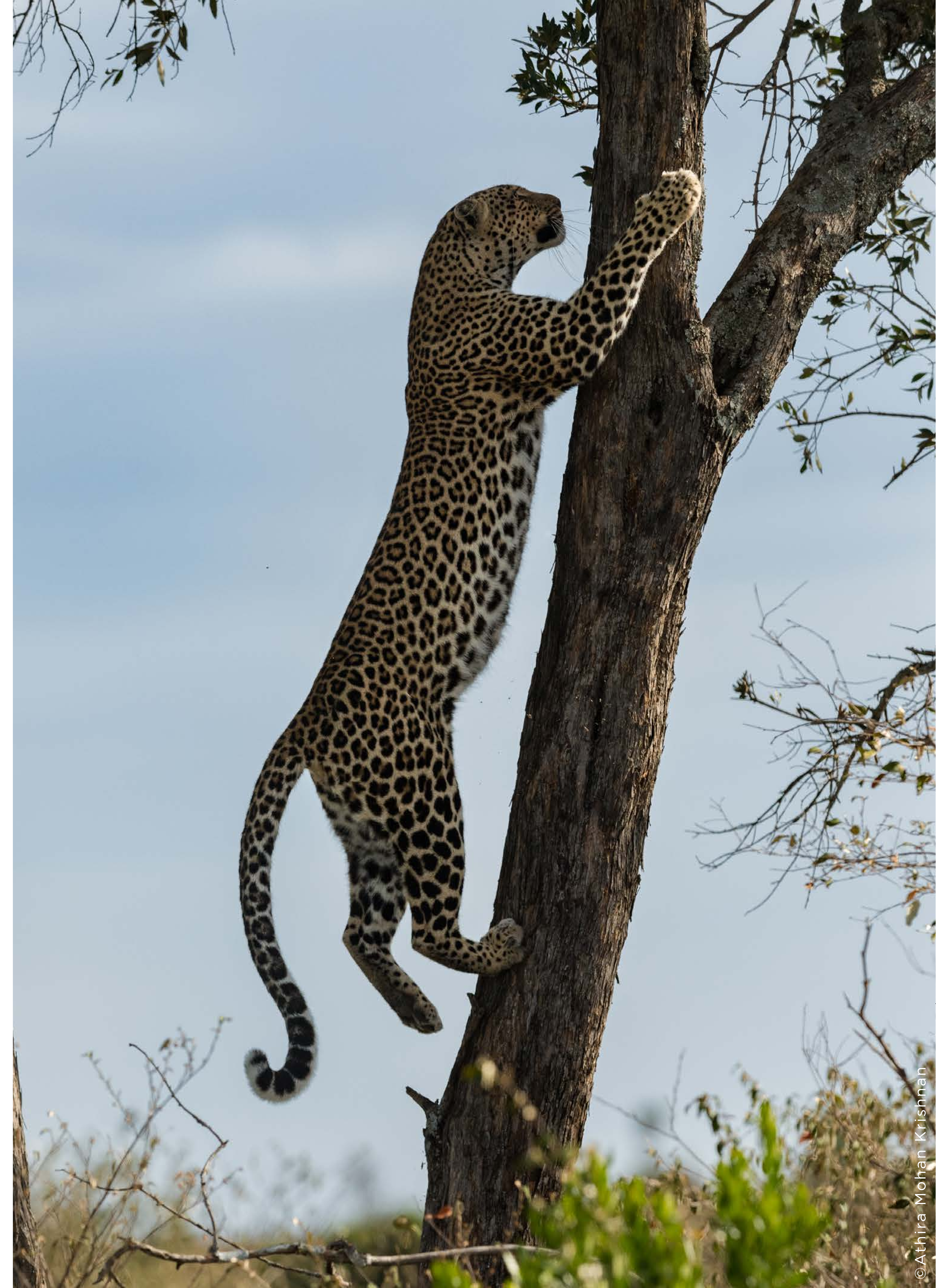
About Masai Mara

Masai Mara National Reserve is a stunning location of savannah wilderness running along the border of Tanzania, located in Southwestern Kenya. There are vast and grassy plains as far as the eye can see, Masai villages in the surrounding landscape, and some magnificent animals such as elephants, lions, cheetahs and more in their natural territory. For those looking for a truly African wildlife

experience, Masai Mara is a hugely popular safari destination.

The experience

In late November 2018, a group of 9 individuals chose to come together on a wildlife photography expedition with the Paws Trails team, headed by Hermis Haridas and Nisha Purushothaman. One of those individuals, is myself - an avid travel photographer and wildlife lover. I had an incredible experience on this





©Athira Mohan Krishnan

journey, wherein for the two years before this trip, I'd been dreaming of attending a wildlife photography workshop out in the wild. To be taught about photographing nature within nature itself, is undoubtedly a surreal experience.

There was a total of 6 days out in the Mara, with early morning game drives that lasted till about noon, lunches back at the hospitable Malaika Bush Camp, and back out for an evening drive until sundown.

We were fortunate enough to see an abundance of animals out in the wild. From a memorable cheetah kill, to a breathtaking sighting of a leopard, and so much more, this trip was definitely a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Added to this, there's the exclusivity factor of having only two people in a vehicle, with either Nisha or Hermis mentoring us on the nuances of wildlife photography. I should point out that I couldn't have asked for better teachers - their patience in their teachings was admirable and their skillset excelled throughout the trip.

Three considerations to take into account before you plan your trip

1. Sleep.

The only way that you can truly obtain the best out of the entire trip is to lose out on your sleep. As funny as this may sound, this is something I struggled with - the guests are required to be up by about 4:45am (leaving the camp at 5:30am for the morning safari), and by the time we would get done with dinner it was close to 11pm. That's the

whole experience though, and even if it's exhausting by the end, believe me when I say it's well worth it.

2. Fortune and patience.

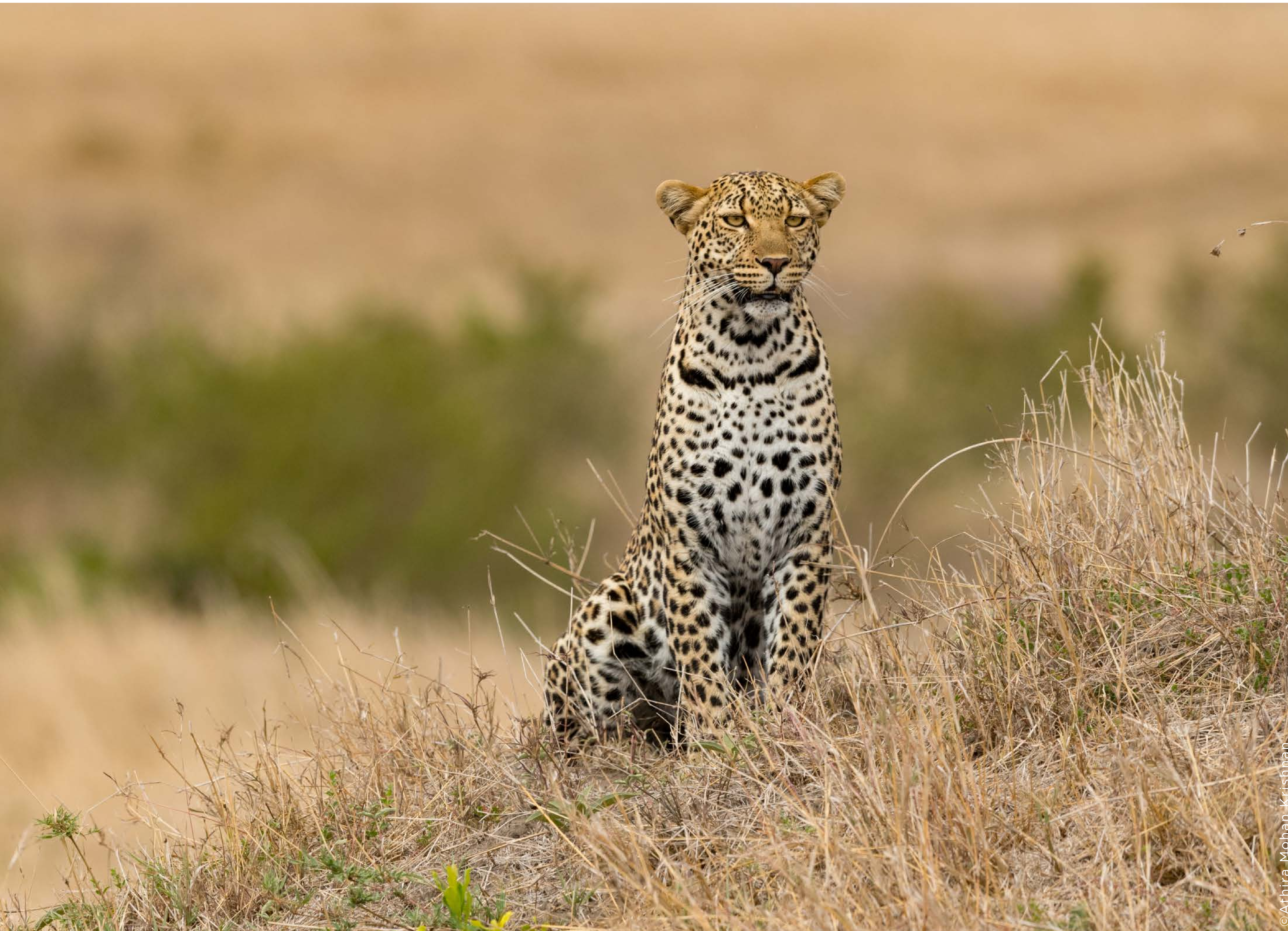
As Nisha has often enough mentioned to me throughout my trip, you can never know what to expect in the wild. We have to take into consideration that the encounters or sightings we are fortunate enough to see, is by pure luck, and be grateful for the same. Having said that, you can only predict so much of animal behaviour. Hence on a sighting, we learnt to be alert throughout the time, waiting in patience for anything that could occur.

3. Respect for the environment.

Masai Mara is known for having several vehicles surrounding the animals as they move through their environment. This can be disheartening for some, and for others it may be common enough. Although this is something that the animals seem to have adapted to, there is some discussion on this conservation issue. Are we disturbing the wild in its natural state with the vehicles following around the animals constantly? This is an ethical issue that we as wildlife photographers definitely need to consider.

Sometimes, it's not about getting the best photograph - it's especially not worth it if we are going against the laws of nature. Ideally, we should be the ones using our photography as a conservation tool in order to bring awareness to the wider community about the beautiful earth that we live in, and the animals that deserve to live in their ecosystem.





There's more to these three key points naturally, however these are the top items I would let someone know before they plan their first safari. For those of you who are more accustomed to these types of adventures, adjustment should come easy.

Three highlights from the trip

1. Playful cubs

Having never had the opportunity to see lion cubs out in the wild, this was a visual treat. On the first day, it was by pure luck that on the drive we stumbled upon two adorable lion cubs and their mother. Interestingly enough, this was one of the few moments in which there were few vehicles around these lions, and the mother was unconcerned about our presence, content to lie in the shade as her children frolicked about.

2. Leopard sighting

Given how I'd learnt that leopards are the most elusive of the big cats, it was a delight for us to be able to witness Laurean, a mother leopard, take a leap onto a tree and relish in her kill. This sighting took about two hours before she actually leapt on to the tree. Our jeep had steamrolled off in the morning to the location where it was said that Laurean was last seen; and then we began the wait. Given that her kill was hanging on a tree, the guides knew that she would show up; it was just a matter of when.

Following on from witnessing her graceful movements, we got the opportunity to meet Laurean's daughter, Luluka, and





158

PT EXPLORERS JUN/JUL 2019

it was a delight to witness these two leopards on the last day of our trip. Two leopards in one day, in broad daylight – that is pure luck!

3. Two big cat kills

Admittedly these are two separate incidents. In one scenario, there were five cheetahs looking for a kill. Four of them

distracted a Mother Eland from her baby, and the remaining cheetah went in for the kill. It was brutal, and hardly anyone noticed the fifth cheetah sneaking to make his kill until the last few moments!

In the second situation, a Mother Lion was looking to feed her cubs, and she spotted a family of warthogs. Much to our dismay, a baby warthog was caught

and killed within seconds, and the battle continued between the cubs for food – the excitement didn't end at just the kill!!

Best time to visit

This would depend on what you'd like to experience in the wild, added to the kind of photography goals yours would be.

It's suggested that the best time to visit is

159

during the dry season between early June to late December, in which the wildebeest migration also occurs (between July and October). The rains often occur between March to May, in which it may be harder for animal sightings, but photographers can encounter some beautiful shots of animals out in the rain.





Photography
Techniques
By Lisl Moolman

TIPS & TRICKS





In her mid 30's she moved to Phalaborwa - adjacent to Kruger National Park. Having been visiting Kruger since a very early age with family, this move was overdue and much appreciated! Being in such close proximity to the park, it was inevitable that she would pursue the hobby of photography. She aim is to share her images to as many like-minded people as she can, so that they can experience the beauty of nature through her eyes.

Lisl prefer portraying nature from a different angle, as she see and perceive it. Capturing detail and using light to enhance the picture, are some of the paramount elements Lisl incorporate to create more impact.

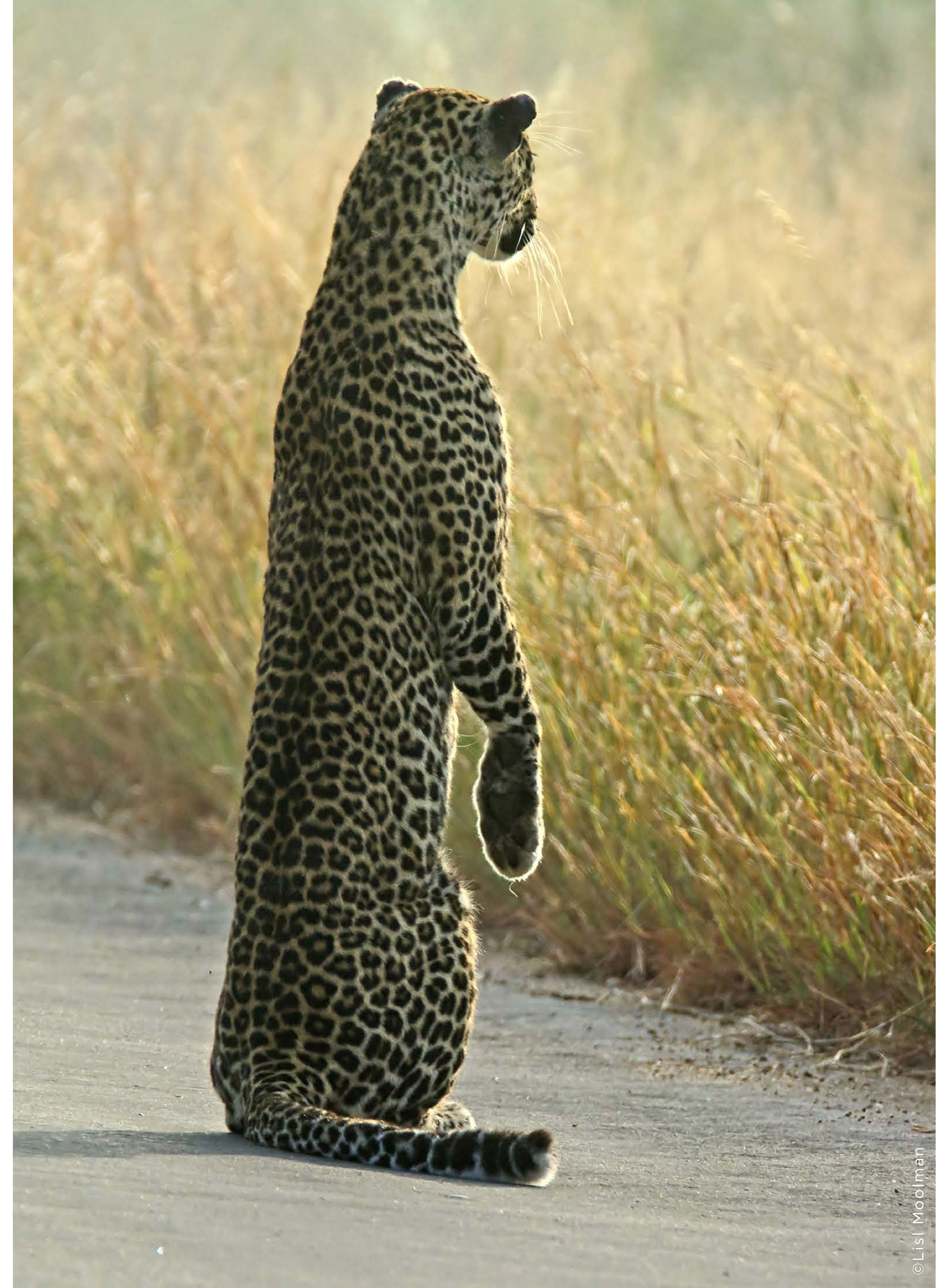
<http://lismoolman.com/>
[facebook.com/lismoolmanwildlifephotography/](https://www.facebook.com/lismoolmanwildlifephotography/)

Driving around the bend, my heart starts racing as a couple of yet-to-identified shapes appear in the distance - strolling casually in the road.

As my hand starts reaching out to my camera, I start counting: 3 Lions? Then the guessing game comes to an end - 3 leopards! Adrenaline flow, a shaky hand grabs the camera... (this type of behaviour has an explanation and name: Kruger-Photo Fever!)

.....and suddenly a whole story unfolds through the viewfinder of my camera. The adult leopard sits upright on her haunches looking out for her cub as he went exploring in the long grass. She did this not once, twice, but three times. Fortunately, my camera was ready to capture this unique moment.

There is nothing wrong about capturing a moment in your memory forever, but sometimes the moment is special enough





©Lis! Moolman

that you wish you could look at it again and share it with friends and family.

As a wildlife photographer and regular visitor to the Kruger National Park (and resident of the small town of Phalaborwa adjacent to the park), I would like to share a bit of experience to make your next visit photographically more memorable. I derived this information from fellow-photographers, taking courses, own experience and using a bit of my own imagination.

The following are elements I incorporate in my photography in Kruger.

PHOTOGRAPHIC HOT SPOTS IN THE PARK

There is no easy answer as animals move around, and it is also seasonally determined.

These are general suggestions which might assist you though:

1. Visit Bird Hides like Lake Panic, which cater for photographers.

2. Visit waterholes, dams & rivers especially during the dry period. Predators tend to prowl near water during these periods. Various types of animal behaviour can be observed when animals come to drink. For example, elephants are extremely playful and relaxed in this environment, unless baby calves are present when they tend to be more wary of predators.

3. One of my favourite areas to visit remains the Satara area, as it provides more open areas and the photographic subjects are more visible with a simple

background.

Every area of the park offers its own magic. From the abundant large trees and birdlife in the north, the waterhole at Punda Maria Camp, to the south with its more regular sightings of cats. More day visitors and safari vehicles visit the south, leading to more reported sightings. Sightings are therefore more congested and photographically it might sometimes present a challenge to get a good spot.

EYES

Always try to get the eye in focus, and check that there is light in the eye. Eyes are how we connect to animals/people. Capturing the eyes in a wildlife photograph, you have achieved the main element of a great image.

BEST TIME OF THE DAY TO TAKE PHOTOS

1. Most people have heard about the golden hour. This is typically the hour after sunrise and before sunset, which basks animals in a soft warm light. The light is not as harsh as typical in the middle of the day.

2. Cloudy days (not heavy overcast) produce soft light and prolong your photographic hours.

BE PREPARED

1. Learn from my mistakes: Switch on your camera before leaving the camp or driving into the park. Countless occasions, I have missed shots because my camera was still switched off, or the lens cap was still on.

2. Check the light from time to time and

adjust the settings accordingly, should you shoot on Aperture or Manual mode. (Auto mode will adjust the settings by itself, but also offers less control over the speed and depth of a shot.) It is quite frustrating to take a photo with a previous sight's or day's settings. There is sometimes simply too little time to adjust your settings as nature waits for nobody!

3. Make sure you download your memory cards on a regular basis to provide ample space for the next day's shooting.

4. Keep the camera batteries charged. I do this as soon as I return from a drive.

LIGHT

Unless you want the animal to have rim-lighting, don't shoot into the sun. It will result in your subject being a silhouette only, and you will lose detail and colour.

ANTICIPATION OF ANIMAL BEHAVIOUR

Anticipation of possible behavioural trades will aid you significantly during your photographic adventures.

- Animals are normally quite wary of lurking predators at a waterhole since they tend to be vulnerable when they are drinking. This makes for good action photography, as they will start drinking and at the slightest sound or movement, react and start fleeing.

- Elephants are notorious for believing they are the 'owners' of any water source and don't readily share with other thirsty animals. Yet again this provides interesting interaction and therefore photographic opportunities as the elephants will charge/shoot water at other animals which dare to try and share.







- I prefer driving with open windows. This puts me in touch with what is happening in my immediate surroundings. Snorting impalas, a lion's roar, a fish eagle's call points me in the direction of a possible sighting and/or action. The smell of a carcass will lead you in the direction of the carcass...

BACKGROUND

The simpler the background, the more your subject will stand out/'pop'. Too much detail is distracting to the eye. The further the background is removed from the subject, the more blurred it will be, even with a basic camera lens.

GUIDELINES FOR SHUTTER SPEED:

Non-moving subjects - 1/500sec to 1/800sec. Faster when using very long lenses.

Slow-moving subjects - 1/1000s to 1/1600s (Animals walking, or running slowly).

Fast-moving subjects - 1/2500s to 1/4000s (Birds flying, animals leaping, playing, fighting).

Avoid the following:

Shadows on the animal's face and body and/or twigs and branches covering the subjects' face (unless back- or side-lighting is utilised). This will prevent a clear shot of the face.

Camera Equipment

The basic camera gear that I use in Kruger is: Camera Bodies: Nikon D7100 and Nikon D500; Lenses: Tamron 150-600mm, Nikon 300mm F4 and Nikon 500mm F4





© Gabriel Hermida

Gabriel Hermida -
Argentinian Artist

WILD ARTS SHOWCASE



The Argentine artist Gabriel Hermida aims, through his art, to create awareness for the protection and conservation of endangered species. Gabriel has a special interest in capturing the character and natural expression of the animal.

His works invite the viewer to experience a different dimension, alien to our daily reality. The animal's gaze is the gateway to this dimension where words do not exist, only presence.

https://www.instagram.com/hermida.gabriel_art/

<https://www.facebook.com/hermidagabriel/>

My experience and interest in animal painting began at an early age, at the same time that my artistic career was gaining impulse and I was beginning to consider the possibility of dedicating myself to painting full time. By the time I was 20 years old, I was able to get a place to exhibit my works in the prestigious "Los Coleccionistas" art gallery in Buenos Aires.

Over time, I have also been a member of organizations dedicated to spreading animal-art, such as "Nature artists for Conservation" and "Society of animal artists".

Although, my learning and search for an artistic identity and development of technical mastery, led me to represent different themes, my interest



© Gabriel Hermida



was always focused on realistic and traditional painting. In fact, I have come to experience techniques as varied and different as pastel, ink, charcoal, watercolor, acrylic, oil, etc. These techniques allowed me to address subjects such as landscape, human figure, still life, among others. From the admiration towards the great masters of painting I could understand the extreme importance of capturing the effect of light, as a first resource to emphasize in a convincing way both the volume and the sensation of space within the scene. Among the real artists that I have most admired are Velázquez, Rembrandt, Sorolla, Zorn, Sargent, etc.

However, as I was deepening my learning and expanding my knowledge of the artistic scene in my country, I was able to get to know the work of a renowned artist who impacted me in a special way; his name was Axel Amuchástegui (1921-2002). This admiration led me to meet him in person with the purpose of showing him my first works about animals and asking him for criticism and guidance. Although I did not learn about his technique and creative processes, it was when talking to this artist, when I found a stimulus to continue on the path I had started to follow.

My growing admiration for animal art, also led me to discover the work of great contemporary artists, such as Robert Bateman, John Banovich, Paul Augustinus, Bob Khun, among others. I can affirm that such artists were my reference and model to follow for a long time.



© Gabriel Hermida



As for the creative process, this is always a challenge, since my purpose in creating a work is not simply based on the copy of a beautiful photograph. It is a process that demands an analysis and understanding of the species that I decide to represent. I am interested in capturing the character and achieving a natural expressiveness that in some way awakens the viewer's attention and generates feelings of admiration. I am looking for the observer to feel transported to a different dimension, to an environment that as human beings we are not accustomed to frequent, accustomed to our daily reality.

Therefore, beyond basing myself on photography to create the works, on very few occasions I find a single image that fits this purpose, so for each work I use several photographs, together with preparatory studies drawn in pencil. Thus, there will be images of which I am interested in lighting conditions, in others the expression of the animal, the color of the coat, etc ... However, I always leave a large part of the process released to creativity, which always emerges as I achieve certain advances.

To create the composition, I have different resources that are not only limited to the treatment of the figure and face of the animal, but also involve the management of the environment. At this point I think it is also important to establish priorities for the treatment of detail. I like to vary the degree of detail so that I can direct the viewer's gaze towards the main focus of interest, which obviously resides in the eyes and expression of the animal. Therefore,

one of these resources consists of representing in a semi-abstract way the elements of the environment, especially those that move away from the first plane..

Although the detail is important and attractive to me, over the years and as a result of my evolution, I find the texture and richness that can be achieved with a limited number of strokes very interesting. This is one of the reasons why I really enjoy painting in oil. The possibilities offered by this technique are amazing and incomparable.

Within the animal theme, I have found special interest in the representation of big cats, mainly tigers. I find the look impressive. Everything that this transmits and that it is possible to associate with the particular character that the felines have; It is a type of look that has a lot of depth, and I personally associate it with moods, perhaps of balance, passivity and self-control. I perceive





© Gabriel Hermida

that tigers have a quality of always being at their center, with nothing that alters them. In this sense, I also intend to awaken those feelings that are latent in our human nature.

My passion and taste for painting is not limited to animal art, in fact, there were some years when I painted still life. Cultivating such a kind of painting was very beneficial for me. In fact, it was essential to achieve greater technical mastery, since it is a theme where it is customary to paint from nature. This turned out to be a great challenge at first, but I think it served as a solid step before investigating outdoor painting, also known as “plein air” painting. This is a discipline that I enjoy very much, since it implies a great challenge to work in an open space, where there are no concrete limits (as in the case of a photograph) and the light changes rapidly. This fact obliges me to synthesize, and the objective that I propose in these cases is to capture the lighting conditions in the scene, beyond the descriptive detail, which passes to a lower level of importance.

Another way in which art led me a few years ago was that of teaching. This experience is very enriching for me, since I can share my knowledge and collaborate with my students, whom I thank for trusting in my ability and experience to accompany and nurture their learning process.

Currently I keep my goal to continue my process of artistic evolution, both in the painting of animals, as in any other variant that creativity impels me to take. However, I still maintain the purpose of contributing through my works, to create awareness in favor of the conservation and protection of the species of the animal kingdom as well as of nature, which is obviously the source of life itself.





YOUR GALLERY

Shahul Hameed Valasy

Pharaoh Eagle-owl (*Bubo ascalaphus*)





YOUR GALLERY



Dilipsinh Chudasama

Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*)



YOUR GALLERY



Renny Poulose

White Rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum*)



YOUR GALLERY



Vinod Kumar

Leopard (*Panthera pardus*)



YOUR GALLERY

Diana Rudenko

Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*)





YOUR GALLERY



Chandrashekar Sundaram

Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*)



YOUR GALLERY



Khalid Al Wdaihi

Dwarf Honey Bee (*Apis florea*)



YOUR GALLERY



Manu Reghvarajan

Painted Lady (*Vanessa cardui*)



YOUR GALLERY



Mousam Ray

Himalayan Griffon (*Gyps himalayensis*)



YOUR GALLERY



EXPLORERS

Nihad N Vajid

Tiger (*Panthera tigris*)



YOUR GALLERY

Saidalavi Ambalath Veetil

Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)





YOUR GALLERY

Vipin Sharma

Desert Fox (*Vulpes vulpes pusilla*)



YOUR GALLERY

Vinu Mathew

Pharaoh Eagle-owl (*Bubo ascalaphus*)





TALE OF A ROYAL HUNT

By Nitin Michael



Fishing cat

By Vipin Sharma



Nikon Z7 Review

By Nisha Purushothaman
