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EXPLORERS

NOV / DEC 2024



INTO THE WILD WITH MUKUL SOMAN

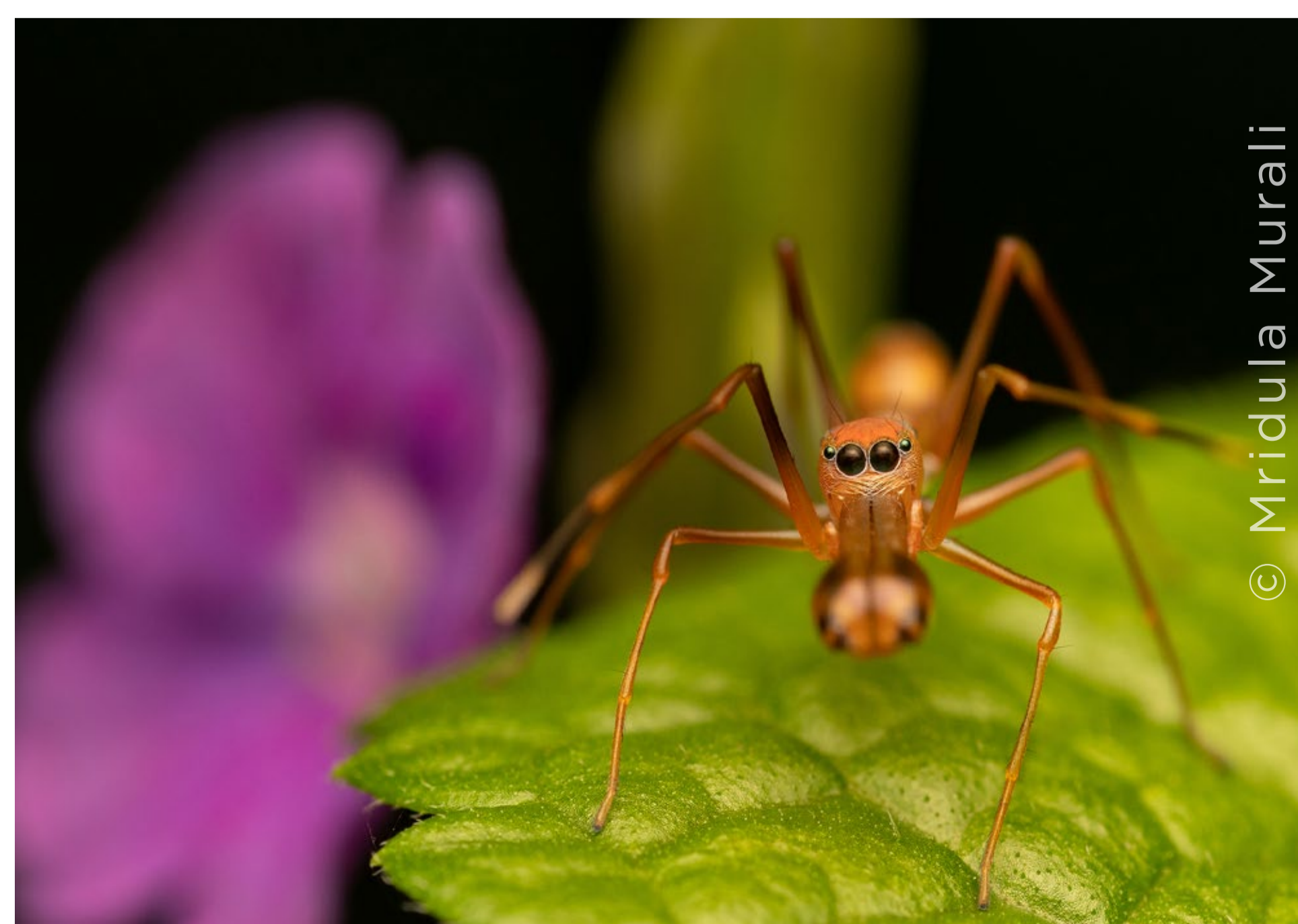
THE BENGAL TIGERS OF
THE SUNDARBANS:
CONSERVATION
CHALLENGES & EFFORTS
BY HERMIS HARIDAS

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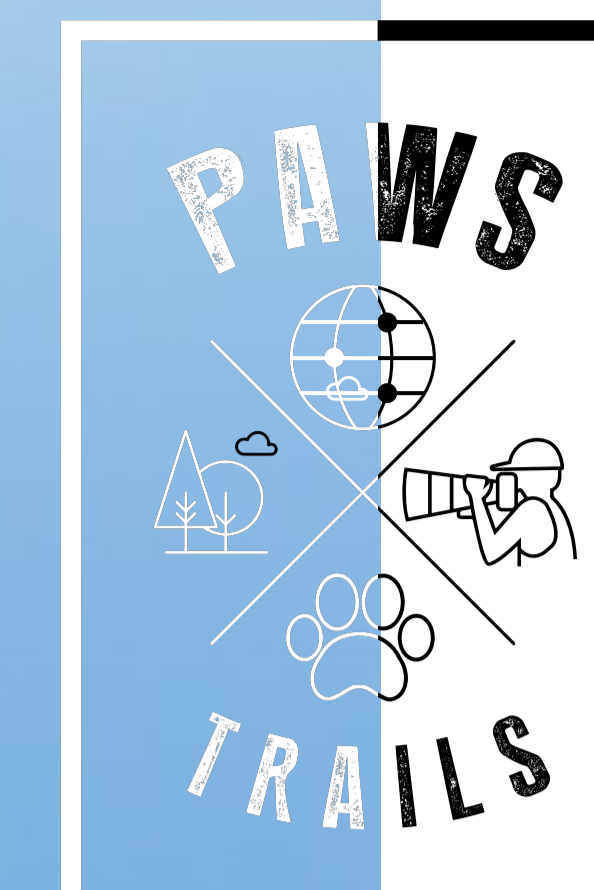
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008

Cover Story
Mukul Soman



Publisher: Paws Trails Explorers **Editors:** Cynthia Bandurek, Ragul Patteri, & Bruno Ferreto Fiorillo
Content Director: Nisha Purushothaman, **Director Photography:** Hermis Haridas, **Design Desk:** Nithya Purushothaman
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PT Explorers Editors

Ragul Patteri, Cynthia Bandurek, & Bruno Ferreto Fiorillo



EDITORS DEN

Welcome to volume 43 of PT Explorers, full of stories on conservation and wildlife photography from around the world.

In our cover story Mukul Soman from Kirkland talks about his blissful experiences in nature, photographing the wild with the goal of using his art bring focus on wildlife issues. Be prepared to be amazed by some fantastic images.

Our own Hermis Haridas dwells on tiger conservation in the Sunderbans, with insights gained from his multiple visits there.

Gopala Krishnan from Dubai shares his experiences spending time with a Tibetan Sand fox and the challenges faced by the species.

In Her Views and Visuals, Mridula Murali from India portrays her love of nature and experiences with urban wildlife and macro photography.

Cub's corner section features Shreyovi Mehta, who is the youngest Indian to win the prestigious Natural History Museum's Wildlife Photographer of the Year award.

Shyam Menon from UAE talks about his experiences on a Gorilla conservation trek at the Mgahinga Gorilla National Park in Uganda.

In the Through the Lens article Dr. K M Anand shares his images for the enigmatic Ganesha Spider from an encounter in the rain forests of Agumbe.

Ata Hassanzadeh from west Azerbaijan, Iran, shares his Tips & Tricks on Close-up Nature photography.

Wild Arts Showcase section features nature artist Paloma Collar from Madrid.

We thank all the wonderful photographers and contributors for their continued support. Please reach out if you wish to be published in PT Explorers.



PHOTOGRAPHY DIRECTOR'S CHOICE

Shijin CM

Oriental Rat Snake (*Ptyas mucosa*)
Ottapalam, Kerala, India





FOUNDERS' NOTE

Welcome to PT Explorers Magazine's 43rd issue.

As we reflect on September and October 2024, the world of wildlife photography and conservation has been marked by remarkable achievements and poignant reminders of our planet's fragility. Notably, Canadian photographer Shane Gross was honored as the [Wildlife Photographer of the Year](#) for his captivating image of western toad tadpoles, highlighting the delicate balance of aquatic ecosystems.

In conservation news, a coalition of environmental NGOs launched an initiative at COP16 to facilitate debt-for-nature swaps, aiming to unlock substantial funding for biodiversity preservation. ([Reuters](#))

Additionally, the rediscovery and first-ever photograph of the New Britain Goshawk in Papua New Guinea after 55 years underscores the importance of ongoing exploration and documentation efforts. ([People](#))

However, challenges persist. A fire in Stonehaven, Scotland, devastated the habitat of the rare northern brown argus butterfly, emphasizing the need for vigilant protection of vulnerable species. ([The Times](#))

Moreover, the International Union for Conservation of Nature's updated Red List revealed that 38% of the world's trees are at risk of extinction, highlighting the urgency for global conservation actions. ([AP News](#))

At Paws Trails Explorers, we remain committed to showcasing the beauty of wildlife through photography and advocating for conservation. We believe that by sharing these stories, we can inspire collective action to protect our natural world.

Let us take the pledge for a greener future!

Hermis Haridas & Nisha Purushothaman

Founders - PT Explorers



COVER STORY

Into The WILD

with Mukul Soman

Based in Kirkland, Mukul Soman is an accomplished wildlife and nature photographer as well as an art director. He combines documentary-style photography with fine art techniques, creating compelling and emotive images that capture the beauty of the natural world. His photography is rooted in a deep sensitivity to light and an abiding love for wilderness and its creatures. When not exploring the wild, he applies his artistic talents as an art director in the advertising and video game industries, blending creative visual storytelling with immersive experiences.

Awards & Accolades

Grand Prize Winner -

Outdoor Photographer Magazine 2021

Winner - Capture One Pro Photo Contest 2019

Winner - Photographic Society of America "Best of Show" 2019

Honorable Mention - Photographic Center Northwest 22nd Juried Exhibition 2019

Winner - Washington Trails Association Photo Contest 2014, wildlife category

Achievements

Advisory Board Member - University of Washington
Continuum College Photography Program

Published by National Geographic Society's
"Your Shot"

Featured in The Huffington Post, The Daily Mirror
International, The Hindu Daily (India), and Better
Photography Magazine

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Can you share the story of how you first became interested in wildlife photography? What drew you to this particular genre?

From my childhood days, I was always interested in the arts, starting with drawing and painting. Also, I had a lot of curiosity and love for the natural world and its inhabitants. Photography became a way to further pursue that love. I have done different types of professional photography, including commercial work, portraiture, landscape, weddings, and photojournalism.

However, it was much later in life when I visited the Grand Teton National Park, that I realized that my true calling is wildlife photography and being in the outdoors, experiencing the raw elements of nature and pursuing aesthetically pleasing story telling through my work.

Who or what has been your biggest influence in your journey as a wildlife photographer?

Early on, my dad was definitely an influence. He taught me the basics of drawing and painting and was an avid photographer as well.

Later in life, I found the work of certain photographers to be really inspiring. Vincent Munier, Sebastião Salgado, Michael Nick Nichols, Brian Skerry, Jasper Doest and Nick Brandt are some of the photographers who greatly inspire me.

What was the first wildlife photograph you took that made you realize this was your calling?

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It was a photograph of a line of Bison walking on the snow, with the Grand Teton Mountain in the background.

What are some of the biggest technical challenges you face when photographing wildlife, and how do you overcome them?

Maintaining focus and keeping the subject in frame is always a challenge although it has become second nature for me, so not as challenging as before. Modern camera technology has made autofocus much easier. However, since I also do a lot of wildlife cinematography, learning manual focusing has been extremely challenging. I overcame that with practice and lots of research to build rigs that facilitate these very specific needs.

How do you prepare for a shoot in the wild, and what equipment do you consider essential for capturing the perfect shot?

I prepare by being organized, making a list of all the items and equipment I need to bring with me. The most critical equipment for capturing the perfect shot is a camera and a lens, I guess? Haha!

Honestly, I feel that, having a clear vision of what I want to capture and why, is very critical. When I'm out in the wild, my presence of mind, understanding of the subject, awareness of behavior, and ability to anticipate action are crucial for capturing the perfect shot. These factors guide my choice of equipment and how I use it.

Can you walk us through your process of getting a perfect shot of a skittish or elusive animal?

First, I do as much research I can do about the species to get an understanding of their habitat, behavior and biology. Then I plan a trip to the location where the species could be seen. After that it is all about data gathering, studying the geography of the area and mapping out the daily activities the species performs, what times of the day they perform that, what light am I looking for etc, etc.

Then it's about positioning myself at the spots I have staked out and wait until the moment unfolds. The key is to be there before the animal shows up and be quiet and patient. Sometimes, I must be hiding behind bushes, other times laying on the ground or being in a hide.

What is the most memorable wildlife encounter you've had while photographing, and how did it impact you?

This is a very hard question. Ok, I have a LOT of memorable wildlife encounters while photographing! But one that sticks out as a lovely memory is from a trip to Iceland, when a mother Arctic fox left its babies with me and went hunting.

I felt that the fox trusted me enough to know I wasn't a threat and that her babies were safe around me. I came back from this experience with a sense of gratitude and responsibility, like as if the universe trusts me to do the right thing, which is to care for nature and make meaningful



© Mukul Soman







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choices that impact the natural world in positive ways.

Can you describe a situation where things didn't go as planned during a shoot? How did you adapt?

Haha, well that is almost every single time. I plan, but things sometimes take time to happen, so patience is key. For me, wildlife photography is actually about being accepted into the comfort zone of wildlife, being respectful and patient with them, until they gift me the imagery that they choose to give me. So, I adopt the route of being patient, sometimes for hours, sometimes for days, and sometimes for years.

How do you maintain ethical practices while photographing wildlife, ensuring that your presence doesn't disrupt the animals' natural behavior?

I never approach any wildlife straight on, I always do my process of scouting and learning about their movements and pathways, then positioning myself at a spot. Additionally, I take distance that is safe for both the wildlife and myself. I also make sure I am not causing stress or discomfort to the animals I photograph. If I sense that the wildlife is being anxious in anyway, I back off.

How do you see your work contributing to wildlife conservation efforts?

I have a solid reach on social media., so I use that platform to educate and spread the message of conservation. I have raised funds for Non-Profits that support wildlife rehab, given lectures at schools and universities, interacted with children





and young adults to get them interested in nature, ecosystems, birds and animals through my work. Once people connect with these subjects, they care and once they care they will carry the message forward and make choices that impact the natural world positively.

Have you been involved in any specific conservation projects through your photography? Can you tell us about them?

I have not. But I would love to in the future.

In your opinion, what role does wildlife photography play in raising awareness about endangered species and habitats?

I feel that wildlife photographers have the opportunity to use their creativity to tell stories about ecosystems and habitats that are under threat. It is not just about making pretty pictures, rather it's about using our art to bring light to an issue. So clearly the role of wildlife photographers is the same role that any storyteller has, which is to tell compelling stories that grab the viewers' attention.

How do you stay creative and inspired in your work, especially when dealing with familiar subjects or locations?

That's easy for me. I love light. I can study light all day long. For me it is about the experience of being out there and exploring. It is ok if no great photographs are made, because every time I am outside in the middle of nature, my mind and heart is at peace and I am learning about light.

Do you have a signature style or approach to wildlife photography that sets your work apart? How did you develop it?

I don't know that. You guys should tell me! Do I have a signature style?

Can you share some tips on how aspiring wildlife photographers can develop their unique perspective and style?

Stick to what you love to do with your photography, do not fall for the popularity trap, where you just follow trends to build a following on social media. Focus on a vision, work towards attaining it in an organized, ethical and honest manner. Be authentic and try to find that inner voice which will guide you when you spend enough time in the field. Don't obsess over results, rather obsess over the process. And always remember to love wildlife more than your photographs of them.

What are your future goals as a wildlife photographer? Are there any specific species or locations on your bucket list?

I want to make wildlife documentary films similar to the content we see on shows like Planet Earth. I don't have any specific species or locations on my bucket list, I believe every creature is special and has a life and story worth of telling.

What advice would you give to young photographers who are passionate about wildlife photography but are just starting out?

Don't focus so much on the equipment









and technical aspects. Instead focus on building a vision by studying the work of other artists who you admire. Build a visual vocabulary for yourself so you can use that to create imagery that reflects your vision and how you see the world. This gives you clarity on what you want to photograph and why you want to photograph it. That is far more powerful, because once you know what you want to do, you can always go get equipment and start to figure out how to do it.

In the age of digital photography and social media, how do you think wildlife photography will evolve, and what should photographers keep in mind to stay relevant?

Photographers should stop worrying about staying relevant altogether and focus on just telling stories. I feel we need to embrace the outlook that this is not about us or our ego, this is about using our artistic vision, talents and experience to put the focus on wildlife. Let them take the center stage. Let us share information about them and build awareness about conservation and protect our wildernesses through our work, by showering attention on them instead of us, the photographers.





CONSERVATION

The
Bengal Tigers
of the
Sundarbans:
Conservation
Challenges
and **Efforts**

By **Hermis Haridas**



Hermis Haridas, an award-winning wildlife photographer and conservationist, is widely recognized for his exceptional talent in capturing the beauty and essence of the natural world. Hermis' journey from a computer science graduate to a dedicated nature photographer and conservationist is an inspiring example of following one's passion and making a positive impact on the world through photography and environmental activism.

His work with Paws Trails and Mara Trails Camp demonstrates his commitment to preserving nature and supporting communities in need. With an unwavering passion for the wild, he has spent countless hours in the wilderness, patiently waiting for the perfect shot and documenting the untamed wonders of nature.

Through his enthralling images, Hermis not only spreads knowledge and creates awareness about the need of protecting animals, but he also encourages others to explore the world in order to appreciate and preserve the planet's unique biodiversity.

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The Sundarbans, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is a vast mangrove forest located where the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna rivers meet, stretching across parts of Bangladesh and India. This unique and rich ecosystem is home to the largest population of Bengal tigers, a subspecies of the Royal Bengal tiger. What makes these tigers truly special is how they have adapted to survive in the swampy, mangrove-filled landscape, making them one of the most fascinating big cat populations in the world. However, the Bengal tigers of the Sundarbans face serious threats, including the loss of their habitat, conflicts with humans, and climate change. While conservation efforts are helping, there are still many challenges in ensuring the survival of these important predators in their natural environment.

The Unique Bengal Tigers of the Sundarbans

The Bengal tiger is the most common tiger subspecies in the wild, but the Sundarbans' population is different in many ways. These tigers have developed special traits to live in the mangrove forests. Unlike other Bengal tigers in India, the Sundarbans tigers have to swim between islands and waterways to hunt and establish their territory. They've become excellent swimmers, a rare ability for big cats, which helps them thrive in this unique environment.

Another difference is that Sundarbans tigers are smaller than other Bengal tigers. This smaller size likely helps them move through the dense mangroves and swim across the rivers more easily. Their





diet is also different—they not only hunt deer and wild boar but also eat fish and other aquatic animals, showing how well they have adapted to the variety of life in the mangrove ecosystem.

These tigers play a crucial role in maintaining the balance of the Sundarbans' environment. As top predators, they keep herbivore populations in check, which helps keep the forest healthy. Their presence is a sign of the ecosystem's overall health—if tiger numbers decline, it often means the environment is also in trouble.

Threats to Bengal Tigers in the Sundarbans

While the Sundarbans is a natural refuge for Bengal tigers, their survival faces many serious challenges, from natural disasters to human activities.

a) Habitat Loss and Degradation

One of the biggest threats to Bengal tigers is the loss of their habitat. The Sundarbans is a constantly changing ecosystem, with rivers shifting and islands being eroded naturally. However, human actions like deforestation, farming, and industrial development have made this worse. Illegal logging and the conversion of mangrove forests into shrimp farms have destroyed large areas of tigers home range.

As human settlements expand into the Sundarbans, the space where tigers can roam and hunt gets smaller. This forces the tigers into smaller, isolated areas, making it harder for them to find food and more likely to come into conflict with humans.



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b) Human-Wildlife Conflict

Conflicts between humans and tigers are a long-standing issue in the Sundarbans. People living near the forest often come into direct contact with tigers, leading to dangerous situations. Sometimes, when their natural prey is scarce, tigers wander into villages looking for food, attacking livestock, and occasionally people.

The Sundarbans is known for having “man-eating” tigers, a behavior that has been noted for centuries. While the exact reasons are unclear, it is believed that habitat loss, lack of food, and the tough environment play a role. When tigers attack, villagers often retaliate by killing them or setting traps, further reducing their numbers.

c) Climate Change and Rising Sea Levels

The Sundarbans is especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Rising sea levels, higher salt content in the water, and more frequent cyclones threaten the entire ecosystem. Already, parts of the mangrove forest are sinking under the sea, and some islands have disappeared altogether.

For Bengal tigers, climate change means losing both their home and their food sources. As the forest shrinks and breaks into smaller sections, tigers are forced into even tighter spaces, increasing competition for food. The rising salt levels also harm the mangroves and the animals tigers hunt, making survival even harder.

d) Poaching and Illegal Wildlife Trade

Poaching is another major threat to Bengal tigers, despite efforts to stop it. Tigers are hunted for their skin, bones,

and other body parts, which are highly prized in traditional medicine across Asia. The remote and difficult-to-access terrain of the Sundarbans makes it hard for authorities to patrol, allowing poachers to operate with little interference. Although poaching levels in the Sundarbans are lower than in other areas, the risk is still high due to the ongoing demand for tiger parts. Stopping poaching requires not only stronger law enforcement but also international cooperation to break up the networks that trade in illegal wildlife products.

Conservation Efforts and Strategies

Despite the serious threats facing Bengal tigers in the Sundarbans, many conservation efforts are being implemented to protect this endangered species. Both India and Bangladesh understand the importance of preserving the Sundarbans and its wildlife and have taken steps to ensure the long-term survival of these tigers.

a) Protecting and Restoring Habitat

One of the most important parts of saving the Bengal tigers is protecting their habitat. Both countries have set up tiger reserves and wildlife sanctuaries in the Sundarbans, where human activities are limited to help preserve the mangrove forest.

In addition to protecting current tiger habitats, efforts are underway to restore damaged areas. This includes replanting mangroves to rebuild lost forests and create buffer zones between human communities and tiger territories. These buffer zones help reduce the chances of tigers wandering into villages and give them more space to live and hunt.



b) Reducing Conflict Between Humans and Tigers

Reducing conflicts between people and tigers is a key part of protecting them. Several initiatives have been introduced to lower the risk of encounters. These include building enclosures to protect livestock from tigers, offering alternative jobs to locals to reduce their reliance on the forest, and educating communities on how to prevent and handle tiger encounters safely.

In Bangladesh, the Sundarbans Tiger Project has been especially helpful in involving local communities in tiger conservation. The project set up a “Tiger Response Team” that responds when tigers enter villages, helping to safely capture and return the animals to the forest.

c) Anti-Poaching Efforts

Stopping poaching is essential for tiger conservation. Both India and Bangladesh have increased patrols in the Sundarbans to monitor tiger populations and stop illegal activities. In Bangladesh, the Forest Department uses modern technology like drones and camera traps to track tiger movements and detect poaching attempts.

On an international level, both countries are part of agreements like the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), which work to stop the illegal trade of tiger parts. Stronger border controls and tougher penalties for poaching are key to protecting Bengal tigers from being hunted.

d) Research and Monitoring

Good conservation plans depend on accurate information about tiger populations and their habitats. Ongoing research in the Sundarbans uses tools like camera traps, radio collars, and DNA analysis to track the tigers and understand their health and behavior. These studies are important for learning how tigers move, their habits, and how diverse their gene pool is. This data helps conservationists create better strategies to protect both the tigers and the environment they live in.

The Future of Bengal Tigers in the Sundarbans

The future of Bengal tigers in the Sundarbans is uncertain, but with ongoing conservation efforts, there is hope for their survival. The challenges are huge—climate change, conflicts with humans, and poaching remain serious threats. However, recent successes in conservation show that progress is possible, and with continued efforts, the Bengal tigers can still have a fighting chance.

The Bengal tigers of the Sundarbans are a symbol of the region’s rich natural heritage and play a vital role in the health of the mangrove ecosystem. Their survival is closely tied to the well-being of the Sundarbans itself, and protecting these tigers means preserving one of the world’s most unique and diverse environments. With continued conservation efforts and global cooperation, we can ensure that future generations will have the chance to witness the beauty and power of these majestic tigers.







SPECIES

“The **Tibetan Sand Fox** of Hanle Village”

By Gopala Krishnan





Gopala Krishnan who currently lives in Dubai is an avid wildlife photographer, conservationist, and winner of a few awards for his stunning wildlife images. During his wildlife trips, he sometimes spends the whole trip with just one species or even one single individual subject, intending to observe and understand their habits and also the threats they face.

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The Tibetan Fox, also known as the Tibetan Sand Fox, is a small breed of fox that lives in the high altitude grassland plains of the Tibetan Plateau, China and India. In India they are found in Sikkim and Ladakh. They have also been found in the Himalayan slopes of Nepal.

They are characterized by soft, thick red fur with a grey undercoat and a white underbelly with a long, bushy tail that has a white tip. Their dense coat protects them from the fierce winds of the barren landscape.

Tibetan fox are best known for their uniquely square-shaped face and small, triangular ears that are set close to their head. Perhaps the square-shape is to facilitate hunting skills. These foxes have a very keen sense of hearing, making them excellent hunters.

This fox lives in a burrow or hollow most of the time in abandoned Marmot holes.

They hunt voles, pikas, marmots, lizards, insects, birds and also scavenge on the remains of creatures.

They are not very territorial. Their mating is usually at the end of winter around February and March and they give birth to about 2-4 kits after a gestation period of about 60 days. The kits are raised in holes or burrows and they are with the parents till they are about 8-10 months old. Both the parents feed the kits and many a times the grown up kits occupy places close to the territory of their parents.

They are known to live for about 6-7 years and they are known to mate for life.





I chanced upon a mother and her two kits while on a visit to Hanle Village in Ladakh district. I went there to photograph a Pallas cat mother with her two kittens, but they had taken shelter on a mountain ridge, and the mother was extremely wary of human presence. So, I decided to give up trying to photograph the cats to avoid disturbing them and focused on the fox instead.

These are very shy animals and the mother kept a distance of about 100-150 meters from the road where we had parked our car and were shooting from inside the car. It was very difficult to spot them through the grass most of the time.

I spent 12 days on the road trying to photograph them whenever the light permitted. Since the ground is always cold the heat haze starts to affect the images as soon as the Sun is out above the horizon.

Additionally, the subjects were always far, therefore I had to depend on the longest lens 840 mm shot in DX mode. Some images were taken with the 2x Converter to get the subject at least in 20% of the frame.

This family had chosen a field very close to the village for some reason but I guessed they felt safer there, just like the wolves, who were also local residents. Nevertheless, their lives are not free of challenges. As these animals are very shy (and for a good reason) they scamper to the next available hole whenever they spot any human walking in the field or whenever the shepards, sheep, and the sheep dogs come closer.









Threats to the Tibetan Fox at Hanle village

Domestic Dogs:

The first threat to foxes existence is from the dogs whom I found everywhere inside and around Hanle. I heard many incidents of them killing the young individuals of several species, such as red and sand foxes, and even an adult pallas cat. Dogs can also prey upon ground nesting and other birds, such as the Black necked crane which migrates to this place to breed each year.

Dogs have been present around all human settlements from historic times and, in Hanle, their population was much higher compared to the other wildlife destinations I have visited so far. Despite the damage caused by the dogs, wildlife still persists thanks to their tact and perseverance. However, I can easily make out that the wildlife numbers would increase if the dog population were brought under control.

A possible solution for this issue would be the mass spaying of the bitches, reducing the problem to some extent. Proper disposal of food waste too can help in reducing the population of these dogs.

Traffic and Bikers:

The second threat comes from the traffic. In the total three weeks I stayed at Hanle in from July to August, five times I witnessed the Kiangs almost getting run over by vehicles as they crossed the road. The Sand Fox mother and two kits were crossing the road almost vey often and I am not sure how many times they have come close to being a roadkill.



The threat posed by the bikers in this fragile ecosystem is very grave. Several times, we stopped to warn bikers not to ride on the meadows, explaining that it could harm ground-nesting birds, destroy their nests and eggs. The dust they stir up, especially when ten or more bikers thunder on the mountain paths suffocated me and I can imagine the plight of poor wildlife.

We urgently need speed breakers on the road passing through the wild areas, sign boards with a clear message to reduce speed, strict penalties on the offenders and a ban on the drivers/riders from entering Hanle if they repeat the offence.

Wolves:

The hamlet also houses the Himalayan wolves and they pose a natural threat to the Tibetan Fox. To avoid the wolves the local foxes have adapted to hunting well after sunrise and in to the mid-day when the wolves are usually resting. But the threat from the Wolves is nothing compared to the threat they face due to human activity.

Towards the end of my stay with this Fox family the mother and the kits separated and the young were seen hunting not very far from the den where they were raised. I did not see the father of the kits all through my stay, but I hope he is around somewhere close so this couple can raise their next brood soon.







Her Views & Visuals

By Mridula Murali



Mridula Murali, a dedicated professional with over 15 years of experience as a Senior Associate at the State Bank of India, has established herself in the banking sector.

A graduate in Agriculture from Kerala Agricultural University, she combines her academic background with her financial expertise. Balancing her career with family life, she is supported by her husband, Muralimohan P V, and their son, Ishaan.

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Her Views and Visuals









**How did your interest in wildlife arise?
How would you describe your journey as
a photographer and as a person?**

My journey in photography began in 2018. Much earlier, I used to accompany my husband, Murali, who is a wildlife photographer, on his trips. That is how I connected with the camera. Initially, I used a Nikon Coolpix model and later upgraded to a DSLR. I started by photographing birds around my home and visiting the Kole Wetlands in Thrissur, a Ramsar site known for thousands of migratory birds. During this period, I developed a habit of observing nature, documenting and studying the behaviors of flora and fauna. Later, I began exploring nearby forest areas like Nelliampathy and Chimmini.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, I had plenty free time but couldn't go out. That's when I acquired a second-hand macro lens and started capturing images of the small creatures around my home. This became a turning point in my photography. Initially, it was about taking beautiful pictures, but it gradually evolved into storytelling and later into themed projects.

**What is your view on nature
conservation? How can wildlife
photographers contribute to protecting
Mother Nature?**

In my opinion, nature conservation should begin at home. We can plant indigenous trees around our houses and avoid using pesticides in home gardens, as these gardens support countless small insects, butterflies, dragonflies, and bees.

As photographers, we should model conservation behavior for others.

Many people are unaware of the rich biodiversity around them. I believe that, through our photos, we can educate others and inspire a protective attitude toward nature. Consolidated observations from photographers can aid in behavioral studies of plants and animals, helping us understand them better.

The insights gained can guide policymakers in creating effective conservation strategies. Every photographer should aim to deepen their knowledge of the subject and observe it regularly. During photography expeditions, photographers may encounter fascinating behaviors and perhaps even discover new species.

**Could you share some wildlife
photography tips? Any recommendations
on settings or equipment?**

- Start by loving nature. Taking photos should come second. First, enjoy being in nature, watch and listen. Gradually, you'll understand what's happening around you, making it easier to capture beautiful moments.
- To capture perfect shots, know your equipment well. Whatever camera you use, get comfortable with it and practice regularly.
- Study the work of masters in the field and learn the techniques they use. Strive to create your unique style and identity.
- There's no one-size-fits-all camera setting for wildlife photography. Set











© Mridula Murali

up your camera to capture the images you visualize.

- Choose equipment based on the type of work you plan to do.

What are your future plans in wildlife photography?

I plan to work on urban wildlife, with a focus on close-up and macro photography. We also conduct photography exhibitions in schools, colleges, and public places in Thrissur to raise awareness about nature conservation among children and the public. We're planning to expand these activities across all districts of Kerala.

Tell us about the equipment you use.

I primarily focus on habitat, for which I use a Nikon ZF camera with a Nikkor Z 100-400mm F/4.5-5.6 lens, and for macro work, I use a Nikkor Z 105mm F/2.8 lens. Recently, I started using the OM System OM-1 Mark II with a 90mm F/3.5 macro lens.





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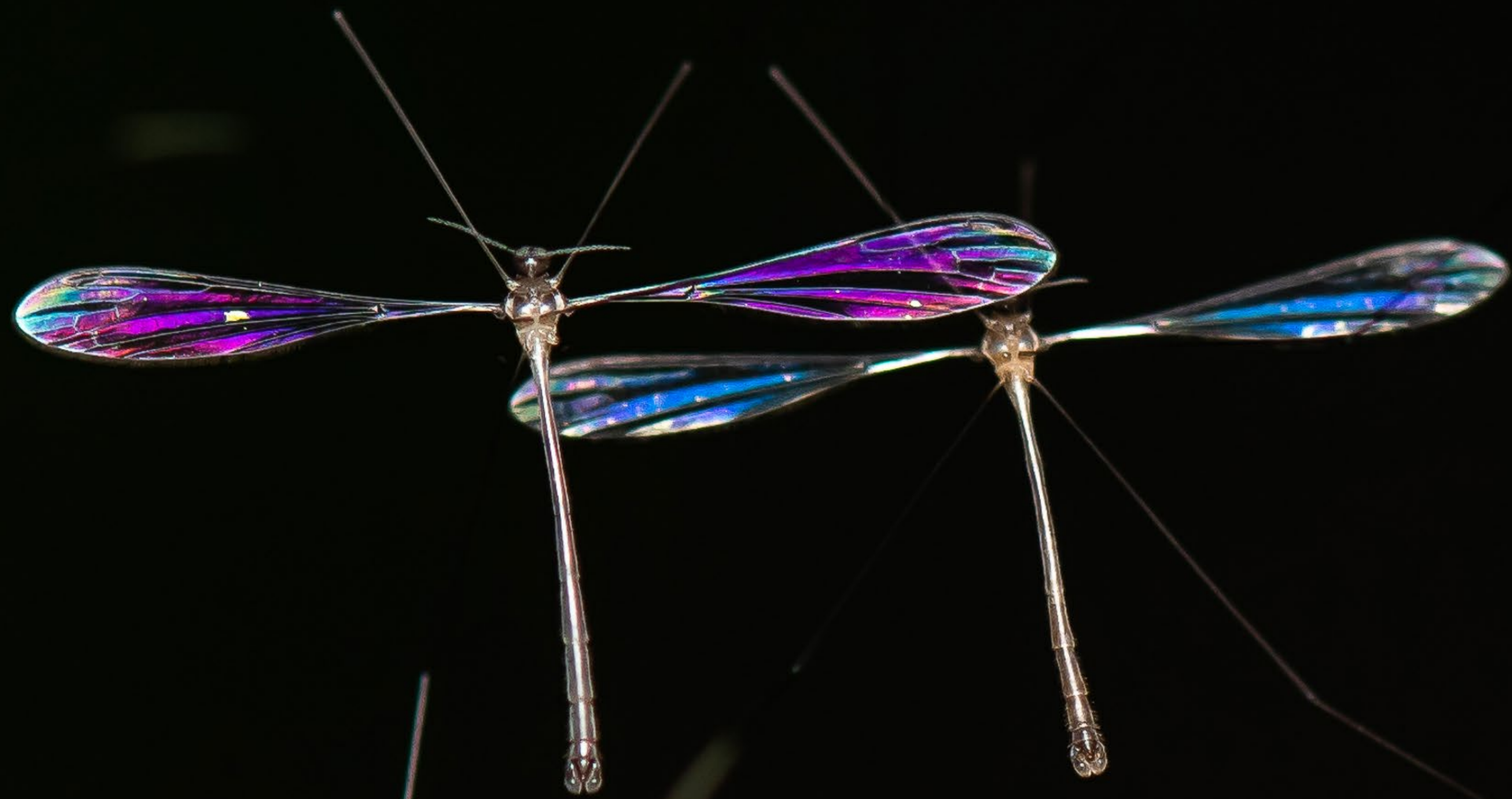




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CUB'S CORNER

NATURE
THROUGH
MY EYES

Shreyovi Mehta



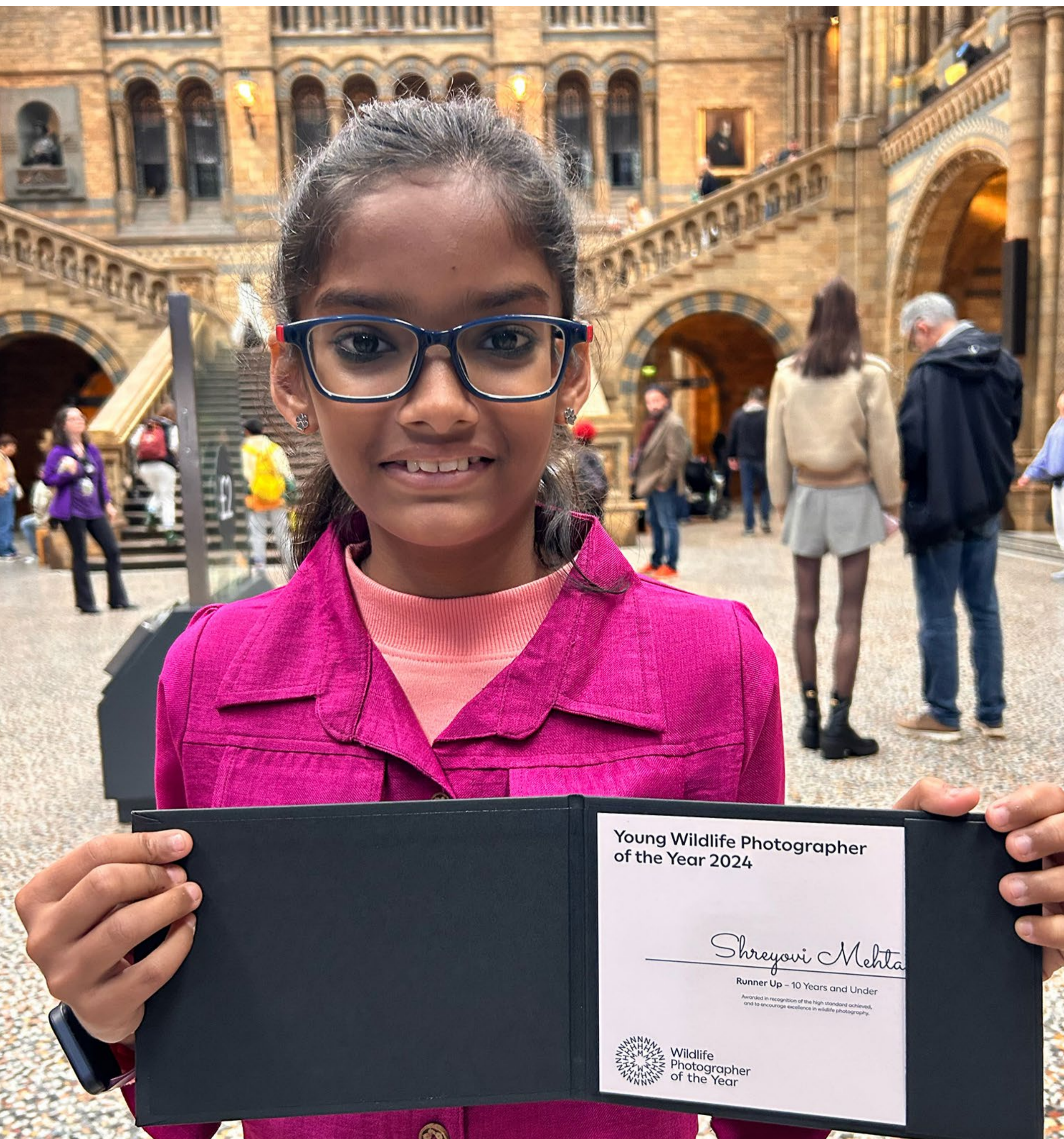
CUB'S CORNER

CUB'S CORNER



At just ten years old, Shreyovi Mehta from India has become the youngest Indian to win the prestigious Wildlife Photographer of the Year award. Her striking image of peahens in the morning mist at Keoladeo National Park has earned international acclaim. Growing up in a family passionate about wildlife, Shreyovi has visited numerous national parks and dreams of exploring the Himalayas with her father on a snow leopard expedition.

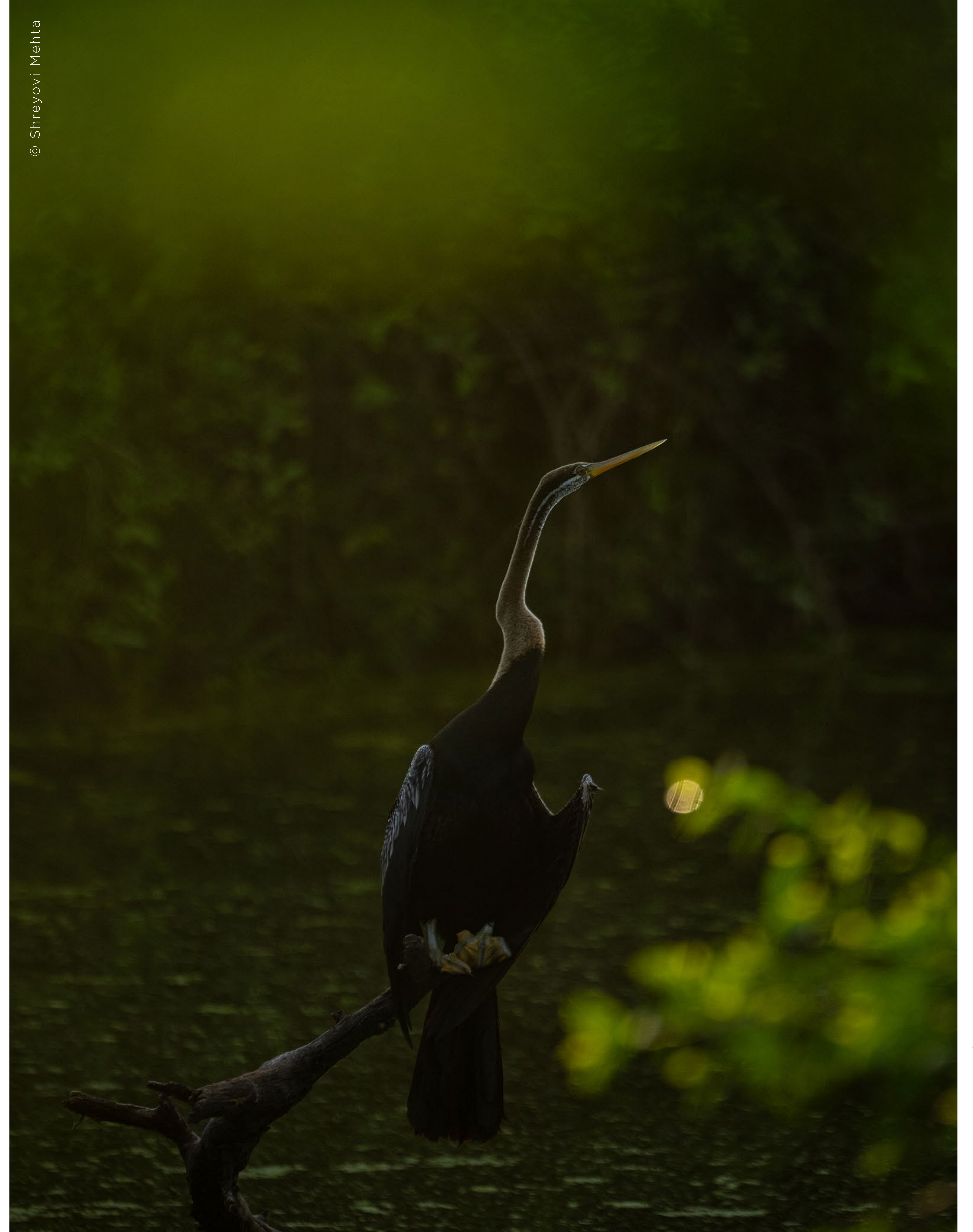
[instagram.com/shreyovi_mehta](https://www.instagram.com/shreyovi_mehta)



Ten year old Shreyovi Mehta from India has scripted history by becoming the youngest photographer from India to win the prestigious Natural History Museum's Wildlife Photographer of the Year competition in October 2024. At the age of 9, Shreyovi was declared as the runner up at what is popularly called the 'Oscars of Wildlife Photography'

Shreyovi's image of two peahens silhouetted against the early morning winter mist of Keoladeo National Park in Bharatpur has caught global attention ever since Natural History Museum released her image in the official media

© Shreyovi Mehta







© Shreyovi Mehta

release showcasing, the first set of winning images in August 2024. She was later awarded in the grand award night in London on October 8th, 2024.

Shreyovi Mehta belongs to a family of India's leading wildlife professionals. Her mother - Kahini Ghosh Mehta - is the founder of India's foremost wildlife photography tourism company Nature Wanderers. Her father - Shivang Mehta - is an internationally acclaimed photographer, an accomplished author and has worked on critical projects with various conservation and government bodies. With this background, Shreyovi started her journey in wildlife at the age of two when she visited Ranthambore for the first time and since then she has travelled to ten national parks of India including Corbett, Bandhavgarh, Pench, Satpura, Kanha, Keoladeo, Panna, Sariska and Rann of Kutch.

She started getting a hang of photography using her father's spare camera bodies by the age of six and ever since she manages to spend around 30-40 days on the field with him annually. Shreyovi loves going for tiger safaris, but her keen interest is to explore forests on foot and hence Keoladeo National Park in Bharatpur gives her the freedom to document wildlife on foot.

Balancing her studies and her passion for wildlife photography, Shreyovi - a grade five student of Shiv Nadar school gets ample support from her school which is also proud of her achievements and talent. She aspires and dreams to explore the Himalayas and join her father for a snow leopard expedition in the coming years.

Shreyovi's award and recognition is a clear testimony of the fact that children can be productively groomed and nurtured at a young age and their skills and abilities if tapped and channelised in a positive direction can help a long way in shaping their future.

























TRAVELOGUE

Gorilla Conservation Trek

By Shyam Menon

© Shyam Menon

TRAVELOGUE





Shyam Menon is a seasoned wildlife and bird photographer whose passion for the natural world began long before the digital era. Transitioning from film to digital cameras, he brings both deep-rooted appreciation and technical skill to his photography.

Inspired by National Geographic and pioneers like David Attenborough, Jacques Cousteau, and Dr. Salim Ali, Shyam combines his love for nature with his expertise as a lighting professional in the UAE.

His understanding of light enhances his work, helping him capture the wild's unscripted beauty. With extensive travels across national parks in India and Africa, Shyam hopes his images will inspire a new generation to embrace nature photography as a powerful conservation tool.

**[instagram.com/reachshyam](https://www.instagram.com/reachshyam)
[facebook.com/shyam.menon.589](https://www.facebook.com/shyam.menon.589)**







Climate change, Global warming, biodiversity degradation, CO2 emissions are some huge concerns we are facing today, overwhelming the collective efforts by so many organizations and governments across the world. The struggle to make any huge impact on the status quo has been frustrating. Surprisingly, if one looks back at history, most of these initiatives on conservation have been sparks of individual brilliance with sheer grit and determination. One such name is Diane Fossey, whose contribution to the field of Gorilla conservation and with it, the biodiversity of the Virunga mountains covering Uganda, Congo and Rawanda has been unprecedented. Every nature lover surely remembers the famous article in the National Geographic published in 1978, featuring the gorilla named Koko who could understand and use sign language. I have been longing to see the Gorillas in its wild natural habitat ever since.

Gorilla conservation has since come a long way and we have witnessed steadily rising numbers of the mountain gorillas from what was a mere 240 in 1981 to what could well be around 1000 today and the status of Gorilla has been downgraded from “Critically Endangered” to “Endangered” in the IUCN Red list of Threatened species. When a particular species makes a dramatic comeback, it is the ecosystem that is rejuvenated and along with it a plethora of species, flora and fauna make a comeback. The role of the community in this revival has been commendable.

Today Gorillas can be found in the network of parks along the Virunga





© Shyam Menon



© Shyam Menon

mountains crossing the borders of Rwanda, Uganda and the DRC and all these countries offer excellent opportunity to witness these magnificent apes in their wild habitat. What is noteworthy is that when one undertakes such a trek, it is making a big contribution to the conservation efforts of this fragile ecosystem. It is crucial for any conservation program to involve the local community and ensure they benefit from gorilla tourism. Almost 10% of the park fees goes to the local community development programs like Education, health care, drinking water and most importantly employment.

Mgahinga Gorilla National Park in Uganda not only organizes gorilla treks but also offers the opportunity to trek for the endangered Golden Monkey, along with excellent birding experiences. The national park consists of three peaks called Mount Gahinga at 3,747 mts, Mount Sabiniyo at 3,645 mts and Mount Mohavura at a height of 4,127 mts. The gorilla trek is organized in batches of 8-9 visitors who get to spend an hour with the group of habituated Gorillas. These animals are constantly on the move, looking for fodder and an advance team of trackers leave early to look out for where the gorillas have slept overnight by locating their beds which are made from vegetation. The visitors have a strict protocol to follow and once their location is confirmed, they start their trek with armed rangers and naturalists who will brief you along the way about the local species inhabiting the forests.







The trek can take anywhere between 3-6 hours depending on their location. The initial climb (from the reserve's parking lot to the base camp) is a climb of a narrow uneven zig zag path of stones flanked by stone walls which has been laid out this way to stop the Cape buffaloes

from encroaching. The rest of the trek from the base camp will depend on the location of the gorillas on that particular day. Mgahinga forest has one resident group of habituated gorillas called the Nyakagezi, which includes nine gorillas, among them four males three of them

silverbacks, two adult females, one juvenile and an infant. An hour with these gorillas gives one an amazing insight into the lives of a species that shares 98% of the human DNA. The rangers constantly communicate with gorillas assuring them of their safety at all times.

The Golden monkey is another endangered primate found in Uganda and is a subspecies of the blue monkey. There are around 2000-4000 individuals estimated in the wild. Their struggle for survival has been largely overshadowed by that of the Gorillas and the



© Shyam Menon



© Shyam Menon





Chimpanzee, but its rather concerning that reportedly they registered a decline of around 41% from around 1463 to 521 (conservative estimate) between 1998-2003 alone. Since then, the habituation program for Golden monkeys was initiated in 2003 for the purpose of research and ecotourism. The golden monkeys are restricted within the Bamboo zones of the Virunga mountains.

The Mgahinga Golden monkeys trek is an excellent opportunity to peek into the lives of these beautiful primates. The trek to reach the golden monkeys in our case turned out to be more grueling than the Gorilla trek. The terrain leading to the bamboo forests is difficult and once there, had to cut through vegetation and make our path to reach the group of monkeys. The Golden monkeys are usually found in groups of 60 -100 led by an alpha male. The same protocols established for gorillas' treks apply here as well and one has to maintain a minimum distance, avoid wild gestures and loud noise, wear a face mask at all times.







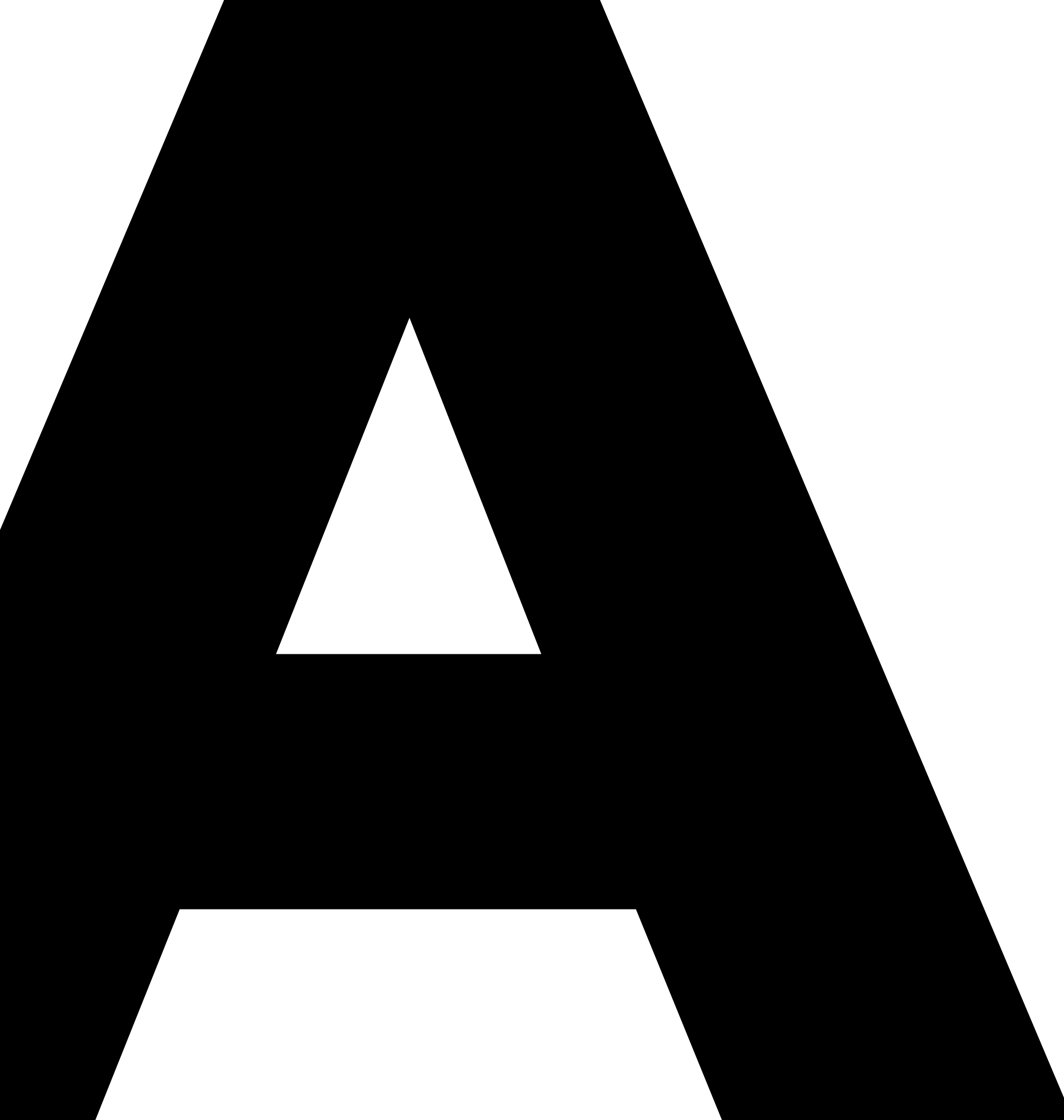
THROUGH THE LENS

The Enigmatic Ganesha Spider

By Dr. K. M. Anand

THROUGH THE LENS

© Dr. K. M. Anand



Dr KM Anand, a paediatrician from Kochi India started his photographic journey when he had time in his hands during the Covid period. For him examining a child as well as wildlife photography requires patience, preservice and practice. Although wildlife photography is his main passion, he is not averse to do other genre like stage, landscape.

During his photography journey he has won few prizes which includes the Kerala state award 2021 and 2024, Nature in Focus Award 2022, BBC wildlife award, Journal of Wildlife photography award, Wildlife abstract photography award and a few more. With his photographs he hopes the younger generation will be motivated to take care and protect the environment which is under threat in the name of development.

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[threads.net/@kalyanpuranand](https://www.threads.net/@kalyanpuranand)

The Enigmatic Ganesha Spider: A Unique Find in Agumbe's Evergreen Forests

During a herping trip to the lush evergreen forests of **Agumbe, India**, I encountered a rare and intriguing spider







species known as the **Ganesha spider**. Nestled deep in the Western Ghats, Agumbe is often dubbed the “Cherrapunji of the South” for its immense rainfall and dense biodiversity. Known for its reptiles, frogs, and rich insect life, Agumbe has long been a paradise for naturalists and photographers seeking to capture the mysteries of its hidden creatures.

A Special Discovery

After spending hours photographing the usual suspects—frogs, insects, and common spiders—I stumbled upon an unexpected gem. Our group of naturalists had just wrapped up a session of macro photography when we spotted something hanging from the branch of a tree. This was no ordinary spider; it had a distinctive shape, resembling none other than the revered **Hindu deity Ganesha**, the elephant-headed God known for his large ears and trunk.

At first glance, the spider’s body seemed to mirror the features of Ganesha, with the elongated “trunk” shape and ear-like structures making it stand out from the other spiders we had come across that night. The Ganesha spider is a species that has been rarely documented in the scientific community, with sparse literature describing its characteristics. This lack of information made our discovery even more exciting, as we realized we had come across something truly unique.

The Ganesha Spider: A Rare Specimen

Very little is known about this rare spider. While some local naturalists refer to it as the Ganesha spider, the scientific classification remains unclear due to the limited studies conducted on it. This scarcity of information adds an air of mystery to this species, which inhabits the humid, thick forests of the Western Ghats. Its exact habitat range, feeding patterns, and behaviors are still topics that invite further research and exploration.

What struck me the most about the Ganesha spider was its intricate web structure. Unlike other spiders whose webs are constructed in open spaces, the Ganesha spider’s web was discreetly built between branches, camouflaged in the foliage. This made it difficult to spot at first, but upon closer inspection, the artistry of its silk weaving became apparent.

It was both a shelter and a deadly trap, waiting for an unsuspecting prey to stumble into its sticky embrace.

A Surprising Encounter: The Cicada's Demise

As I crouched down to get some portrait shots of the spider, the unexpected happened—a cicada flew directly into the spider's web, unable to free itself from the silk's clutches. For those unfamiliar with cicadas, they are robust insects known for their loud, distinct sounds during the mating season. They often remain high in the trees, but this unfortunate one flew directly into the web, unaware of the predator lurking nearby.

In an instant, the Ganesha spider sprang into action. With lightning speed, it latched onto the cicada, wrapping it in silk and effectively immobilizing it. What followed was nothing short of a spectacle. The spider toyed with the cicada, almost as if testing its strength, before delivering a lethal bite. This “deathly embrace” was a stark reminder of the ruthless efficiency of nature's predators. The Ganesha spider, like most arachnids, relies on its venom to subdue its prey, liquefying the internal organs of the cicada before consuming it.

As I watched, I was fascinated by the methodical way in which the spider worked. It consumed the fleshy parts of the cicada, leaving behind the dry, inedible remnants—such as the wings and harder exoskeletal parts. It was as though the spider had a preference for the succulent inner portions, saving the less palatable bits for later, or perhaps discarding them entirely.

A Night to Remember in Agumbe

The experience of watching this predator in action was nothing short of extraordinary. As a wildlife photographer, moments like these are what we live for. Capturing the **Ganesha spider** in action not only added a rare subject to my portfolio but also deepened my understanding of the intricate food webs that exist in the wild. The rest of the night was filled with awe as we continued our exploration of the Agumbe forests. While frogs croaked in the distance and the occasional rustle of leaves hinted at other creatures moving about, it was the memory of the Ganesha spider and its swift cicada hunt that left a lasting impression on me.

Agumbe itself, with its diverse fauna and rich ecosystem, remains a vital region for both conservation efforts and scientific research. Despite being known primarily for its **King Cobras** and **Malabar pit vipers**, the region houses many lesser-known species like the Ganesha spider, which deserve attention and study. As we learn more about these creatures, we gain insight into the balance of life in the forests, understanding how each species—no matter how small or obscure—plays a role in maintaining the ecological equilibrium.

The Importance of Documenting Rare Species

It is moments like these that underscore the importance of documenting rare and lesser-known species. While large mammals often take the spotlight in wildlife conservation efforts, smaller creatures like spiders and insects are critical to the health of ecosystems.



© Dr. K. M. Anand



© Dr. K. M. Anand

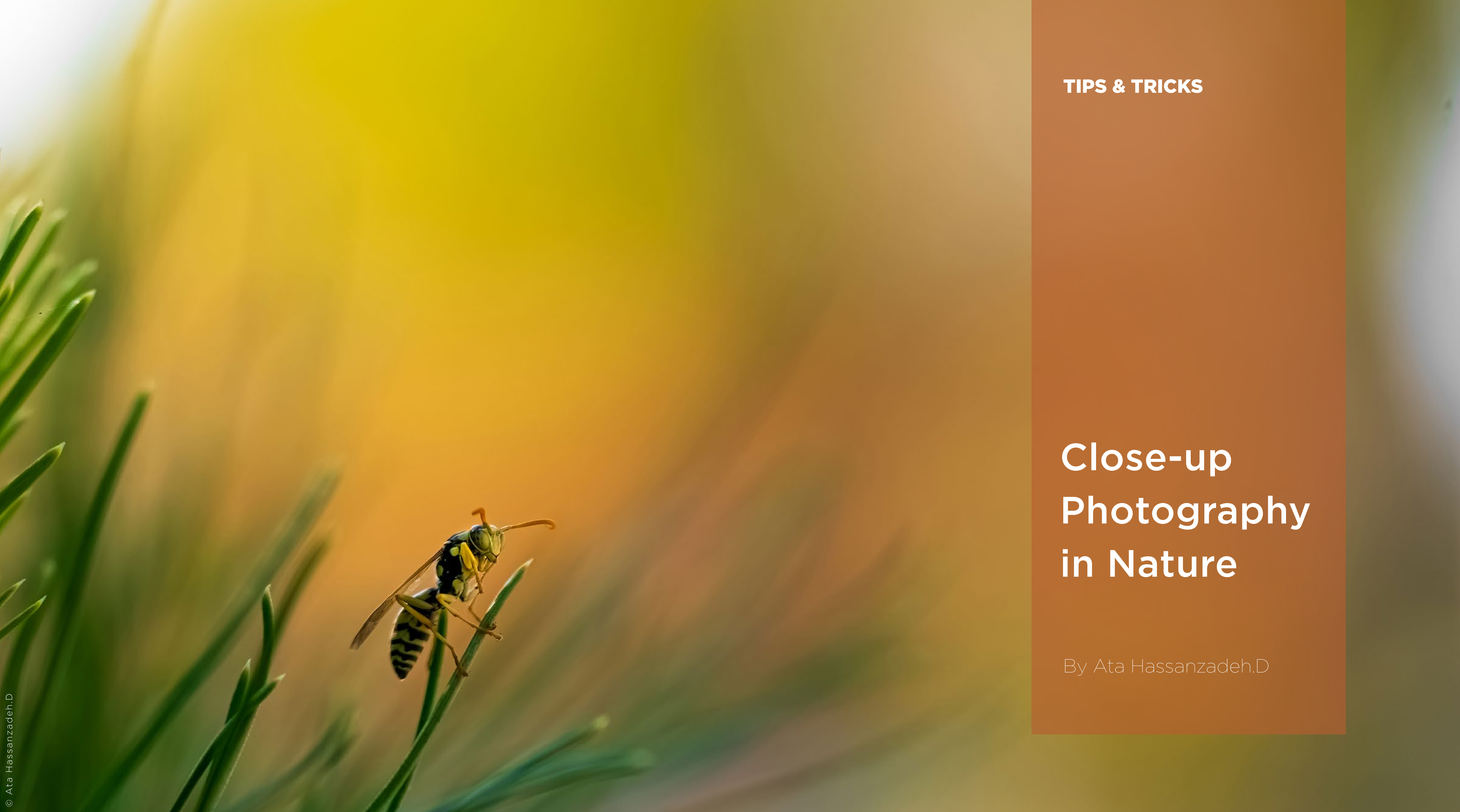
Spiders, in particular, are vital in controlling insect populations, acting as both predators and prey within the food web. The **Ganesha spider**, while not yet widely recognized, could be an important species for further study. Its behavior, habitat preferences, and role in the local ecosystem are subjects that could contribute to our understanding of the biodiversity of the Western Ghats. By documenting these encounters and sharing them with the broader community, we help raise awareness about the hidden gems that still thrive in our forests—gems that, if not protected, could disappear before we even begin to understand their significance.

A Final Thought

The Ganesha spider's rarity makes it a symbol of the unexplored and often overlooked wonders of the natural world. In a time when many species are under threat due to habitat loss, climate change, and human interference, every discovery becomes more meaningful. As I left the forest that night, I couldn't help but reflect on how much of nature remains a mystery, waiting to be uncovered by those willing to look.

The night in Agumbe was one well spent, not only because of the thrilling wildlife sightings but also because it reminded me that even the smallest creatures have stories worth telling. The Ganesha spider, with its unique appearance and predatory prowess, is a testament to the wonders that lie hidden in the world's forests, waiting for someone to shine a light on them.



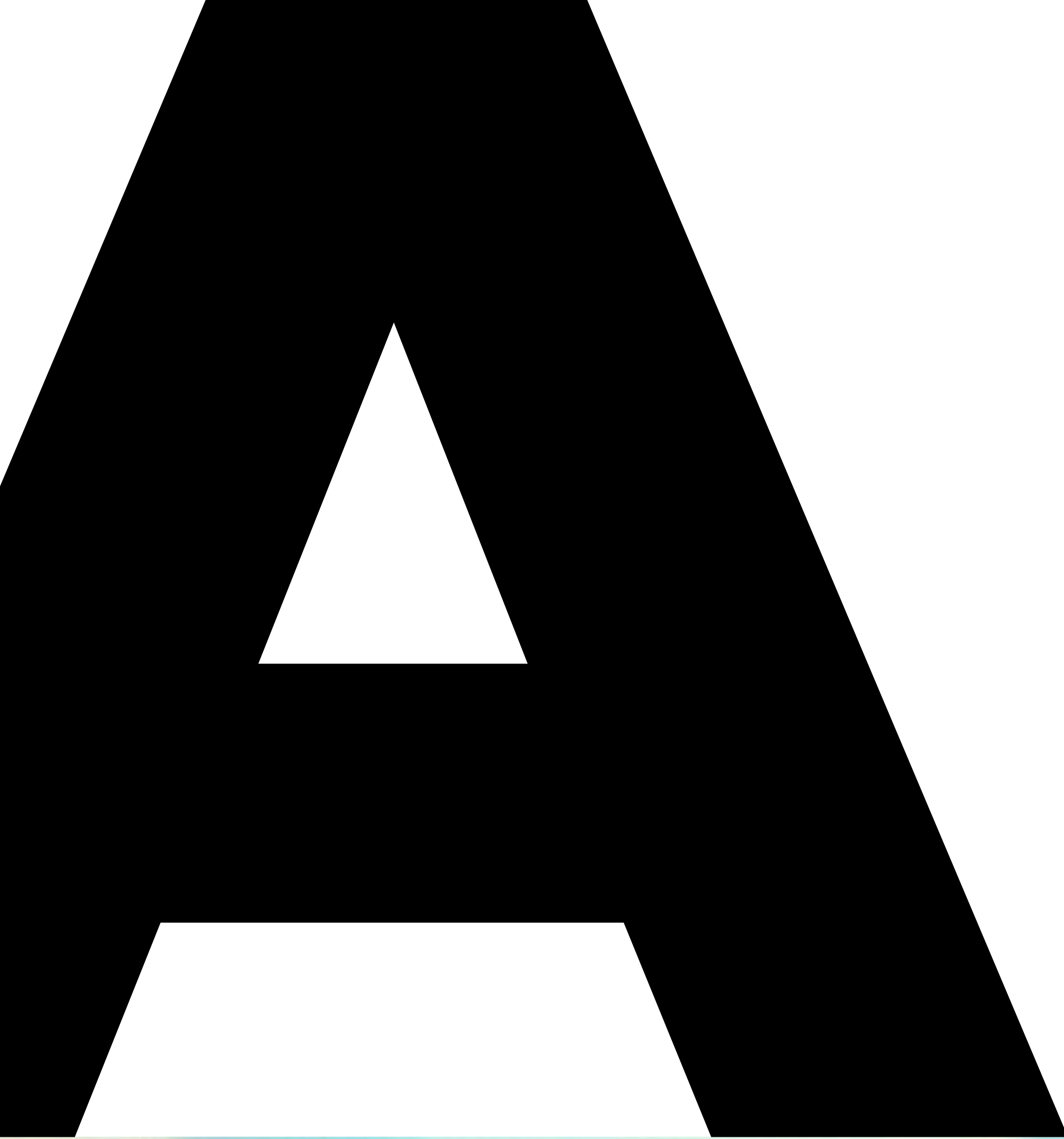


TIPS & TRICKS

Close-up Photography in Nature

By Ata Hassanzadeh.D

TIPS & TRICKS



Ata Hassanzadeh Dastforoush, based in Urmia, West Azerbaijan, Iran, is the author of *Close-up Photography in Nature*. His photography focuses on capturing intricate details and the soft rays of sunlight on his subjects.

A member of FIAP with over 25 acceptances, Ata has also had four articles on photography accepted at the 6th International and 7th National Conference on Civil Engineering, Architecture, Art, and Urban Design at Tabriz Islamic Art University in July 2024.

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

As the name of this style of photography suggests, it is different from the Macro photography. It can even be said that the equipment related to these two might be slightly different. As a Close-up, Macro



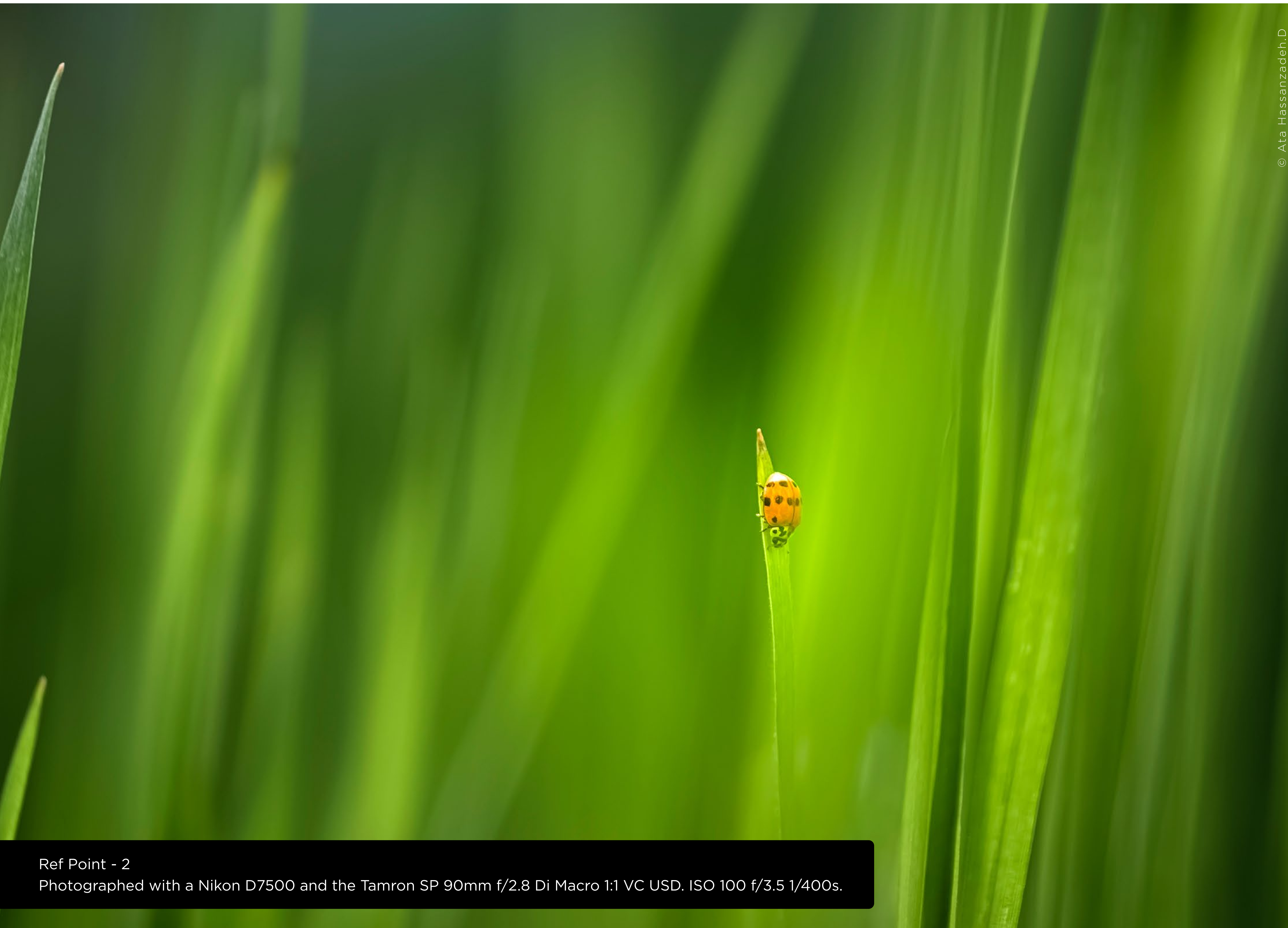
Photographed with a Nikon D7500 and the Sigma 150-600mm F5-6.3 DG OS HSM | C. ISO 250 f/6.3 1/2500s at 600mm -0.7EV



Ref Point - 2

The Winner of Shutterbug's Spring "Time of the Season" Photo Contest. Jun 28, 2021.

Photographed with a Nikon D7500 and the Tamron SP 90mm f/2.8 Di Macro 1:1 VC USD ISO 200 f/13 1/250s.



© Ata Hassanzadeh.D

Ref Point - 2
Photographed with a Nikon D7500 and the Tamron SP 90mm f/2.8 Di Macro 1:1 VC USD. ISO 100 f/3.5 1/400s.

and a Nature photographer, I would like to mention a few tips for lovers of these styles in Nature :

1- Always carry equipment such as a backup battery, an extra lens, a compact tripod, a water spray bottle, a small pocket mirror, a 20x30 cm reflector or glossy A4 paper, a small pair of scissors, clips, and LED lights. If you plan to shoot in rainy weather, be sure to bring protective gear for both yourself and your camera.

2- Never rush to find your subject (whether it is pre-planned or not). In a hurry, you may easily miss your interesting subjects. However, if you neglect it, maybe that scene will not be repeated for your photography, and you will miss it! For example, always remember to search among the leaves of trees, bushes and grass. This Photo was The Winner of Shutterbug's Spring "Time of the Season" Photo Contest. Jun 28, 2021.

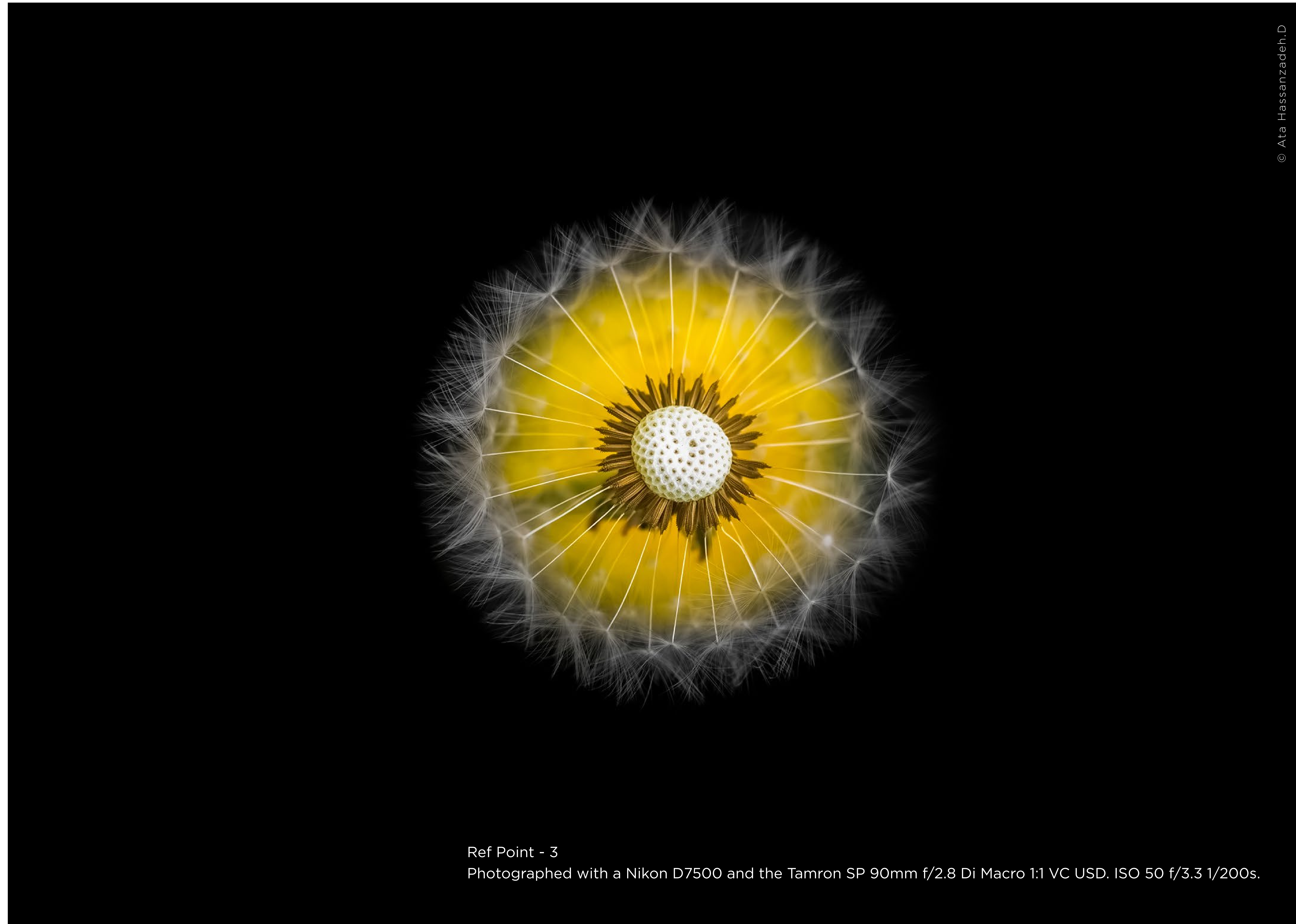
When I took this picture, it was almost noon and the sky was partly cloudy,. I started to water the flowers in the yard, and suddenly I noticed that a fresh rose leaf was folded in a strange way. When I gently pushed aside a few of its branches, I saw a spider laying on its web. I didn't waste time, I took my camera and started photographing this beautiful leaf with spider webs. Due to the partly cloudy sky, a ray of sunlight sometimes shines on the leaves, then I positioned the camera in continuous shooting mode and took several pictures of this beautiful and scary subject.

In this other example, of this beautiful

ladybug, it was also near noon when I noticed it among the grasses that had been watered. Most of the time, I have a camera with me, so I can quickly pick it up. In this case, because it was at a very low height, I had to start photographing the ladybug lying on the grass! However, this didn't stop me from capturing this beautiful existence on my camera sensor.

3- Don't keep the camera angle or your position fixed—take photos of the subject from multiple angles and positions. Move the camera around the subject or change your location; if the subject is movable, use holding clips to adjust its position for the best shot. Unfortunately, many amateur photographers—and even some professionals—settle for just one or two location changes. Personally, I continue shooting as long as I can change the position of myself, the camera, or the subject, resulting in multiple angles of the same subject. See the photo below for reference:

This photo actually depicts two subjects in one scene. At ground level, there's a yellow dandelion flower, and about 10 cm above it, angled slightly, are delicate dandelion seeds ready to drift in the wind. I captured this image by bending slightly toward the flower and adjusting the camera angle to create depth and interest. Remember to vary your position and the camera angle relative to the subject—and, if possible, adjust the subject's position as well. I also recommend trying eye-level photography for subjects like flowers, tree leaves (if height isn't an issue), and even insects. Take a look at the photo, which captures a macro shot of a dragonfly's face! This



Ref Point - 3

Photographed with a Nikon D7500 and the Tamron SP 90mm f/2.8 Di Macro 1:1 VC USD. ISO 50 f/3.3 1/200s.



photo was The winner of the “Your Photos” page competition as “Star Photo” . BBC WILDLIFE MAGAZINE, August 2021 | Vol. 39 No. 09| Pg. 86 .

4 - Always observe the light on your subject to capture it at the best possible moment. Good lighting can make even an ordinary subject look remarkable! See the photo below, where I captured a halo of sunlight shining through the leaves of the tree on this single branch. When going under the trees, look for the sunlight on their leaves!

5 - To take a photo with a shallow depth of field with a soft and beautiful background (moody), you can use wider apertures, and if there is no suitable sunlight on the subject or its surroundings, you can use an LED light or the flash of your mobile phone. Pay attention to this photo taken at sunset. You can see all the elements of the scene and beauty in this photo.

6-Use a low ISO value as much as you can!.

7- With a bit of patience and careful observation of insects or other creatures in nature.

Ref Point - 3

The winner of the “Your Photos” page competition as “Star Photo” . BBC WILDLIFE MAGAZINE, August 2021 | Vol. 39
Photographed with a Nikon D7500 and the Tamron SP 90mm f/2.8 Di Macro 1:1 VC USD. ISO 100 f/13 1/250s



Ref Point - 3

Photographed with a Nikon D7500 and the Sigma 150-600mm F5-6.3 DG OS HSM |
C. ISO 1000 f/6.3 1/3200s at 600mm -0.7EV



Ref Point - 4
Photographed with a Nikon D7500 and the Tamron SP 90mm f/2.8 Di Macro 1:1 VC USD. ISO 100 f/3.2 1/800s.



Ref Point - 5
Photographed with a Nikon D7500 and the Tamron SP 90mm f/2.8 Di Macro 1:1 VC USD. ISO 100 f/3.2 1/400s.



Ref Point - 7
Photographed with a Nikon D7500 and the Tamron SP 90mm f/2.8 Di Macro 1:1 VC USD. ISO 100 f/3.2 1/400s.



Art of Nature!
By Paloma Collar

Four-spotted Blisterbeetle (*Mylabris quadripunctata*)



Princely Tiger Moth (*Chrysocale principalis*)

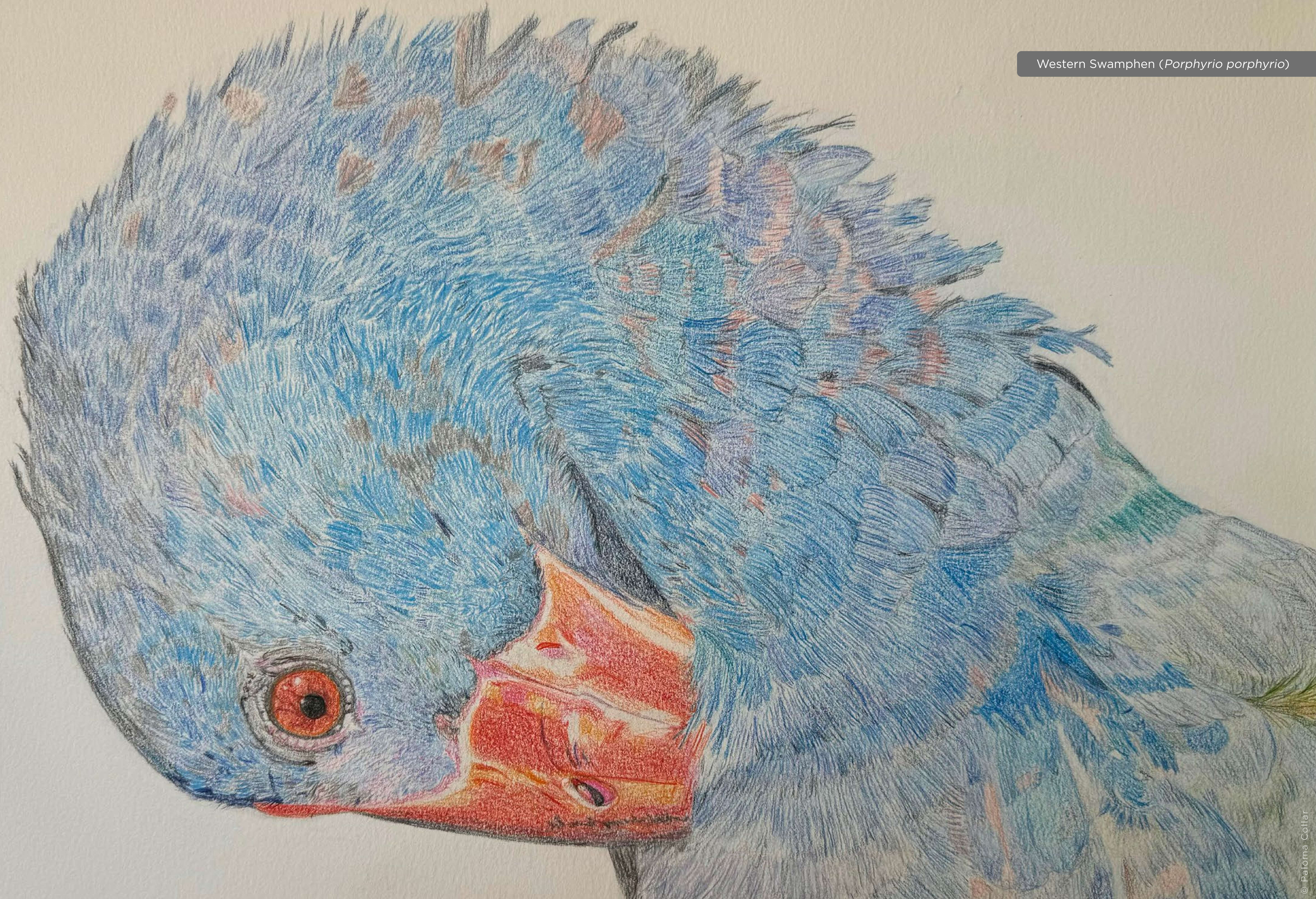


Paloma Collar, an artist from Madrid, has cultivated a lifelong passion for nature and art, shaped by family summers in the Madrid mountains and her parents' encouragement of creativity. Self-taught, Paloma is inspired by wildlife and often collaborates with photographers to bring birds and animals to life in her detailed, realistic drawings. Her work reflects her deep respect for nature, whether in traditional pencil and watercolor or digital formats, and has been displayed in a Madrid gallery since 2021.

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



Western Swamphen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*)



Buff-necked Ibis (*Theristicus caudatus*)



My name is Paloma Collar, I'm from Madrid and I draw with my left hand, although I write with my right hand because I was forced to do so at a young age at school.

I share my name, Paloma, with a very common species of bird, a pigeon (Columbidae). In Madrid it is common to find many women who bear my name.

From a very young age I spent the long summers in the mountains of Madrid, where without realizing it, my family gradually instilled in me a great respect and love for nature.

In my house we all enjoyed drawing and paint. There was never a lack of coloured pencils, colouring books, drawing pads and doing so was very valued. My father also made small wood carvings that always impressed us.

In the winters, on Sunday mornings, our parents took us to visit the wonderful museums in Madrid. I repeated this custom with my children to inspire in them a love of beauty.

While I was at university, I participated in a ceramics workshop where clay modelling was done. Thanks to it I acquired a good ability to understand the volumes of the pieces I was working with.

Around that same time, I had a camera and even had a small black and white laboratory. Later, I took several workshops to photograph birds, and I formed a group with my colleagues where we exchanged the photos we were taking.



Cordillera Central Tree Frog (*Hyloscirtus larinopygion*)

Around that same time, I had a camera and even had a small black and white laboratory. Later, I took several workshops to photograph birds, and I formed a group with my colleagues where we exchanged the photos we were taking.

My job helped me to strengthen this hobby, as I worked for a few years in the archive of the Royal Botanical Garden in Madrid where beautiful drawings and engravings were kept (especially from the expedition of J. C. Mutis), which were imprinted in my head.

If we add the love of nature, artistic activities at home, clay modelling, a love of photography and a taste for drawing and engraving, all this has created a solid base to later make my own drawings.

Although I always liked to draw, the trigger for this last more intense phase occurred not long ago, one day at work when I was bored Looking at the photos of my colleagues in the workshops, I made a drawing of a bee-eater, which I was even able to colour with the range of colours that my office used. I liked how it turned out and after this, many others followed until we reached almost the current 400.

I am self-taught, I never had the opportunity to attend courses or study a career dedicated to art, although I do have a few books that show how to draw birds, explaining what their anatomy is like.

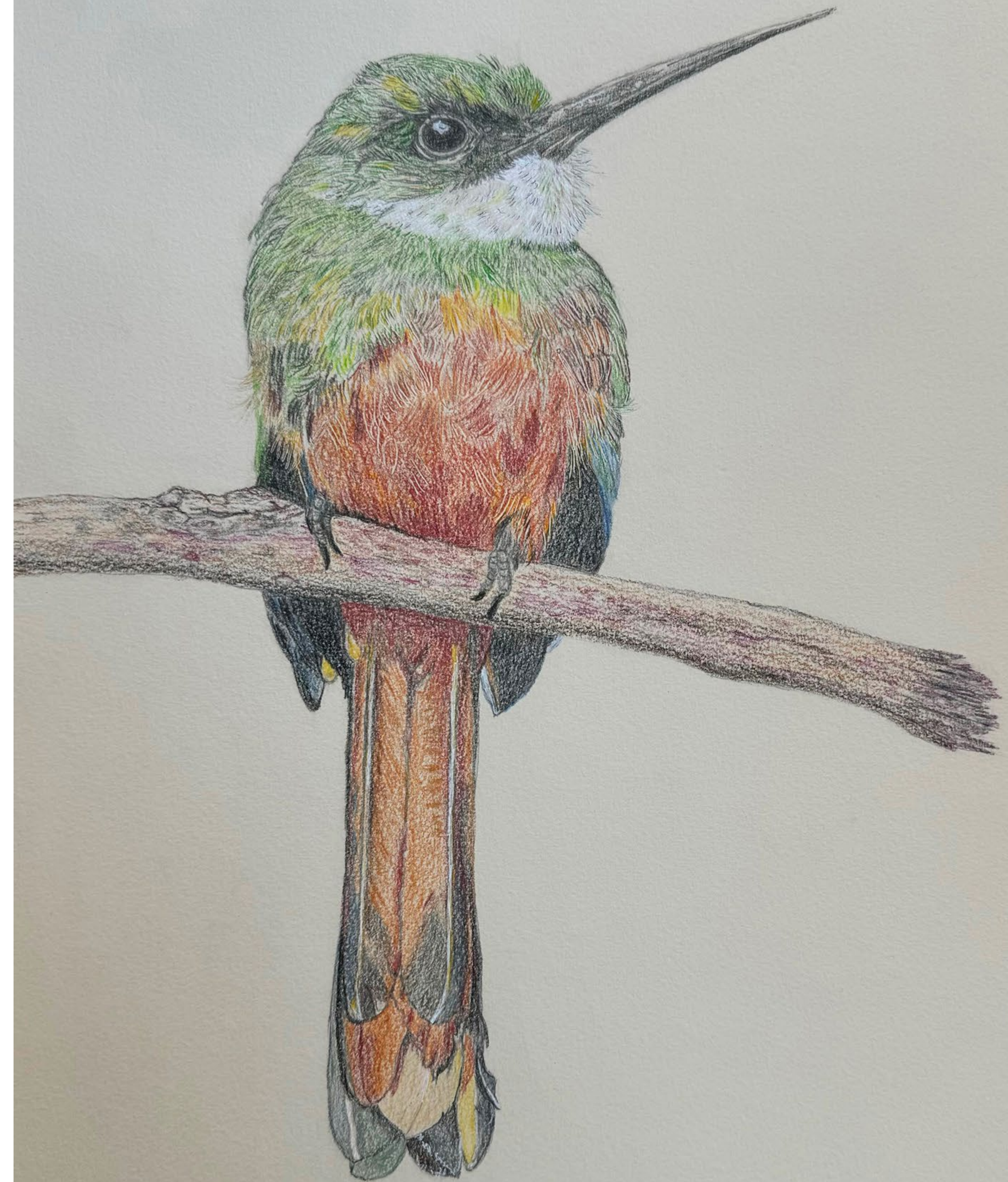
To draw, I am moved by common

sense and an attempt to be faithful to photography that at that time serves as a guide and that is why my style is realistic. This is easy and difficult at the same time.

It's find, as it's already there, in the photo, you just must draw it and it is not necessary to remember what it looked like, how long the beak or tail was or how far the dark spot on the head reached. And difficult because on many occasions I fall in love with an image (lately they are images from Social Media) and without thinking about it for a second, I contact the author to tell him or her that if he or she has no problem with me drawing his or her spectacular photograph; I let myself be carried away by the beauty of photography and when I go to draw it I see that it is very complicated and I ask myself why I am so impulsive and do not think about the complication that photography entails. The only thing I do pay attention to is that it is very well focused, to try to get the most out of it.

Generally, the authors of the photographs gladly accept and comment that they are already eager to see the result. I like to publish my drawings including the authors of the photograph. It is a nice way to share the work of others and to establish friendships that would have been impossible for me by other means.

The authors of the photos are from any corner of the world. Social Media opens borders and make it easier to interact with anyone who is part of them, also being able to speak in any language via translators. Thanks to this, I have expanded the collection of birds and other animals from many countries.



Rufous-tailed Jacamar (*Galbula ruficauda*)



Indian Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*)

Boana Riojana (*Hypsiboas riojanus*)

Sometimes, I don't know the name of the selected animal, but the authors immediately give it to me so that I can name them. I think this is a way of giving them their own entity and doing my part in their conservation. I believe that everything that has a name is alive, and it is necessary to respect and preserve it.

The Amazon rainforest is one of those places that I tend to visualize with more intensity since the birds present a wide variety of shapes and colours, each more beautiful and exotic than the next. Africa is also very attractive, especially because of its large mammals.

When planning the drawing, I spend time thinking about the paper I'll use to capture it, since the size of the photograph doesn't always match the size of the paper. I also consider which pencils to use. Over time, and thanks to my hobby, I've built up a large collection of various types. After the first deliberation I choose the colour of the paper, which is also important, because depending on the type of photograph and its background, a white, black paper or even tan, blue and grey colours will be more suitable.

The formats I use the most are A3 and A4, although lately I also draw with other landscape measurements that allow me to frame other different figures. The latest acquisition has been round paper where I have thought of making a collection of portraits.

Once the material has been chosen, I usually view the photograph on an iPad to be able to enlarge the image and look at the details. I like to draw with

mechanical pencils. I am used to it and although it has always been said that the hardness of the pencil is important, it is essential for me that it is comfortable and with fine strokes. Having these details frees me from making circles, ovals and other geometric figures that many draftsmen consider essential to be able to make a proportionate drawing but which I don't like and never use.

The last step, but not least, is to shade the drawing with the pencil to give it volume. I let the drawing rest one night and the next morning, I check if I have captured the essence of the animal. If I am convinced, I give it the go-ahead, and if not, I touch it up a little and leave it ready for the next phase.

I never trace, it seems to me that pencil drawing is fundamental and is part of the challenge of reproducing the image, perhaps it is the most complicated part, but when you start it and see how it takes shape, it is comforting.

When I'm satisfied with how the pencil drawing turned out, I start with the colour, which is where the real magic happens. I don't have a specific method to give colour to my drawings. Sometimes I use watercolours, sometimes coloured pencils or crayons, fine markers, sometimes I make mixtures between one and the other, I think this is what gives authenticity to each drawing.

I like to take special care when drawing the eyes and the small reflections they have, because they are the soul of the animal, and it is what gives them life.

The background of the drawing generally



Clark's Grebe (*Aechmophorus clarkii*)

looks simple, but sometimes shadows, tree branches or reflections in the water appear and they are very difficult to capture with paints.

I ordered a small stamp that I use as a signature for the drawings, so once finished, at the bottom of the drawing, I leave a small bird in black ink as a sign of identity.

In addition to birds, little by little, I dared to try larger birds: storks, black and griffon vultures, bearded vultures, caracaras... making close-ups or full-length drawings.

I also have a good collection of butterflies and moths, the occasional caterpillar, frogs, bees and other insects that allow me to experience other types of skin, wings, eyes, and so on.

Some mammals have also been the object of my pen, wild animals, antelopes, lions, cheetahs, giraffes, deer, lynxes, genets and other more domestic ones such as a few dogs and even a mare.

My only exhibition has been in Madrid, it began in September 2021 and has not ended, it continues to adorn the walls of a creperie in the central Malasaña neighbourhood and from time to time we renovate the exhibition with new additions.

Recently, I've started creating drawings on an iPad with the Pencil, achieving a photorealistic look by playing with layers, blurs, and adjustable brushes that offer an endless world of possibilities. Although sometimes technology and I are not good friends, it is also a way to learn new things and to be able to access technological art and see that it is not something that only young people can do.

I hope you enjoy my works as much as I enjoy making them. Compared to other authors I have seen in this same magazine, my artistic curriculum is not the most impressive, but my passion for art has nothing to envy them.



Southern Ground Hornbill (*Bucorvus leadbeateri*)



Red-necked Falcon (*Falco chicquera*)



European Robin (*Erithacus rubecula*)



Common Genet (*Genetta genetta*)



**PHOTO
GALLERY**



YOUR GALLERY



Prince Pravin
Tiger (*Panthera tigris*)
Kanha Tiger Reserve, India.



YOUR GALLERY



Vijesh Maroli

Juvenile Brahminy Kite (*Haliastur indus*)

Kannur, Kerala, India



YOUR GALLERY



Prince Pravin
Indian Gaur (*Bos gaurus*)
Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu, India



YOUR GALLERY



Vijesh Maroli
Pheasant-tailed Jacana (*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*)
Kannur, Kerala, India



YOUR GALLERY



Sajeev Krishnan
Oxpecker (*Buphagus*)
Masai Mara, Kenya



YOUR GALLERY



EXPLORERS

Nishim Hameed
Leopard (*Panthera pardus*)
Masai Mara, Kenya



YOUR GALLERY



Krishna Devangamath
Green Vine Snake (*Oxybelis fulgidus*)
Magod falls, Karnataka, India



YOUR GALLERY



Subhash Krishnan

Plum-headed parakeets (*Psittacula cyanocephala*)
Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India.



YOUR GALLERY



Rujlan Ahmad

Pond Heron (*Ardeola*)
Kashmir, Pampore Wetland, India



YOUR GALLERY



Nishim Hameed

Spotted Hyena (*Crocuta crocuta*)

Masai Mara, Kenya



YOUR GALLERY



Krishna Devangamath
Daddy-long-legs Spider (*Pholcidae*)
Dharwad, karnataka, india



YOUR GALLERY



Rujlan Ahmad

Himalayan Rubythroat (*Luscinia pectoralis*)
Sinthal Top, Kashmir, India



YOUR GALLERY



Shijin CM
Oriental Rat Snake (*Ptyas mucosa*)
Ottapalam, Kerala, India



YOUR GALLERY



Nishim Hameed
Giraffe (*Giraffa*)
Masai Mara, Kenya

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EXPLORERS

UPCOMING
FEATURES



© Harshad Karkera

INTO THE WILD

with Harshad Karkera



© Vasu Kiran Ranga

BLACK LEOPARD

By Vasu Kiran Ranga



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KODIAK BEAR TRAILS

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