

# P

EXPLORERS

DEC 2017/JAN 2018



## THE MAGICAL MACRO WORLD!!

By Yousef Al-Habshi

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## TAKAHE, ONE OF NEW ZEALAND'S MOST ENDANGERED BIRDS

By Julie Harvey

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# D850

**I AM** RELENTLESS

*David Yarrow*



## DAVID YARROW INTRODUCES THE NEW NIKON FULL FRAME D850.

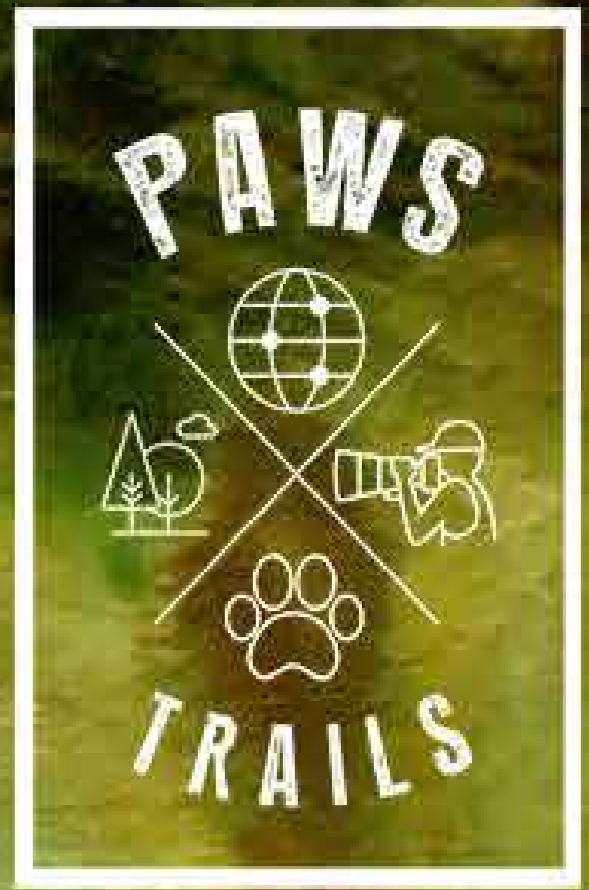
To launch the new Nikon D850, master wildlife photographer David Yarrow was given the creative freedom to capture the image of his lifetime, shot on the new D850. Thanks to the powerful combination of the 45.7MP FX format back-side illuminated CMOS sensor and the speed of 9\*fps shooting, he could tell a story like never before. With ISO 64 to 25600, 153-point AF, 8K time-lapse\*\* and full frame 4K UHD video, now you too can capture your masterpiece. David is passionate about wildlife conservation, and is the affiliated photographer of the Tusk Trust Foundation. To find out more about the D850, and David's story, follow Nikon on Facebook and YouTube.

\* Requires the optional MB-D18 Multi-Power Battery Pack and EN-EL-18a/b battery.

\*\* Requires Interval Timer settings and 3rd party software.

Nikon <sup>(th)</sup>  
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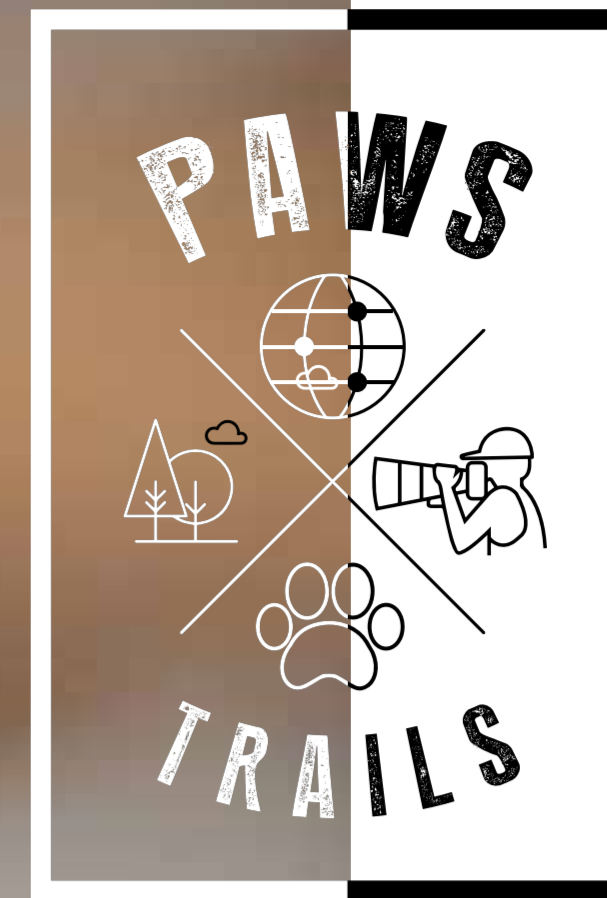
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**Publisher:** Paws Trails Explorers **Editors:** Hank Tyler, D.D. Tyler, **Associate Editor:** Raghul Patteri  
**Content Director:** Nisha Purushothaman, **Photography Director:** Hermis Haridas, **Design desk :** Nithya Purushothaman  
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PANTANAL

By Praveen Siddannavar



Hank Tyler  
Editor

South America's rich biodiversity and spectacular landscapes offer fabulous opportunities for nature photography. We are pleased to feature four articles from Argentina and Brazil.

The Pantanal is South America's largest and most famous wetland for wildlife that is located in Brazil. Brazil's wildlife guide, Jarbas Mattos describes the spectacular wildlife to be found in the Pantanal - jaguars, monkeys, parrots and many species of wading birds.

Praveen Siddannavar, a leading Indian photographer, reports on his ecotourism and photographic visit to the Pantanal. His photos are spectacular.

Argentina's biologist and wildlife artist, Cynthia Bandurek, is featured in our Wildarts section. Cynthia's remarkable career covers an interesting path as conservation biologist, nature photographer, artist and author

Argentina's National Park system is growing as documented by Francisco Gonzalez Taboas story of the newly created Translasierra National Park. Restoration of former pasture lands into parkland form an important linkage of other protected lands into the Chaco Seco Ecosystem. The NGO Aves Argentina deserves credit for this conservation accomplishment

New Zealand's Julia Harvey reports on the remarkable effort to protect and constant work to recover the population of less than 350 individuals of the flightless Takahe, one of the world's most endangered birds.

Nature photography is the cornerstone of PT Explorers. We strive to select the most outstanding images for the sharpness, brightness, action and overall composition. We look forward to you sharing your best wildlife photographs with our readers by contributing them to our website. We also would like your recommendations of wildlife habitats or endangered species in your region of the world that we should feature in PT Explorers.

**EDITOR'S DEN**

©Praveen Premkumar Pai



**PHOTOGRAPHY DIRECTOR'S CHOICE**

**Praveen Premkumar Pai**

Leopard

*(Panthera pardus)*

Bandipur Tiger Reserve, Karnataka, India



# FOUNDERS' NOTE

Now that our first birthday's cake has digested, we are back at work with renewed vigor. Our photography exhibition in Dubai "The Wild Trails" was well received. Four workshops at Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain and Dubai on the theme Wildlife Conservation & Photography in association with Nikon School were well attended and lively with enthusiastic participation from the attendees. These gives us hope that voices will be raised in support of conservation.

Such is the Irony of life, it is often the most beautiful locations that face the worst destructions. In the pages of this edition you will see travelogues praising the beauty and biological richness of the Brazilian Pantanal, a unique jewel in the crown of the tropical paradise that is Brazil. But not to forget - It is hardly a few months back that the Brazilian government took the unfortunate decision to abolish the vast Renca national reserve in the Amazon and open it up for mining.

This area larger than the size of Denmark will no doubt be lost forever once miners takes over. In the aftermath of huge public outcry and opposition from both inside and outside the country, coupled with intervention by the courts, the Brazilian government decided to scrap the idea. A small victory for the green warriors. But is it really a victory?

We would say that the interests of the earth and its many inhabits were defeated the moment the very thought to destroy a natural treasure set root in the minds of one of us. It is blatant plunder, nothing less. Common logic says, "don't consume that, which you cannot replenish". Why do we want those minerals anyway. Can't we humans forgo that fancy gadget, that glittery ornament, or that destructive battle tank? Are they essentials or are they good to have, or are they plain discretionary luxuries? The answer is definitely 'not essential' and hence the human race absolutely cannot justify the very thought of such unmindful plunder. Please please rationalize your use of natural resources. Always keep in mind that our essential requirements are few, the earths reserves are limited and its ability to replenish and heal is eroded.

Please rationalize the use of natural resources.

Always keep in mind -  
our essential requirements are few  
the earths reserves are limited, and  
its ability to replenish and heal is eroded.

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**Hermis Haridas & Nisha Purushothaman**

Founders - PT Explorers









COVER STORY

**THE MAGICAL  
MACRO WORLD!!**

By Yousef Al-Habshi





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**Yousef Al-Habshi is from United Arab Emirates and specializes in “macro” and “micro” photography. He has won numerous local and international awards, most notably first place for two consecutive years at the Emirates International Photography Contest, first place and a gold medal at the Sharjah Arabian Photo, macro division, and was honored by His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi, Ruler of Sharjah.**

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**Al-Habshi has contributed his images to several universities and advanced students for research and scientific projects. His photographs have been published in several national newspapers and specialized photography magazines around the world including for building awareness about agricultural pests. Additionally, National Geographic Al Arabiya Magazine used his photographs as the main content for their 2016 calendar.**

**To view more of his works visit:**

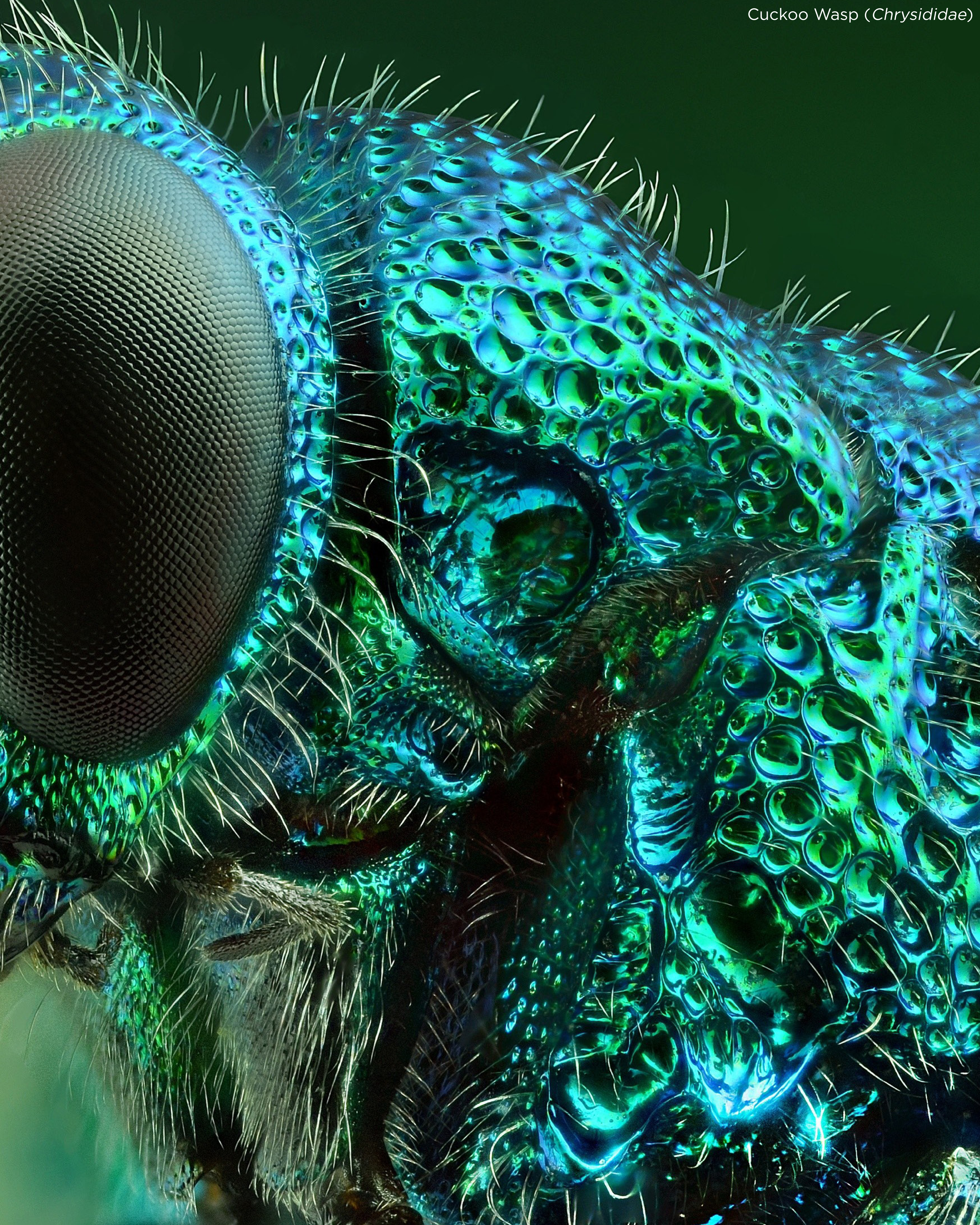
**[UAEmacro.com](http://UAEmacro.com)**

**[facebook.com/UAEmacro](https://facebook.com/UAEmacro)**

**[instagram.com/Yousef\\_al\\_Habshi](https://instagram.com/Yousef_al_Habshi)**

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## **Can you please tell us about yourself and a little bit about your experience as a macro photographer**

I am Yousef Al Habshi, from the UAE and I like to describe myself as an Emirati photographer who specializes in “Macro” and “Micro” photography. Ever since I procured my first camera in the year of 2010, I have taken photography seriously and from the start I have discovered a liking in me for the intricate and beautiful world of macro photography.

## **What are the special areas of knowledge that is required to take macro photography?**

Macro photography demands a lot of preparation and study before you get into the field. This form requires a great deal of understanding of your equipment. This starts with studying the options available in the market and identifying the correct equipment, learning how to use it and how to get the best out of it, identifying the best accessories which enhances your equipment’s performance amongst others. This includes identifying and studying, your camera body, the lens, appropriate DOF, lighting sources. You also need to do research into the best post production techniques and platforms available for it. I would like to call this first set of knowledge as the Technical know-how.

Second comes the Scientific and taxonomical knowledge. You need to put in that effort to learn the lifecycle, feeding habits, breeding habits, behavioral aspects of your subjects.

Crab Spider (*Thomisidae*)









It is this which contributes a major part towards composing a beautiful image. Taxonomical knowledge is essential as each shot in this genre of photography needs to be tagged with at least the basic important information about the subject.

### **In your concept, which feature is the most important to capture macro images creatively?**

Primarily, it is all about the lighting. You get the lighting right and that takes care of the major chunk of your composition. Now you look at your creative angle, that is something which either makes your image a conversation starter or leaves it at the level of a viewing experience. Composing with a harmonious background and the type of species are also important. Some species by themselves are eyecatchers with their unusual appearances and attractive colouring.

### **Are there any specific times of the day, special locations or any special seasons for shooting macro subjects? How far do you travel to find your subject?**

The short answer is yes and this is primarily driven by your subject. Depending on the species I am after, I select the right season, time and location. Some organisms are seasonal at some locations. Insects like butterflies, bees and wasps are not nocturnal and hence they should be shot in daylight. Some organisms require special geographic features like still water surfaces or highlands. Now you see your knowledge and preparation coming in here, that is

what guides you to select season, timing and location. I do not let political borders limit me, it is challenging and fun to chase your dream targets and new subjects in different countries.

### **How much time do you spend to shoot a macro subject?**

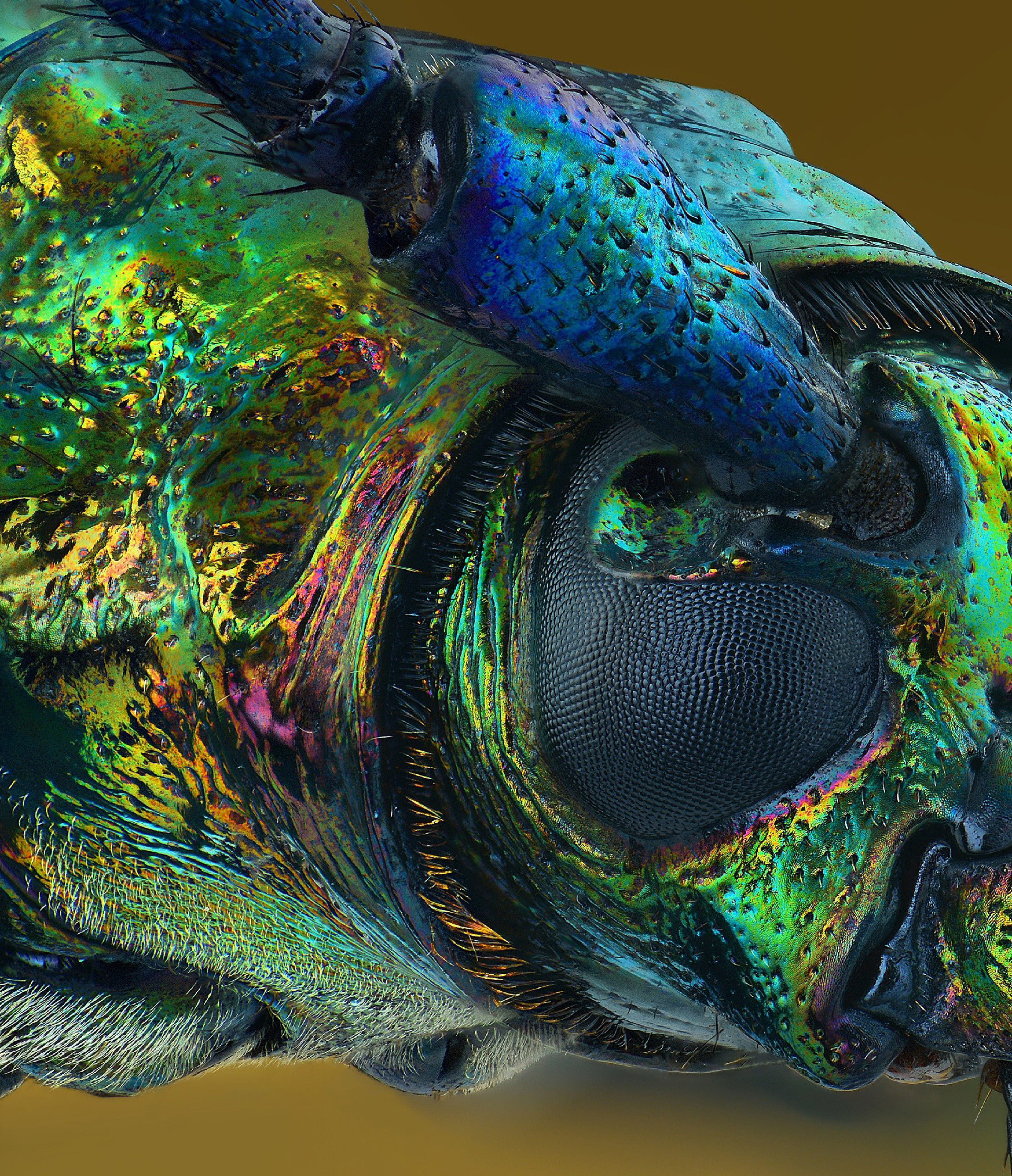
This is not easy to answer as there is no generic answer. Depending on factors such as whether shooting in nature or inside my studio, each method has its own set of unique challenges. I usually need three days to a week to finalize one single stacking. The time taken is proportional to the difficulty of the stack which depends on factors like transparency of parts, shining metallic bodies, vibrations and shallow DOF which could cause issues with the lighting reaches. At times field shooting is easier and faster to produce more works given that there is no deep stacking involved in the processing and the weather co-operates.

### **How important is composition in macro photography?**

Photo composition is considered as one of the major factors for a successful work. It is easier and straightforward to take the shot in As-Is condition. But going the extra mile and spending extra effort to get the best composition always pays and yields good and remarkable results.

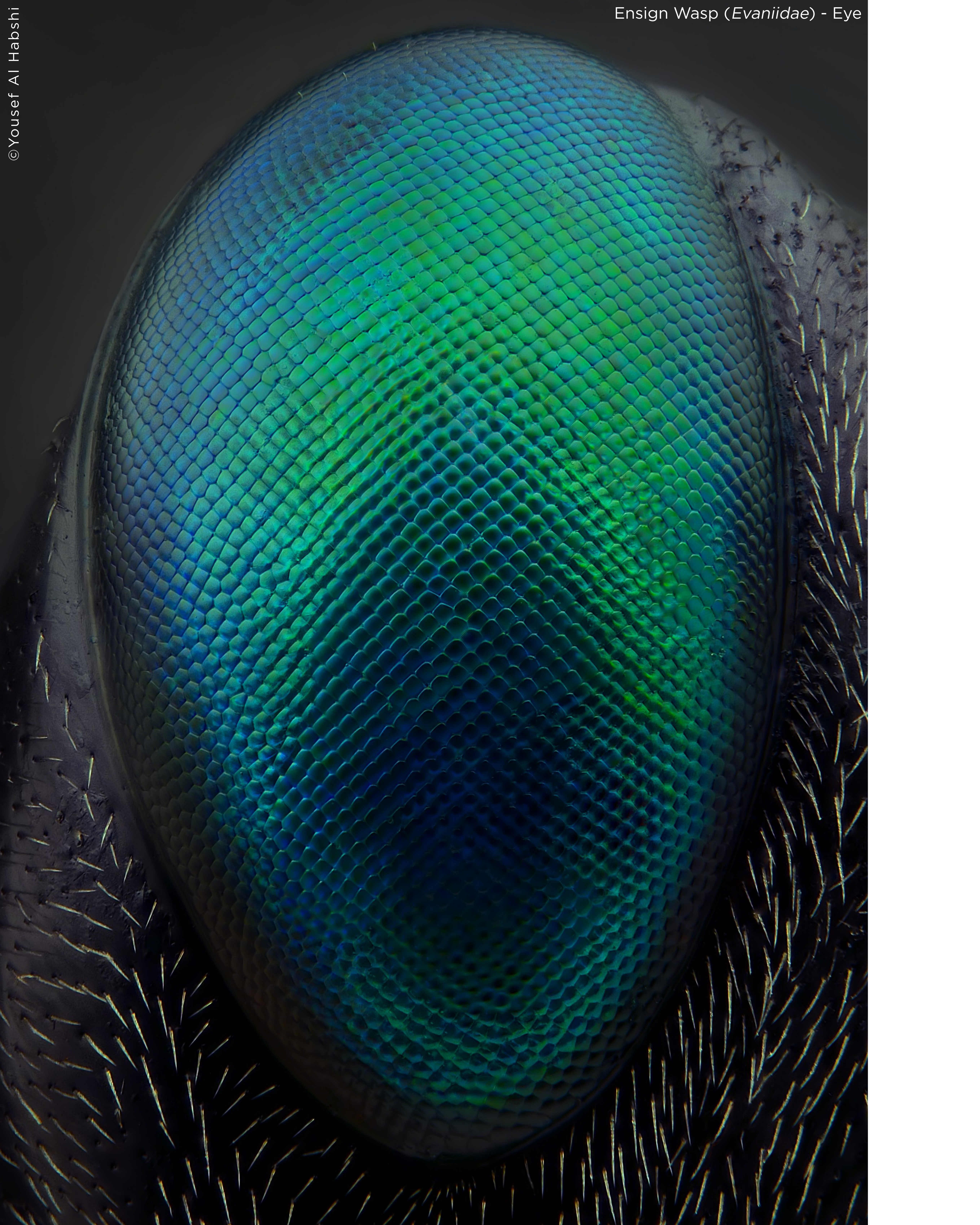
### **In your aspect, what is a perfect picture?**

In my opinion, that will be the picture which can attract people, capture their attention and subtly steal some precious minutes from their life which they spend admiring the work. This could be



Musk Beetle (*Aromia moschata*)





achieved by an artistic, unique, emotional or even provocative work. The best images act as conversation starters and can even trigger the start of a journey in photography or conservation of an unsuspecting viewer.

### **Can you share about your toughest challenges in macro photography?**

The ecology of the emirates is not as rich in vegetation compared to other areas of Asia and Europe. This limits the number of species that thrive here thereby reducing the number of subjects available for me to photograph. This is the single biggest limiting factor in field photography in the emirates. In studio shooting, vibrations are the main challenge that a macro photographer needs to overcome.

### **Depth of Field (DOF) is important for macro photography. What is your opinion in this matter? How do you ensure to get good depth of field in your photographs?**

DOF is a game changer in all categories and genre of photography. The challenge magnifies in macro photography as the DOF is already shallow at the base magnification level. The higher the magnification, the shallower is the DOF. This is where the focus stacking jumps in.

### **Can you share one or two of your most favorite macro photographs from your collection and tell us why are these photographs so special for you and the process behind the scenes?**

There is this image of the jumping spider, which is my all-time favorite work.. Different from the regular macro

finishing, I have tried to make this more of an artistic composition. The main focus of this image was to show the frontal row convex eyes of the jumping spider. A challenge I faced is to highlight the details of the black body against the black background while keeping the correct exposure of the bright eyes. Later on, this image was selected among the "IMAGES OF DISTINCTION" in the famous scientific contest NIKON small world 2016. It was a three-year goal of mine to get my country listed amongst the list of countries for selected works and this image achieved that target for me.

### **Besides macro photography, are there any areas of photography that you are interested in?**

Landscape photography is my second favorite area. I also shoot wildlife and likes to play with monochrome portraits.

### **Having won several awards in your field, which has been your most unforgettable moment of all?**

Out of all my achievements, I still remember the ceremony night in 2012 of the internationally well-known Emirates Photography Competition. Macro category was introduced for the first time under their aegis that year. .

Winners of the macro category was announced and I was called on stage to collect an Honorable mention award. Exactly two minutes passed and my name was again announced, this time for the silver medal, second place in Macro category. And just when I was telling myself that it was an amazing night, my name was called for the third time for the first place and gold medal for works



Jumping Spider (*Salticidae*) - Eye







Click Beetle (*Elateridae*)

collection presented in the Emirati category.

I couldn't wake up from this beautiful dream till the next day. That's when I saw my awards and knew that I have stepped into a new level in my photography journey.

### **Can you share more information about your lectures and workshops?**

I have done lectures both inside and outside UAE over the past few years. My workshops on macro photography have been held in Abu Dhabi and Al-Ain. These workshops were targeted both at beginners and intermediate levels. Presently I am in the process of planning new workshops in Dubai for the year 2018. These lectures and workshops are for me an opportunity to interact with photographers and also to give back to the community. I enjoy sharing whatever experience I have amassed over the years.

### **What is your future photography goal?**

One of my goals is to become known as a primary resource for entomology images and research material in the country as well as to continue contributing to both national and international publications for scientific journals.

### **What gears do you use for macro photography and what would you recommend for the**

### **beginners?**

My main gear usually consists of two camera bodies, variety of macro lenses (105mm and 180mm for both short and long MFD), extension tubes and enlarging lenses, flash lightings with diffusers, wired remotes to eliminate any vibrations and a steady tripod.

I would advise those who are new to the macro experience to start with the 100mm macro lens focal length range and experience this field first, then to add-on all the other necessary accessories accordingly. Macro workshops are always considered as a good place for advice to have a promising start in this field.

Photoshop or an image editing software skill is considered as a plus for a photographers journey.

### **Please share few important tips and advices about macro photography to encourage beginners and photographers who want to improve their macro photography?**

Patience is the magical key to achieve your goals in life, and photography is no exception.

Be assured that all the great and famous photos out there have costed their owners a lot of patience, time, effort and money. So, believe in yourself, keep improving your technical and knowledge skills and never stop clicking.

All of us did start from scratch with bad results, today's successful results are the outcome of years of experience and experiments combining and practicing the many attributes, skills and knowledge discussed in detail as part of the previous questions. There is an amazing world out there to explore if you are willing!







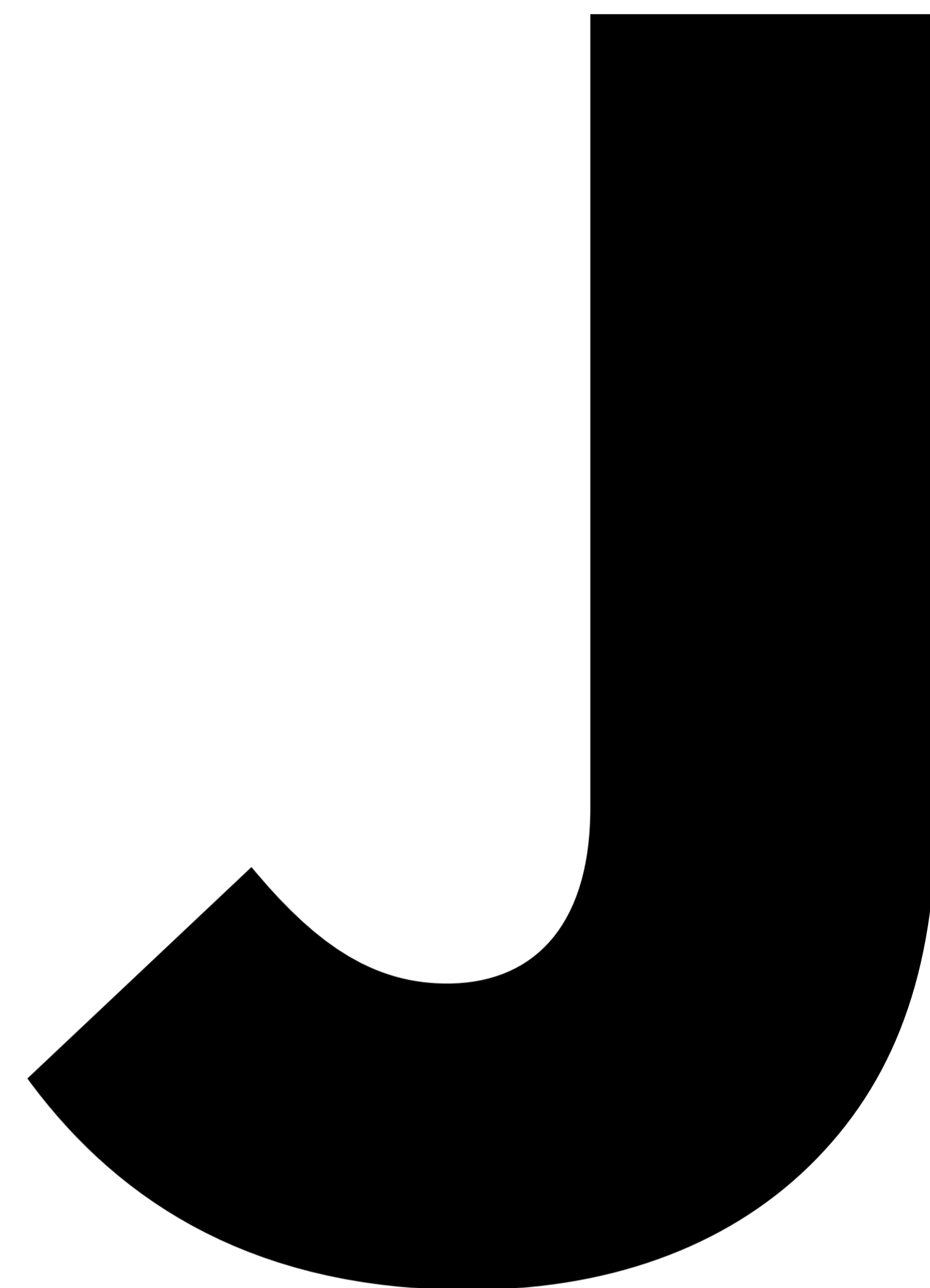
SPECIES

TA KAKAHE  
(*Porphyrio hochstetteri*)

One of  
New Zealand's  
Most  
Endangered  
Birds

By Julie Harvey

Photos By Anja Kohler



**Julie studied Ecology at the University of Otago and has worked on DOC's Takahē team for two years as the Advocacy Ranger.**

**She's responsible for sharing the takahē story far and wide, helping people engage with Takahē conservation and building support for Takahē and the Recovery Programme.**

**[www.takaherecovery.org.nz](http://www.takaherecovery.org.nz)**

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About 55% of New Zealand's bird species have become extinct in the last 1,000 years. The South Island Takahē (*Porphyrio hochstetteri*), a large flightless rail, was thought to be extinct at the end of the 20th century, but was rediscovered in 1948 in the remote Murchison Mountains next to Lake Te Anau in the South Island. The species, without intensive management, is still at risk of extinction, but the population has increased from a low of 124 in 1981 to over 340 in 2017 (note 347 as of 1st October 2017). In the last three years the Takahē Recovery Programme has seen an annual growth rate of 10%.

In the 1980s New Zealand government and concerned bird conservationists began implementing a plan of establishing the 50,000 hectare specially protected area over the Murchison Mountains in Fiordland National Park, developing a successful breeding program and establishing a security population across several island and mainland sanctuary sites. Conservation efforts have been successful in preventing extinction and with nearly 70 years of research and experimenting the recovery programme has gained critical experience and knowledge in managing this endangered species. The Department of Conservation has a dedicated Takahē Recovery team that work closely with Iwi (Maori tribes) and a network of scientists, volunteers, vets and cooperate partners to manage the Takahē population.

Takahē weigh up to four kilograms and stand about 50 cm high. This flightless rail is stocky, blue-green in color, and has strong red legs and a massive reddish bill.

Alpine tussock grasslands are the current habitat of its wild population where it feeds on several species of tussock grasses.

Takahē are monogamous and breed every year, laying one to three eggs. They have a low reproductive rate in the wild, producing around half a chick per year on average. Productivity in the wild fluctuates, depending on tussock seeding and weather conditions.

Habitat loss from early colonists and introduced predatory cats, dogs, rats, stoats, ferrets and deer that also eat tussock grass, are the major threats to

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## **In the last three years the Takahē Recovery Programme has seen an annual growth rate of 10%.**

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the Takahē. A small population of Takahē survived many years in the cold, damp alpine tussock grassland of the Murchison Mountains where predator numbers and competition from deer were lower.

Conservation efforts of the Department of Conservation's Takahē Recovery Programme focus on four facets of management. First is the maintenance of the sole wild population in the 50,000 hectare Murchison Mountain protected area. Protecting this wild population is a priority for both preserving genetic diversity but also retaining wild







behaviours to ensure Takahē remain a fully functional element of their natural ecosystems. Except for management purposes, humans are prohibited from this area, and since 2002 extensive trapping of predators, especially stoats, has been undertaken. Currently about 35% of wild birds wear radio transmitters, and these birds are monitored four times a year, or more often in years when stoat numbers are high. Population levels have fluctuated over the past two decades, with a high of 170 birds in 2007, and more than 40% decrease in the population the following year after a stoat plague as a result of a beech 'mast' (mass-fruiting). With further trapping efforts, predation rates are now low, and mortality is usually caused by accidents such as falling off cliffs, drowning or landslides/avalanches. The Recovery Programme has determined that this wild population is unsustainable, and have been introducing young birds from the secure site breeding programme to replenish the population levels. Between 2015-2017, 60 birds were released into the Murchison Mountains, with the population currently estimated to be 134.

Trapping predatory stoats is vital to protecting this wild population. Dedicated rangers such as Glen Greaves added that "the Murchison Mountains is a tough enough environment without predation pressure from introduced stoats. One stoat keyed into Takahē as a food source can do a huge amount of damage, especially with the Takahē population being so small naturally. " Radio tracking of the wild birds is vital to understanding survival and reasons for mortality and habitat use. Monitoring has

shown that most deaths are due to the dangerous terrain rather than predation, and that weather conditions affect survival and productivity.

The second focus of the Programme is maintaining an efficient and productive breeding program. The Burwood Takahē Centre, located near Te Anau, is the central hub of the breeding programme. Burwood is home to between 19 and 25 breeding pairs and young are raised by natural or foster parents, with around 23-25 juveniles produced in each of 2015 and 2016 breeding seasons, and 30 expected for this year. Burwood is also one of the only secure sites with tussock so all birds destined for the wild will spend time with the resident birds learning valuable foraging behaviours.

"Volunteers provide invaluable support in the running of the Burwood Takahē Centre volunteer", Glen says " Eeva Kumpula a volunteer at Burwood says "it was the opportunity to get close to these super rare birds and to help a small part in bringing them back from the brink that made me want to volunteer at Burwood. During my time there I got to know some of these blue birds with huge personalities while monitoring them for the rangers, while enjoying little hikes in beautiful tussock land and doing the volunteering tasks such as pest trap checks and supplementary feeding in the Takahē pens. The wonderful opportunity to learn from the rangers and do some real work to help this beautiful native species was too good to miss out on!"

The third action of the Recovery Programme is to maintain a meta-

population of Takahē across “sanctuary sites”, either island or mainland sanctuaries, that have no or very low numbers of predators. Beginning in 1984, a small Takahē population was established on Maud Island. In addition to Burwood there is now a network of 17 Takahē sanctuaries (including 10 breeding sites and 7 advocacy sites). Rangers who have worked on these island have interesting stories to tell, with Takahē often being the largest and most charismatic and gregarious species present. These secure sites provide a safe home for Takahē to breed but are only a medium term solution for the programme as the sanctuaries are restricted by size and available habitat, none large enough to sustain a large wild Takahē population. Management of this meta-population is intensive to ensure adequate genetic mixing and effective pairings are made.

The fourth action is to establish at least one other mainland South Island wild Takahē population by 2020. With both the secure Takahē sanctuaries and the Murchison Mountains fast reaching carrying capacity a new home is needed to house the growing Takahē population. Investigations are currently underway to

identify potential sites within their former South Island range. Selection criteria are for an upland tussock site with low numbers of stoats, no cats or ferrets, capable of holding at least 30 breeding pairs.

In early 2018 the Programme plans to release 30 Takahē into the Goulund Downs area of the Kahurangi National Park on the Heaphy Track. Senior Takahē Ranger, Glen Greaves who has been working on this project since 2005 says successfully establishing a second wild population here would be the first







signed up with DOC as the national partner for the Recovery Programme in July 2016 and Mitre 10 and New Zealand National Parks and Conservation Foundation support the programme as the official supplier and trust administrator respectively.

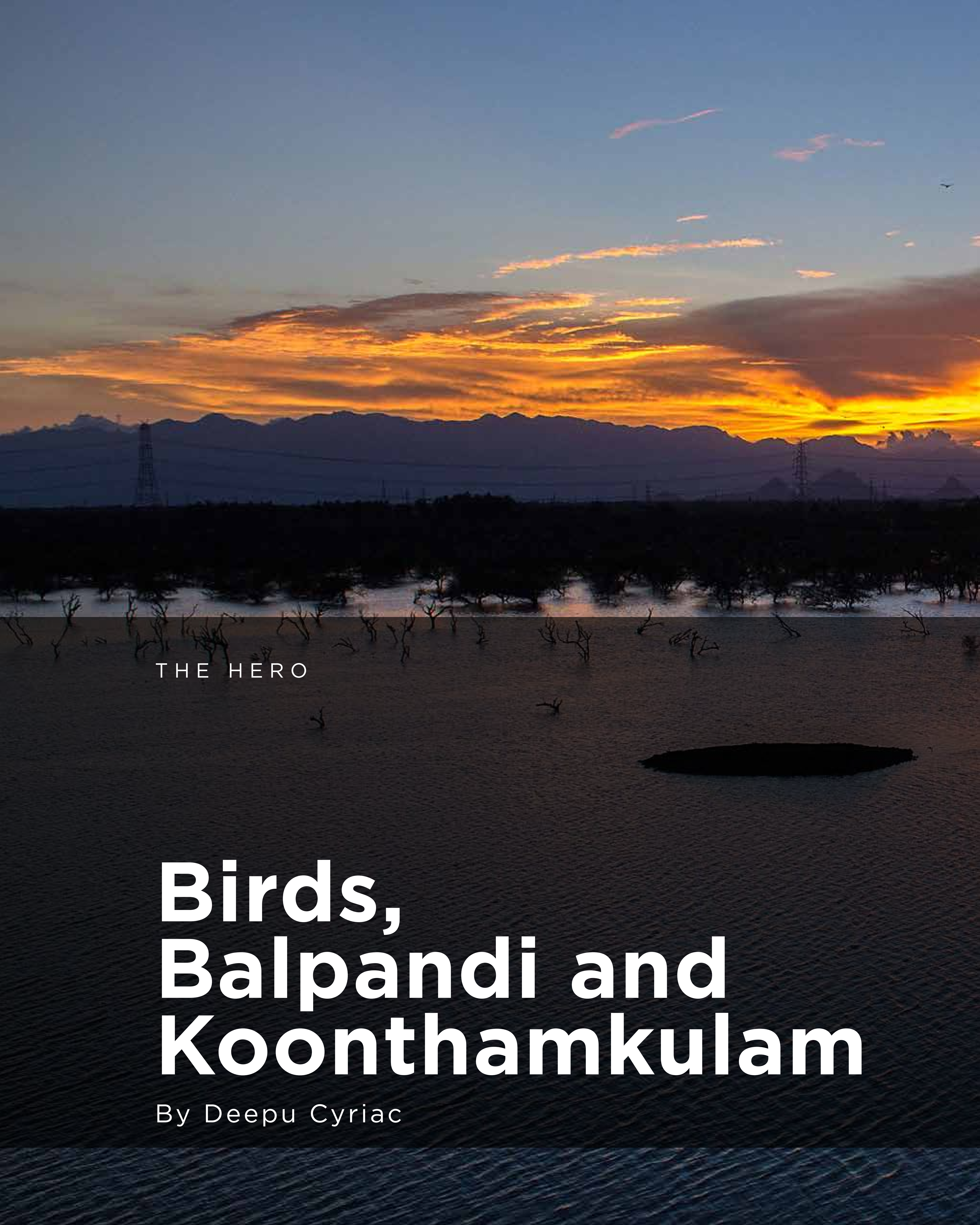
The Takahē is not the most endangered flightless bird in New Zealand. That distinction goes to the New Zealand fairy tern, which only has around 45 individuals left.

Only the dedicated, hard work of New Zealand conservation workers over many decades have prevented the extinction of the flightless rail. New Zealanders are proud

step towards reaching the overarching Recovery Goal “of wild populations of growing numbers in large areas of their former natural ranges as a functioning element of natural ecosystems”.

The Department of Conservation has a staff of ten working for the Takahē Recovery Programme, including rangers, technical and science advisors and an Operations Manager. Government funding and donations from individuals and corporations amounts to an annual budget of \$525,000. Fulton Hogan

of their conservation work to ensure that the Takahē is never considered extinct again. They achieved a notable success in May 2017 when the Takahē was down listed in the New Zealand Threat Classification system: from ‘Nationally Critical’ (the highest risk) to ‘Nationally Vulnerable’ – a jump of two places. Although still at risk, we look forward to an expanding population, and not another unique New Zealand species sliding into extinction.

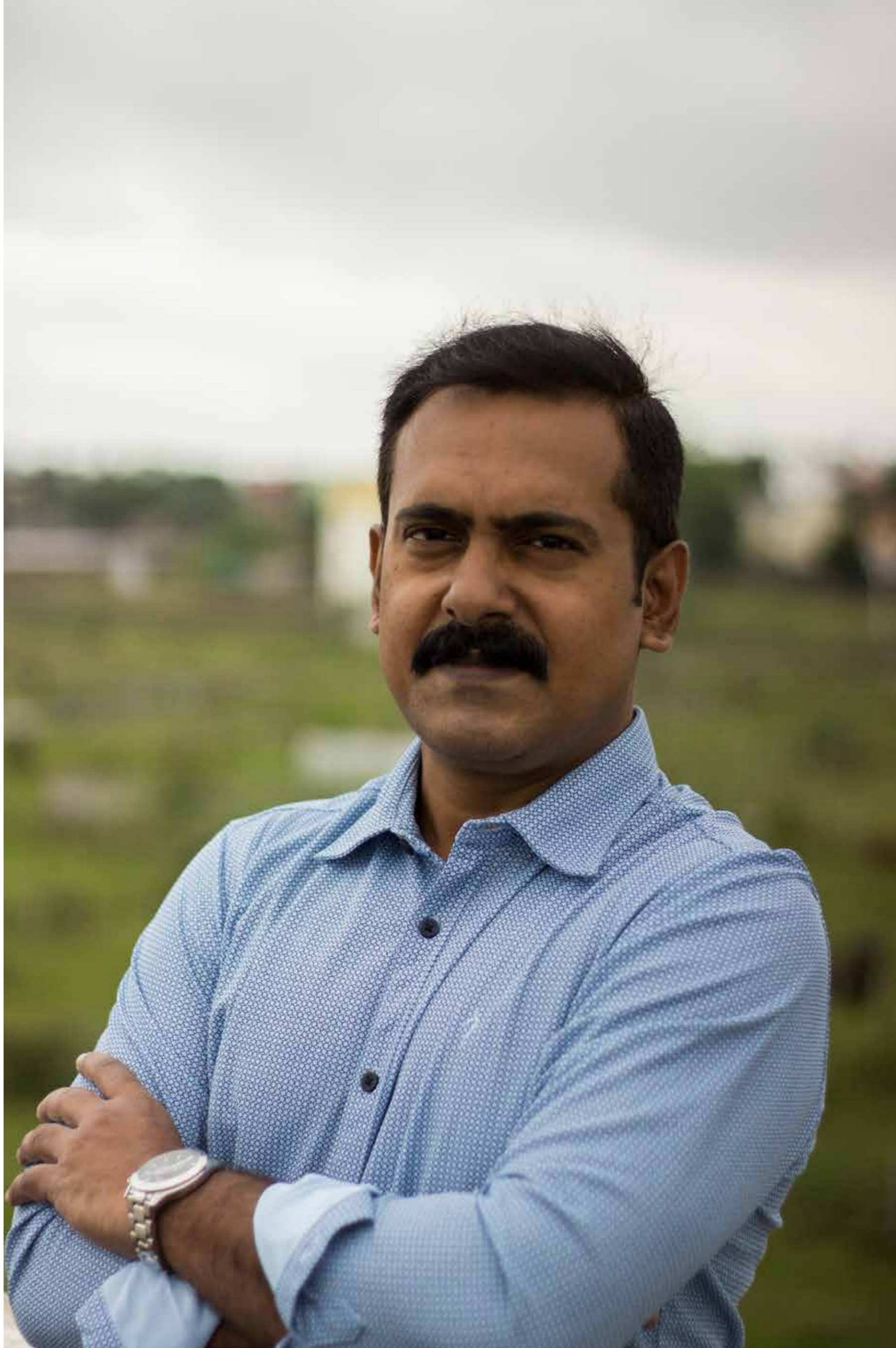


THE HERO

# Birds, Balpandi and Koonthamkulam

By Deepu Cyriac





**Deepu Cyriac, a trekker, shutterbug and nature addict, spellbound by nature's treasure trove started exploring the wilderness during his formative years.**

**This intrepid traveller, in his brusque interludes, loves to traverse through the unbeaten path admiring the grandeur of the wild landscapes.**

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The distant cacophony of the winged creatures at dawn embarks the beginning of the day of Balpandi - The Guardian Angel of the Birds of Koonthamkulam, Tamil Nadu, India. The rugged mien of Balpandi encapsulates the endurance of hardship he sailed through and the invaluable field experience which no expert in the stream can challenge.

This sparsely populated sleepy hamlet is a 35kms drive from Tirunelveli town in Nanguneri Taluk on the Southern end of Tamil Nadu. Different flocks of feathered creatures have been religiously visiting Koonthamkulam for more than 200 years. Koonthamkulam Bird Sanctuary is a unique sanctuary actively protected and managed by the village community. It is comprised of Koonthamkulam and Kadamkulam tanks which cover an area of 130 hectares. The largest breeding water bird reserve in South India attracts more than 100,000 migratory birds annually that comes by December and fly away to their northern homes by August. Birds like Bar headed goose, Common sandpiper, Common teal, Coot and Pintail comes from far away Siberia. Greater Flamingos come from Northern India and White Stork comes from Central Asia. It was declared as a sanctuary on 30th Aug 1994.

Balpandi, a scrupulous man, during his school days itself had a fascination towards birds around his surroundings. This affinity that he had with his avian friends was not well appreciated by his family who believed he was wasting his time. As a schoolboy, he often rescued injured birds on his way to school. Nonetheless he had a natural inclination

towards birds, it was his school teacher who inculcated the value to conserve nature. After his high school, Balpandi had the rare opportunity to meet the famed ornithologist Dr.Salim Ali when he came to Koonthamkulam.

Balpandi said, "I didn't know who he was. I told him about the birds I know. As I didn't know the English names of the birds, I told in Tamil".

Dr.Ali was flabbergasted by the knowledge and interest of young Balpandi. He was thoroughly impressed by him. "He is another Salim Ali in the making". Said Dr.Ali to his students. Dr.Ali encouraged him to do his higher studies as he could envision the enormous potential of young Pandi. Due to financial constraints, he couldn't pursue higher studies. An altercation with his father made him run away from home to make some fortune. But after a series of misadventures, he came back home. He finally went to Bombay [now Mumbai] after a few months with his father's permission in search of employment. He worked as a newspaper boy in Dharavi and later shifted to Gujarat where he got a job at Nirma Detergent Co.

It was during this period that Balpandi got married to Vallithai. Entry of Vallithai had a paramount influence in his life as she became the sole reason for the transformation of Balpandi for the later years to come. She motivated him to leave his job and come down to Koonthamkulam to have a full life. Vallithai discerned her husband's in-depth knowledge in birds and she fathomed that his heart was always longing to be



in the bird's paradise. She inspired him to become a local guide and a naturalist in Koonthamkulam. It was an invigorating moment for Balpandi as his wife insisted what his heart was craving for. The role of Vallithai is so pivotal that the potential that Dr.Salim Ali saw in Balpandi was later nurtured, groomed and elevated by her. Together they planted trees all around the sanctuary and the village for the nesting of birds and conservation. Ever since the social forestry started planting karuvelam trees, the number of birds have increased manifold. He was provided a temporary job as a birdwatcher for 8 rupees per day in 1988. The couple were blessed with two boys and two girls. As

time went by, both the husband and wife became an invincible force in bringing up Koonthamkulam to the world's centre stage.

During the nesting season, the chicks may fall off from the trees due to thunderstorm or heavy rain. As fallen chicks are usually abandoned by their parents, Balpandi and Vallithai become their surrogate parents and take care of the fledglings until they are adept to fly. Pelican is a heavy bird and when the chick falls from the trees it ruptures the stomach and the intestines may come out. In 1999, Dr.Subramanian, a veterinary doctor, taught him to tend a









© R. Karthik

fractured bird scientifically. As the chicks are gregarious in nature, large quantities of fish need to be purchased to feed them. There are instances where Vallithai had sold her gold in order to meet the fish supply. They have rehabilitated approximately 3,000 birds like painted stork, pelican, darter, spoonbill etc. It is heartening to watch the chicks following their foster parents like their human counterparts. In order for the bird to be independent, Balpandi will abscond for five days until the bird realizes it has to tend itself. It's heartbreaking for Mr. Pandi to do that. But his pangs evaporate and is replaced with bliss as the same birds come next year to the place he reared them to show their gratitude.

Apart from bird conservation, Vallithai also moulded her ever romantic husband into a good singer. His rustic voice has recorded some mesmerising songs penned by him including the Koonthamkulam welcome song.

Due to constant contact with the birds, Vallithai was infected with bird flu. After

the prolonged illness, she passed away on 17th July 2008 leaving Balpandi and Koonthamkulam behind, orphaned. She was revered with prestigious awards like Sirantha Sevai Penmani and Paravai Manusi. A documentary on her, titled, "Vallithai", has garnered some esteemed awards. Before she left her earthly abode, she made her husband vouch that he would continue his work with birds. In order to make his life smooth and untroubled, she requested that he may marry one of her friends who had been widowed early in life.

Balpandi's work starts early in the morning with a hot cup of tea from the nearby tea kadai. He will then head towards the sanctuary and jots down the checklist of birds in a logbook including the number of birds, male/female, number of eggs, if any. He then proceeds to the open space to explore more migratory birds. The birdwatching continues till 11am and then proceeds from 3pm to 7pm until the light fades out. He has studied nesting, feeding and other

behaviour of several species. The nesting of Greater Flamingos was recorded in Koonthamkulam in 1992 and 1994 which is a rare phenomenon. The rare sightings of Egyptian Vulture, Grey-necked Bunting and Caspian Plover are documented in the annals of Koonthamkulam Bird Sanctuary. He also spends time with local school children teaching them about birds instilling in them a sense of pride about their village's natural heritage. Dr. Robert Grubb presented him his first pair of binoculars, marvelled by his insatiable urge and love for birding. Balpandi became acquainted with the English names of the birds when he was gifted Salim Ali's "*The Book of Indian Birds*" by Mr. Madhavan Pillai.

His ingenuity and sagacity is stupefying as he can predict the weather condition based on the calls of birds. "Once, it was a sunny day. I said it will rain by evening as I heard Red-naped Ibis making a peculiar sound which it makes only when the rain comes. It showered in the evening." Recalls Mr. Pandi.

"It was difficult for people to believe it. If we observe nature closely, we get many cues like this." Reminds Balpandi.

The monsoon season in Koonthamkulam commences in September and extend till February. From the ranges of Kalakkad Mundamthurai Tiger Reserve [KMTR] on the south-eastern parts of Western Ghats, the Manimuthar river originates. The water reaches Koonthamkulam through Karumeni Canal from Manimuthar dam. The abundance of fish, serenity and safety attracts the migratory birds to Koonthamkulam Bird Sanctuary.

"Birds in Koonthamkulam can be classified into three types; waders, ground birds and raptors," explains Balpandi.

"Waders comes in January beginning and can be seen till August end. There are 24 variety of water birds that nest in trees and ponds. Comb Duck, Spot-billed Duck, Stilt, Little Grebe, Coot, Indian Moorhen, Yellow Bittern, etc nest on the mount formed in the pond. Spot-billed Pelican,







Open-billed Stork, Painted Stork, Glossy ibis, Red-naped Ibis, Black-headed Ibis, Eurasian Spoonbill, Grey Heron, Night Heron etc nest on trees.” Said Balpandi.

“The nesting of ground birds occurs between the month of July and September. Little Ringed Plover, Kentish Plover, Lapwings, Sandgrouse, Indian Courser, Pipit, Crested Lark, Thicknee, Button Quail, Grey Partridge etc are some of them,” asserted Balpandi.

The best time for sighting raptors are from October to April. As the birds of prey are active in grasslands, high octane drama of chasing and hunting can be expected.

“The highest number of congregation of Amur Falcon was recorded here in 2016. 272 were counted including two males”. Said Balpandi proudly.

Some well-known raptors that can be found here are the Common Kestrel, Lesser Kestrel, Booted Eagle, Short-toed Snake Eagle, Greater Spotted Eagle, Marsh Harrier, Pied Harrier, Pallid Harrier, Montagues’ Harrier, Black Winged Kite, Brahminy Kite, Red-necked Falcon, Laggar Falcon, Peregrine Falcon etc.

The wide range of bird species in Koonthamkulam are not consolidated within the sanctuary alone. They are spread across the village in various habitat and without the aid and acumen of the birdman of Koonthamkulam, it would be a gargantuan task to spot one as some are well camouflaged or elusive in nature. He is an expert in identifying the nest and eggs of various birds and have a great level of patience to observe

and gather information about them even when the night falls.

Mr. Pandi reminisced about one incident that is etched to his heart. “Last year I went to Kadamkulam tank when it was raining profusely. I saw the nest of a Little Ringed Plover where the female was incubating trying to protect her eggs from flooding. Those puny feathers weren’t sufficient enough to shield the nest from the deluge. The male was running around in panic not knowing what to do. I felt sad about the birds. I took the eggs and placed them on a higher pedestal safe from downpour. The female, after a while came closer cautiously, sat and settled on top of the eggs. The male rustled around once again clattering and fluttering its wings unceasingly, but this time, out of excitement. It was a very fulfilling moment for me, that I cried uncontrollably.”

After a respite, he continued, “There is a mysterious relationship between me and the birds. They usually don’t fly away when they see me. I think they consider me as one of their own.”

An outstanding aspect that makes Koonthamkulam different from other bird sanctuaries is that it is open all year round. There is no off season as such as different types of birds fly all through the year. It’s like a buffet where a birder is spoiled with choices. In the words of Balpandi,

“We consider the arrival of birds as the harbinger of luck. We believe that no famine will occur if the migratory birds keep coming.”



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The guano dropped by these birds are considered as a natural fertilizer. The birds' droppings make the water richer, fertile and provides good agricultural yield. Thousands of birds flock on tamarind and neem trees, water bodies and farmlands. More than 173 bird species are identified in Koonthamkulam.

The tolerance of people of Koonthamkulam is legendary as they don't burst firecrackers during Diwali as it frightens and would drive away their avian guests. Hunting or disturbing birds is not entertained in this remote village. If found, the culprit will be punished by having their head tonsured and being paraded on a donkey in a public procession.

Balpandi's 40-year-old association with his feathered friends have made him an unconventional ornithologist. When we see through the eyes of Mr. Pandi, our perspective transcends to a whole new horizon yoked with awe and wonder. Many researchers and scientists have made use of his immense wealth of knowledge in return for a paltry sum and in worst-case scenario, not even acknowledging his contributions. Despite known for his closeness to birds, he is still underpaid. Nevertheless, he got permanent job in 2010 with a salary of INR 5,400/- per month, he retired in 2012. He still works in Koonthamkulam Bird Sanctuary as there is no person to take his place with the kind of expertise he possesses. In his illustrious career, he has received 46 awards including three international awards. In 2009, Balpandi co-authored a book, "*Diary on the Nesting Behaviour of Indian Birds*" with

naturalist Chinna Sathan. The walking avian encyclopaedia of this tiny village is a rare gem in the history of Nature Conservation of India.

"My life is dedicated for birds. I can't think of a life without them," affirms Balpandi.

Koonthamkulam is the avian shrine where birders, researchers and people hit by the shutterbug throng to see and capture these feathered beauties to engrain in their memories for a lifetime. Balpandi with his childlike enthusiasm, invites them in his typical rustic voice welcoming all to have a glimpse of his tribe. When night falls and the birds go for roosting, the avian watchman of Koonthamkulam, guards his goldmine zealously and with tenacity.

#### **Acknowledgements:**

*Balpandi : A Bird's Best Friend*  
by Madurai Messenger







CONSERVATION

# Traslasierra National Park: A new protected area for Argentina

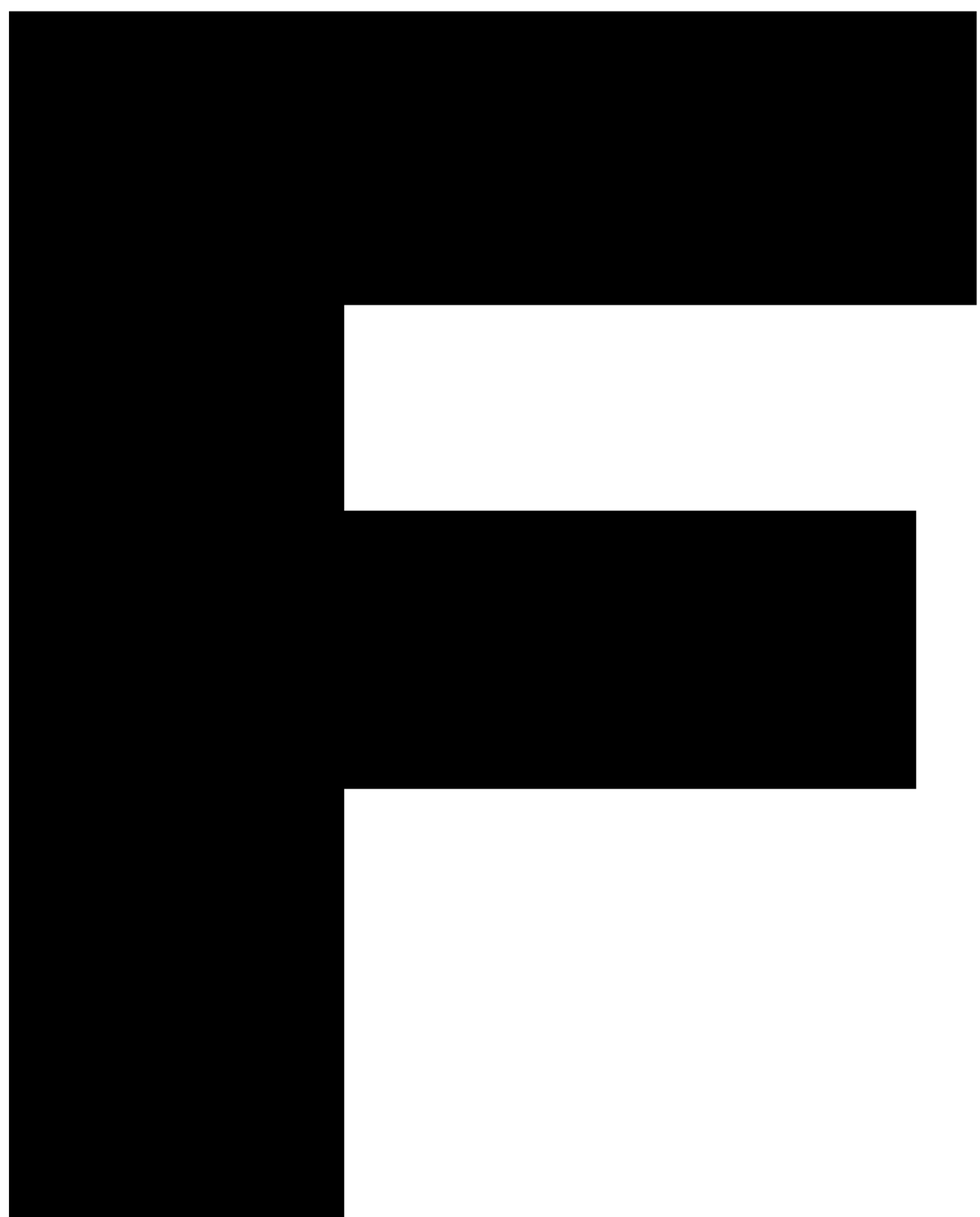
By  
Francisco González Taboas

Images By  
Pablo Rodríguez Merkel





P.T. EXPLO



**Francisco is naturalist and birdwatcher and he is the person in charge of communication and press for ONG Aves Argentinas.**

**[www.avesargentinas.org.ar](http://www.avesargentinas.org.ar)**

**[francisco.gtaboas@avesargentinas.org.ar](mailto:francisco.gtaboas@avesargentinas.org.ar)**

In the near future a national park will be created in 105,000 hectares of land, located at Córdoba Province in Argentina (South America). The goal is to protect biodiversity and cultural heritage as archaeologists have found vestiges of ancient comechingones aborigines and, at the same time, the land was property of a well-known writer, journalist and Argentinian politician Lisandro de la Torre (1868-1939).

Argentina currently has 33 National Parks that include about 3.8 million hectares, or about 4% of the country. Argentina is in the process of expanding protection to the Chaco Seco Ecosystem region.

### **A key place**

Located in north west of Córdoba province, Clean up Latitude 31 09 South and Longitude 77 65 West at 300 meters elevation on the eastern slopes of the Andes, and thus in a “rain shadow.” The land is part of the ancient farm called Pinas that was dedicated to cattle breeding. Ecologists define this land as belonging to the Chaco Seco Ecosystem, one of most threatened natural region worldwide. This Ecosystem is characterized by a very arid climate with approximately 600 mm of rain per year. The vegetation is adapted to an arid environment. Dominant plants include....It is also one of the most “forgotten”, fragile ecoregion on earth and people (general public, not specialists) are not aware of its presence and importance.

As the restoration of the land is implemented by National Parks, use and appreciation of this ecosystem will increase. The Chaco Seco needs a

promotional campaign and journalistic articles which describe its beauty and ecological significance. In the future, hiking trails and facilities will be developed to accommodate ecotourism.

The new national park will be very important to develop ecotourism in the region as it is located near Chancani provincial park (5,000 hectare) and the Salinas Grandes reserve (196,000 ha). Local authorities aim to build the BioCorridor of the Arid Chaco as a tool to promote the area and encourage the presence of visitors. Traslasierra National Park is about 220 km from the city of Córdoba with a population of 1.4 million people.

Traslasierra National Park belongs to the Conservation Corridor of Northern Córdoba along with the future national park of Ansenusa and the well-known National Park Quebrada del Condorito, the perfect place for watching condors.

“The creation of this park means the conservation of an ecosystem threatened by deforestation and, at the same time, a real contribution to local economic development through ecotourism”, says Hernán Casañas, executive director of Aves Argentinas, NGO which supports this project. Local supports of this conservation project include the government of the province of Córdoba.

### **Biodiversity values**

Researchers from the University of Córdoba have been working in this area to document the reasons for the 105,000 hectares of land must become a national











park to protect its biodiversity and cultural heritage.

This portion of the Chaco Seco region is home to 161 species of birds, 24 of mammals and 30 of reptiles. Recently, scientists have discovered a species whose presence is new for Córdoba province: Chaco Peccary (*Catagonus wagneri*) that is in severe danger of extinction.

About plants, there are Quebracho Blanco (*Aspidosperma quebracho-blanco*), Algarrobos (*Prosopis flexuosa*, *P. chilensis*, *P. torquata*), Cardón de Las Salinas (*Stetsonia coryne*), Ucle (*Cereus validus*), Brea (*Cercidium praecox*), Retamo (*Bulnesia retama*), Tala (*Celtis tala*), Chañar (*Geoffroea decorticans*), Mistoles (*Ziziphus mistol*), Garabatos, Espinillos y Aromos (*Acacia caven*, *A. aroma*, *A. praecox*, *A. furcatispina*).

Some of the birds in danger are: Águila Coronada (*Buteogallus coronatus*), Ñandú (*Rhea americana*), Aechuza Bataraz Chaqueña (*Strix chacoensis*), Carpintero Negro (*Dryocopus schulzi*), Martineta (*Eudromia elegans*), Cóndor (*Vultur gryphus*), Halconcito Gris (*Spizapteryx circumcincta*), Monjita Salinera (*Xolmis salinarum*).

Although Pinas farm has historically been dedicated to cattle breeding, the land and the whole ecosystem are healthy. The reason is the lack of water: as a semidesert area the farm production always worked with a low load per hectare, which contributed to soil conservation.

For all these characteristics, Pinas farm is the opportunity to protect a portion of Chaco Seco in a good state of biodiversity conservation. The category of national park is the best warranty for long term protection.

### **About NGO Aves Argentinas**

Along with local government of Córdoba province and the National Park Administration, Aves Argentinas (associated with Birdlife International) works on the promotion and the creation of Traslasierra National Park with the goal of protecting an important portion of the Chaco Seco region. Traslasierra is expected to be officially designated a National Park in 2018.

People working on this project: Hernán Casañas - Executive director Aves Argentinas; Malena Srur , coordinator of the project; Silvana Zaninetti - lawyer; Gustavo Bruno - biologist and Andrea Filadoro - agricultural engineer.









# SNIPPET

Jessie Stone is a medical doctor, professional whitewater kayaker, and the founder and director of Soft Power Health ([www.softpowerhealth.org](http://www.softpowerhealth.org)), a medical non-profit organization based in Uganda that provides primary healthcare and community based health education.

In 2007, during the construction of the Bujagali Dam on Uganda's Nile River, the World Bank and the Ugandan government created a protected area known as the Kalagala Offset Area. The purpose of this offset is to preserve a completely unique 25 kilometer stretch of the Nile River and its environs from future hydropower generating dams. The Kalagala Offset Area is extremely important for the preservation of livelihoods for thousands of Ugandans. It protects a unique biodiverse environment

found only in this section of the

river, an environment that

includes the natural habitat

for two endangered species, pangolins

and haplochromine

fish. It safeguards

a section of river

that is home

to extremely

important

cultural sites and

spirit gods for

tribes on both

sides of the Nile.

It preserves one

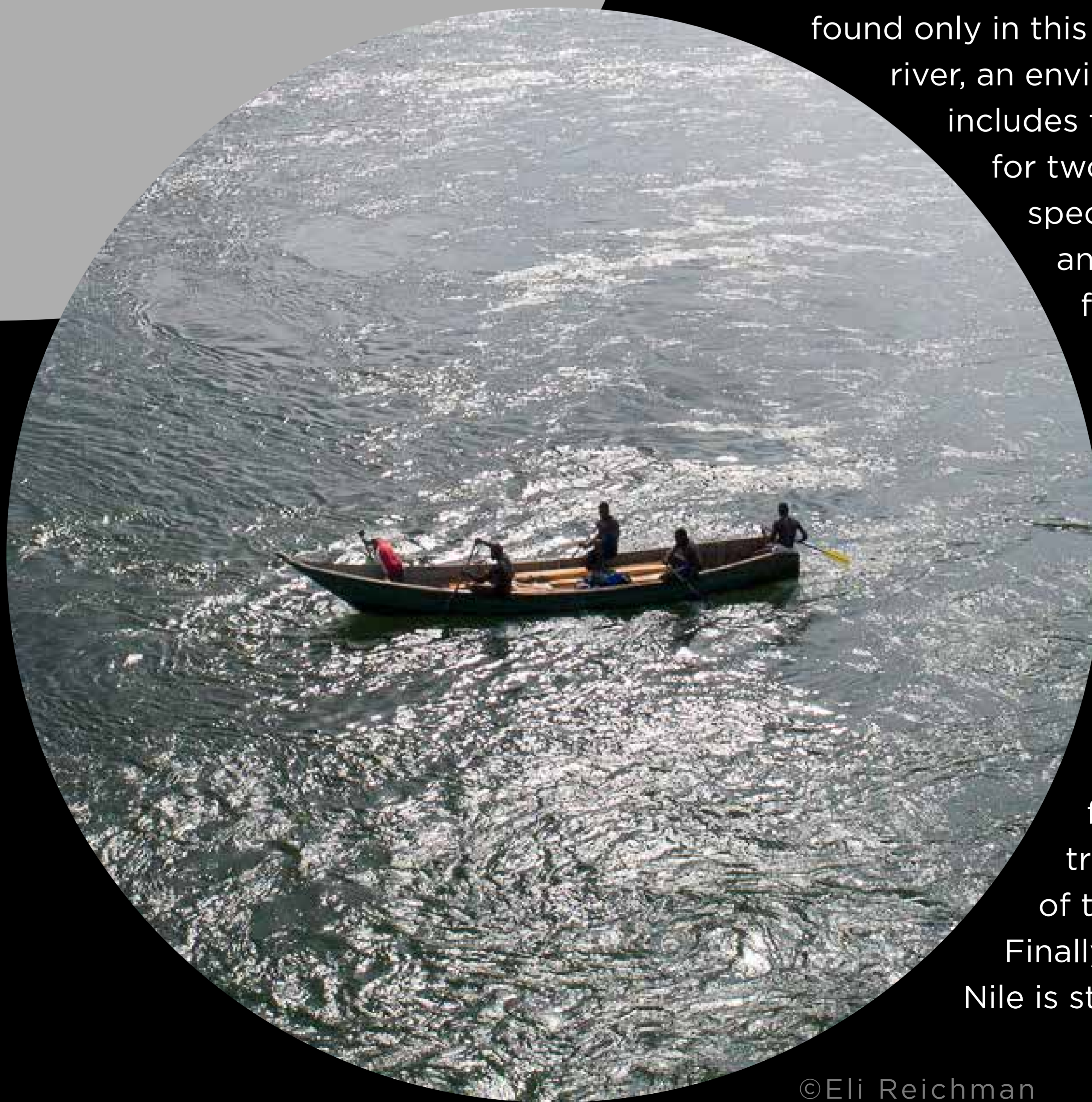
of the last wild,

free-flowing and

truly unique sections

of the Nile in Uganda.

Finally, this section of the Nile is stunning - unlike any





# The Nile River in Uganda

By Dr. Jessie Stone

Photos By Eli Reichman



other with a number of world renowned rapids including Itanda, Hypoxia, and Kalagala Falls.

The Kalagala Offset begins just 40km downstream from the source of the Nile, Lake Victoria, and encompasses the Nile itself, both sides of the river including its banks, islands in this section of the

Nile, and some national forest reserve that accompanies the Nile. Lake Victoria is home to over 300 fish species found only in the area. The health of the White Nile is critical to maintaining such a high number of unique fish species as well as many other animals, birds, and plants that are found in few other places, if any. Importantly, the endangered Crested Crane (otherwise known as the Grey

Crowned Crane) uses islands in the river for breeding grounds.

Right now, the Kalagala offset area is threatened by the construction of the new Isimba dam, which is just 12 kilometers downstream from the offset area. The Isimba dam is being built even though dams in other locations would produce more power, according to surveys by the World Bank and the government of Uganda. Several locations for future dams on the Nile have been assessed by the World Bank and the government of Uganda for power generation. These analysis indicate that the Isimba dam has the potential to generate the smallest amount of power of all the evaluated sites. 188 megawatts is the maximum amount that could be generated if the dam wall is built to its tallest proposed height. In contrast, another location surveyed at the same time, the Karuma Dam location, is projected to generate 600 megawatts, and was announced publicly as the next hydropower project on the Nile as far back as 2011. Karuma is located near Murchison Falls in Northern Uganda, far from Isimba.

If the Isimba dam is built to the smallest proposed dam wall height, the Kalagala Offset can be saved and this unique section of the Nile with the all the life it supports will be preserved. Though power generation will be less with the shorter dam wall height, this irreplaceable section of our biome will be saved and preserved.







CUB'S CORNER



# Flying With Feathers

By Parvathy Mithun

## CUB'S CORNER



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P.T EXPLORERS DEC. 2017/JAN. 2018

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**Parvathy Mithun (Pavi), is a nine year-old who is passionate in photography from Kerala, India. She is a 4th grade student at Indian School Al Mabela, Muscat.**

**She is an enthusiast in Dance and keeps a keen interest in bird photography and environmental photography.**

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At a young age she started experimenting with her father's camera which gradually turned to the interest in photography. Sharing her father's interest in bird photography her skills and interest rooted deep during visits to forests with parents. The initial captures convinced her father to gift her with a camera for her 9th birthday and then on she started picturing birds. Assisting her father during weekends in birding, she has gained knowledge on the birds in the Sultanate of Oman and still continues to learn about different species. Slowly her attention met the environmental threats posed on the colourful birds around and is experimenting on photography to create awareness among kids against littering. Though unpleasant to see, the images were aimed at conveying the message about the menace we may cause to the surroundings.

Before moving to Muscat, during my stay in Perinthalmanna, Kerala, family trips were mostly taken to be with nature









rather than cosy resorts . The trips were mostly unplanned and were mainly into the forests of Valparai, Nelliampathy, Masinagudi etc. The nature and wildlife around instigated my interest in them and continues to grow as I learn more about them. I learned the basic skills of photography from my father who was enthusiastic in capturing the birds around. Later when I moved to Muscat with my parents my passion in photography got a boost with the activities of the Friday Shoot Out, Muscat. My father's friends in the photography club helped me to learn the tricks of photography and consolidated my interest in birds and wildlife during these weekend photography trips.

The colourful birds and animals around charms me like anyone else. It was always told that we enjoy our life and surroundings more when we notice the small beauties around. It is true that birds and animals add to the same and photography as told to me is a good way of appreciating it. I am eager to go for

wildlife photography in a forest capturing the big cats.

I was lucky to get my photos published in the newspaper Muscat Daily. The first of my expeditions to open sea for watching Dolphins in their natural habitat, brought me the luck of capturing them, which was published in the newspaper. It brought me a lot of appreciation and encouragement to continue with my passion.

I have experimented a little on the life and activities around during my recent outings. It continues to amaze me how people do enjoy their life and feels good when I capture them to convey the message among my friends through my pictures. At the same time, I noticed that it is not always beautiful images that tell stories. I felt bad seeing the left overs and garbage in the habitat of birds around. Then I got the idea to spread the awareness among my friends and other children to stop this happening in future and is trying to do the same through my photos.









THROUGH THE LENS



THROUGH THE LENS

Face to  
face with  
a wild  
Orangutan  
*(Pongo pygmaeus)*  
in a river in  
Indonesia

By Jayaprakash Bojan



**JJayaprakash Bojan is a nature Photographer based out of Singapore. After working for 18 years with corporates, he decided to take a break and is pursuing his passion for travel and photography.**

**Over the last two years he has been traveling across Asia primarily focussing on seeing and photographing some of the rare and highly endangered primates in the wild.**

**[facebook.com/jayaprakash.bojan](https://www.facebook.com/jayaprakash.bojan)  
[instagram.com/jayaprakash\\_bojan](https://www.instagram.com/jayaprakash_bojan)**

A photo story of my close encounters with the Orangutans in the wild at Kalimantan, Sekonyer River, Borneo, Indonesia.

I first saw them in a zoo in Singapore and just could not take my eyes off these wonderful primates that display behaviour so much like us humans. I was awestruck and spent an entire day at the zoo just watching them. This was a turning point in my nature photography journey and quest to see some of the rarest and endangered primates across Asia in the wild.

Over that weekend I spoke to a friend who had been a ranger protecting and watching over the Orangutans in Kalimantan, Indonesia and decided to

spend a week with him in Borneo to find and photograph them living free in the wilderness. My journey started on a house boat floating down the Sekonyer River and that itself was an amazing experience, being out there in wild Borneo. Over the week I was very lucky to see and photograph many Orangutans and other primates but one of my most thrilling and memorable encounters was coming face to face with this huge alpha male crossing a river. We were told by the rangers one morning that about 50 km down the river they had seen an Orangutan occasionally cross the river to get to the other side and immediately my brain cells went on overdrive and started imagining an Orangutan in the river. Knowing that Orangutans hate water and that this is completely against



their natural instincts, I tried to reason it out and could only think of two reasons for an Orangutan to get into a river - either they learnt by observing humans or maybe they are adapting to the shrinking and changing landscape of their habitat due to palm oil farming that's rapidly destroying their habitat.

The location was far from where we were but thankfully I had two days before I had to leave. We decided to leave the houseboat for a speedboat and got there overnight hoping we could see a natural history moment of an Orangutan crossing a river. I was up by 3 am in the morning and was all set to get into action. Around 8am that morning one of the rangers who came back after a night patrol told us that he had seen the Orangutan by the side of the river just around the corner. I jumped in joy and decided to walk into the four feet deep river instead of taking the boat just to ensure we did not scare him away. After wading through the river for about 30 meters, there he was, all set to cross the river - my timing could not have been better!

He saw me inside the river and initially hesitated to get into the water while I stayed still in chest deep water. After what looked like a lot of thought, he decided to get into the river and slowly moved in. He was approximately 10 meters away from me and I slowly started to move a bit closer to make some images of him in the river from behind the trees. He was sharp and noticed me move closer and decided to hide behind a dry tree bark in the water. For a second it appeared I had him, but it was amazing to watch him peep out from behind the tree











to check if I was still there. I stood my ground and tried to stay still, but the shutter sound from my camera gave me away again. It was like playing hide and seek with this primate in the middle of a river.

I know all of this sounds exciting but I was brought back to earth when my friend and ranger from behind told me, "Bro I don't think we should go any further, we've seen crocodiles in this part of the river." Not knowing how to react to something like that, I continued to quickly make some images as this mighty creature crossed the river.

Unfortunately, the Orangutan population has declined drastically over the last several years due to clearing of forests for palm oil farms. I was saddened to see a lot of rescued Orangutans at a rescue center. While a lot of organisations are doing their best to save this species and the habitat, I personally feel that at the current rate of habitat destruction the day is not far when we will only see them in a zoo!

When the plane took off for my flight back, all I could see below were palm oil farms - These were once pristine Orangutan Habitat!









TRAVELOGUE

# Pantanal – The World's Largest Wetlands

By Praveen Siddannavar

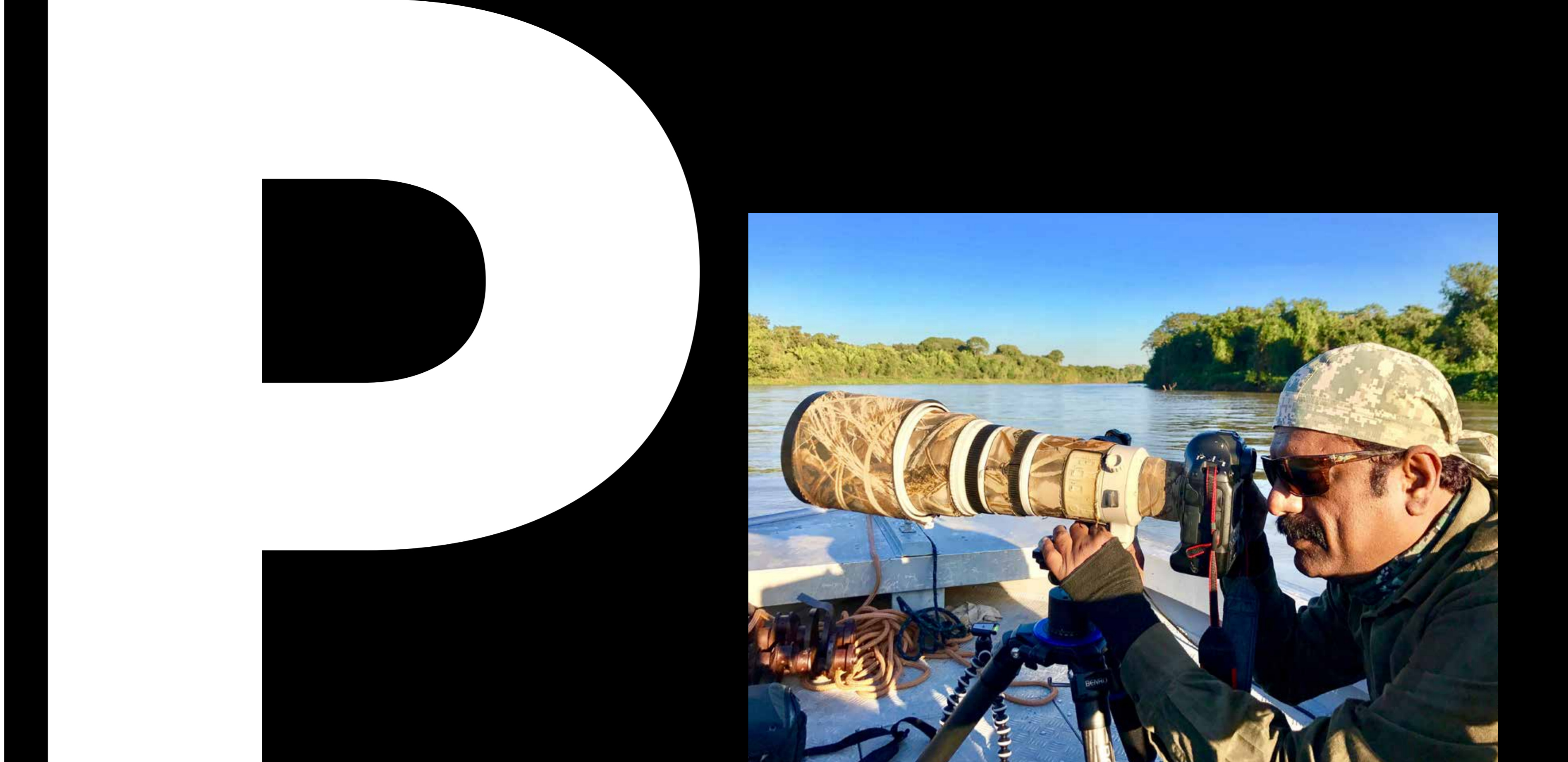
TRAVELOGUE

EXPLORERS









**Praveen is an engineer by profession and an award winning Natural History Photographer by choice. For the past few years he has been working on various conservation related projects and has supported several NGO's that include SAEVUS- Hem Chand Wildlife Foundation. He is currently one of the founding members of Indian Wildlife Conservation Trust (IWCT) and works in the capacity of Vice President.**

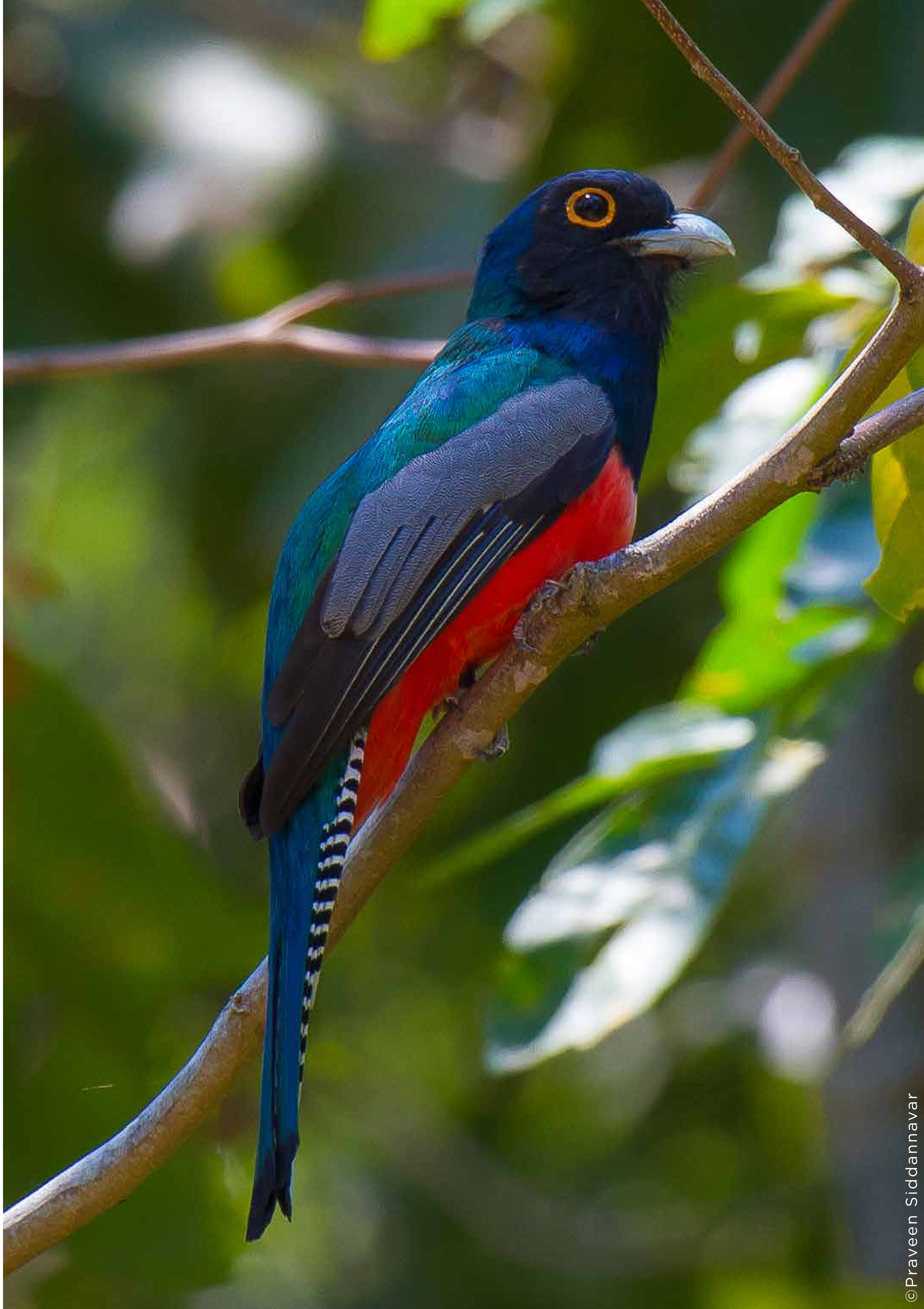
**On the professional front, Praveen is employed with KPIT Technologies Limited and currently heads their Bengaluru center. KPIT is a global technology company that specializes in providing IT Consulting and Product Engineering solutions and services to key focus industries - Automotive and Transportation, Consumer and Industrial Goods, Energy and Resources, High Tech, Life Sciences, and Utilities.**

**His work can be followed on his exclusive photography page: [facebook.com/PraveenSiddannavarPhotography](https://facebook.com/PraveenSiddannavarPhotography)**

Pantanal is one of the most immense, pristine and biologically rich environments on the planet. Often referred to as the world's largest wetland system, it extends through millions of hectares of central-western Brazil, eastern Bolivia and eastern Paraguay. With its extraordinarily concentrated and diverse flora and fauna, and a landscape spanning a variety of ecological sub-regions, the Pantanal stands as one of

the world's great natural wonders hence it was established as world heritage site in 2,000. Pantanal's wetlands cover a vast region spanning 181,299 square km, an area much bigger than England. For several years now South America's Amazon rainforest gets all the attention however when it comes to wildlife viewing in its natural environment, Pantanal easily tops the list amongst world's top five wildlife destinations.





However it is sad to know that there are some serious threats and concerns to Pantanal and its amazing biodiversity, and a lot of conservation efforts are needed to safeguard these pristine wetlands. Few of the major concern areas that need immediate attention and action are -

**Water Pollution** - Water contamination is one of the increasing concerns that mainly include mining byproducts, agrochemicals, sewage and garbage.

**Loss of biodiversity** - At least 50 species are reported to be threatened or endangered in Pantanal, such large predators and herbivores as the Giant river otter, Maned wolf, Ocelot, Cougar, Jaguar, Giant anteater and Marsh deer used to be found in large numbers in the Pantanal. Today, these are all listed as endangered or threatened with fear of extinction. The main sources of pressure on biodiversity are habitat destruction, poaching, over-fishing, and the business of capturing threatened and endangered species for export or for the Brazilian pet trade.

This is my second visit to Pantanal after about five years and this time it was a group of like minded friends traveling together, which was great fun. Typically June until end October or even early November is considered as dry season with reduced water levels, and that is the best time for wildlife viewing especially the Jaguars. I along with a local tour company had created an itinerary that gives ample opportunity to cover a wide range of wildlife that included various bird species, mammals, reptiles, endemic nocturnal animals and of course the Jaguars.

We landed in Cuiaba after flying over 25 hours with three different planes only to hear from my guide that the weather conditions at our first destination Chapada dos Guimarães wasn't great due to arrival of cold front, dense fog and mist all over the region had made it almost impossible for outdoor activities. Cuiaba is the capital of Mato Grosso state and is the home to the Chapada dos Guimarães National Park that is just about 65kms by road. This news wasn't encouraging and I already started feeling the pressure of leading this large group of friends, it was their first ever visit to Brazil. I always believed that if you were a true lover of nature, she would never disappoint, with this belief I moved on and left few decisions with my guide.

Considering the adverse weather conditions, our guide suggested we spend some time on the outskirts of Cuiaba until we get weather updates and the go ahead green signal to drive to Chapada. Our first encounter was with a tiny primate known as the Blacked Tailed Marmoset that belongs to the species of New World Monkey. I was dumbstruck after spotting this tiny primate, she stood tall on the ground like a statue posing for few seconds, and she was so innocent and cute. Having spotted her on ground I immediately fell flat on the ground and shot this cutie handheld.

These Marmosets are actual rainforest inhabitants, however due to loss of habitat and in search of food they had arrived closer to human habitations. The Marmoset is diurnal and arboreal using their claws to climb trees. They mainly feed on tree sap and occasionally insects and eggs of birds.





Late afternoon we arrived at Park Eco Lodge that is located on the fringes of the Chapada dos Guimarães National Park and it was a secluded place and the feeling was akin to staying inside the national park. The rest of the day was spent around the lodge and it was amazing to capture humming birds in their natural habitat. Unlike Costa Rica and Ecuador there are no multi-flash setup and feeders for hummingbirds in State of Mato Grosso, Brazil. However we were lucky to spot quite a few species of hummingbirds at our lodge and It was amazing to watch these tiny birds in the open that were seen sipping nectar from the flowers in the garden area.

Hummingbirds don't only live on nectar alone but also feed on insects and tiny spiders to supply protein and also feed on tree sap. They flap their wings over 50-80 times per second, hence one needs to have a high shutter speed between 1/4,000 or 1/6,000 per second to freeze their movements.

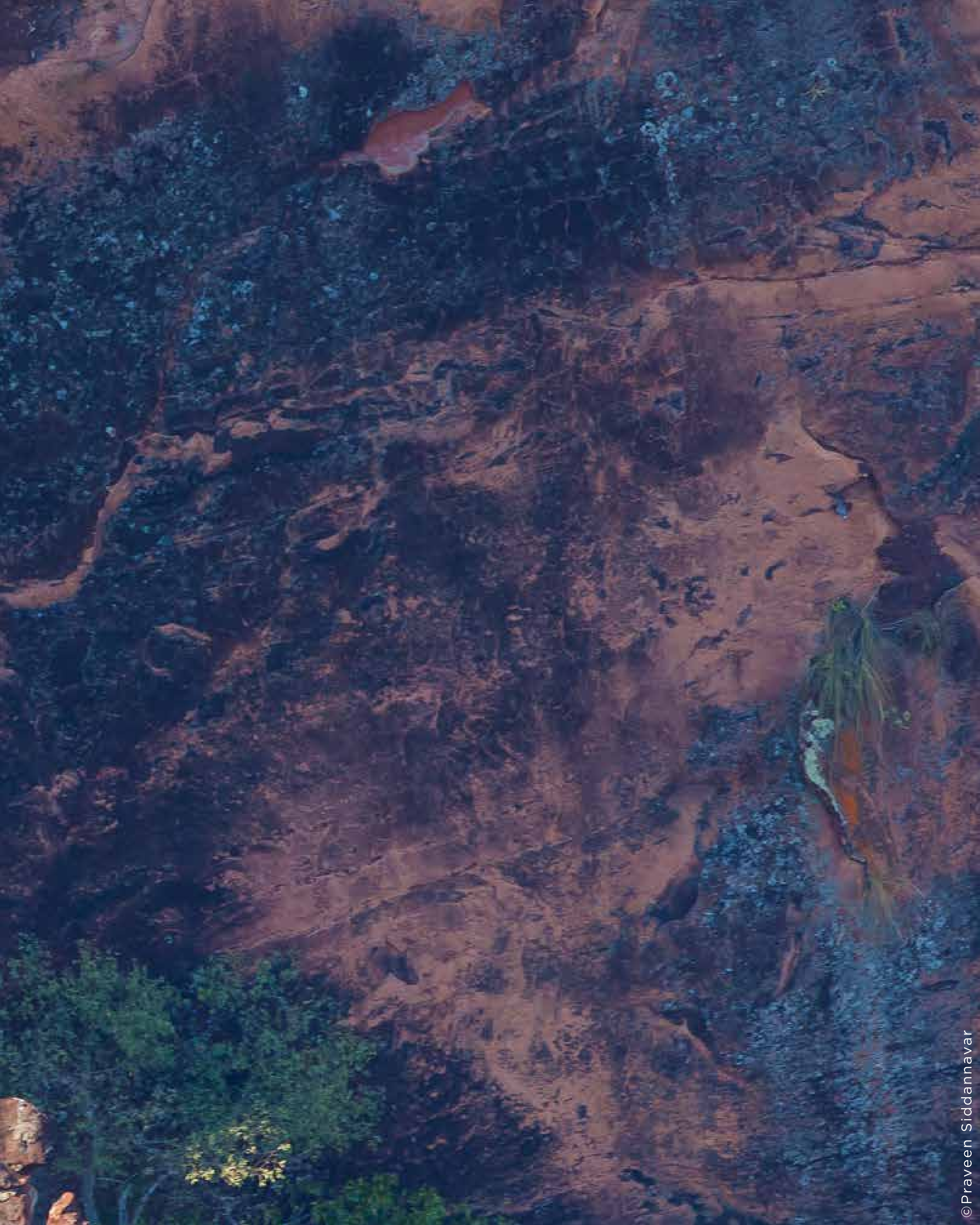
This national park was established in 1989 and is located in the State of Mato Grosso, Brazil. It is a region of rugged terrain with dramatic sandstone cliffs, caves, waterfalls and contains the geographic center of the continent. Chapada is a Brazilian word that means a region of steep cliffs, usually at the edge of a plateau. This national park is in the basin of upper Paraguay River, protecting the headwaters of the Cuiaba River, and one of the main feeders of Pantanal, Mato Grosso. This national park consists of unique archaeological sites and is critical habitat for wildlife that include the Red and Green Macaws, Jaguars, Howler Monkeys, Tapir, Giant Anteater, Maned Wolf and many other bird species.











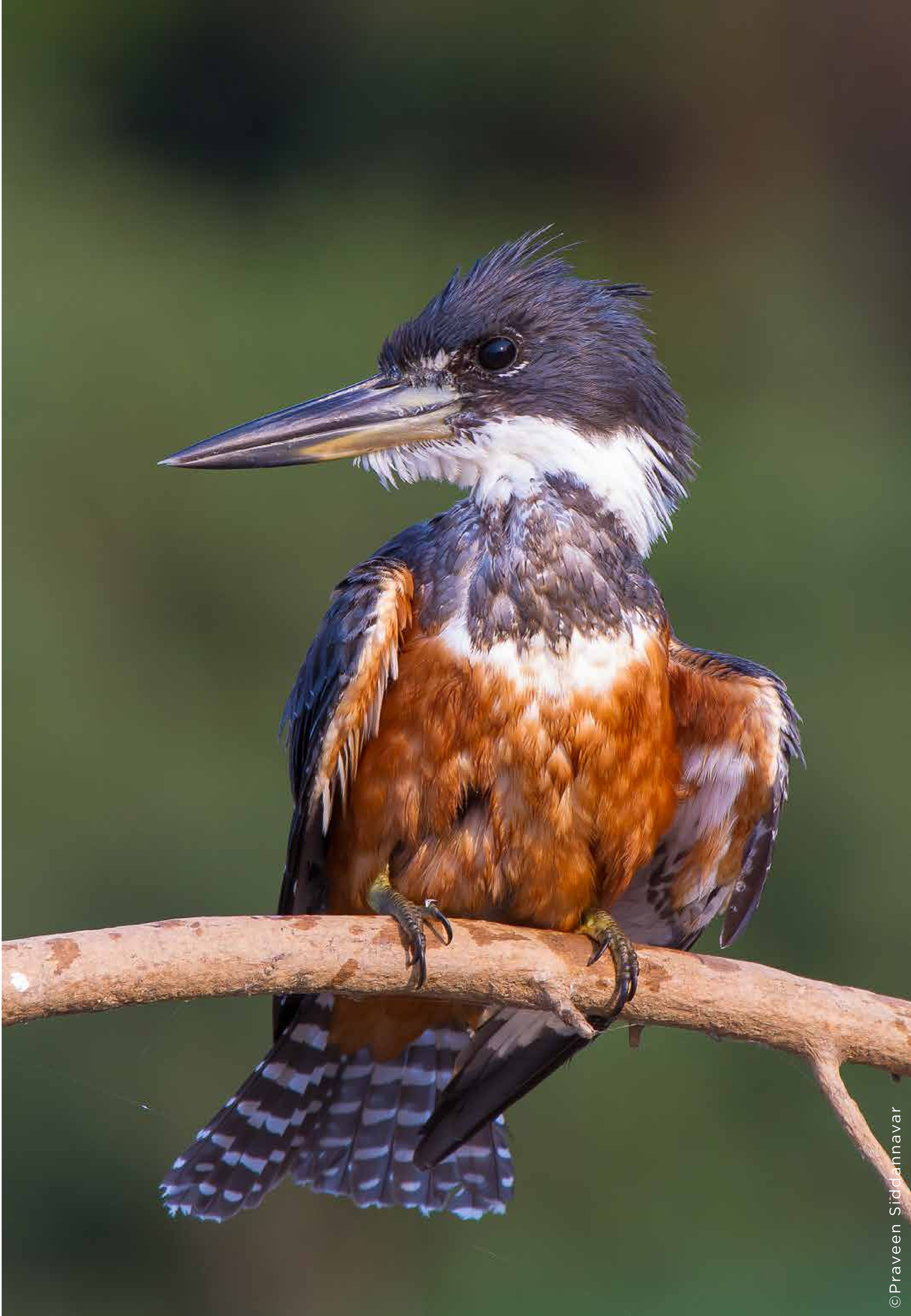


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The Red and Green Macaws are colorful macaws and watching them fly through red sandstones cliffs was a real treat to our eyes. The Red-and-Green Macaw can be found from eastern Panama through Colombia and from Venezuela east to Brazil and south to Paraguay and Bolivia. As the name suggests, these Macaws are primarily red with green greater and median wing-coverts. This bird's primaries are blue and has blue scattered throughout the rump and tail. Similar in appearance, the Scarlet Macaw lacks the green wing-coverts of the Red-and-Green Macaw. The Red-and-Green Macaw is a resident of humid lowland evergreen forest and tropical deciduous forest, as well as occasionally savannas. These large parrots nest in holes in cavities in red sandstone cliffs and trees too. Although this species is not globally threatened,

Red-and-Green Macaws are targeted by the pet trade and are in decline at the edges of their range.

Humming birds are yet another amazing tiny birds found in the Americas, they are amongst the smallest of birds. They are known as hummingbirds because of the humming sound created by their beating wings, which flap at high frequencies audible to humans. They hover in mid-air at rapid wing-flapping rates, which vary from 12 beats per second to 80 or more. I captured this White vented violetear humming bird and as the name suggests these hummers have vibrant coloured violet ear and of course the white vent. It is amazing to watch these hummers display their violet ear on several occasions and even in the face of threat from other birds.





Transpantaneira road, unpaved road that has approximately 122 wooden bridges, is the entry point into the Pantanal region. This road has amazing wildlife viewing so it is important for visitors to plan to spend time during this road journey. I was lucky to spot lots of caimans, capybaras, a variety of birds that included Ringed Kingfisher, the Amazon Kingfisher, Herons,

Raptors like the Savannah hawk, Roadside hawk, South American coats kite to name a few. It will be unfair if I don't mention the iconic and Symbol of Pantanal, the "Jabiru Stork" and it was nesting time for these huge birds. During the journey on Transpantaneira route one can see few lodges most built on the riverbanks. The lodges offer a wide range of spotting of



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birds including the most beautiful and popular toucan of Brazil known as the Toco toucan.

We arrived the Southwild lodge for lunch and after an authentic Brazilian meal, we had some time to rest before we ventured again into the wetlands. At about 5pm we all were busy capturing birds that frequented our lodge and then suddenly I

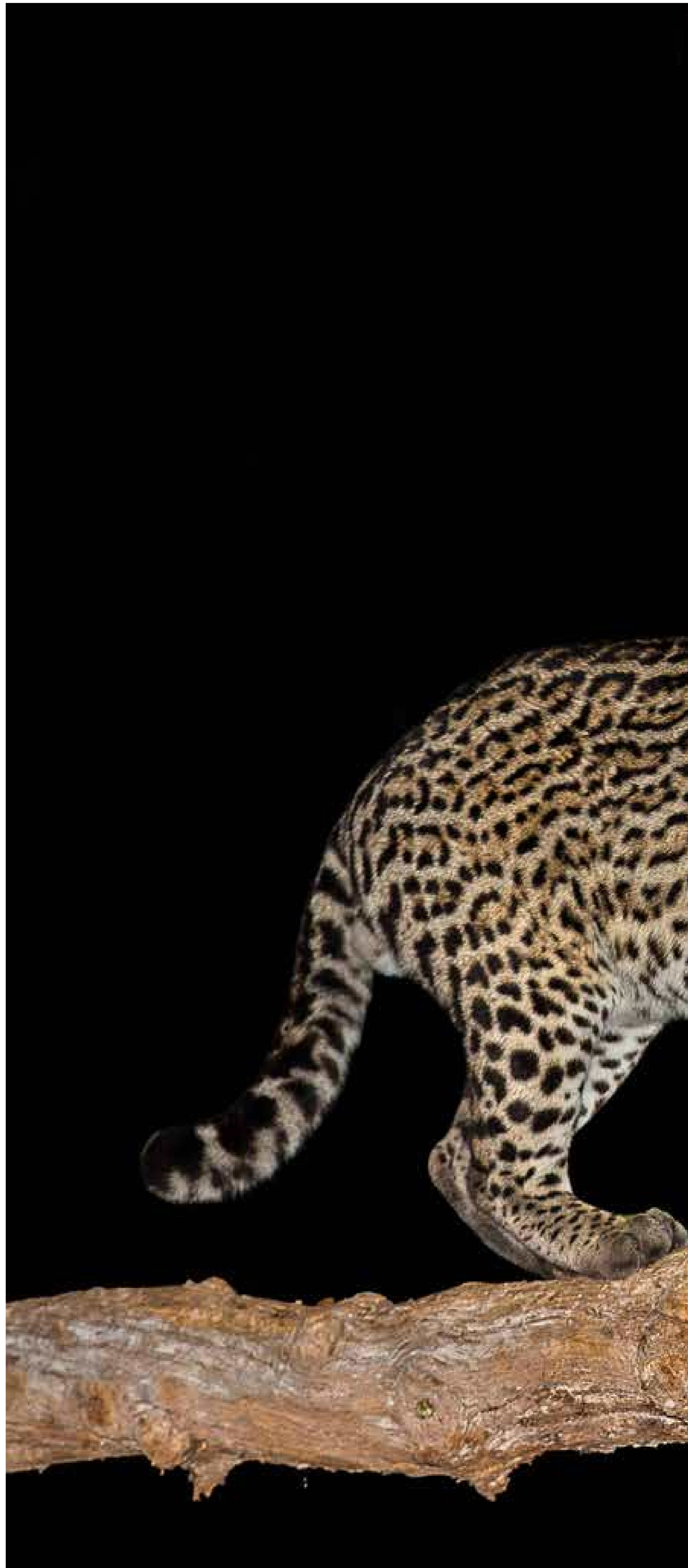
spotted the Toco toucan, it was my dream to capture this amazingly beautiful and colorful bird. Toco toucans are the largest and probably the best-known species in the toucan family. These toucans eat fruit using its bill to pluck them from trees, but also insects, frogs, small reptiles, small birds and their eggs.

At dusk we were taken to nearby wooded

forest where ocelots spotting was 75% guaranteed, and to our luck a young Ocelot showed up after a long wait in the hide and I had to capture it using external diffused light due to pitch-dark conditions. Ocelot is wildcat, also known as Dwarf Leopard and probably the rarest and most elusive of all cats. Ocelots are mostly nocturnal and like other cats, they are adapted for eating meat; they have pointed fangs used to deliver a killing bite, and sharp back teeth that can tear food like scissors. These cats prey on small animals like monkeys, snakes, fish, rodents, amphibians and birds too. The Ocelots fur resembles that of a Jaguar, it was once regarded as particularly valuable for fur coats and several hundred of thousands Ocelots were killed for their fur.

Our excitement of capturing this exclusive cat wasn't yet over and after returning back to lodge we were informed that we be experiencing the nocturnal wildlife of pantanal region mainly on the Transpantaneira road using an open safari truck. This was of course some experience at night and we were fortunate to spot the most elusive Tapir, and there's no doubt that this animal is the largest living mammal in South America. We also spotted couple of foxes and few Owls.

Next day we took the boat on the Pixaim River that flows adjacent to our lodge and went in search of more birds. We were lucky to spot Amazon Kingfisher and a catch, Ringed Kingfisher, Pygmy Kingfisher, several Herons like Tiger Heron, Night Heron, Raptors and many more. And later we trekked to a nearby spot to try our luck with Hyacinth Macaws and also the iconic stork of pantanal -









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The Jabiru Stork and undoubtedly these macaws are the world's largest flying parrots.

Pantanal is also the by far the best place to spot the Hyacinth Macaws. These macaws are beautiful and are the largest flying parrots in the world. However sadly due to habitat loss and the trapping of wild birds for the pet trade have taken a heavy toll on their population in the wild, so the species is classified as "Vulnerable" on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List.

The majority of the Hyacinth Macaw diet is nuts from native palms, such as acuri and bocaiuva palms. They have a very strong beak for eating the kernels of hard nuts and seeds. Their strong beaks are even able to crack coconuts; Pine nuts are also one of the most popular foods.

The trip thus far was simply amazing and more than what we expected and it was now time to head to our final destination to go in search of the Jaguars. Pantanal is the best place in the continent to spot the Jaguars and Giant River Otters. These cats are classified as "Near Threatened" on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List.

And interesting we had booked a houseboat that is strategically located in core Jaguar territory and we had booked to stay in the houseboat for five days. For spotting Jaguars we had two exclusive high-speed small motorboats and the boat safari was almost for full day except for short lunch break, so that we avoid the afternoon heat as well as harsh sunlight. Temperatures during midday were soaring

as high as 38-40 degree Celsius. However that didn't stop us to go in search of Jaguars. Our first encounter didn't take long enough, we spotted a female Jaguar on the riverbank and thereafter we had amazing sighting of about 20 Jaguars that included two huge males.

Pound for pound Jaguars are the strongest amongst all cats when compared to their powerful bites. Jaguars are apex predators and are the largest cats in the Americas, 3rd largest of all cats after Tiger and Lion. The strength of the Jaguar's bite is due to the arrangement of its jaw muscles; its jaws are slightly shorter, which increases the leverage for biting. These two modifications, though minor, combine to give the strongest relative bite force. Indeed, a Jaguar can bite straight through the skull of its prey, and pierce the thick skin of a caiman with ease. These cats love hunting mainly on capybara, however caimans are on top of their menu too. Jaguars are well adapted to water and are excellent swimmers unlike leopards.

Giant River Otters are world's largest otters and mainly hunt on fish. They range across north-central South America and live mostly along the Amazon River and in the Pantanal. Habitat degradation and loss is the greatest current threat. These otters are classified as "Endangered" on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List.

Caimans are similar to Crocodiles but much smaller and belong to the sub family of Caimaninae. These reptiles inhabit Central and South American from marshes and swamps to Mangrove







Rivers and lakes. The caimans mainly feed on fish and also hunt on small birds, mammals and reptiles. Caimans are on

the top of the menu for the Jaguars. Capybaras are largest living rodent in the world. They are native to South America



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and inhabit savannahs, dense forests and lives near water bodies. The Capybaras are in the prey base list of Jaguars.

TRAVELOGUE

# Brazil's Pantanal Wetland

By Jarbas Mattos

TRAVELOGUE









**Jarbas Mattos is a nature and wildlife photographer and guide based in São Paulo, Brazil,**

**from where he travels and leads photographic expeditions to Brazil and Patagonia, and seeks the best moments in nature.**

**His work can be followed on his exclusive photography page:**

**[jarbas mattos.46graus.com](http://jarbas mattos.46graus.com)**

**[facebook.com/Jarbas-Mattos-Photographic-Expeditions-775901302441401](https://facebook.com/Jarbas-Mattos-Photographic-Expeditions-775901302441401)**

The Brazilian Pantanal is the the world's largest tropical wetland area, at almost 195,000 square kilometres near the Bolivian border and is divided into two major geographical regions: The North Pantanal in the Mato Grosso state and the South Pantanal in Mato Grosso do Sul state. The Mato Grosso state's capital is Cuiabá and Campo Grande is the Mato Grosso do Sul state's capital. Besides Brazil, the North of Paraguai and East of Bolivia are also wetlands connected to Brazilian pantanal and is called The Chaco. The pantanal can also be subdivided in another 11 small areas based in it's flood regime and on it's relief:

Cáceres, Poconé, Barão de Melgaço, Paraguai, Paiaguás, Nhecolândia, Abobral, Aquidauana, Miranda, Nabileque, Porto Murtinho. The Pantanal has two distinct seasons; a hot and wet summer from October to March, the flood season - when the temperature fluctuates around 90° F (32° C) and a little bit colder and dry winter, from April to September, when the temperature stays around 70° F (21° C).

In the Pantanal water means everything; from the life of animals and plants and the way they interact to the routine of the native men and women of the region

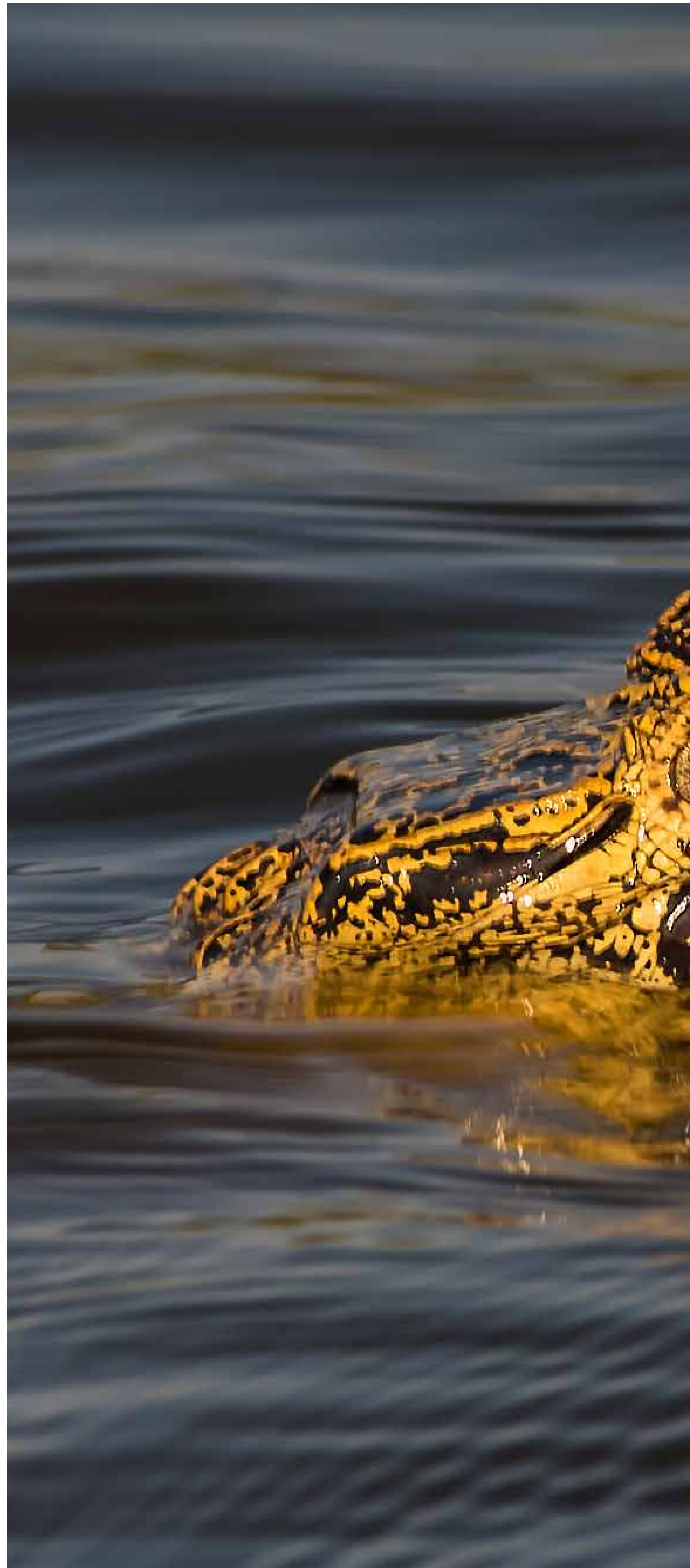


- The Pantaneiros, 'cowboys' that live and raise their cattle in harmony with the Pantanal seasons and wildlife. The seasonal floods are also important for tourism and wildlife conservation in the Pantanal, and although winter is the best season for tourism, there is plenty to see and do all around the year.

In the Brazilian Pantanal, a large area is under protection of the government - the Pantanal Matogrossense National Park. There are also many others private areas that are protected too, some are hotels like the Fazenda San Francisco in Miranda and Pousada Mangabal in Corumbá, both in the South Pantanal between others, and some are more ambitious like the SESC Pantanal Private Natural Heritage Reserve a privately owned reserve in Brazil, that has a great structure for eco-tourism and is also used for research and education.

The Pantanal Biome is divided in many subregional ecosystems, each one with distinct hydrological, geological and ecological characteristics, each one with it's own particular flora depending on soil and altitude.

In the lowlands, there's a predominance of grasses, these are areas of natural grazing for livestock - livestock is a major economic activity of the Pantanal. In the Cerrado area, the vegetation is composed of medium-sized trees interspersed with shrubs and creepers, it usually appears in the middle heights. A few meters above the flooded areas are the bush canyons, with larger trees such as Angico, Ipê and Aroeira. At higher altitudes, the arid and dry climate makes the landscape similar to those of the semi-desertic caatinga,









©Jarbas Mattos

showing typical species such as Palm trees, Piúvas, of the Ipês family with pink and yellow flowers, Orchids and Fig trees.

Water is fundamental for life in Pantanal and there are immense areas covered by aquatic vegetation such as Aguapé and Salvínia. All these plants are carried by the waters of the rivers specifically in the flood season and they compose green islands, called as Camalotes by the natives.

The Pantanal fauna is impressively rich with over 650 bird species, 1,100 butterfly species, among them the famous Cramer's Eighty-eight (*Diatheria clymena*) and the Banded Orange Heliconian (*Dryadula phaetusa*). Over 125 mammals species, 263 fish species like the Huge Jaú (*Zungaro jahu*), the Pacu (*Piaractus mesopotamicus*) and the famous Piranha (*Serrasalmus spilopleura*). There are 40 amphibian species like the Chaco Tree Frog (*Hypsiboas raniceps*), the Cururu Toad (*Rhinella schneideri*), the Dwarf Tree Frog (*Dendropsophus nanus*) and the Creole Frog (*Leptodactylus chaquensis*). Over 170 reptiles species, among these the Jacaré do Pantanal (*Caiman yacare*), an alligator like reptile, and 30 snake species including the Huge Sucuri (*Eunectes notaeus*), the Lguana Iguana (*Iguana iguana*), the Lagarto-do-ipê (*Tropidurus guarani*) and the very poisonous Jararaca (*Bothrops jararacussu*).

The avifauna in Pantanal is so rich, that it attracts tourists from all over the world searching for the beauty of these feathered friends like the Amazonian Motmot, the endangered Hyacinth Macaw (*Anodorhynchus hyacinthinus*),







Red-and-green Macaw (*Ara chloropterus*), Blue-and-yellow Macaw (*Ara ararauna*), Chestnut-eared Aracari (*Pteroglossus castanotis*), Toco Toucan (*Ramphastos toco*) and many others.

There are some really impressive mammal species in the Pantanal and among them the giant otter, the capybara, marsh deer and the most impressive of all; the Jaguar (*Panthera onca*) or Onça Pintada in portuguese. This feline of the Panthera genus can reach over 1.2m and varies from 1.12 to 1.85m and 85cm tall at it's shoulders. The female jaguar in average weighs about 95 kg and a male can reach over 150kg. Intersting to say that the jaguars in Brazil are bigger than those found in other countries, and those found in Pantanal open areas are the biggest found in Brazil. Forest jaguars are usually darker and smaller than those found in open areas, not to confuse these with the melanistic, the Black Jaguar or in portuguese Onça Negra.

We must realize that the Pantanal is so much more than the wetlands, there are many important conservation and touristic areas around like Corumbá, an important city in the very heart of South Pantanal with good touristic structure. Corumbá is located in the margins of the Paraguai river and in the border with Bolivia, from where many fishing and touristics boats called "Chalanas" leave to the Pantanal around. Corumbá is a "border city" so it has a solid touristic structure with many hotels and restaurants with international and regional food.



© Jarbas Mattos





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Halfway between Miranda and Corumbá there's the entrance to the "Estrada Parque" or park road in English, a dirt road that crosses the South Pantanal to the city of Ladário, an old military post and neighbor to Corumbá. This dirt road is one of the best and cheapest ways to know the Pantanal by your own, but you must be very careful because you're gonna be in the wild and an accident could prove dangerous. The road crosses the Paraguai river in a small vilage called Porto Manga, where the Brazilian explorer Marechal Cândido Rondon built a telegraph post in the end of 19 century, It is rumored that the former president of the United States Theodore Roosevelt had stayed there when he traveled on

the Paraguay River with Rondon to the Amazon in 1914.

Another important region around the Pantanal is the Serra da Bodoquena area with important touristic cities like Bonito, Jardim e Bodoquena. The word "Bonito" means beautiful in English, and it is easy to guess why; together with Jardim and Bodoquena, there are many cristal clear rivers with nice beaches, lakes and lots of waterfalls, where tourists can play aquatic sports or just relax in the water. There are all kind of hotels, pousadas and good restaurants. Besides that there are great points for birdwatching, wildlife photography like the RPPN Buraco das Araras, Boca da Onça Ecotour, Parque



Nacional da Serra da Bodoquena and Recanto Ecológico Rio da Prata.

In my opinion all these places complement the pantanal experience, and all of them are great for all kinds of tourism, but there is something special about seeing those beautiful Red-and-green Macaw flying around close to the walls of Buraco das Araras, specially from August to February, when it is breeding season and the Macaws choose their mate for life.

When going to South Pantanal one must fly to Campo Grande International Airport, in Campo Grande capital of Mato Grosso do Sul state.

The North Pantanal begins in the city of Poconé, a 100km far from the Mato Grosso's state capital Cuiabá. Poconé is a very well touristic structured city from where through the Transpantaneira Road tourists reach the heart of North Pantanal in Porto Jofre settlement. The Transpantaneira is a dirt road that goes across the North Pantanal where there are many pousadas with very good touristic structure, most of them with different packages like day use, fishing, birdwatching, nautic and night safaris for wild life observation and the famous Jaguar safaris, which attract many people specially in August and September, the best months for Jaguar observation.







©Malcolm Arnold

WILD ARTS SHOWCASE





©Cynthia Bandurek

*'The First Year*

By Cynthia Bandurek



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**Cynthia Bandurek, someone who combines art, science and aesthetics. Ecologist and field naturalist, Cynthia has since seven years ago devoted herself to capturing nature with particular sensitivity through her photographs and paintings, thus bringing the public closer to little known and yet astounding aspects. She has obtained more than 4,000 images imbued with a remarkable artistic magic, be it in the permanent wealth of colors, shapes and behaviors.**

**See: [cynthiabandurek.com](http://cynthiabandurek.com)**

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The admiration and passion for nature are part of my essence. I grew up in an animal-loving family, so when I was a little girl I developed a special sensitivity for animals, plants and interest in natural processes. And at the same time, I was worried about the impact that humans have on planet earth.

I remember asking my parents, even in elementary school, to buy me books about ecology. When I finished school,

I had no doubts about the path I would choose: I studied Ecology and Environment, and graduated as a Naturalist.

This second career managed to get me completely involved in environmental issues, and for more than 10 years I have been working in the Argentine Museum of Natural Sciences “Bernardino Rivadavia” and participated in several



C. Bandurek



©Cynthia Bandurek



conservation projects: Corrientes Biological Station and Environmental Education activities with the local community; (Butia yatay), evaluating the impact of the European Wild Boar (exotic species) on the mortality of this palm tree 's renovales, taking data in the Palmar National Park (Entre Ríos) to study the population dynamics of the Palmera (Butia yatay); As well as performing Amphibian Monitoring in two Buenos Aires reserves (Otamendi and Ribera Norte), in order to evaluate the variations in its biodiversity and to be able to relate it to different local and global factors.

### **The visual Universe**

At a very early age I showed a certain ease in drawing, drawing on paper the love for all forms of life on the planet, a skill inherited by family legacy, since both my paternal grandfather and his brother were great visual artists, who had to seek exile from Poland to South America to escape World War II. One of their names remains (Wolf Bandurek), recorded in books, marking a before and after in the history of Paraguayan art. After several years forming self-taught in painting, I continue to improve in various art workshops.

“Cynthia Bandurek, someone who combines art, science and esthetics. Needless to say, she possesses the certain vision of things and therefore this enables her to imagine landscapes where she has never been before and the consequence transfer them to the painting of oil and acrylic strokes. In general, they are African landscapes, the

Savana, lion families (‘I love Africa, just make my imagination run free’). But this young photographer and painter, who is also a dancer and acrobat in her spare time, has her mind set on Argentina.” (Nature and Conservation Magazine - Aves Argentinas - 2011)

Photography appeared in my life in the course of the career of naturalist, as a tool to record fauna and flora. But the moment I shot the shutter for the first time, fell in love with it. Passionate and anxious for knowledge, I prepared myself as a self-taught person. Photography allows me not only to record an instant of reality, it also allows me to be part of a creative process, where I can leave my sensibility for nature captured.

“Ecologist and field naturalist, Cynthia has since seven years ago devoted herself to capturing nature with particular sensitivity through her photographs and paintings, thus bringing the public closer to little known and yet astounding aspects. She has obtained more than 4000 images imbued with a remarkable artistic magic, be it in the permanent wealth of colors, shapes and behaviors.” (Emilio Villarino, Argente Magazine -Argente Magazine - 2015)

“Cynthia Bandurek develops her life with passion and immersed in the art, science and aesthetics, with nature as a nexus of union. Through his photographs, Cynthia seeks to enjoy the privilege to closely observe the natural world but also trying to raise consciousness about what is hidden beyond the cement of the cities



©Cynthia Bandurek

...” (J. M. Escarabajal- Birding Murcia - 2012)

Within the photograph I have specialized in macro photography and my favorite characters are arthropods (Insects and Spiders). Macro photography caught me completely because it allows us to unveil a world of details that our own biology cannot access.

In her photos as well as in her pictorial works of art, Bandurek stands out for her visual acuity and sensitivity at

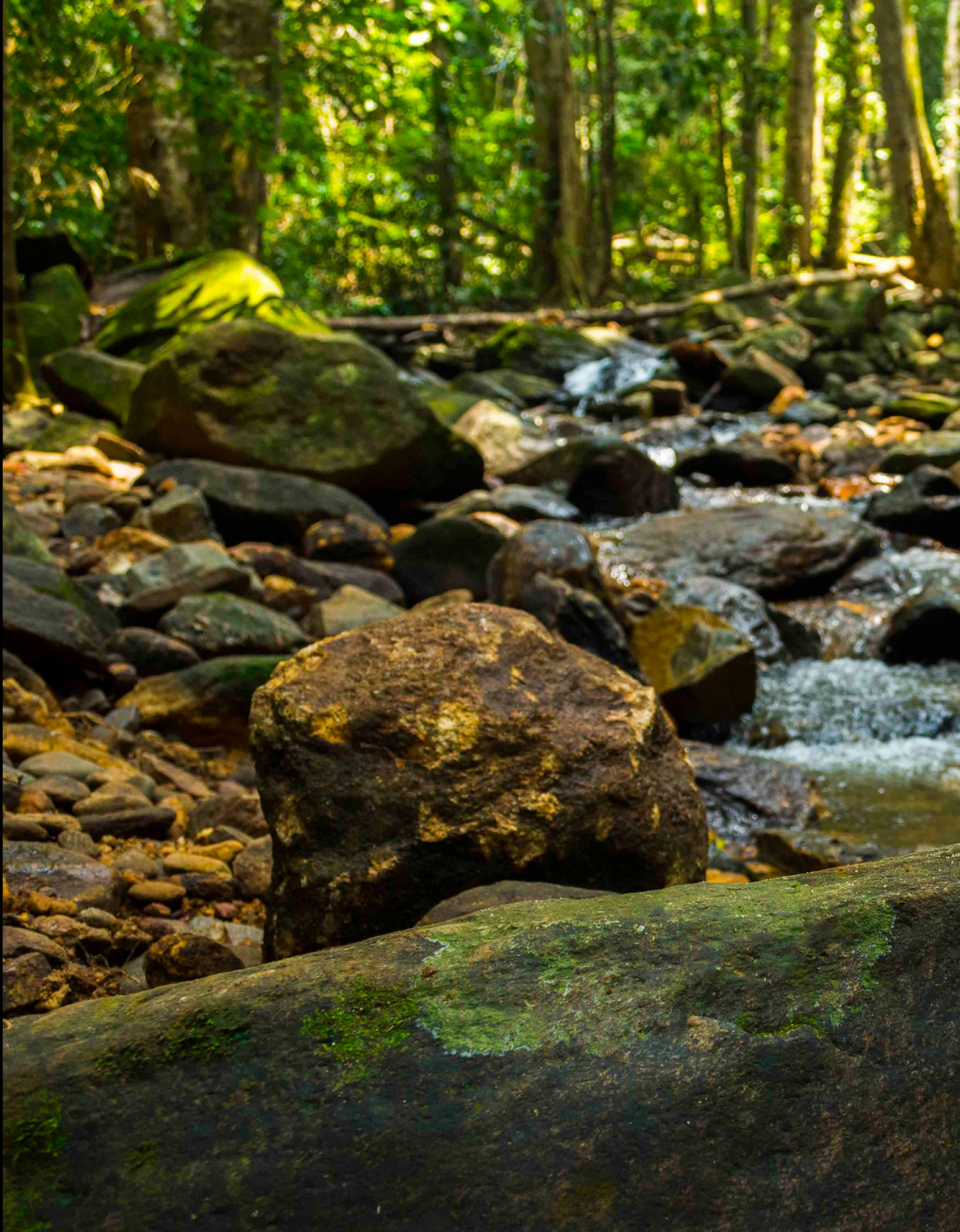
capturing the natural world. Something striking in her photographic work lies in the sensitivity she possesses to spot beauty in the tiny, along with her ductility with which she captures the photographic instant, the detail. She holds a unique sense that allows her to pay attention to that which is not in all of us.

She recently published her first book of macro photography: “The World of Small.” An approach to the universe of arthropods from an artistic, visual and evolutionary perspective.









YOUR GALLERY



Ajith Padiyar  
Malabar Pit Viper (*Trimeresurus malabaricus*)





## YOUR GALLERY

Arijit Sen

Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*)

Location: Pench National Park, Madhya Pradesh, India.





## YOUR GALLERY



Rajbir Sunny Oberoi

Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)

Location: Menar Lake, Rajasthan, India.



## YOUR GALLERY

Ramesh Servani

Nilgai (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*)

Location: Sasan Gir National, Gujarat, India.





## YOUR GALLERY



Arghya Adhikary

Tiger (*Panthera tigris*)

Location: Sundarban Tiger Reserve, West Bengal, India.



YOUR GALLERY



John Antony  
Lion (*Panthera leo*)  
Location: Tanzania





## YOUR GALLERY



Praveen G Nair

Short-nosed Indian Fruit Bat (*Cynopterus sphinx*)

Location: Chirakkadavu, Kerala, India.



## YOUR GALLERY

Shaji Chandran

Dragonfly (*Anisoptera*)

Location: Shahaniya, Doha, Qatar.





## YOUR GALLERY

Suman Dasgupta

Brahminy Kite (*Haliastur indus*)

Location: Mangalajodi, Chilka Lake, Odisha, India





## YOUR GALLERY

Aneesh Thomas  
House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)  
Location: Qatar





## YOUR GALLERY

Muhammed Yasir

Blue-cheeked Bee-eater (*Merops persicus*)

Location: Saudi Arabia



**UPCOMING  
FEATURES**



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## **A WALK THROUGH THE WESTERN GHATS**

By Kalyan Varma

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## **GREAT HORNBILL**

By Hermis Haridas

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## **INDIA'S PROTECTED LANDS**

By Amrita Das

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