



# PR

EXPLORERS

FEB / MAR 2017

## **SPIRIT OF THE WILD**

By Sergey Gorshkov

## **SQUIRREL: EMOTIONS IMPRESSED**

By Stefano Ronchi

# WILD TRAILS

AN INTERNATIONAL  
PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION

AT CARTOON ART GALLERY, DUBAI  
FROM 16 - 22 MARCH, 2017

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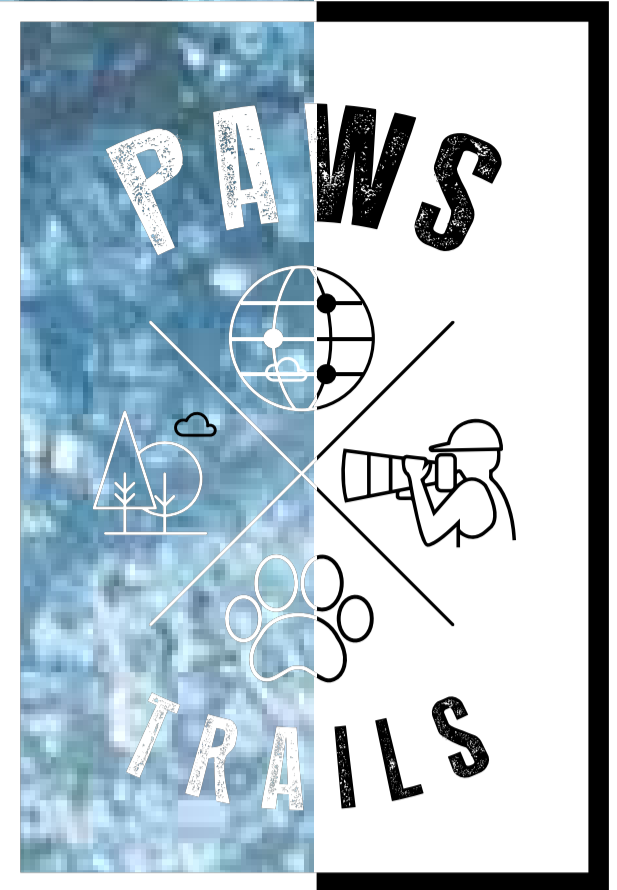
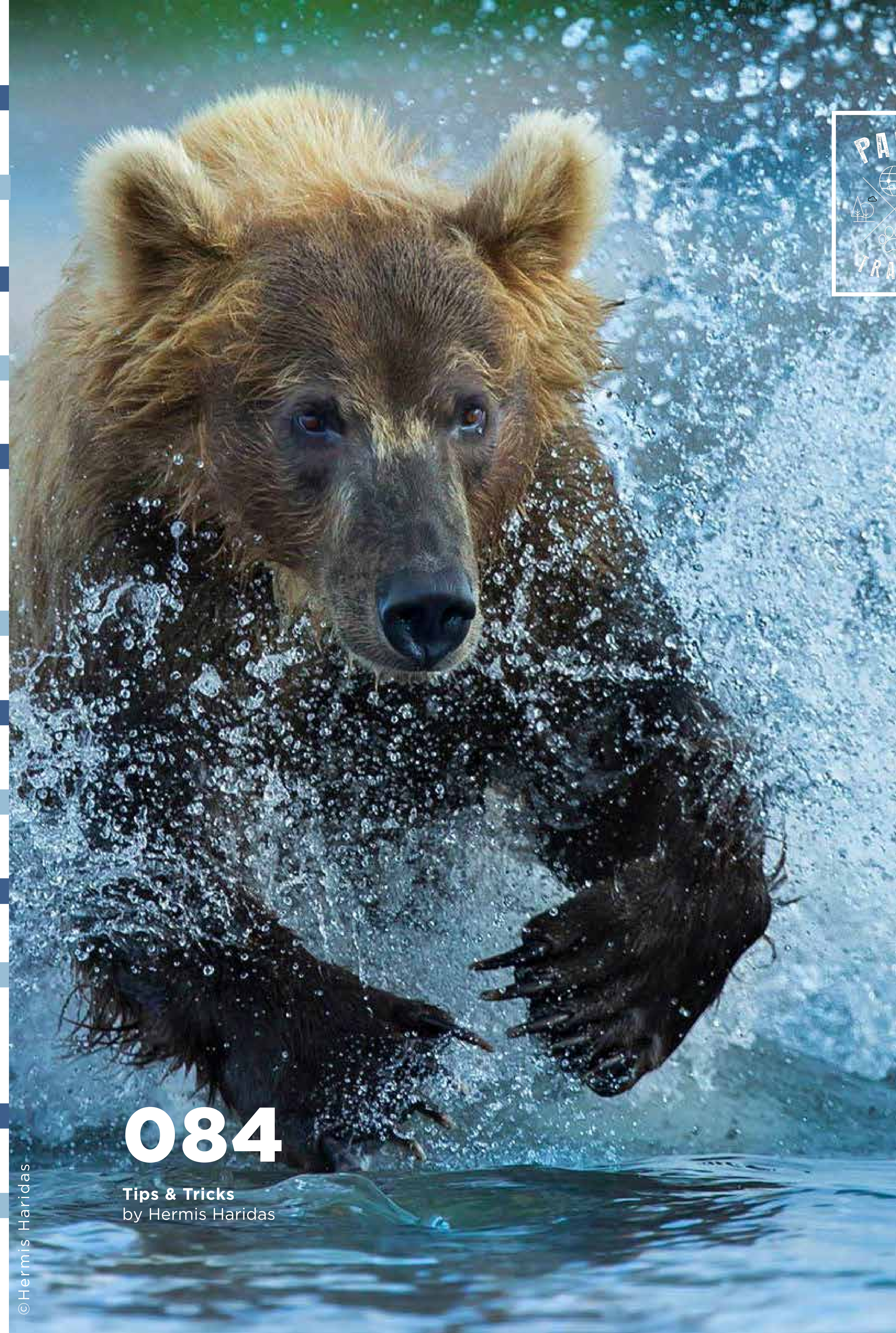
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Hank Tyler  
Editor

## EDITOR'S DEN

PT Explorers has been very well received around the world since being launched in October 2016. More than 63,000 have visited our website and magazine during the past few months.

An online publication, we are able to quickly distribute our images and news on environmental issues around the world. This platform saves paper and trees.

Photography is a key cornerstone of PT Explorers, with images of exceptional quality. Our photos capture precious moments of nature. Our photographers spend years in the field striving to capture that unique image. We are pleased to have the opportunity to display these images.

Conservation of Mother Earth's special landscapes, habitats and endangered species is priority. Nepal has greatly reduced poaching as reported in Deependra Joshi's article. Invasive species are a threat to ecosystems and the varied habitats around the world. Dr. T V Sajeev's article focuses on the problems created by different species of plants and animals. Italian Stefano Ronchi's article is on the American Gray Squirrel, an invasive in Europe that has displaced the native European Red Squirrel. Invasive species are a significant problem everywhere. Three articles in this volume are set in national parks: Galapagos NP, Nagarhole NP and Silent Valley NP.

Wildlife artists play an important role in highlighting the beauty of magnificent birds and animals. We are pleased to include in this volume the meticulous paints by Dutch artist Leon van der Linden, Wildlife artists.

We offer our readers and photographers the opportunity to share your wildlife photos on our website. Several of the best photos will be included in the magazine's gallery. Please go to our website, [www.pawstrails.com](http://www.pawstrails.com), and click on submit to upload and submit your best photos.



## PHOTOGRAPHY DIRECTOR'S CHOICE

Photographer  
Nimit Viridi



## FOUNDERS' NOTE

It is an instant world that we live in and people demand everything instant. Instant food, instant cures, instant information and instant results. This is also one of the major hurdles in conservation. The effects of conservation are at times visible only a decade or two later. This is a significant time and anything can go wrong during this time. People can lose interest, Governments can change, policies get modified, officials in charge can get replaced, priorities can change, natural disasters can occur, NGOs can run out of funds... literally anything can happen. Any of these can trigger a catastrophic reversal of all the good work in just a short time. The good effects of conservation takes a long while to show but destruction happens faster. Just open up a virgin forest for mining and we get to see this happening before our very eyes. This throws up the interesting question, how then do we do conservation in a sustainable way?

As we explored before, policies can fail, organizations can fail and regulations can fail. The answer is simple - Relationships. We have often heard about great triumphs and great turn arounds brought about primarily because of the synergy caused by the depth of relationships between two men. Wars have been won, wars have been ended, partnerships forged - all because two people decided to be available to each other and build a relationship. For conservation however, the sustainability does not depend on the relationship between people. Here it is the relationship between people and nature.

What sort of relationship do you share with nature? Is it one based on profiteering or one based on give and take? Is it based on responsibility, ownership or a sense of duty and guardianship? It has got to be better than that. Men should have the purest of relationships with nature. How is this relationships built - is it by attending seminars or reading books on nature? Is it by travelling to exotic locales? All these help, but a purest of relationship can only be attained by spending time with nature while being completely available to all the sounds, feels and smells of nature. Complete availability is different from concentration, in the sense that here you are not selective but at the same time you are not distracted. You are aware of everything happening around you and you are not concentrating on only one of them. It is loads of time spent in this state just being with nature that builds that special relationship. And don't be shy introducing your children to this pleasure. It is imperative for the survival of the earth that our children build their relationship with nature. Then conservation will not be a task, it will be a way of life.

Please build your relationship. After-all a person without a relationship with nature, does not have a relationship with oneself and there is nothing worse than that!

**Hermis Haridas &  
Nisha Purushothaman**

Founders - PT Explorers



COVER STORY

# SPIRIT OF THE WILD

by SERGEY GORSHKOV



**Sergey Gorshkov who now lives in Moscow is one of Russia's leading wildlife photographers. For many years Sergey Sergey has photographed wild nature. Every year his feeling of alarm has grown. The world, which he photographs, is in danger now. Kamchatka is Sergey's favorite place of shooting. "Travelling through the world of the wild nature of Kamchatka is so fascinating and amazing that many years of work have gone by seemingly as one single day. I am happy that I had an opportunity to observe the beauty of fauna of this peninsula. Memoirs, which I have got here, will remain with me all my life..."**

**- Sergey says.**

He thinks that each photographer should have an individual project, which he should know and develop. Sergey's photography is focused on the wild world of Kamchatka, to be exact the wild world of a bear.

**web page: [www.gorshkov-photo.com](http://www.gorshkov-photo.com)**

**Facebook: [www.facebook.com/gorshkov.photo](https://www.facebook.com/gorshkov.photo)**

### **How did it all start? Let's begin with the story of the wildlife photographer in you. How do you perceive the beauty of nature in your fabulous images?**

Initially, I was engaged in trophy hunting. I traveled all over the world. I was eager to get a trophy with horns two centimetres bigger than the world record. But then I picked up the camera - and it was much more interesting for me. When I first saw a leopard, I could not shoot him, put off the shotgun and started clicking. At this point, and that was the tipping point, I realized that I should not intrude into their lives. A pair of leopards playing nearby was lot more fun to watch and photograph than to shoot with a gun and hang a trophy horn on the wall. In Africa, I got attached to photography forever, but

I do not consider myself a professional photographer. I have a lot of hobbies and it is not my means of livelihood. I actually spend more money on photography. For me it is spiritual food and hobby, to which I give most of my free time and get great pleasure, being in communion with nature. I plan every trip in advance, gather a lot of information from friends and then build my plans.

### **Do you have a favorite model among animals?**

Yes, My beloved African model - a leopard in Botswana and in Kamchatka - bears and Steller's sea eagle, a beautiful bird that lives only in Russia. The eagles fly to Japan in winter, but only breeds on the eastern coast of Kamchatka and along the coast of the Sea of Okhotsk.









Now there are about 2,500 pairs worldwide, and all of them live with us in Russia. The eagles are incredibly beautiful birds and very difficult to photograph. I have spent five years to get good pictures of them. This bird is very shy but incredibly photogenic.

### **Your view on wild animal - human conflicts or interactions?**

I come from an area where wild animals live in abundance. They exhibit differing behavior - some attack strangers invading their territory, while others try to flee and hide. Therefore, the biggest problem is to find, understand and photograph them. Stressed animals are not the best subjects for photographing. For me it is important to grasp the peculiarities of their character and behavior, and for this it is important that they are relaxed in my presence. The predators are always alert, and sometimes fear turns them aggressive!

### **Over the years, how is the progress you see in your photography?**

During my early days of photography I used to click a huge number of images out of which most were discarded. As time passed, my experience taught me to be selective and patient to wait and capture the right image at the right time. Now I can wait patiently for a whole day without shooting till the right and interesting moment comes along. During the day many events unfold in front of me, but I am always alert to capture the best image.

### **Tell us about Russia and its potential?**

Russia has vast territory, endless spaces, diversity and thus we have great potential for outstanding wildlife photography. Russia gives me great advantage to have the best conditions needed for capturing wildlife images. Being Russian it is easy for us to understand nature, its spaces and the behavior patterns of our wild animals. Years of tireless efforts and patience in learning have taught me to catch the right image at the right time. Learning to shoot the right image is a never ending process. I feel that I am still a child who learns to reach a new level of proficiency with the camera.

Vision and knowledge is very essential in post processing to develop and improve the photographs. For this we have to frame and analyze each picture critically, so as to understand the areas which can be improved and to avoid the shortcomings.

### **Tell us about your camera and other equipment?**

The quality of photos depends upon the light. Usage of light to get competitive and good results will differ from person to person. Good lenses increase the opportunity to take creative pictures. It is always better to use lenses of camera manufacturing companies. Instead of spending huge amounts on the camera it is better to invest in good lenses, because excellent lenses produce excellent images. I prefer Nikons because their cameras and lenses are the best. Nikons are very easy to operate and they give high sharpness and good pictures. They



never let you down. Nikon D2x was my first digital camera. Digital technology gives you the opportunity to see in real time what you shoot and correct errors in the process of shooting. Nikon D2x gives the needed high quality. D3S is one of the top models; this camera covers all the needs. The D3S gives great speed to cover unique events which the ordinary human eye cannot detect. It can work in any lighting condition. For shooting wild animals I use several cameras with different lenses. Now I use Nikon D300S, Nikon D3S, along with lenses like - Nikon 24-70 mm, F2.8, Nikon 70-200mm, F2.8, Nikon 400mm, F2.8 and Nikon 300mm F2.8 , Nikon 600mm F4. With these I cover all my needs.

You can argue over camera gear forever and each person has his own favorite equipment.

I like zoom lenses, they provide an opportunity to choose different focal lengths. In essence, multiple lenses are united into one. With their help, I can build a picture quickly and correctly and discard unnecessary parts of the

**For me it is important to grasp the peculiarities of their character and behavior, and for this it is important that they are relaxed in my presence.**



©Sergey Gorshkov



©Sergey Gorshkov

frame. The tele zoom also highlights the important subject and blurs the background, so the background does not distract from the main subject. They are fairly fast, because they use the maximum wide aperture lens with a variable focus distance. Thus, the tele zoom gives almost the same results with respect to sharpness and saturation of colors than lenses with a fixed focal length. Lenses with variable focal length are more popular and professionals use them due to their versatility and excellent results.

### **What's your typical image processing method?**

After a day in the field, I download images to a computer and sort them. Usually at the outset I delete few images, which I find technically weak, overexposed or underexposed, uninteresting or blurred. I copy the remaining images on a disk or external hard drive, to avoid losses. Preparing the image is an integral part of the process of creating photographs. Pictures should be always organized. Now a days with the advantages of digital technology it is much easier to process a picture and quality has increased significantly. But the recording technique itself remains the same, so if I take the picture with all proper settings then I need to use minimal processing.. My goal is to capture the perfect shot, rather than do it in Photoshop.

### **Can you tell us about one of the most famous image you have made - the bear under water?**

First of all – it was by chance, I was busy shooting salmon's underwater and unexpectedly came across the bear, who was hunting fish. I managed to make a few shots and swim away. Then idea struck me and I set out to make a portrait of the bear partly in water and partly above it. This was a rare shot in Russia and elsewhere. It was a struggle to use a wide angle lens from that close range. Though I was afraid I plunged into the water to get more shots. The bear turned hostile and tried to hunt me. Somehow I managed to escape to the shore. I was really afraid because I was fully aware of the danger but the passion for the shot had overtaken reason and made me take the risk. Every animal have its own behavior pattern, we must study that and understand this in-depth before venturing out.

### **Are you not afraid?**

I am often asked this question - whether I am afraid. Of course, I'm afraid. I'm human and I know the feeling of fear. I will say more, I'm afraid more than you, because I understand and know what can be the outcome. But often passion is intoxicating. I understand that it is bad but ... When I am in a situation; I don't think about fear, but of the frame. In the field it's all about capturing the right moment in the perfect manner.

### **What is equivalent to the joy of photography for you?**

The game of hockey. Twice a week I play hockey. And I will keep playing till the team "retires" me.





## Your outcome?

I'm still too young to make conclusions about my own work and too early to summarize. I'm still learning, make mistakes and move forward. I'm a person with lots of ideas and I gradually implement them. I have released three books and I hope that there will be more in the future. I was successful in many international competitions, did a lot of large and small exhibitions, both in Russia and in Europe. There have been several successful presentations at Russian and European festivals. Opportunity to work with such large audiences is the greatest reward for any photographer.

## A tip for readers?

Giving advice is difficult, but I'll try. In short, dare to try something new. Bad, random, dubious pictures - ruthlessly discard.



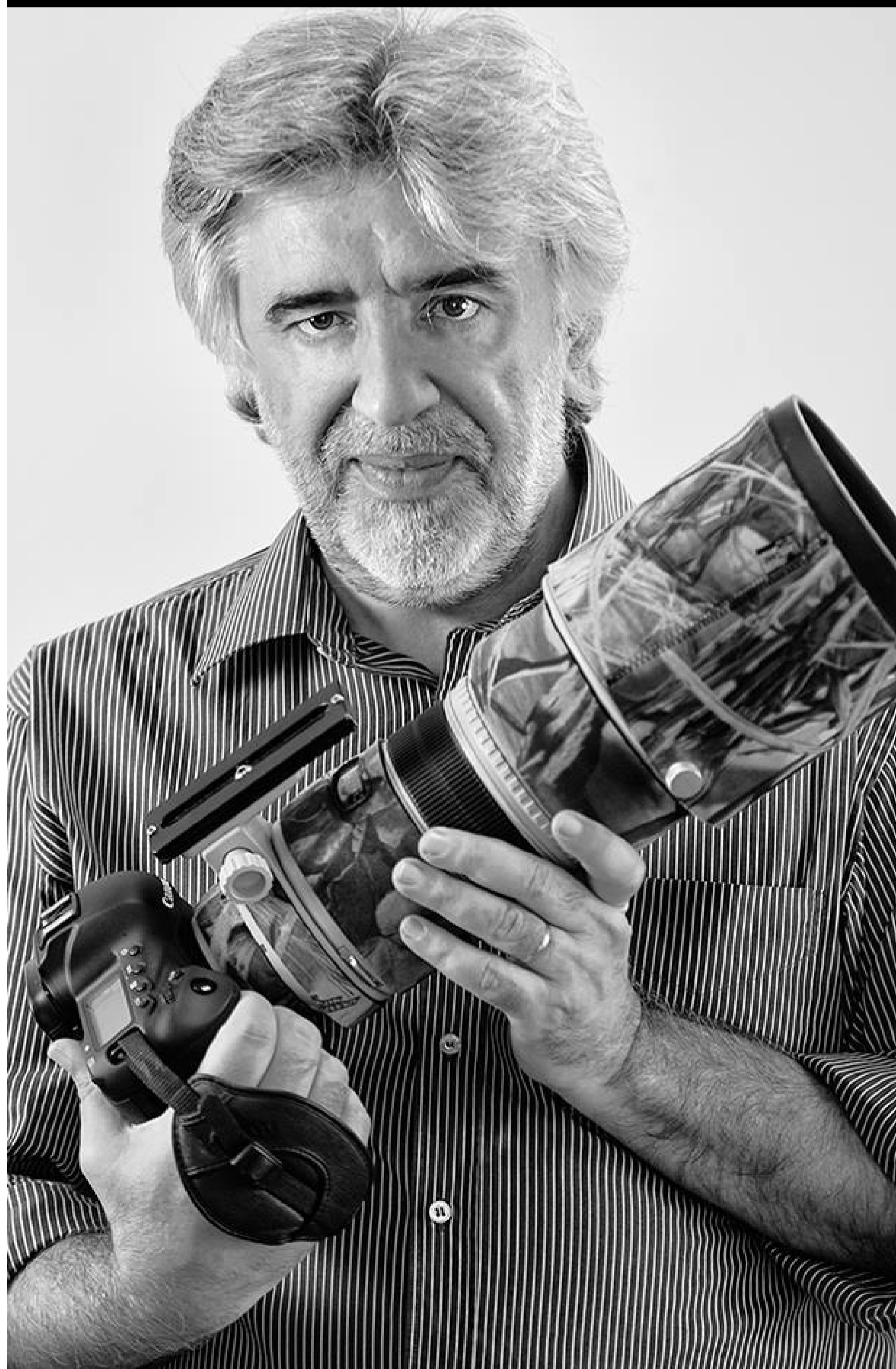
SPECIES

SQUIRREL:  
*Motions*  
IMPRESSED

By Stefano Ronchi







Stefano started his photographic journey with an Olympus OM10, which he still owns. The advent of digital technology and the purchase of an SLR camera increased his interest and passion for photography.

He always emphasizes the dignity of the animal itself, above all in his photography, giving a representation, which is the most truthful and suggestive possible. He devotes most of his time photographing the animal world in all its forms and he loves to be with nature.

Stefano lives in Caravaggio (Bg), Italy.

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Most people might find it strange, but a squirrel has always been for me the most fascinating animal to spend time with and photograph. How can you not fall in love with its cute snout, with the light, elegant and still brave way it takes flight from one branch to another, with its way of running on arduous fences to get to food, with its frenetic antics in order to reach for a desired walnut and digging the ground to hide it. All this made the squirrel the

most enjoyable and intriguing animal to me. A squirrel is an expert jumper and its favorite places are woodlands. It feeds mainly on nuts, acorns, mushrooms and fruits, which it stores in well-hidden places (which are sometimes forgotten and thus contributing in spreading plant species). Its natural predators are Martes (*Martes martes*), Wild cats (*Felix silvestris*) and several species of birds of prey.

The best-known gene of squirrel is Scirus, which include the Eastern Gray Squirrel of North America, the Red Squirrel of Eurasia and the Fox Squirrel of North America. Squirrels have extraordinary ability to adapt that gives them the flexibility to live in close contact to human beings. Being rodents and daytime animals, it is not hard to find them in city parks. They are so used to human presence and dare get close enough to feed of a person's

hands. I can still recall when I first saw Gray Squirrels in a park with their funny way to take cover behind trees, hiding their body leaving only their little snout visible, at one time peeking from the left and the other time from the right of the tree, appearing like children playing hide-and-seek. Suddenly, you could see them chasing each other to steal nuts. A breathless run in fields and then on trees, climbing quickly, and after that a jump from a branch to another, mostly in unstable balance, but always affixed, never falling down. Then, abruptly, they

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**A squirrel is an expert jumper and its favorite places are woodlands. It feeds mainly on nuts, acorns, mushrooms and fruits, which it stores in well-hidden places.**

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reach you, looking as if they fear coming close but at the same time knowing they will be rewarded for such bravery. A fraction of a second later they take a nut from you; they curl up and protect it in their front paws; their small teeth start their feverish job and quickly the lavish meal is gone. They are ready again to face their fears and run after another nut.

Then autumn comes and in the month of November you can see squirrels preparing their pallet high on the trees. They collect leaves from the ground, fill



them in their mouth helped by paws and carry them up to their nest in order to be used as sleeping material.

This way they prepare for the reproductive period, which comes twice a year between December and February and then between May and July (there can be variations in timing according to latitude). It is a peculiar moment that I always want to capture through my camera. It has been a five years long wait, an effort well rewarded. I was lucky to see a squirrel collecting leaves and climb on to a branch; me getting closer made it suspicious and it decided to jump on to a close by tree. The speed of that movement and the wonder still sparkle in my eyes; the rapidity in the focus of the camera and the lens contributed to

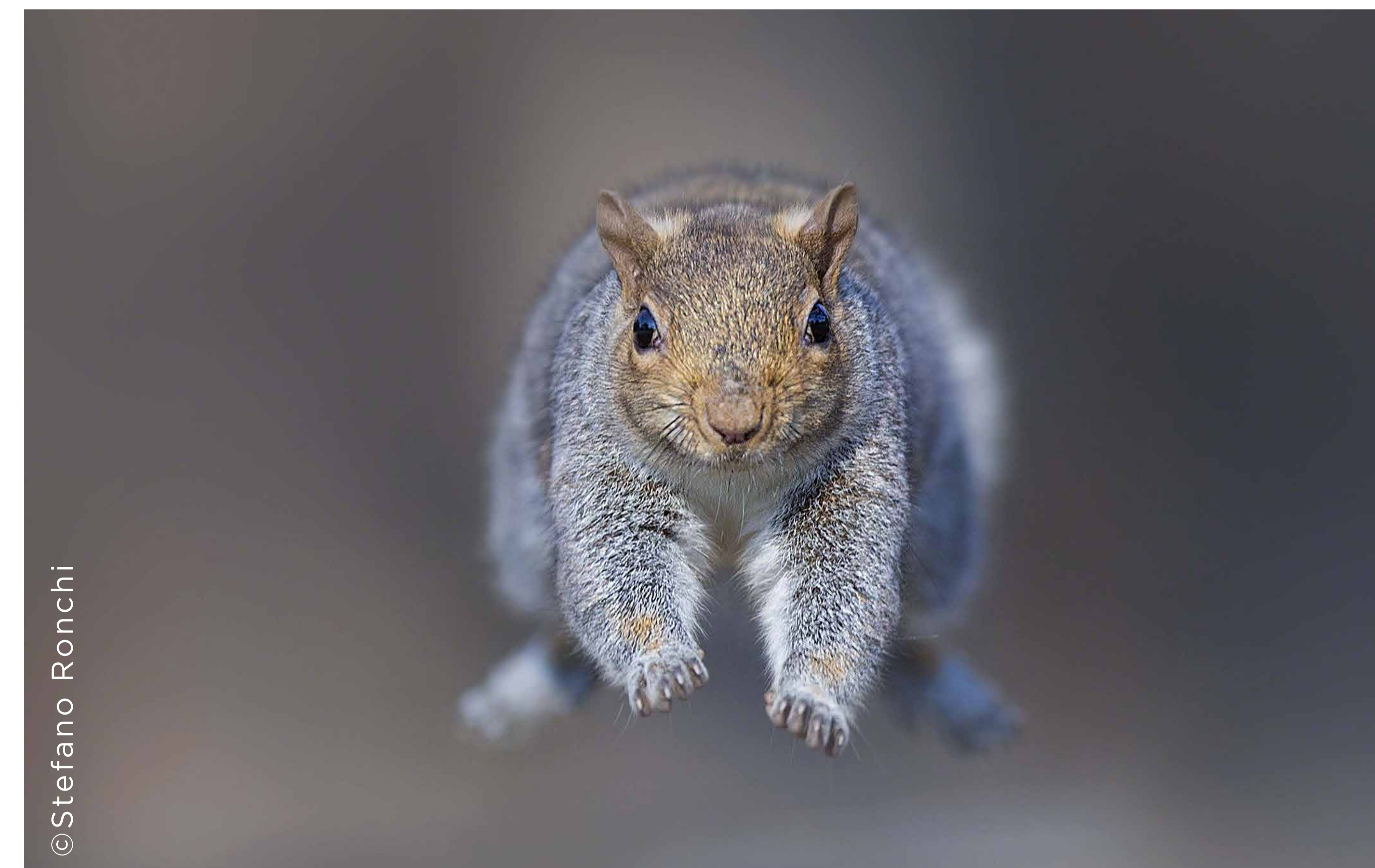
make that picture one of those I am most attached to.

I have always thought that photography should not be educational, but that it should make the observer be astonished by the magnificence of the animal world. I believe that the important thing is to give dignity to the animal you are portraying; you should try to catch the essence of its true self and to transmit all this in a picture. The Treaty of Lisbon affirmed that animals are sensible beings, meaning they have the ability to feel emotions and transmit them. Therefore the duty of a natural photographer is to educate the user of the image so that he can pick the dignity in the animal itself. If this contributes to save the life of even only one animal, the goal of

the photographer will be fully attained. To this end I tried to figure out in my mind which one could be the picture best representative of a squirrel. Paying attention to them I noticed that their most peculiar characteristic are the speed of movement and the ability to jump. Particularly watching how, while running, they manage to hang midair for several milliseconds, fascinated me. There are moments when their paws do not touch the ground, the squirrel appears floating in the air as if it is fighting and winning against gravity. Therefore I looked for the right place, I drew the attention of the squirrel through the persuasion of food and I managed to fix that precise moment. Knowing I could pass that moment on to whoever viewing the picture is great by itself.

I have the possibility to make the beauty of the Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*) known, as it is recently a less loved genre. This happened because it was named in the list of the one hundred most dangerous invasive species in the world, compiled by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. Although the origin of this squirrel is in North America, it was introduced into some European countries such as Italy, Great Britain and Ireland. Its strength and its ability to adapt made the American Gray Squirrel predominate the European Red Squirrel

(*Sciurus vulgaris*), making the indigenous squirrel extinct in certain areas. It was then decided to set plans in order to capture and eliminate the American squirrel and at the same time stop the eradication of the indigenous one. In Italy, the position of the most important association is not unambiguous. The LAV (Association Against Vivisection) considers the threat of grey squirrel with no foundation and tries to stop the EC\_SQUARE project for their eradication.



On the other side, Legambiente (Association for Environment) sustains this campaign and supports legislative initiatives to forbid the selling of this species. This position is similar to the one of WWF Italy, which support the campaign and since 90s asks for a resolution to stop the selling of non-local species in order to avoid extreme measures. Also Unione Zoologica Italiana (Italian Zoological Union) is also

working towards limiting the spreading of the Gray Squirrel.

In winter I love travelling to Switzerland, especially to Pontresina, a location near St. Moritz. I like to venture into Val Roseg, walk down a snow covered path, with trees showing me the way, enjoying the blowing wind and the tweeting of birds as soundtrack. A river crosses it and along the river, trees, bridges, silence follows one another, a small heaven where you can experience incredible wilderness and find your own balance in this place which is, not just by chance, called “enchanted wood.” Here a perfect unity between man and nature seems to take place, animals do not fear man and man live respecting animals. If you hold some seeds in your hand, in short time you will see birds come down looking for food, ignoring any danger. In the coldest seasons, when snow covers all the landscape, when every noise is muffled and softened, when there is lack of food and it becomes a struggle to survive, it is beautiful to walk across, holding walnuts and nuts in your hand. The empty sound of the nuts tapping, calls for the red squirrel, which at first are fearful but then come out following the bravest among them. They often fight their diffidence and come closer, at a distance of one or two metres at most. The sight of the food down on the snow and they get even closer with light and quick steps. The dark brown or bright red color of their fur contrasts the whiteness of the snow, creating an incredible effect. At that moment, you cannot help but lie completely down in the snow, almost becoming part of the habitat they live in. You take your camera, set the lens in line with their eyes and let your mind find the right inspiration to





make the feeling you are experiencing becoming real. As Harry Cartier-Bresson said, thinking that pictures are taken by camera is an illusion... they are taken by the eyes, the heart and the mind. You start clicking the picture and immediately look at the screen to understand if that moment you remember is impressed in the memory card. You lower your eyes and they find the footprints of a little friend who found its courage by itself to make that moment magical. In this way, photography becomes the way to freeze the moment and make it immortal.

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**Here a perfect unity between man and nature seems to take place, animals do not fear man and man live respecting animals. If you hold some seeds in your hand, in short time you will see birds come down looking for food, ignoring any danger.**

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Capturing those snouts, the tail they sometimes keep above their head to warm and cover themselves, is a pure emotion, the same emotion I hope I pass down through my pictures.





CONSERVATION STORY

# WHEN THE BABY IS TOO BIG

By Joshil Maliyekkal  
Photographs By Jayakumar P

**J** Joshil Maliyekkal lives in the state of Kerala, India. Joshil received a masters in zoology, and began working for the Forest Department in 2006. He currently is stationed at Kannavam range, Kannur, Kerala. Joshil is a passionate traveler, writer and nature photographer.

I was on my regular inspection at Sairandhri, the gate way to Silent Valley National Park, Kerala, India. Sairandhri is such a beautiful and calm place, 23 kilometres away from my office and I have to inspect this place regularly. The remoteness of the place was an added attraction to me in carrying out this responsibility. Inaccessibility over mobile phone may be a nightmare for a crowd lover, but I consider this a blessing. Wildernesses all around, cool whether at this altitude of more than 1,000 metres above MSL, the beautiful Kunthi river flowing with a wild song, beautiful frames of life everywhere and the company of some dedicated people working at the grass-roots level for conservation -all these were incentives for me to come here whenever possible. Unfortunately there are a few places like the top of the 30 metres watch tower where your mobile phone will find some network when the weather is fine.

**He was the former Assistant Wildlife Warden at The Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary. The Sanctuary in northern Kerala is a premier habitat for tigers and elephants. The sanctuary has well developed ecotourism facilities and programs.**



© Jayakumar P

**It was a female, she was only few weeks of age, showing symptoms of starvation and dehydration and she stared at me hopelessly. I could quite understand her fear as we humans have done nothing fair to her kind.**



Silent Valley National Park in the Palakkad District of Kerala, is not simply any National Park, but was the defining milestone in the history of conservation in the nation. 3,400 hectares of Evergreen Forests in the Western Ghats were saved from being submerged by the reservoir of a dam proposed to be built across the Kunthi River, after public protest by people from various corners. The protest resulted not only in abandoning the project but it succeeded in enacting a national law for the conservation of forests. The Forest (Conservation) Act 1980 with a few sections of law saved a lot of forests and related ecosystems from being diverted and destructed for various projects and from that perspective silent valley was the Makah of conservation efforts in India. As every forester, I also dreamt of serving in the valley and the department gave me the opportunity to be with her for more than three years as the Assistant Wildlife Warden. 89 Square kilometres of core area and 154 Square kilometres of Buffer Zone of the park is adjacent to Mukkuruthi National Park of Tamil Nadu State and the new Amarambalam Reserved Forests. The park is home for the highly endangered Lion Tailed Macaques and many other rare forms of life. Biologists working in the park even now discover new species of life. In my point of view rather than the check list of animals and plants, it is the check list of habitats that make the Silent Valley National Park so special. There is everything from low land moist deciduous forests to high altitude rolling grass lands. I will refer to it as 'the privilege of a forester' to visit these and

many other beautiful forests, as most of these area are not open for public, even to those who are involved in conservation initiatives.

It was a fine evening of February 2014 and I was at the watch tower. To my surprise, my phone rang and my colleague at the other end informed me that there was an elephant calf spotted at the foothills where the National Park shared boundary with a rubber plantation. As per the information received it was seen abandoned by the herd and was less than one month old. I instructed him to keep away from the scene and to let the mother come back and rescue the calf back to the warmth of the herd. I also told him to monitor the situation and to avoid leaking the issue to the media which would lead to a crowd gathering for the spectacle. We all slept that night but the tapping laborers staying in the rubber plantation reported hearing the elephant baby crying all through the night. Next day morning I reached the place and saw the calf looking very tired and somehow mangaing to stand with the help of support of the reeds growing there. It was a female, she was only few weeks of age, showing symptoms of starvation and dehydration and she stared at me hopelessly. I could quite understand her fear as we humans have done nothing fair to her kind.

Prior to reaching the spot, I had had a long phone call with Dr Arun Zacharia, a senior veterinarian and on his advice we had carried some tender coconut and glucose powder. We mixed the tender

coconut water with glucose and forcefully made her drink, after initial refusal she began to drink, sweet liquid wasted from her mouth but even then she drank few liters. We poured cool water collected from a nearby stream over her and after a few hours she managed to get enough strength to stand steady. She hugged me with her trunk and I felt the warmth of that in my soul. I was confused on what to do next, neither I nor my colleagues were familiar with the situation, I sought permission over the phone from the Chief Wildlife Warden to relocate her to some other location and he granted this. Meanwhile the news spread and people started reaching the spot, so we decided to act quickly.

Even though only two weeks of age she was too big for us. She refused to walk and we had to make a sac structure which we slipped under her belly and slowly brought her near the vehicle which was almost a kilometre away. With the baby on board the jeep drove slowly towards our headquarters which was 40 kilometres away. It was her first voyage with members of strange species and around midway she showed symptoms of severe tiredness which made us take a break. Our team along with the veterinary surgeon who joined us on the way, started feeding her with the tender coconut and meanwhile I called the Chief Wildlife Warden once again.

Normally in Kerala rescued elephants were shifted to Muthanga, Kodanad, Konni or Neyyar where the department has good facilities. But only less than fifty percentages of the elephants survive and even if they survive they will have

to remain captive elephants throughout their life. I was and still am of the firm belief that an elephant born in the wild deserve to be free. My thoughts were very much influenced by the experience I had read in the book 'Born Free' by Joy Adamson and so I explained to my superior that the baby being very weak is not able to travel even 20 kilometres and so will not survive the long journey to the nearest elephant rescue centers. I requested for permission to keep the baby in one of the buildings we have inside the forest from where we will try to return her to the wild and permission was granted. She was shifted to an anti-poaching Camp at Keerippara which was only five kilometres away from my headquarters and is well inside the forest. At Keerippara we had a small watch tower inside an elephant proof trench and I thought it will make an ideal cradle for the baby. After reaching there she also seemed more relaxed and I showed her the way to her new home, she walked with me, which gave confidence to both of us.

The decision was taken and now I had to implement it. My God, what a task! I had never studied anything about this, neither from colleges nor from training institutes. I decided to call everybody who could help me. Again I called my friend, veterinary surgeon Dr Arun Zacharia who he told me that an elephant calf of this age has very less chances of survival and she requires a person completely dedicated to take care of her. He had seen few mahouts in Muthumalai Tiger Reserve who succeeded in fostering a baby elephant by sleeping besides the the cradle so that the baby can keep its trunk across the barriers to feel its foster

parent, wow! Secondly he warned me not to feed her with cow's milk as it leads to many problems and advised to feed only with milk powder. Feeding was not to be done using feeding bottle, instead tubes were to be used. Everything had to be sterile and I had to ensure that there is a strict check on visitors. On the other hand few of my friends criticized me for stealing the elephant from the warmth of its herd as they didn't believe that the herd had moved away leaving the baby behind.

Shaji and Santhosh came forward and

volunteered to be foster parents, a temporary cradle was made using locally collected poles. A small tub of water was made available for playing and regular supply of tender coconut was ensured. Even high profile visitors were banned and my superior officers including the Wildlife Warden Mr. Cheriyankunju supported me in all aspect. Meanwhile Dr Saseendradev, the official Veterinary officer came there travelling more than 350 kilometres. He prescribed some supplements to be added along with the milk powder and showed us how to feed her with the tube, he also gave a chart to

monitor the quantity and time of feeding and urination. After all these I felt more comfortable and on the following days all went to schedule and the elephant calf named 'Neeli' became a family member to us. She was named after the Forest Neelikkal from where she was rescued.

By now it became a regular practice to buy Lactogen and Supplements regularly from a medical shop and the pharmacist there was aware of the story too. One day there were some others present in the store who wondered at the quantity of my purchase and one among them asked

whether I am having twins. I replied that I am having three children and this is only for the third one who is ever so hungry! While I was leaving the store I heard the store keeper explaining to the stranger that I am taking care of a baby elephant. It wasn't easy, every day there were some issues to sort, finding substitute for Shaji and Santhosh when they had some personal affairs, getting veterinary support from the local hospital, ensuring the hygiene of the place and so on. But I was so fascinated by the experience of being with Neeli, the feeling was amazing when she sniffs me with the tip of her trunk when I went near.

Fifteen days passed and we were still not in any position to be sure about the future of Neeli. Things were not looking great, she seemed little hesitant to drink and the quantity of urine had also reduced. I had made arrangements for the forest veterinary officer to visit her the next day, before I started by train overnight to the state capital to attend a meeting. By three o'clock in the early morning my phone rang to inform me that Neeli had just left us. I decided to go back and got down at the next railway station and travelled back. On reaching Keerippara I saw her lying in a corner with the ants having started sucking the liquid dripping from her mouth.

I had to arrange postmortem for the body. I had assisted and witnessed postmortems many times before, but this was something personal. When the veterinary doctor cut open the carcass and we examined various parts of the carcass looking for anything unusual, I couldn't shake of the feeling that blood was so thicker than water.



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CONSERVATION STORY

# Galápagos: THE MUSINGS OF AN ADMIRING ECOLOGIST

By Richard Thackway



**Richard Thackway, an Australian biologist, visited the Galápagos Islands in August of 2016.**

**He worked for the Australian Government for 28 years as a science-policy analyst and is now an environmental consultant and Adjunct Associate Professor at University of Queensland, Brisbane.**

In 1959 the Galápagos National Park was established. In 1979 UNESCO declared the Galápagos Islands a World Heritage Site. The islands are a National Park and the sea surrounding them is a Marine Reserve.

Most people visiting the Galápagos archipelago do so as part of an organized tour group, and generally access one or more of the islands via boat. The Ecuadorian government and park officials have designated boat landing sites and

high use visitor areas onshore for corral park visitors. Visitation to the Galápagos National Park is highly regulated and controlled.

In 2013 Park visitor numbers were 204,295 (13% increase from 2012). Of this total, around 42% of all visitors (86,000 people), took a boat cruise however visitor numbers accessing the islands via cruises is declining. This reflects a changing demographic, with greater

numbers of young people (26-35 years old) visiting the Park. Generally, these travellers cannot afford multi-island cruises. While do-it-yourself land based options abound, and are cheaper, the Park's unique and world renowned birds, lizards and mammals, spectacular volcanic landscapes, cannot be fully encountered or appreciated by visiting only the main islands.

### **WHEN IS A NATIONAL PARK NOT A NATIONAL PARK?**

Around 97% of the Galápagos Islands are designated as National Park but is off limits to the public and the international visitor. The National Park is declared essentially off-limits, except by formal approval granting permission to enter. There is no opportunity to explore the area simply out of a need for personal inquiry and adventure.

From an Australian perspective this level of control is draconian and is only assigned to small areas of public land designated as a Scientific Reserve. This creates confusion. In Australia National Parks are gazette (regulations approved by the national government) for the people. The question of limiting access via closing roads thereby making some areas remote and hence difficult to access is not an issue in the Galápagos National Park.

For the international visitor who is familiar with the use and application of IUCN PA classification system, the Ecuadorian government's classification of the Galápagos Islands as a National Park, raises the issue of mixed messages.

My tour guide says he understands that this issue raises false expectations in international visitors but that is the rule of law in the country.

From the perspective of the definition of IUCN protected areas categories, Australia's National Parks are classified as IUCN Class II PA. Australia's Scientific Reserve are classified as an IUCN Class I PA. In this context it is understood that a class I PA has restricted access and prohibited without an approved reason to enter i.e. for scientific research. There is no opportunity for the curious tourist to stumble into and explore an IUCN class I PA, simply out of a need for adventure.

So let's consider what might motivate the Ecuadorian government to publically declare an area, such as the Galápagos Islands, as an IUCN PA class II, but on ground manage the area as an IUCN class I. This raises the expectation in the international visitor's mind that areas not designated as visitor hubs can be explored at their initiative. This is clearly prohibited.

It appears that what is at play in Galápagos Islands is the reverse of what one expects. Small areas that are designated as visitor hubs, essentially operate as an IUCN PA class II, whereas the much of the Galápagos archipelago, is in practice a scientific reserve i.e. IUCN PA class I. Rather than being a National Park, the Galápagos Islands archipelago is a scientific reserve.

So what are the pros and cons of the Ecuadorian Government not adopting the IUCN PA classification system?

The informed i.e. ecologically literate, international tourist is misled and confused because of mixed messages.

There are benefits of such command and control of visitors.

### **Restricting access**

Access is prohibited outside of the visitor hubs. In fact, access is restricted to predefined management zones. Indiscr etions of the curious visitor or scientist, such as walking off the formed tracks, are quickly corrected by the guides who firmly and repeatedly remind the curious to stay within the bounds of formed tracks. And in the case of use of marine hubs access is scheduled and is time bound; 45 minutes with an upper limit of 60 minutes.

Access is also controlled through scheduling access of visitors at visitor hubs. This enables high throughput of visitor numbers. Regulating boats and the number of people per boat enables the National Park Service to monitor visitor numbers at different sites. It also enables those 'hardened' or 'sacrificial' sites to be easily monitored and remedial action taken to repair loss of amenity. Restricting access and movement of visitors to high use visitor hubs, limits and largely eliminates ecological impact/s across the wider landscape. Placing the responsibility of visitor management onto tour companies, places the onus and the burden on the company's to comply with conditions set by the certifying agency. Failure to comply carries with it the threat of discontinuance of license to operate i.e. use of, and access to, designated visitor



hubs. All this means that the National Park Service only needs a skeleton staff. Park rangers need only do spot checks to evaluate license conditions. Tour operators are essentially free service providers to the National Park Service. They are also the eyes and ears of the NPWS, notifying the authorities of degradation or loss of amenity.

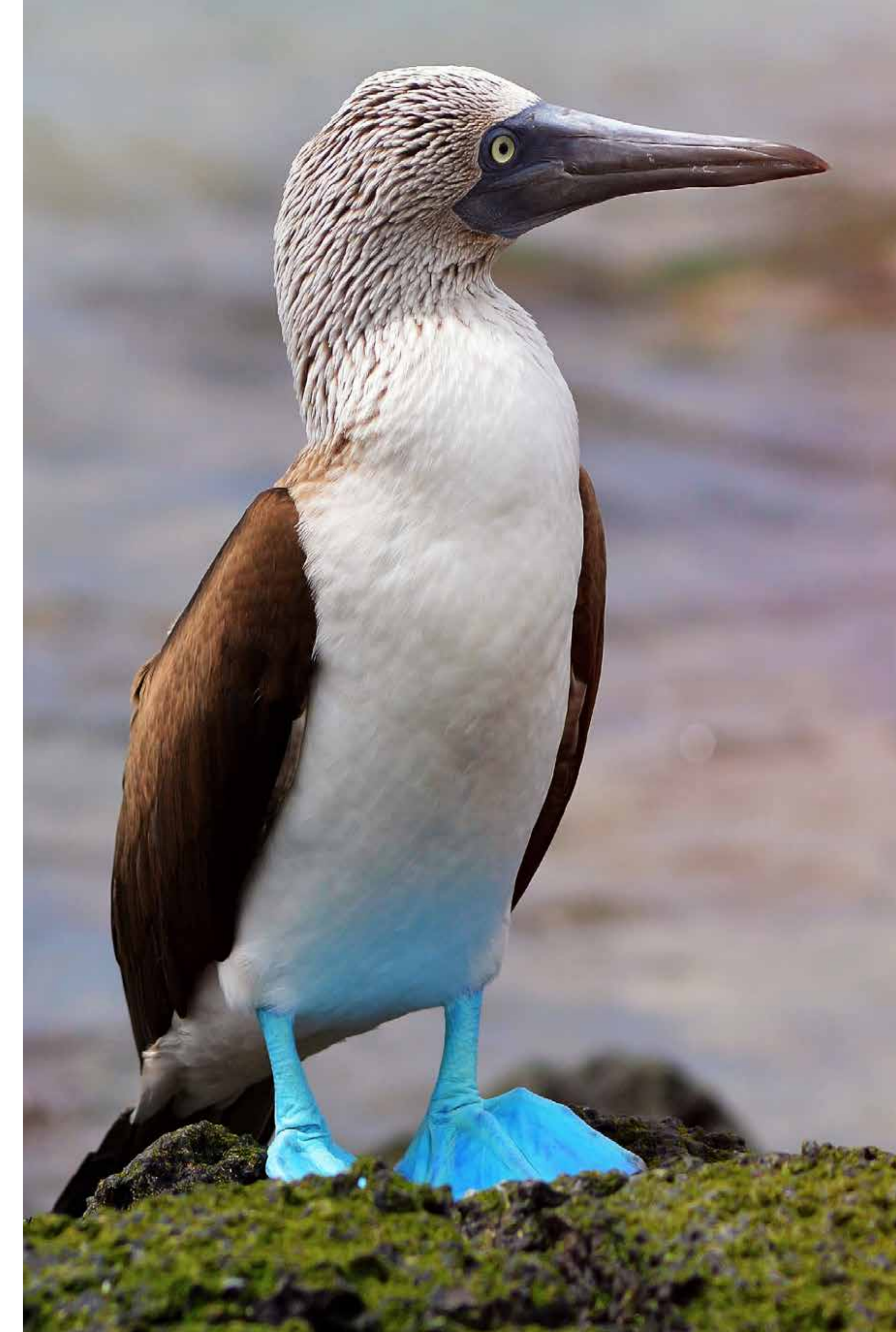
Restricting access to visitor hubs assumes that the regulations are complied with and that the off-limits areas have a high degree of natural integrity and that integrity is maintained over time. For most informed ecologists that assumes that the natural condition of the off-limits areas was high to start with and that those value are being maintained near to reference state i.e. fully natural. However, even a cursory glance of the effects of the land management history shows modifications in structure and composition and function of the vegetation. These impacts, historically can be traced to local nationals and opportunistic foreigners seeking to exploit a variety of natural resources, both living and physical. As tourism has become the dominant source of revenue for the archipelago there is a risk that tourists will too exploit the natural capital of the islands. A 'one size fits all' policy has been adopted i.e. restricted access applies to all would be users of the 'national park', local nationals and tourists.

Human use and abuse over time in some areas have resulted in degrading the environmental states of many of the more accessible areas, which will be seen for many decades to come. Human agents of

change of the structure, composition and function of the vegetation are the usual suspects that affect islands and mainland ecosystems, but with a twist. The usual exotic introduced vertebrates, deliberate and inadvertent, that became feral include cattle, goats, pigs, mules and ship rats. Then there are the introduced plants, including blackberry, guava and almost all agricultural plants and all forestry trees. Pirates and more recently local nationals who helped themselves to the wildlife, primarily the land tortoises. Collectively these land management practices began in the late 1700s.

Critical to the restoration of these degraded sites and landscapes is to ascertain what changed when, where and why and to assess what can be feasibly done to reinstate the natural order. Since the late 1960s the National Parks Service has done much including the removal of feral cattle, goats, pigs and mules. So called 'wild cattle' have been controlled and once again domesticated. Access by local nationals to free range domestic animal natural areas has been eliminated, through strict land use planning and land tenure regulations.

Then there are the slow recovery issues of captive breeding programs and reintroductions of land tortoises. Reinstating these populations is essential to restoring the structure, composition and function of the vegetation towards its fully natural reference state. The loss of genetic integrity of the tortoise populations, and the ongoing maintenance of this reinstated integrity on the various islands is the focus of long-term international conservation efforts.



### Visitor experiences

Schedules under this restricted access model are everything. Boats with their passengers are scheduled to hubs at allotted times; to view the scenery, or a colony of rare or restricted or endemic species of flora and fauna. Hubs offer high quality visual experiences, in easily accessible areas, which can be achieved in a short period of time and over short distances.

The tour operators and the naturalist guides, in particular, play a critical role in the visitor experience. Guides are charged with providing expeditioners with a full-orbed visitor experience at each hub. Guides engage and entertain as well as impart general and specific information and knowledge. The naturalist guide must manage the expectations of the group and have a gift for transcending the disappointment of visitors when a species only provides a fleeting glimpse

for some in the group or is absent during the excursion to the hub. Successful visits to hubs have a balance of naturalist finding, identifying and interpreting the key features or species found at the hub. Such engaging commentary for the group, is particularly important when and where the guide cannot queue a firsthand experience or the appearance of fish, bird, reptile or mammal.

In nutshell, most visitors entering the Galápagos Islands are not informed scientific types. Most people have a curiosity about the natural environment and some have acquainted themselves with what they may be likely to experience on their tour or expedition.

The Galápagos Islands are an inimical draw card for a few select players. It is a major and unique focal point for scientists including biologists, ecologists, botanists, geneticists and zoologists. It is also a must go to place for the curious and amateur environmentalist.

The above issues about National park classification, management intent and visitor access are matters that could be regarded by some as mere quibbling. These matters are footnotes that could be dealt with by clarifying relevant issues in handouts and on websites.

### MORE INFORMATION

Galápagos National Park:  
[www.quasarex.com/Galápagos/the-Galápagos-national-park](http://www.quasarex.com/Galápagos/the-Galápagos-national-park)

Galápagos Conservancy:  
[www.galapagos.org/](http://www.galapagos.org/)

Nepal harbours one of the richest biodiversity resources in South Asia that encompasses a wide variety of ecosystems, including some of the most diverse protected areas and a large variety of plant and animal species. Biodiversity conservation lies at the heart of the Government of Nepal's commitment intended to preserve for the benefit of present and future generations. Nepal has a long history of wildlife conservation having enacted various policies, legislations and regulations to enable conservation and management of wildlife. The country's commitment to biodiversity conservation is clearly reflected with the creation of an impressive network of protected area system.

Protected areas, most notably Chitwan National Park, have been recognized as assets that generate tourism income, which is not only contributing to improving the livelihood of the buffer zone populace, it is equally contributing significantly to the country's economy, especially as tourism industry is a major foreign income generating sector of the country. Nepal's biodiversity has significant economic values. While the direct values through agriculture, fisheries and forestry are obvious, the indirect values of biodiversity, most



# Zero Poaching in Nepal: Building on successes

By Deependra Joshi



notably wildlife body parts, has posed significant values in the ever-increasing demand.

And, the real conservation challenge begins here. Poaching has stimulated considerable action for wildlife conservation. The Nepalese people are aware of wildlife conservation issues as is amply manifested by the headway made through landscape level conservation.

## A look back

The year 1980 stood as a watershed in the conservation history of Nepal. The first and full-fledged Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) was established with the mandate to safeguard the biological

resources of Nepal. During the last three and half decades, the Department has metamorphosed and evolved into a mature institution. Since then, it has made great strides in the conservation arena starting from a species approach to a more holistic approach to landscape level conservation.

A great deal of effort has been made over the years to protect and manage biological resources and their diversity in Nepal. Phrases such as "conservation for development", "living in harmony between park and people" and "from hostility to harmony" have enormously galvanized actions at different levels. The result has been immensely positive as the buffer zone communities have demonstrated and taken stewardship



of the protected area resources. These achievements witnessed in the conservation front are due to the government's far-sighted vision and leadership, which has been instrumental in putting the conservation agenda at the forefront of the national development plans.

Over the last three decades, the Government of Nepal has matched words with actions by devising impressive forward looking policies that has made the local communities the main actors and principal beneficiaries. The conservation area model, the community forestry and the buffer zone programmes are some of the successful models for wildlife protection in the country.

### **Zero tolerance for wildlife crime**

Wildlife crime stands as one of the most challenging issues in biodiversity conservation today. Unfortunately, Nepal has become a transit point for illegal wildlife trade. In recent years, despite inadequate capacity, limited resources and skills to deal with increasingly complex wildlife crime, Nepal has made headways in updating with the technological advancements by harnessing tools and techniques in combating wildlife crime and gathering intelligence with the support of conservation partners such as WWF, National Trust for Nature Conservation and IUCN. In this regard, the government has been strengthening efforts on wildlife crime control to effectively curb poaching by strengthening community-based anti-poaching operations to enhancing trans-boundary coordination, strengthening law

enforcement agencies to policy reforms. In fact, tackling human-wildlife conflict has remained a priority with an emphasis on both preventive and remedial measures.

Despite this, the government initiatives have yielded significantly impressive results as a result of the adoption of a strict zero-tolerance attitude towards wildlife crime, whereby justice is often swift and harsh. As a result, Nepal has been successful in celebrating three consecutive years of zero poaching since 2016. The government has pledged to increase efforts to deal with premediated wildlife crime, in particular, increasingly organized and violent poachers that enter the national park and are a threat to species conservation and security in

buffer zone communities. In fact, Nepal has demonstrated that achieving zero poaching is actually possible thereby setting an example to the world while forging sustainable partnerships in working together towards zero poaching.

In celebration of the 3x365+days of continued Zero Poaching Year for the third consecutive year, the international community has hailed Nepal's efforts for demonstrating a role model in curbing wildlife crime in the country.

Mr. Joshi is a biodiversity specialist and the CEO of HECT Consultancy, Kathmandu, Nepal



# KARNATAKA BIRD FESTIVAL

A CELEBRATION OF BIRDS AND BIRDERS

By Nisha Purushothaman



Karnataka Forest Department and Karnataka Ecotourism Development Board together organized the third Karnataka Bird Festival at Hampi- Daroji Bear Sanctuary in Bellary District of Karnataka from 5th to 7th January 2017. Karnataka has over 500 species of birds in the State's Checklist with rare endemics and colorful birds.

There were more than 200 registered participants, a mix of expert birders, bird photographers and keen bird enthusiasts. The intention of this festival was to create an occasion where birders from across the country and abroad would get together and spread the joy of birding.

Daily two nature walk sessions were planned for interested participants, organized into different groups led by naturalist familiar with the reserve. The Hampi-Daraji landscape is an interesting mix of ecology, which is unparalleled with a high concentration of special birds like the Yellow throated Bulbul. The region is also host to some great birds like Sandgrouse, Quails, Painted Spur-

fowl and also host many wintering birds including waterfowl. Daroji is also known for its Sloth Bear Sanctuary, which is a photographer's paradise.

Labor Minister and District in charge of Bellary Mr. Santosh S Lad inaugurated the event. Minister inaugurated the convention center, watched the documentary film done on Daroji for kids by Sugandhi & Rana, followed by the formal inauguration of the event.

After early morning bird walking session, programme started with Bird illustration workshop by artist Sangeetha Kadur. 60 students from the local school attended the workshop.

Shashank Dalvi, the first Indian who successfully completed the "Big Year" challenge taken up by birders with a record of 1,128 birds in a calendar year, presented the viewers a virtual journey through his images and experiences.

Ramki Sreenivasan's documentary film on the indiscriminate and brutal slaughter of Amur falcons in the remote state of

Nagaland in India's northeast was an eye opener on how media can influence and bring about positive change in a community. 120,000 to 140,000 birds were slaughtered in Nagaland every year during their passage through the state. Timely intervention by Ramki's organization managed to trigger massive media attention on the matter. Government and officials got involved along with NGOs in educating the community. Now the same hunters have turned into protectors of the birds and other species too, which is a big victory for conservation.

Kaushik Mukherjee, the former Chief Secretary of Karnataka Government, gave a presentation which was a visual treat for bird lovers.

Dr Gobind Sagar Bhardwaj, Chief Conservator of forests and director, desert national park, Desert National Park, Rajasthan, presented the Management Challenges in The conservation of Thar, The Great Indian Bustard's habitat.

Eminent birder Sumit Sen shared a greatly informative and interesting talk on bird migration and flyways.

Mr. Dhananjay Mohan, Chief Conservator of Forests gave a fabulous insight on birds and birding in Uttarakhand.

Shama Pawar, is one of the real examples for women empowerment in Hampi. This fabulous artist is a founder of many conservation and local community development programs in Hampi. Her presentation on her journey as an artist and conservationist portrayed how much a single person's determination can change a community. The most impressive statement was that she planted more than 50,000 trees in Hampi by herself.

Birder, author and publisher, Bikram Grewal, presented an unbelievable collation of bird illustrations. The talk was on a list of birds one must see before one dying.



Ganesh H Shankar, one of the man who made Indians proud in the prestigious Wildlife Photographer of The Year Competition, 2016, by winning the bird photography category spoke about his experience in creating the winning image.

Indrajeet Ghorpade, spoke about habitat conservation of Koppal district and his work on Deccan conservation foundation for the same. It was good to know that he had donated hundred plus acres of his personal land for conservation purpose, which shows humanity is not dead yet.

J Praveen's talk was about the experiences of making the checklist of birds in Karnataka.

Eminent wildlife photographer Sudhir Sivaram gave a spectacular talk on tips and trips in bird photography.

Remembering Carl D Silva, one of India's finest wildlife artist by Parag Rangnekar was a very heart touching one.

Researcher Samira Agnihorti's talk on Vocal Mimicry in wild birds was a great experience for the viewers. She is doing her research in BR Hills since last 12 years, and since 2009 she is researching on Racket-tailed Drongo. It was surprising to know that she in her eight year's research got to know that Racket-tailed Drongo's mimic up to 35 different species. She is hoping to get more to the core of the reasons behind this mimicry in another ten years' time.

Lunch-breaks and dinners give a fabulous opportunity to interact with the masters in birding, conservation and photography. The 3 days festival got to an end with a showcase and panel discussion on the problems and solutions of women in wildlife photography. Myself, Krinal, Vaidehi, Radha and Jainy Kuriakose were the panel and the talk was moderated by Sudhir Sivaram.

Guests then enjoyed their last nature walk of the festival after this panel discussion bringing the festival to a close.



# Using science to identify threats and recover the critically endangered California Condor

By Stephen Kirkland

Steve Kirkland is the California Condor Field Coordinator for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The California condor (*Gymnogyps californianus*) is the largest land bird in North America, with a wing-span of nine and a half feet (approx. 2.9 metres). An obligate scavenger, condors do not hunt for prey, but rely on the carcasses of dead animals for food. Common food items are cattle, feral pig, deer and ground

squirrel. Condors can travel hundreds of miles in a single day while searching for food, primarily soaring on thermals (rising heated air) and winds generated by topography. Condors do not reach sexual maturity until approximately six years of age and typically produce one chick every other year.

## A Brief History

The first comprehensive study of the California condor was conducted by



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S N I P P E T S

Karl B. Koford, on behalf of the National Audubon Society and the University of California, Berkeley in the 1940's. At this time the population estimates were as low as 60 individuals and the condor was already in danger of extinction.

By 1982, the wild condor population had been reduced to a minimum population size of only 22 individuals. This same year, efforts to begin a captive breeding program were underway, using chicks and eggs from the wild, in the hopes that captive bred individuals could be used to bolster the dwindling wild population.

By 1982, the wild condor population had been reduced to a minimum population size of only 22 individuals. This same year, efforts to begin a captive breeding program were underway, using chicks and eggs from the wild, in the hopes that captive bred individuals could be used to bolster the dwindling wild population.

Ultimately the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service made the controversial decision to capture and remove all remaining condors from the wild to retain the greatest diversity of genetic material possible, for use in the captive breeding program. The last wild condor AC-9 (Adult Condor -9) was captured and placed in captivity on Easter Sunday in 1987.

### **The condor recovery program today**

Almost 25 years later, there are now more than 450 condors in the total world. About half are in the wild in Southern and Central California, Arizona, Utah, Baja, California, Mexico and approximately half are in captivity in four primary captive breeding facilities. Re-introduced condors, and their wild-fledged offspring, are once again breeding in the wild. Ongoing genetic management of the captive population is conducted regularly to maintain maximum genetic diversity and identify potential threats.

We continue to optimistically celebrate condor success stories including wild nesting, birds foraging on their own in the wild, continued range expansion into more and more historically occupied habitat, and improvements in field management strategies that result in more condors in the wild.

### **Lead is the limiting factor**

However, despite these successes we also continued to document consistent and excessive mortality in the wild population, that exceeds its reproductive rate. In 2012 researchers definitively identified lead poisoning from spent ammunition as the primary impediment to the recovery of the California condor by matching the isotopic signature of lead found in the blood of sick and dead condors, to that of lead ammunition, including fragments of spent lead ammunition removed from sick and dead condors. The results of this research were published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (Finkelstein et al. 2012 - Lead and the Deceptive Recovery of the California condor\*). This work also concluded that without continued captive breeding, releases and intensive field management of the wild population or a substantial reduction in the amount of lead poisoning in the population, it would revert back to 1980's levels within ten to 60 years (Finkelstein et al. 2012).

### **The Solution**

Switching from lead to non-lead ammunition in taking wildlife for food, sport, or in wildlife and livestock

management, is one of the most important things that public can do to aid in the recovery of the California. Condors and other scavengers are affected by lead ammunition because wildlife that is taken by humans is an important food source for them, particularly if populations of predatory species are reduced that would otherwise leave carrion for scavengers to find and dispose of.

Hunting is traditionally described as one of the original conservation practices and switching to non-lead ammunition continues that tradition without the detrimental effects caused by lead. A good source of information about the availability and benefits of non-lead ammunition is

<http://www.huntingwithnonlead.org>.

A regulatory ban on the taking of all wildlife in California will become effective June, 2019 and voluntary programs in the States of Arizona and Utah provide incentives for using non-lead ammunition. The California condor is a recoverable species. The next, and perhaps the final phase of recovery, is now in the hands of the people and will depend on their willingness to make the switch.

\*Finkelstein M.E., D. F. Doak, D. George, J. Burnett, J. Brandt, M. Church, J. Grantham, and D.R. Smith. 2012. Lead poisoning and the deceptive recovery of the critically endangered California condor. PNAS; published ahead of print June 25, 2012

Photos: USFWS  
Website: [www.fws.gov/cno/es/CalCondor/Condor.cfm](http://www.fws.gov/cno/es/CalCondor/Condor.cfm)



# The Invasive Aliens

By Dr TV Sajeev

© Dr TV Sajeev



**Dr TV Sajeev is Senior Scientist and Head of the Forest Health Division of Kerala Forest Research Institute located in the tropical forests of Kerala, India. He is the Coordinator Asia-Pacific Forest Invasive Species Network (APFISN)- a cooperative alliance of 33 countries in the Asia-Pacific region. His research focuses on alien invasive species, political ecology, landscape fragmentation and population dynamics of forest insects. He speaks and writes on matters related to earth.**



# W

What kills biodiversity of any given landscape? As you may rightly know, the first cause is the destruction of habitats. Many of the pristine landscapes have been encroached, converted,

mined upon, dumped with urban and industrial waste and thus displacing the native species. This phenomenon, happening in all continents is very much in the public gaze and governance systems have long strived to do something about displacement of species.

The second most important reason for biodiversity loss is the encroachment by invasive alien species. Who are they? They

are plant and animal species which travel away from their natural distribution area, reach new locations and establish and reproduce so prolifically that they displace local species.

A good case is of a fresh water fish named Nile Perch (*Lates niloticus*), which had its natural distribution in the river basins of Congo, Nile, Senegal, Niger, Lake Chad and a few other lakes and which was introduced into the Lake Victoria. Prior to the introduction of the Nile Perch, the Lake Victoria had a diversity of small fish species and there was a local community who depended upon this resource. The Nile Perch preyed upon the resident fishes, leading to the extinction or near extinction of several hundred native species. A new fishing

industry sprang up to take advantage of this big fish. Unlike the earlier small fishes which could be dried in the sun, the Nile Perch with high fat content needed to be smoked and fire wood in large quantities was needed for fires. As the big Nile Perch fishing industry developed and bloomed, the traditional communities with fishing gears only suited to capture small fishes perished. Along with it receded the forest line, due to the felling of large number of trees for firewood to smoke the Nile Perch. Biodiversity fell to an all-time low, the local community became displaced owing to the influx of big fishing industry and Lake Victoria lost the trees which enriched its catchment area. The cascade of impacts of introducing the Nile Perch, extended not just to displacement of other fishes but to socio-economic issues.

Not all invasive alien species are introduced knowingly by humans, as in the case of Nile Perch. Even though I had read about the impact of invasive alien species, I had the feeling that it did not concern me, who study tropical forests. Not just me, my colleagues too had a feeling that the natural forest is a climax ecosystem which do allow the entry of alien species. We were quite complacent when invasive species were creating havoc in agricultural systems. Everything changed the moment we discovered a species of plant, which from the fringes of the forest, climbs to the canopy spreading everywhere, depriving the vegetation below of any speck of light for the forest trees to produce their food. This species is rightfully called the Mile-a-Minute weed (*Persicaria perfoliata*). It grows amazingly fast to cover the vegetation beneath and kills them.

Aliens are there in all groups of organisms we have named. Post globalization, merchandize being transported across the globe has tremendously increased, carrying with them seeds, propagules, live plants and animals, to places outside their normal distribution range. This presents them with opportunity to expand beyond their home range. When they cross over to new territories, at times they reach locales which lack their natural predators or enemies. It is here that they exhibit maximum growth and reproduction, undeterred by natural enemies which limited their success in their original areas of natural distribution.

European colonialism helped the spread of invasive plants and animals. When the countries in the temperate zones established their colonies in the tropics, they brought over many plant species to be planted around their establishments which gave a feel of at home. In the tropics, many of these introduced species became invasive, devouring the local biodiversity.

*Lantana camera*, is the best example. From the Kew Botanical Gardens in the United Kingdom, it was introduced to many botanical gardens in the tropics where the British ruled. The birds in the new locations loved to eat the berries of the plant and helped the plant spread out of the Botanical gardens. Today, thousands of hectares of forests in the tropics are under this species, superseding the indigenous species.

There are other ways to spreading of invasive species. When ships unload, they need to be filled with water to equalize the weight of the unloaded cargo. Technically we call this as the ballast water. When the ballast water is pumped into the ship, many

aquatic marine organisms go in along with it, which will eventually be released at a port in a different continent- a perfect scenario for escape from natural enemies. These and other ticket-less travel across the globe has triggered immense invasive species issues which include complete covering of aquatic habitats, drop in species diversity, triggering habitat transformation etc. With nearly 70,000 vessels criss-crossing the oceans and seas, the problem of marine invasion is getting intense.

Water Moss (*Fontinalis antipyretica*) and Water Hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*) are natives of the Amazon basin which have spread to most of the tropical countries, infesting fresh and brackish waters. They have covered the entire water surface in many tropical wetlands and rivers, making it difficult for boats to move and impacting aquatic life.

The Mallard Duck (*Anas platyrhynchos*), a very attractive waterfowl, originally from Siberia which has eliminated diversity in a totally different fashion. The male birds have a metallic green head and neck, yellow bill, and purplish-brown chest. The females are uniformly brown-streaked. They breed with indigenous ducks in new locations and have led to the elimination of many local duck varieties. The American Black Duck (*Anas rubripes*) numbers have drastically declined and the Mexican duck (*Anas diazi*) is now extinct because of hybridization with Mallard ducks.

A snake which belongs to the group of the "cat eyed" snakes named Brown Tree Snake (*Boiga irregularis*) is a nocturnal, arboreal species that uses visual and chemical cues to hunt in the tropical rainforest canopy

and/or on the ground. Shortly after World War II, it was accidentally transported from its native range in the South Pacific to Guam, probably as a stowaway in a ship's cargo or by crawling into the landing gear of Guam-bound aircraft. As a result of abundant prey on Guam and the absence of predators, the brown tree snake populations reached unprecedented numbers. They wiped out most of the native forest vertebrate species; thousands of power outages affecting private, commercial and military activities; widespread loss of domestic birds and pets; considerable emotional trauma to residents and visitors alike, when snakes invaded human habitats with the potential for envenomation of small children.

Most invasive aliens are very beautiful and are transported as ornamental captives. At times, when the owner loses the fascination and they are thrown out into the open, they get the opportunity to unleash a massive process of invasion. The Giant African Snail (*Achatina fulica*) was one such organism, curiously taken to new landscapes where it became invasive and devouring nearly 500 species of plants while also spreading a parasite which causes meningitis in humans.

There are many a stories to narrate. But what exactly is the impact of the invasive alien species in the context of losing our biodiversity? Here are the latest facts as reported by Miguel Clavero and Emili Garcí'a-Berthou from the University of Girona in Spain: Of the 680 extinct animal species, causes could be compiled for 170 (25%), of which 91 (54%) included the effects of invasive species. For 34 cases (20%), invasive species were the only cited cause of

extinction. Habitat destruction and harvesting (hunting and/or gathering) were cited for 82 and 77 species respectively. Several reviews of particular taxa by expert groups have concluded that invasive species are the leading cause of extinction of birds (65 out of 129 species) and the second cause of the extinction of North American fish (27 out of 40 species, world fish (11 out of 23 species and mammals (12 out of 25 species).

So, this is the sad state of affairs regarding biodiversity. As the old age saying goes, all that shines is not gold. The immense impact of invasive species is mounting up additional pressure on species which are already impacted by climate change. The biological characteristics of the aliens and the fact that they are outside the zone on population control by natural enemies, help them to outcompete the local species. Whatever way they invade, the result is a monoculture of a species where the diversity is wiped out and a single species dominates.

So, the next time, when you venture into the wild, look out for the aggressive species displacing the weaker local species. The first step in managing invasive species is to know them.

#### Reference

M Clavero, Garcí'a-Berthou (2005). Invasive species are a leading cause of animal extinctions

TRENDS in Ecology and Evolution, Volume 20, Issue 3, p110

A wide-angle photograph of a glacier with several seabirds, likely terns, flying over the ice and water. The ice is a mix of white and light blue, with some large, dark blue chunks. The water is a clear, light blue. The birds are in various stages of flight, with some landing on the ice and others in the air. The overall scene is serene and beautiful.

# Beautiful Iceland

By Laurence Breton Massol  
Toulouse, France

TRAVELOGUE



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**Laurence Breton Massol is a lover of nature, birds and mountains with a keen interest in photography. In June, 2016 she and five companions spend one week exploring Iceland's natural beauty.**

**This article was written in French and translated into English. Laurence's nature photographs can be seen on:**

**[www.facebook.com/laurence.bretonmassol](https://www.facebook.com/laurence.bretonmassol)**

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Due to the time difference sleep doesn't come, though its 1am. As a remedy, writing fills the page as I think back on our trip. We anticipated it, we saw it and were convinced to visit again.

Dear Iceland, you have bewitched us and offered many secrets. Staring like a wide-eyed child, our spirits have soared. Through your sights, magic Iceland, you have made us happy. To your varied landscapes and animal diversity, we have become disciples. Iceland, you have welcomed us.

### **Magic Iceland**

Cradle of long migrations, criss-crossed by spectacular lava flows, ever-changing diverse scenery. In the 9th century, the Vikings came from Norway to settle in

Iceland. Prosperous times were followed by difficult periods with successive volcanic eruptions. Natural phenomena forged Iceland. They inspired mysterious beliefs and created legends and stories of trolls and elves.

Barely off the plane, one is stunned by the diversity of the landscape. She is well named: island of ice and fire, this sparsely populated country where animals reign. At the little town of Keflavik the first marine birds capture our attention. Arctic Terns are the travellers that migrate the longest distance. Having left the Antarctic, they meet at the arctic frontier to reproduce. Selfless guardians, they defend their territory and do not hesitate to charge if their safety limits are breached.





During this period we witness the ballet of the snipe. We hear them up in the air, cooing and quavering. The birds are gregarious and the dominant impression is that everyone is here in the interest of reproduction. There is no time, or passion, to lose. Keeping a safe distance, their curiosity makes them excellent subjects for animal photographers. I sense their curiosity and I love to watch them with their badly expressed attitude of withdrawal. Charm works both ways: it is a pleasure!

Then a volcanic lunar landscape looms. Not being specialists, we guess at the species of lichens enveloping these haphazard piles of lava. Just behind us rise very sharp volcanic barriers and volcanoes. We remember that beneath this beautiful cover of mosses and lichens

sleeps the ancient remains of volcanic eruptions and that the threat remains. Iceland straddles two deviating plates (Eurasian and American). A little wakeup call: we are the guests of the island and the forces of nature are the masters.

This landscape invites us to disconnect: I immediately decided to pack away my cell phone. Towards the end of June, the night doesn't truly exist. Therefore we decided to live around the clock and let our instincts guide us according to the weather, the light.... No more order or priorities. We live by the rhythm of nature and the animals we meet.

### Meeting

Moreover, here is a bird that inspires - the oyster catcher. These beautiful birds are



everywhere in this humid environment that suits them well. Here on the banks of the water hole are the iconic Eider Ducks. Some adults, including some females, are already there, and others are still hatching. In short, when winter gives way to summer, there is a buzz here. Playing against time, the natural desire to reproduce is all that counts.

Wasting time is a luxury that means nothing to animals. It's also our credo but there's a lot to see in a week. We already know that we'll return. Burning up the kilometres, we head northwest.

We have to stop. Here we face rocky canyons where the rivers have dug meanders and waterfalls. In this mineral environment there are more trees and more lupines and though it seems unlikely, some geese nest in the heart of this barren environment.

We are carried away to another dimension. The most connected among us feels the effects of this mysterious intangible world where illusions and stories live and are maintained. To add to the wonderment, the master of the skies shows us his majestic flight. It's the eagle!

### The place is humming

But here another destination awaits us: the cliffs of Latrabjar. An open air nursery. A true collage of marine birds: Puffins, Auks, Murres, Arctic Terns, and Northern Fulmars. It's a feature-length film of arrivals and departures. And we listen to the concert of so many sounds that we can imagine an entire room of spectators who burst into laughter or even the heart-breaking cries of children. It is completely enchanting. These marine birds are tireless workers. At certain times of the day, the Puffins are the attraction.



Perched on the edges of cliffs hundreds of metres high, they allow themselves to be photographed. They are completely cooperative!

But the best surprise is the sun. Being a dedicated nature photographer, I love to watch the sunset and sunrise. I go into a panic as I hurry to capture the best light at the best moment. I chase the light because in France these moments are brief, fleeting, while in Iceland at the end of June we can enjoy a different spectacle. We turn our gaze to the horizon and admire it. My thoughts are of the sun which will rise again in a few hours. It is 3 AM and the first twinkling stars begin to appear.

Iceland wouldn't be Iceland without mention of the Arctic Fox. After several attempts we would be able to see and photograph it. Predictable in his habits, he manages to be on time. On the lookout, we see a slender lively silhouette on the mountain peak. It's him! We watch him come down, approach us and disappear, looking for food.

Far from the animal kingdom, steam and heat catch our eye. An underground treasure. It is Kafa who has installed one of the many geothermal power stations in Iceland. Thanks to drilling, the steam pump operates the turbines to generate electricity. A natural resource for a glacial volcanic country.

Soon, our quest leads us to the shores of Lake Myvatn, with a background of volcanic mountains. Swarms of small

insects, annoying but not harmful, force us to wear mosquito nets. They make a great meal for the sandpipers we discover. In addition, there are several flocks of ducks and swans, far from the environment of the steppes, some geese and their young, as well as the large Skua. The hours pass and we are leaving for a much anticipated destination: the head of the Vatnajokull glacier.

The icy landscapes of the polar summer delight us. Our eyes and camera lenses compose beautiful pictures. Several small icebergs have washed up on the black sand of the beach. In the sky, a thieving Skua attempts to steal the seagulls' scraps. At the bottom of this estuary large icebergs are balanced. But above all, a play of exquisite shades of images which we freeze in our memory cards.

Suddenly, when night arrives, a muffled sound attracts our attention: a large block of ice starts to break away, creating a swell of waves. At this moment we understand the ravages of climate warming. In this place, the glacier has receded several hundred metres. However, life continues and it's definitely better to be alive than not!

### **Feathers worth their weight in gold**

The Eider Ducks gather. The duck is one of Iceland's icons. It's down is a marvellous insulator. The word comes from the Danish "ederdun", meaning eiderdown or duvet. The ballet of Arctic Terns is as captivating as that of the Snow Buntings and their young.



It is mid-June and we "sleep" in our tents. The more daring will have searched all night for a giant's foot. There is magical light on the glaciers when the sun paints the sky and ice.

With a twinge of regret, we leave and continue our journey to the geysers. As we approach, sulphur, gas, smoke, sludge and vapours remind us of the intense activity underground. Iceland is situated on the upper side of the mid-Atlantic. So, here is an active geyser. First impression is of an inflating bell that soon gives way to a vertical thrust of hot water and sulphur.

Iceland is a place where man has left behind his imprint. The stranded

famous DC3. A vestige sitting on the sand at Solheimasandur, south of the Myrdalsjokull glacier. Lost in the middle of the desert, it's a tourist attraction and, one might add, at certain times a ghostly presence in this place.

Our Iceland journey is almost over. Island of numerous animal and vegetable species, magnificent landscapes, a natural environment that must always be preserved. Even though we deplore the declining number of birds, an inescapable melting of the glaciers, and intimidated by the very active volcanoes, Iceland is unique, beautiful and savage.

A marvellous, captivating country to which one must return!

# TIPS 'N' TRICKS

By **Hermis Haridas**,  
United Arab Emirates

A self-confessed nature lover and travel enthusiast, he became deeply involved in nature and bird photography and found himself traveling around, hunting for and trying to capture moments hitherto uncaptured. His trips to Russia, Sri Lanka, India and African continent gave him the opportunity to understand the nuances of wildlife photography. Hermis believes in the adage that “practice makes perfect” and there isn’t a day in his life without peeping at the world through his “third eye”. He holds his passion closest to his heart and dreams of making it big as a nature photographer.  
Website: [www.hermis.me](http://www.hermis.me)



Bears are majestic and powerful animals and great subjects to photograph. The bears in the wild are dangerous and their behavior is at times unpredictable. Most bear attacks result in injury, which might even cause to death.

It's a visual treat to anyone who enjoys wildlife to see them hunting fish, playing with each other, fighting and showing off their power. Bears are more dangerous while they are with cubs. Even though the cubs are really interesting subjects to photograph, one has to be very careful during this time, as the mother will be in defensive mode to protect her cubs if she perceives you as a danger to them. So always keep a very good distance if you see a bear with cubs. It is always recommended to go in a small group with a ranger or a field guide to be on the safer side.

Always focus on the eyes while shooting bears. It is recommend to set your focus point to center point focus or center point focus with expand to five surrounding points. This will help to make sure that

the focus does not keep on searching too often to areas of the frame that you don't want the focus on.

Try to position yourself, or approach the bear from a down wind position. This will lessen the possibility of the bear smelling you and detecting your presence.

Keep an eye on what is around the subject and behind it. This helps us to determine what exposure compensation to use, if any, as well as having an object to take a light reading from so you can manually set your aperture and shutter speed for your wow shot.

One important factor for shooting animals in action is the direction of light. You have to be careful of where you are shooting in regards to the direction of the light source. Always try to have the light behind you lighting up your subject, unless you are trying for a backlit picture. Photographing keeping the light behind gives you the feasibility of increasing shutter speed that helps to freeze the fast motion.

In order to freeze motion we need to have a high shutter speed. When you are in the field check your settings often to make sure that you have a high shutter speed and the proper white balance. If you find the shutter speed low, then you can play around the settings such as increasing ISO or stepping down the exposure depending on the available light. Keep the shutter speed between 200-400 and the aperture to 6.5-8 while shooting the head shake of a bear in order to freeze the water drops around the bear's head.



© Hermis Haridas

**If you find the shutter speed low, then you can play around the settings such as increasing ISO or stepping down the exposure depending on the available light.**

It is recommended that you shoot handheld as the bears move quickly and often. Focusing a fast moving animal using the camera mounted on a tripod would be difficult. If you have a fast enough shutter speed, hand holding a

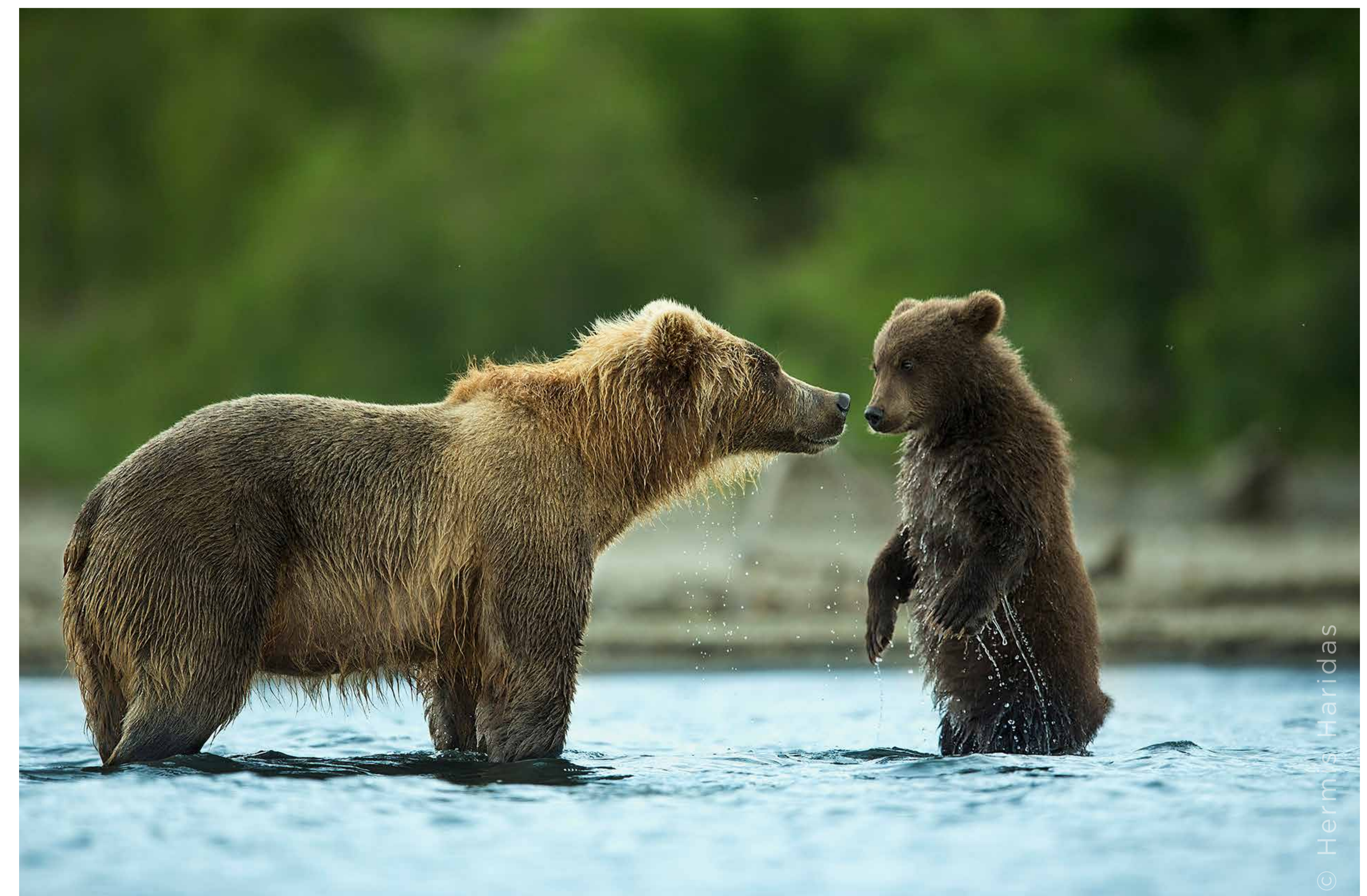
**Bears are more dangerous while they are with the cubs. Even though the cubs are really interesting subjects to photograph, one has to be very careful during this time, as the mother will be in defensive mode to protect her cubs if she perceives you as a danger to her cubs.**

lens such as a 300 f2.8, 100-400mm or a 300 f4, 200-500, etc. should be fine.

Always shoot the bears from a very low level angle. Try to lie down on the ground while photographing the bears fishing for salmon so that it appears like the bear is coming straight towards your camera. Getting down near the water level to photograph bears makes a huge difference in the perspective.

Always keep the shooting mode on your camera to continuous shoot in order to shoot the maximum frames which will help to capture all the action.

These bears are Brown Bears (*Ursus arctos*), photos taken in Kamchatka, Russia.





© Drishti Hoskote

CUB'S CORNER

## CUB'S CORNER



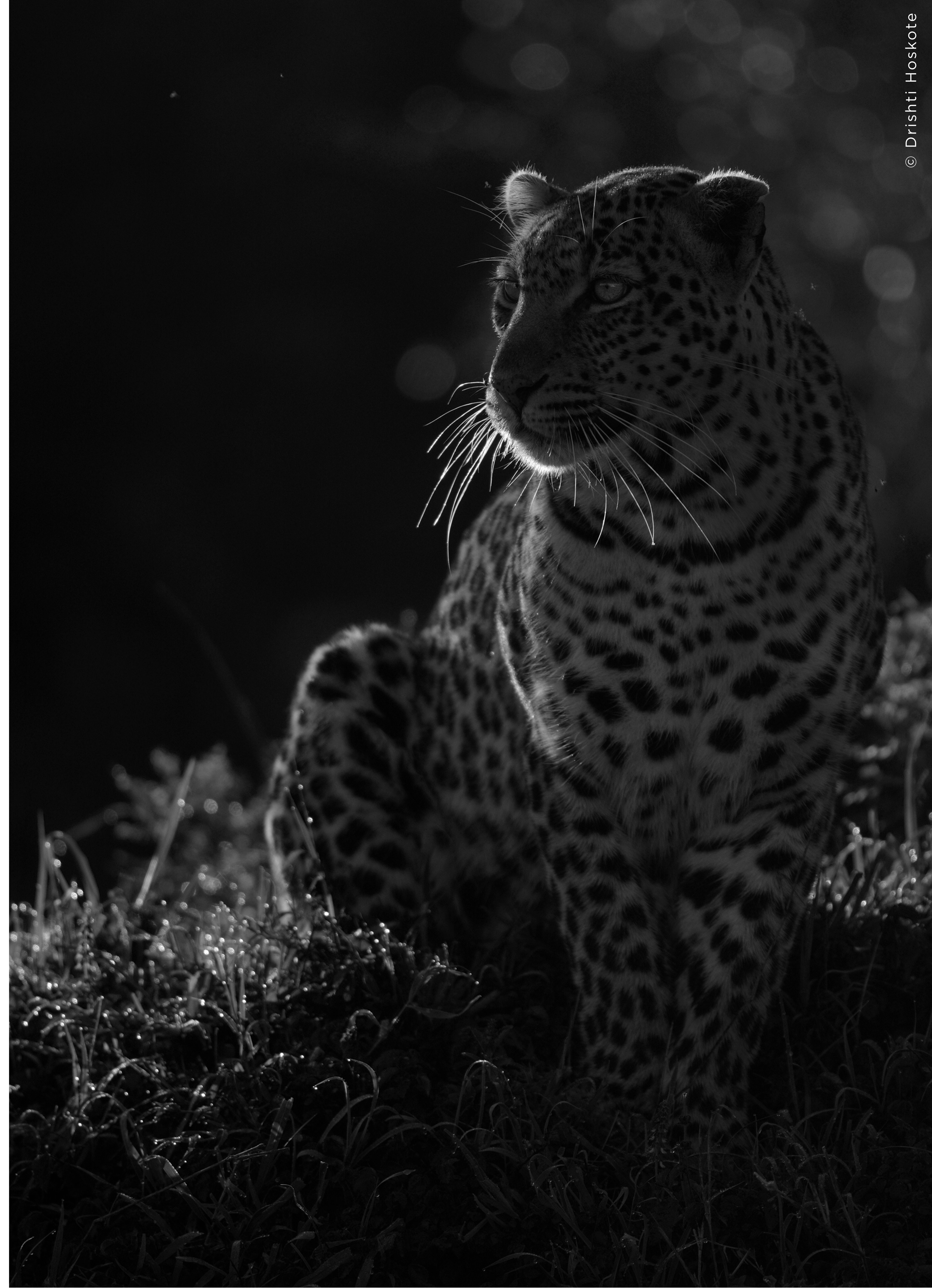
**Do you equate qualities like high thinking and deep contemplation of life and nature with adulthood and grey hair? Think again...**

**Meet Drishti Hoskote from Bangalore, India and your perspective is going to take a U-turn. This youngster has passion for nature bubbling out of her. Her trigger happy fingers has put the shutter on many a breath taking image.**



## LITTLE FOOTPRINTS IN THE WOODS

By Drishti Hoskote





Four years ago my dad gave me the best gift anyone could ever give. He showed me insights of nature. He took me bird watching to Hessarghata, a lake on the outskirts of Bangalore. On the bicycle, a pair of binoculars to guide me, my dad and I trailed along looking for birds. Rollers, Bushchats, raptors, and everything including the trees pulled me into their world, a world which I never want to leave.

That was the start of my journey with nature. Three years ago, I was gifted a camera, so I could record whatever I saw. That camera became a part of me since I received it. I shot pictures everywhere

even though I had no clue what I was clicking. Eventually, love for nature grew and the bond with my camera strengthened.

India's wildlife sanctuaries... Kabini to Corbett, Ranthambore to Bandhavgarh, forests pulled us like magnets. Photography had become a family hobby by 2014, and I had never been more grateful. I had fallen in love with sunsets and bird chirps, wild animals became my biggest fascination. I still wait eagerly for any trip, may it be a forest or somewhere nearby to embrace nature's beauty. Nature made me notice the tiniest of moments, from watching skies change









© Drishti Hoskote



What happens when this balance of nature is disrupted? As I said, one of the things I've learnt is that nature is all about balance. And honestly, if this rate of depletion continues, if this rate of pollution continues, maybe not our generation or hopefully not the next, but our grandchildren or great-grandchildren will definitely face the wrath of nature. The Earth is a beautiful planet, unfortunately not many recognize this beauty. The day a majority of people respect what Mother Nature has given us, the day they see the beauty and realize how blessed we are, that day is the day we win, Nature wins. That's the day we fall in love with existence all over again. I hope I will continue to have

this opportunity to be part of Nature and contribute to her existence in a positive way.

At the Nature-InFocus event (Asia's premier nature and wildlife photography festival), I won awards in the Young Photographer category - both in 2015 (special mention) and in 2016 (1st prize). My images and articles have been published in Sanctuary Asia magazine and other newspapers/online magazines over the last three years. One of my image also reached second round of judging at the Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition conducted by Natural History Museum, UK.

dramatically as the moon replaced the sun, to staring at constellations and imagining figures. My senses sharpened inside the forest, hearing every alarm call, scanning for tigers. It brings me all the happiness in the world.

Nature hasn't only brought me joy, but has also taught me to love, take pleasure in tiny moments. Also, awareness that there is always a balance. Good and bad, a beautiful mixture of both.

Photography came along with nature for me. Learning from each trip I try and improve the best I can. My camera became my best buddy. I started photographing school events, broadening my perspectives, started trying landscapes and night photography.

My recent trip to Ladakh was a game changer. I got into more of night photography. Waking up to cold winds, sleeping on deserts of Nubra under the galaxy, waiting for the moon to set, setting up the camera while the winds froze my fingers, dipping my legs in Tso Moriri... I will run back to that place if given a chance.

Four years and nature has brought me far. Photography has taught me skills while nature taught me patience. A part of who I am is because of nature. As much as I love the city buzz and traffic noises, a visit to a forest or a place close to nature heals and purifies me inside out.

It hurts to see the current depletion. What happens when this beauty ceases?

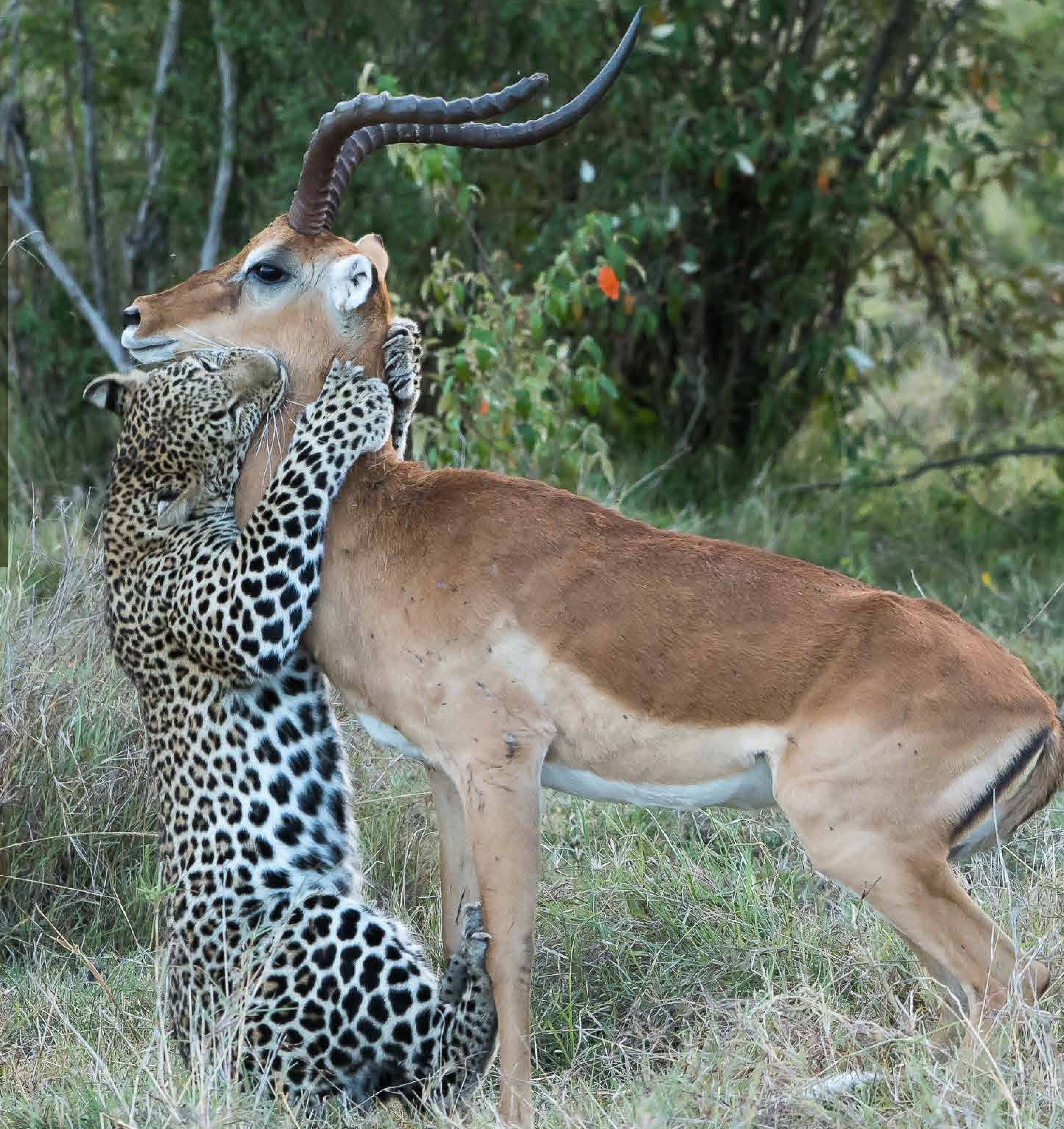


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# Hug of Death

By Chaitanya Vattem



© Chaitanya Vattem

THROUGH THE LENS

# C



**Chaitanya Vattam is a software engineer by profession and an awesome wildlife photographer by passion.**

“Hug of Death”, this is the title that comes to my mind when I see the images of this epic hunt that we witnessed at Masai Mara, Kenya.

It was late evening and we were waiting for the wild cats to wake up, hoping to see some action. Little did we know what was in store.

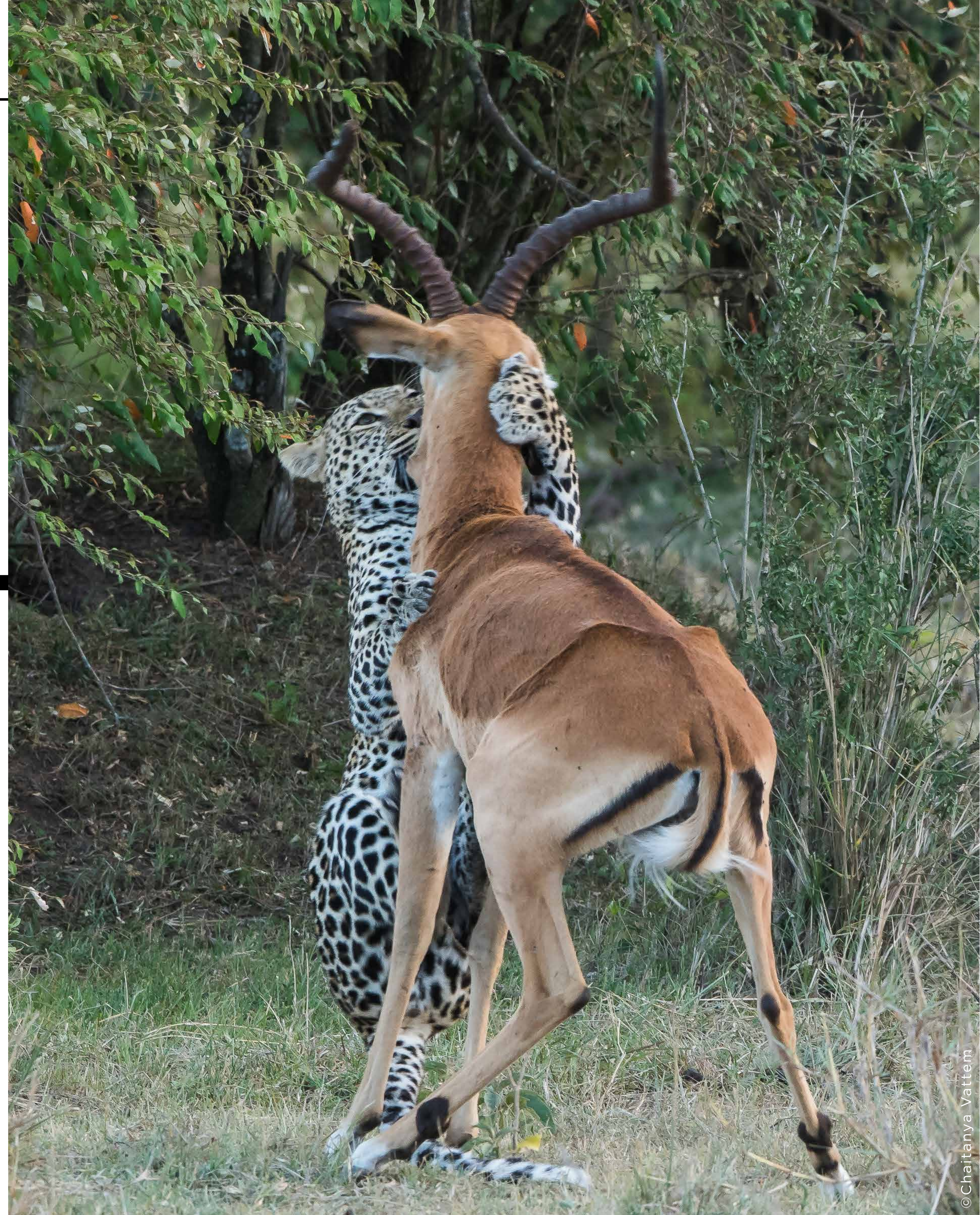
While we were enjoying the scenes of a small pride of lions, our driver’s walkie-talkie buzzed and he exclaimed “Leopard time”! Upon reaching the spot we saw that there were a lot of vehicles lined-up to catch the big show.

Stealthily walking into the bushes and crossing a stream was a young leopardess, aged about 3years, named “Luluka”. Capturing the scenes of jungle is

all about timing and you end up missing a lot if you don’t keep up down to the last seconds. So, to stay abreast of the action, our driver made a daring crossing to the other side of the stream. He told us that there is an Impala around and she might be stalking it. Although, it isn’t easy for a young leopardess to bring down a full-grown Impala on its own.

We were still looking around and from out of nowhere she lunged on and clung to the neck of an Impala. The whole scene was unfolding about 20ft away from our jeep while we stood there recovering from a state of shock.

The Impala was struggling to stay on its feet, kicking away Luluka, who focused all her might on choking the Impala to death. Luluka used her tail to balance and





©Chaitanya Vatttem

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We were still looking around and from out of nowhere she lunged on and clung to the neck of an Impala. The whole scene was unfolding about 20ft away from our jeep while we stood there recovering from a state of shock.

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coil the legs of the Impala to block all movement. The Impala collapsed within minutes giving her a firmer grip on the prey's throat. Now, it was a matter of few seconds before Luluka claimed her meal for the next few days.

Luluka took time to catch her breath and rejoice by playing around and licking the Impala. Finally, she decided on the softest part of the prey: the testicular area, as her entrée of the meal.

A few notes from the hunt to be observed in the photos:

1. The setting: proximity of the jeep.

The jeep, visible in one of the photos shows how Luluka held-on to her prey despite how close the jeep is to her.

2. Hunt strategy: position of rear legs of Luluka.

If you look closely, the rear legs of Luluka are on the hind legs of the Impala in order to exert her whole weight to bring down the prey.

3. The balance: usage of tail.

Luluka used her tail along to gain balance during the hug of death around the Impala.



©Chaitanya Vatttem

# When the prey hogged the limelight

By Goutham Shankar



©Goutham Shankar

THROUGH THE LENS

# G



**Goutham Shankar, an avid traveler, photographer, wildlife enthusiast and an entrepreneur. In the last four years he has been running BookMyLens, an Independent rental-house (Photography and Videography/Filming Equipment Company) and recently started TheEditRoom (a post-production studio based in Bangalore).**

While on a safari in Nagarhole National Park, India, with my friends, we heard a langur alarm call in the distance. We drove towards it, as the call got louder. We decided to stake out this spot. For 40 minutes, the calls went on and off. Now we could hear some kind of noise behind the bushes and the alarm calls were shrill; we had no clue what to expect. The only thing we were sure of was that there was a predator, and we just wanted to see it out in the open.

Then one of us in the jeep whispered, "Leopard, Leopard!" My heart began to pound the moment I saw the leopard, with the kill in its mouth. We assumed it was a langur kill and did not pay attention to its meal, but focused on photographing the leopard itself. This female leopard was very quick and kept an eye on us as she made a few leaps to cross over to the

other side before disappearing into the woods.

When I reviewed my images later, the confusion began. It was not a langur and definitely not something that we could easily identify. We were left guessing as to what the kill was. After talking to a few people, we were able to identify the prey as a Flying Squirrel.

Leopards are opportunistic predators and are known to have a very broad diet, which goes with their exceptional adaptability. In few of the images, it appeared to be a lactating Flying Squirrel. Further reading revealed that Flying Squirrels tend to be nocturnal, except for the ones that are lactating and their offspring, which are diurnal for a period during the summer.





© Leon van der Linden

# INSPIRATION, MATERIALS AND SUBJECTS

By Leon van der Linden and Rejane Bremer

WILD ARTS SHOWCASE







Léon van der Linden's realistic painting style which capture the natural world with a passionate, elegant and respectful look, encourages the viewer to closely observe the natural world. His skill as a wildlife artist is wildly recognized, admired and respected by colleagues, collectors and wildlife enthusiasts.

As a child he could usually be found playing, reading or drawing. At the age of 5 he drew his first lines and never stopped. There has always been plenty to inspire him. Cowboys and Indians, creatures out of school books, daily trips to the sea with the outstretched dunes, marshes and forests. Animals, landscape, wonders of the natural and imaginary world, all became drawings. This love continued on into his adult life and it

absorbed him totally. Any free time was dedicated to creating paintings and drawings. After high school it was clear to him what he wanted to do with his life. Given the opportunity, he wanted a career as an artist and specifically painting wildlife was his aim. After a failed adventure at the university where he studied biology, began to give shape to his career as a wildlife artist.

In addition to his many jobs, drawing and painting became a daily activity. He wanted to become proficient in the techniques required and also to increase his knowledge of the things he painted.

Around the age of thirty, he decided to become a professional wildlife artist and this resulted in 1990 in an invitation to participate in the prestigious exhibition "Birds in Art" in the Leigh Yawkey Art Museum in Wausau, U.S.A. This was the biggest turning point in his artistic life. After this event, the doors were open for him across North America and Europe.

[www.leonvanderlindenart.nl](http://www.leonvanderlindenart.nl)  
[www.leonvanderlindenart.com](http://www.leonvanderlindenart.com)

Leon van der Linden is an internationally known Dutch wildlife artist and a self-taught painter with a university degree in biology. Leon emphasizes that he has not been influenced by any particular artists, even though he is familiar with many different styles of artwork, particularly wildlife art from Europe and North

America. The drawings in the caves in Spain and southern France were a major influence on him. Realizing the difficult circumstances which those people created the very detailed and lifelike drawings, impressed him much and they still do. Of course there were artists whom he admired and influenced his way of approaching the subjects and style. From the early beginnings he studied the paintings of Zdenek Burian from Czech Republic, Dutch artist Rien Poortvliet, Belgian master artist Carl Brenders and especially Ray Harris Ching from New Zealand. Not to forget the old masters like Rembrandt and the Dutch painters Anton Mauve, H.





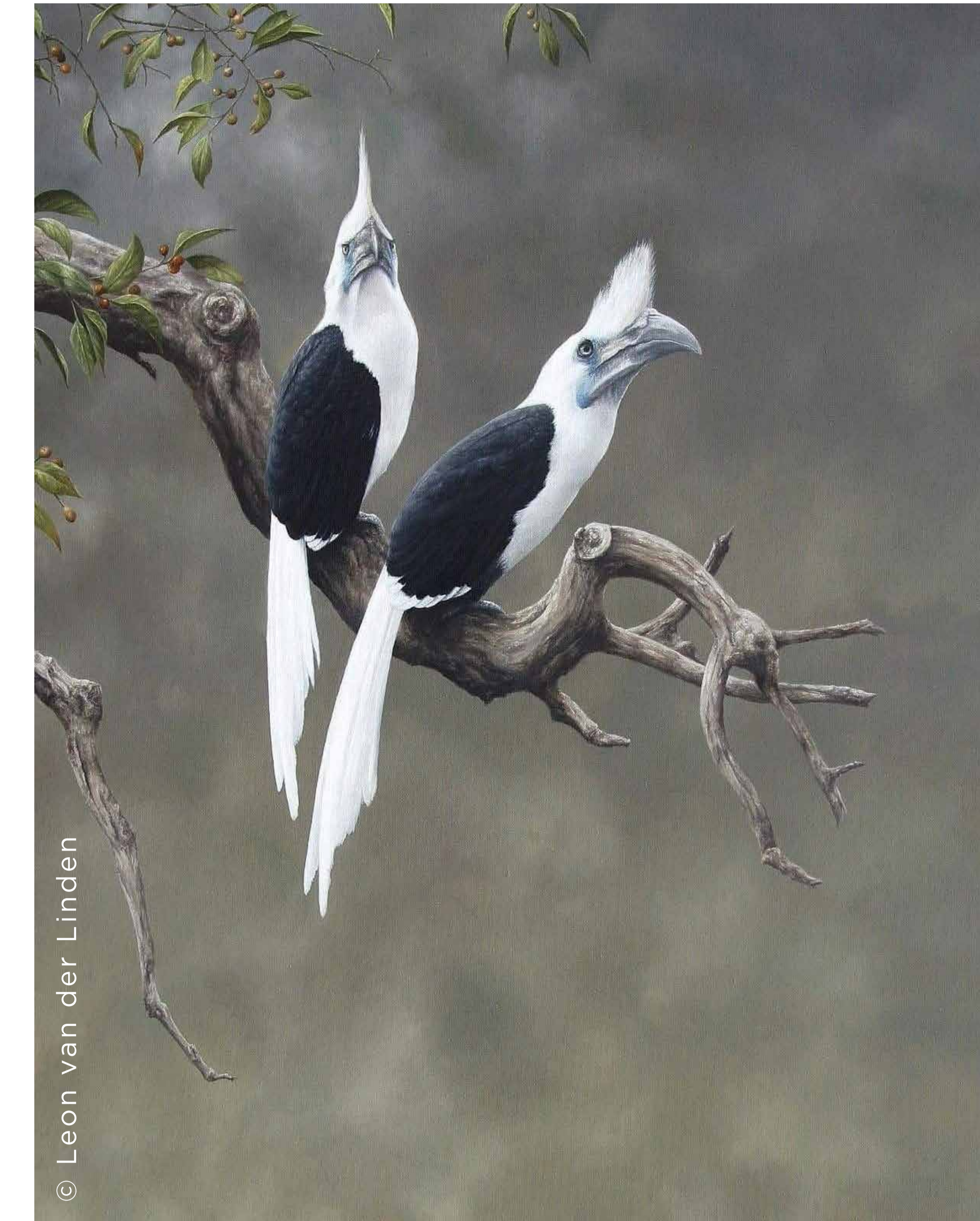
© Leon van der Linden

Mesdag, J. Israels, all members of the Haagse school (19th century) famous for their use of light. The powerful renditions of wildlife in all its spectrum, the mastery of details and the tactile realism Leon creates in his paintings irresistibly draws in the viewers, confronting them to a close encounter with the subject. The only real influence on his work is the natural world with all its myriad creatures... big and small. "Looking at the world around me has taught me how to use colours and to see detail in the big picture called "the World" which is all around us." He has also built up a deep understanding and broad knowledge of the subjects he paints. There has always been plenty to inspire Leon and to form the subjects of his work.

Almost all of Léon's paintings and drawings derive from an extensive on site study of the fauna, flora and environment. He will personally take countless photos of the animal and its habitat, taking great care to document all the elements that will set the stage for his subject such as the vegetation at a particular time of year, the light, relief of the landscape, the shape and colour of the rocks... Only then will Léon let his imagination flow "the painting takes form in my mind and begins with a few sketches. Sometimes it take many months or years to develop the idea born in his imagination. Leon is fond of saying, "A good piece of art is like wine, it needs time to ripen." His vision finally materializes in a detailed pencil drawing which he then projects to his

panel, canvas or illustration board, making adjustments to his composition before applying paint. Although Léon prefers oil paint, he also trained himself and developed his own way of using acrylic paint. He transferred the way the old masters use their paint into his materials, especially in such a difficult modern medium as acrylic paint. It takes many thin layers of paint to obtain the results he wants.

From the first days when he was attracted to paint, many kind of birds were the main subjects in his artwork. Especially birds of prey and owls formed the main part of his paintings. Many of his paintings with this group of birds have been



© Leon van der Linden

published in magazines. In the last decade of the 20th century he was captivated by a group of birds totally different from his usual subjects. These birds, the Birds of Paradise from New Guinea and the northern peninsula of Australia, were a new challenge for him. Before he amassed the courage and the skills to paint these jewels of the rainforests and mountain slopes of this almost untouched island, it took him three years of study and collecting information about the birds and their habitat. This first unusual artwork depicts the male Princess Stephanie's Astrapia with his overwhelming



© Leon van der Linden



© Leon van der Linden

beautiful plumage, portrayed in his natural habitat, the mountain slopes of the Bismarck Range and Mount Hagen in the western part of New Guinea. Every detail is important in his Bird of Paradise paintings...the anatomy, the vibrant colours of the plumage with the extraordinary shape of the feathers, the habitat where they live in and foremost the vegetation in this untouched part of the world. Paintings these birds is like a journey, going back in time when nature was not influenced by visitors from outside. Leon has not seen the Birds of Paradise in the wild, and dreams of a trip to New Guinea. He travelled to Brazil to study the Blue Macaws in the wild and to paint them in their natural habitat.

The plans for 2017 and the years after are clear. He has long worked out ideas for the next many years, of several new works with the birds of paradise, especially the more uncommon species. This again requires much study of the habitat in which they live, their typical behaviour and especially the anatomy of the birds. Another project is the Blue Macaws from South America. Preparing a book on these beautiful large parrots are at an early stage (sketches) and the first serious works should be fully completed in 2017. The book on Macaws will include the Blue Macaws, as well as many other Macaw species,



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some now extinct, which may have been endemic to the Caribbean islands including Cuba's Macaw, St. Croix Macaw and Guadeloupe Macaw. There are also several exhibitions scheduled in North America and Europe. All this together with some commissioned works, ensures that the future looks promising. Leon, now 63 is very active and has an almost full agenda for 2017. The collaboration with his wife Rejane

ensures that Leon can concentrate fully on his work.

Leon's bird paintings are internationally well known. Seven times Leon has been juried into the prestigious "Birds in Art" exhibition annually held by the Leigh Yawkey Woodson Art Museum in the United States. In 2015, Leon was awarded the "Artist of the Year" by the Mandela Gallery in Singapore.

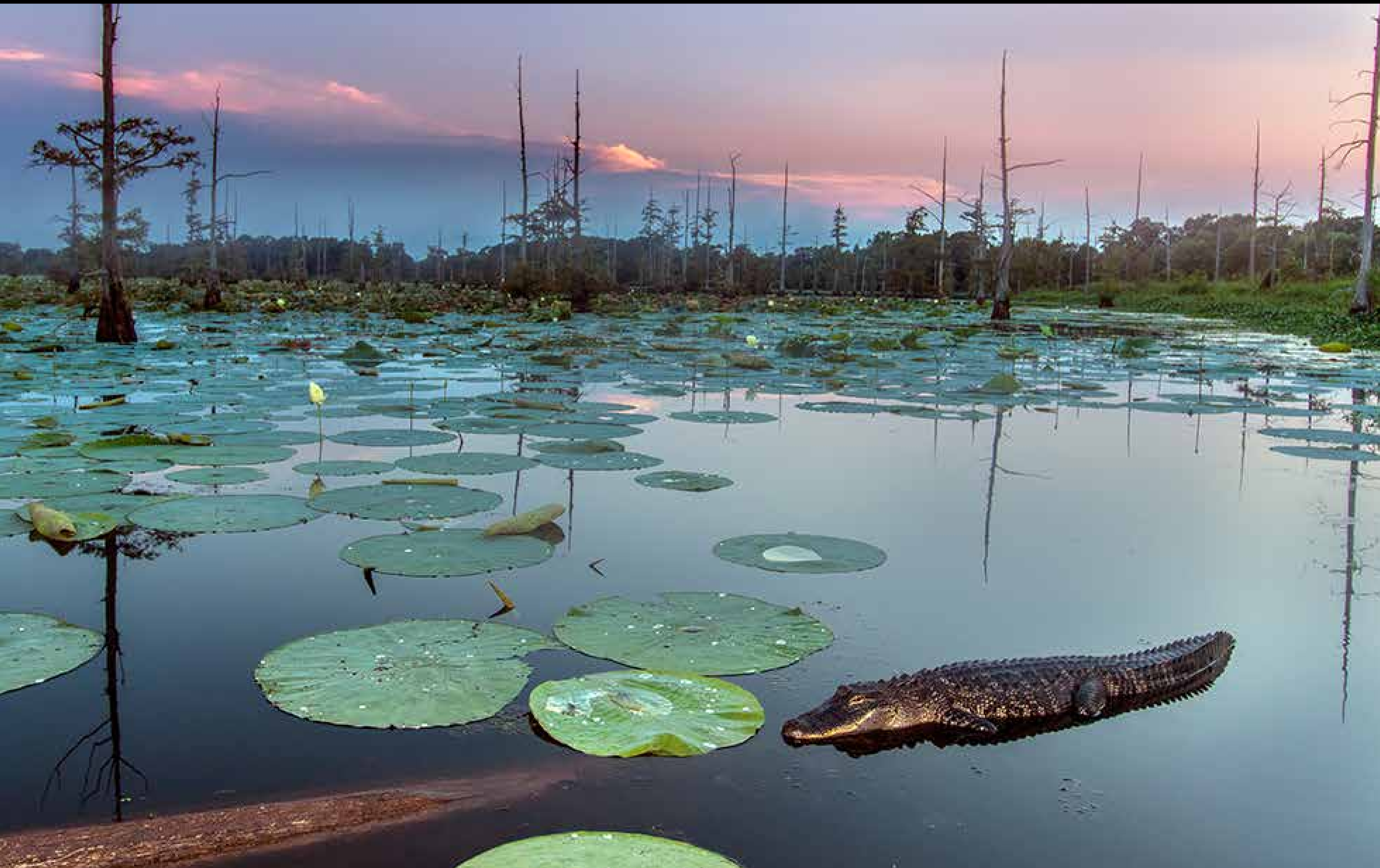


YOUR GALLERY



Rosh Kumar

Brown Bear (*Ursus arctos*)  
Location: Kamchatka, Russia



YOUR GALLERY

**Mohan Krishna**  
American alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*)  
Location: Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Louisiana, USA



YOUR GALLERY

**Arindam Saha**  
Long-legged fly  
Location: Narayanpur, Kolkata, India





YOUR GALLERY



Biju Varghese  
Leopard with kill (*Panthera pardus*)  
Location: Masai Mara, Kenya



YOUR GALLERY



Chaitanya Vattam  
African Lion (*Panthera leo*)  
Location: Masai Mara, Kenya



YOUR GALLERY

Jithesh Purushothaman

Bengal tiger (*Panthera tigris tigris*)

Location: Kanha National Park, Madhya Pradesh, India



YOUR GALLERY

Sabr Dri

Cheetal (*Axis axis*)

Location: Bharatpur, Rajasthan, India



YOUR GALLERY



Steven Sachs

Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*)  
Location: Orange County, New York, USA



YOUR GALLERY



Vinu Mathew

Blue-tailed Bee-eater (*Merops philippinus*)  
Location: Kottayam, Kerala, India



**UPCOMING  
FEATURES**



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## **WINGED BEAUTIES OF KUUSAMO**

By Olli Lamminsalo

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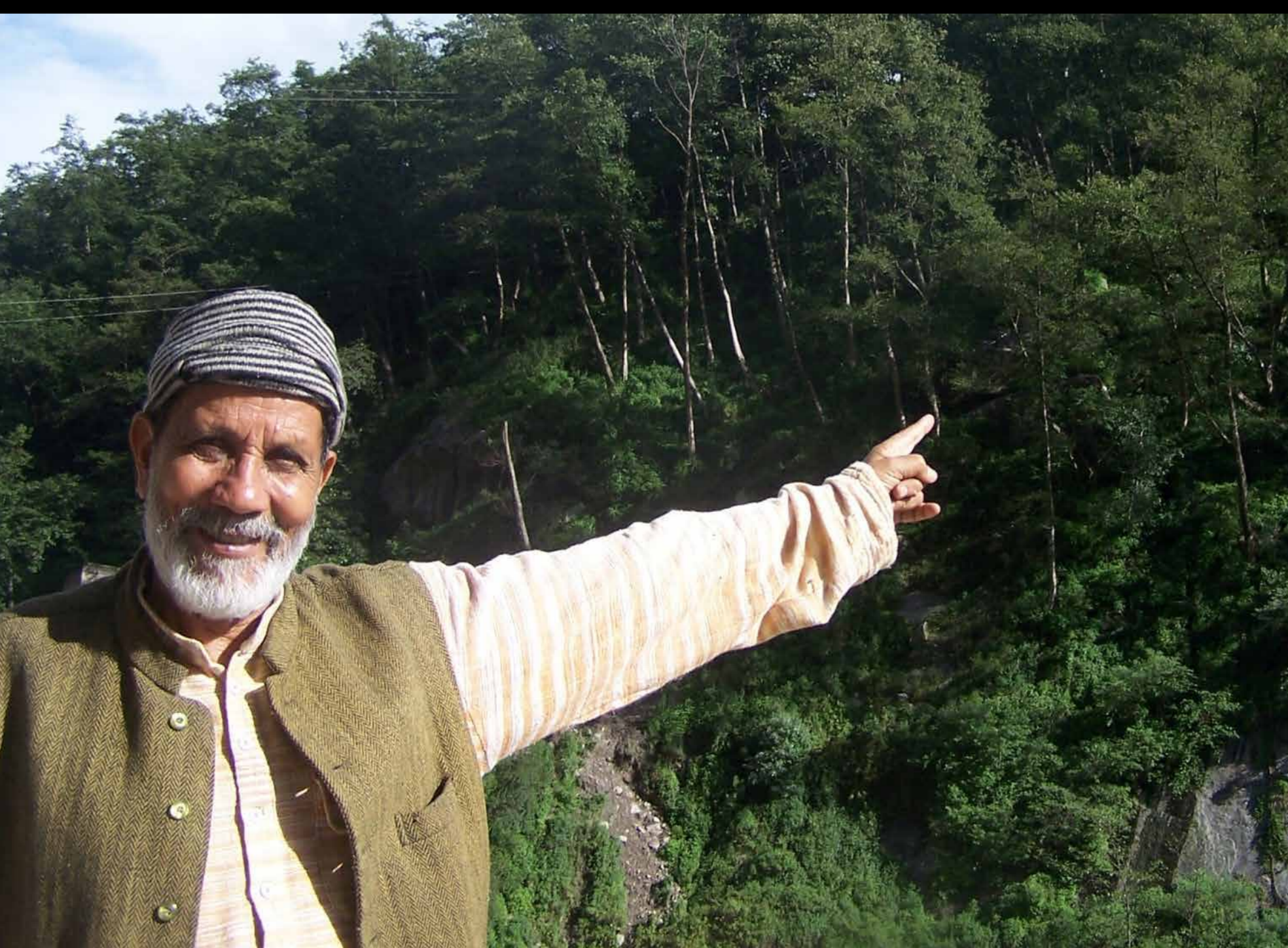


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## **ENDANGERED BIRDS OF NEPAL**

By Carol Inskipp

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## **THE ROOTS OF CHIPKO MOVEMENT**

By Chandi Prasad Bhatt

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