EXPLORERS

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INTO THE WILD
WITH RAHUL SACHDEV

THE MAJESTIC BLACK RHINO: LIFE, CONSERVATION, AND IMPACT IN MASAI MARA

BY NISHA PURUSHOTHAMAN

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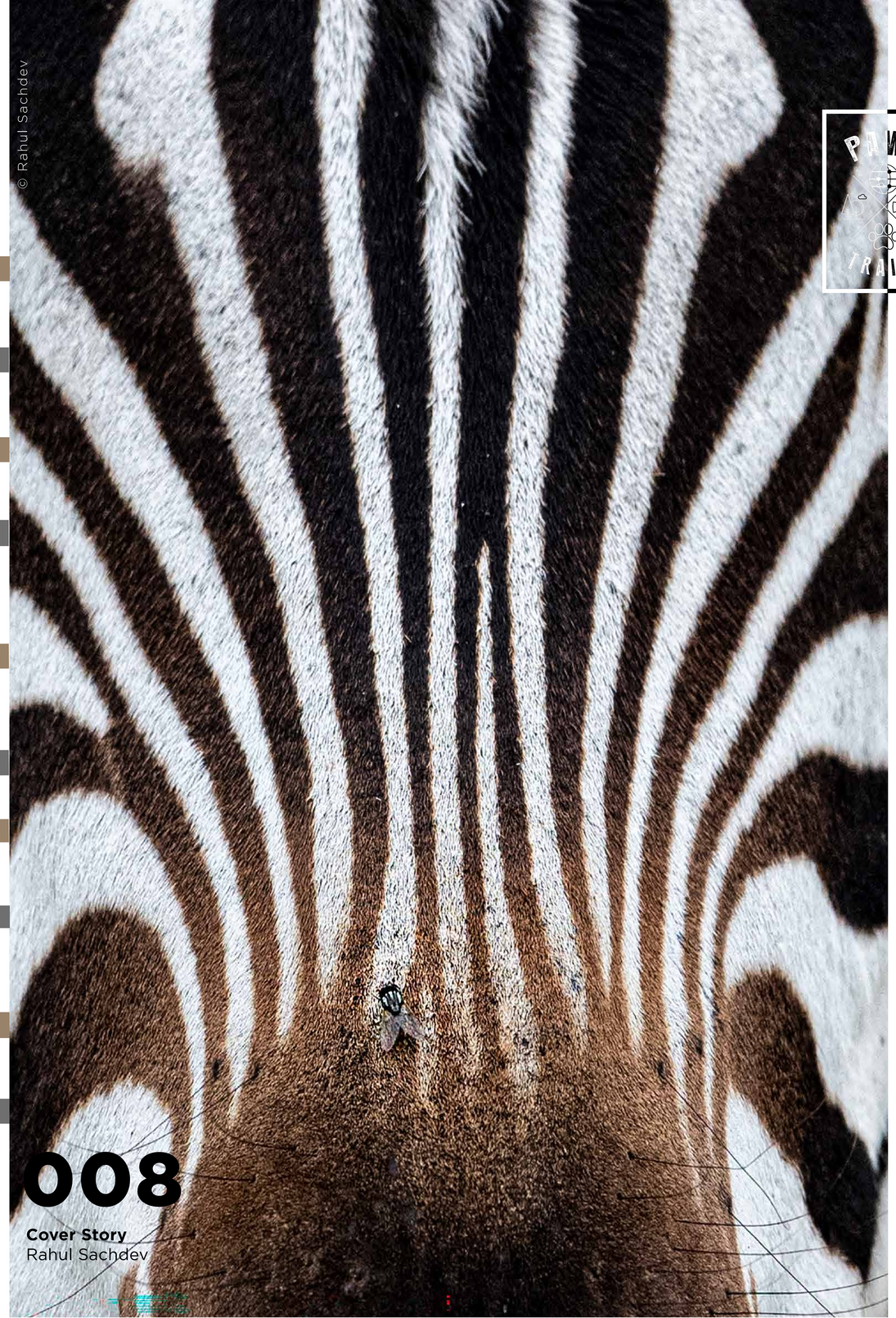
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008
Cover Story
Rahul Sachdev

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PT Explorers Editors
Ragul Patteri, Cynthia Bandurek, & Bruno Ferreto Fiorillo

EDITORS DEN

The Paws Trails team wishes you a Happy New Year. Welcome to our first edition of 2025.

It is that time of the year to make resolutions. We hope our readers take the resolution for an eco-friendlier life and to be kind and considerate of our fellow beings. This edition brings you inspiring stories and amazing images from around the globe.

In our cover story, we Rahul Sachdev from India talks about his journey as a wildlife photographer. His unique use of light and conditions like dust and rain has resulted in awe inspiring images that capture the essence of the moment and invoke strong emotions in the viewer.

Our own Nisha Purushothaman brings to you a conservation story from Masai mara. It is an inspiring tale about the life and conservation efforts for the Black Rhino.

Kiran Ranga shares his experiences exploring the lush nature of Laikipia, Kenya, especially the joy of photographing the black leopard.

In Her views and visuals, Kirti Walia talks about her shift from baking to photography and shares her experiences photographing the beauties of the wild.

Cub's corner section, chronicles the photographic adventures of Shaurya Pratap Bisht, a 13 -year-old from India.

In our Travelogue section, Deepa Girish from Dubai shares her experiences about a trip to Sunderbans, and the serene world of the mangroves.

In the Wild Arts section, Cecilia Segal from Argentina, talks about her lifelong interest in art and how her journey progressed from theatre art to illustration with pencil to and colour illustrations.

Thanks to everyone who contributed to the Your Gallery section. We await more contributions from a wider pool of nature lovers, please contact us if you wish to be published in PT explorers.

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FOUNDERS' NOTE

Dear Paws Trails Explorers Community,

As 2024 comes to an end, we look back on the updates from wildlife photography and conservation world during November and December. The 2024 Nature's Best Photography Awards featured stunning images, including a mother tiger with her cub, highlighting the deep connections in nature.

In Texas, wildlife officials undertook a bold mission, airlifting endangered desert bighorn sheep back to their native habitats, showcasing creative conservation methods.

Despite these efforts, challenges remain. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service plans to classify monarch butterflies as a threatened species, underscoring the dangers facing pollinators and their ecosystems.

On a brighter note, initiatives like Vital Impacts' Annual Print Initiative have been introduced to raise awareness and support for biodiversity conservation projects, featuring works from renowned photographers.

As we welcome the new year, Paws Trails Explorers remain dedicated to showcasing the beauty of wildlife through photography and advocating for their conservation. We are excited to continue this journey with you, our passionate community, into 2025. Together, we can make a difference.

Wishing you a prosperous and wildlife-filled New Year!
Let us take the pledge for a greener future!

Hermis Haridas & Nisha Purushothaman
Founders - PT Explorers

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COVER STORY

Into The WILD
with Rahul Sachdev

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Rahul Sachdev has been actively involved in wildlife photography since 2004 and has over the years built a strong portfolio which is recognized for its unique use of light and creativity. He has been conducting wildlife photography tours and workshops around the globe for over 12 years now, with the focus being to teach how to use light in wildlife photography.

Rahul believes that a photographer has to bring forth the artist within and use wildlife photography as a medium to present ones own vision of the world. His images and articles about photography have been published in many magazines and websites around the world.

rahulsachdev.net
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About the Journey

What inspired you to become a wildlife photographer, and how did your journey begin?

As a child, I dreamed of keeping a horse in our small apartment. I think it was clear to my parents back then that this idiot was going to grow up a little differently. The herd mentality took over during my college years, though, and I became an engineer, eventually completing my master's in computer systems from a quaint place called Troy in upstate New York. It was there, amidst the serene hills, that I felt a magical pull back toward nature.

My first purchase as a Teaching Assistant in the US was a Nikon SLR, and that was the beginning of it all. Once I returned to India, I decided to explore some of the country's national parks. Pure luck led me to start with Ranthambhore, where I had the fortune of meeting Aditya "Dicky" Singh. That trip marked the start of what has now been 20 years of absolute madness—and counting.

Can you share the story behind one of your most iconic photographs?

Iconic is a heavy term, and while I don't believe any of my images have reached that level just yet, the image of the Southern White Rhino has undoubtedly brought me my biggest recognition so far. When I first arrived at Solio Game Reserve, I was unprepared for what to expect, especially the type of forest it harboured. Upon arrival, I was immediately captivated by the

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landscape—rolling hills, lush yellow-fever forests, winding rivers, and reeds that created an awe-inspiring habitat. Solio is renowned for its massive rhinos, and it stands as one of the greatest success stories of conservation, demonstrating what humans can achieve when we pour our hearts into a cause. Each morning, I was drawn to the forest cover, particularly during the early hours when light would gently filter through the striking yellow-fever trees. It became a daily dream to encounter a rhino as I ventured through the forest to reach their foraging grounds. Then, one day, I was blessed with the perfect conditions: a stunning rhino, bathed in beautiful backlight, right in front of me. This image speaks volumes to me—it reflects the resilience, strength, and vulnerability of the species. Rhinos, though incredibly strong, have a trusting nature, and therein lies their vulnerability. Winning the HIPA 2024 award for this image is not only a great honour, but it also fuels my hope that it can contribute, even in some small way, to the fight against rhino poaching.

How has winning multiple international awards shaped your career and perspective as a wildlife photographer?

Honestly, it took me some time to comprehend this question. I am an out and out introvert as a person and global recognition is scary sometimes for me. Having said that, I distinctly remember feeling ‘validated’ when I first won an award. I guess at some level every artist

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seeks validation of some sort. How extrinsic or intrinsic that need is will differ from person to person. To come back to your question, I guess once that first award came my way (by sheer luck) it gave me the confidence that I am probably not doing anything too wrong. I won't say it gave a direction to my photography, but I felt happy that my kind of photography is being liked by folks. It gives me hope that as time progresses more and more wildlife photographers will tap into their creative side, and I am sure that will lead to some beautiful art.

The second part of your question which relates to 'career' part of it, I think winning awards has given me as a wildlife photographer the necessary exposure and reach for my workshops. Winning multiple awards at the very least will give a potential guest the confidence that this chap knows about wildlife photography. Whether I then turn out to be able to impart that knowledge and eye to the guests is a different matter.

Creative Process and Techniques

What's your approach to capturing the perfect wildlife moment?

Capturing the "perfect wildlife moment" is, for me, about visualizing how light interacts with the scene. I focus on the interplay of light and shadow, waiting for the perfect alignment that elevates the mood and composition. Wildlife is unpredictable, but light is a constant guide—I prepare, observe, and hope to capture a fleeting moment when the light transforms the ordinary into the

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extraordinary. It's about creating images that evoke emotions. Perfect wildlife moment in that sense for me is about great interplay between the elements in the frame and not just about the perfect natural history moment.

How do you prepare for a wildlife photography expedition?

If I could ask one question to all the photographers I admire (and there are many), it would be this. Preparation, I believe, is everything—it is not just about what you pack but how you meticulously plan every detail of the expedition.

Here's my approach:

- **What do I want to photograph?** (e.g., Big Tuskers)
- **What kind of images do I want?** (e.g., Dusty, backlit scenes)
- **Where should I go?** (e.g., Amboseli)
- **Why is this location ideal?** (e.g., Dusty conditions, a strong elephant population, and a trusted guide)
- **When is the best time to visit?** (e.g., Dry season to maximize dust)
- **Where should I stay?** (e.g., Inside the park to minimize travel time)

Once I have clear answers to these questions and feel confident about them, I know I'm ready for the journey ahead. It's this process that equips me with the foundation to make meaningful images on the expedition.

Can you describe your post-processing workflow and how you maintain authenticity in your images?

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In the age of AI, this is such an important question. I wish I could give you a precise 10-step workflow, but my truth is different. Most of my post-processing begins in the field—when I'm photographing, I already visualize the final image. This vision shapes my workflow when I return to the computer.

I primarily use Adobe Camera Raw for processing. My starting points are usually the **Whites, Highlights, Shadows, and Blacks** controls—I adjust these almost instinctively. The **Dehaze** tool is another favourite, particularly for enhancing skies. Since I work extensively in black and white, I dedicate time to manual conversions, tweaking the primary colours individually to create the desired tones and depth.

Beyond these basics, I keep things minimal. I dislike cloning and prefer to focus on refining the image as close to the original scene as possible. I absolutely despise the use blurring and the addition of directional light in processing. Something that seems to have become the norm these days.

By sticking to these principles, I ensure my images remain authentic and true to the moment I experienced in the field.

What gear do you typically use, and how do you adapt to challenging conditions in the wild?

My gear is carefully selected for versatility and optimal performance in various environments. I primarily use Canon cameras, such as the Canon EOS R5/R3, and more recently the R5 Mk2. My go-to lens for most situations is the Canon RF 100-500mm f/4.5-7.1 L IS USM, offering both flexibility and exceptional image quality. For wildlife in challenging conditions—particularly extremely low light or when the potential for creative bokeh is high—I rely on the Canon 400mm f/2.8 lens. Since I often do vehicle-based game drives, a couple of bean bags are always on my packing list to stabilize the gear.

Regarding challenging conditions like dust, rain, snow, or heat, I'm fortunate that most of my gear is highly weather-sealed. I always keep protective covers handy, designed specifically for field use, to shield my gear from the elements. However, I'll admit that in the event of a dust storm or heavy rain, if I don't have the rain covers for my camera and lens, you'll still find me shooting without hesitation. The only rule I follow in these situations is to ensure I clean the gear thoroughly as soon as I get back to camp.

Challenges and Lessons

What are some of the most significant challenges you've faced while photographing wildlife?

Predicting weather has become one of my most significant challenges in recent years. My photography trips are highly targeted, designed around specific natural phenomena—such as polar bears on sea ice, elephants in dusty conditions, or the elegant, red-crowned cranes dancing in the snow. Each of these experiences is heavily reliant on weather conditions, and the unpredictability of weather has been a constant obstacle.

I recall one particular year when I planned

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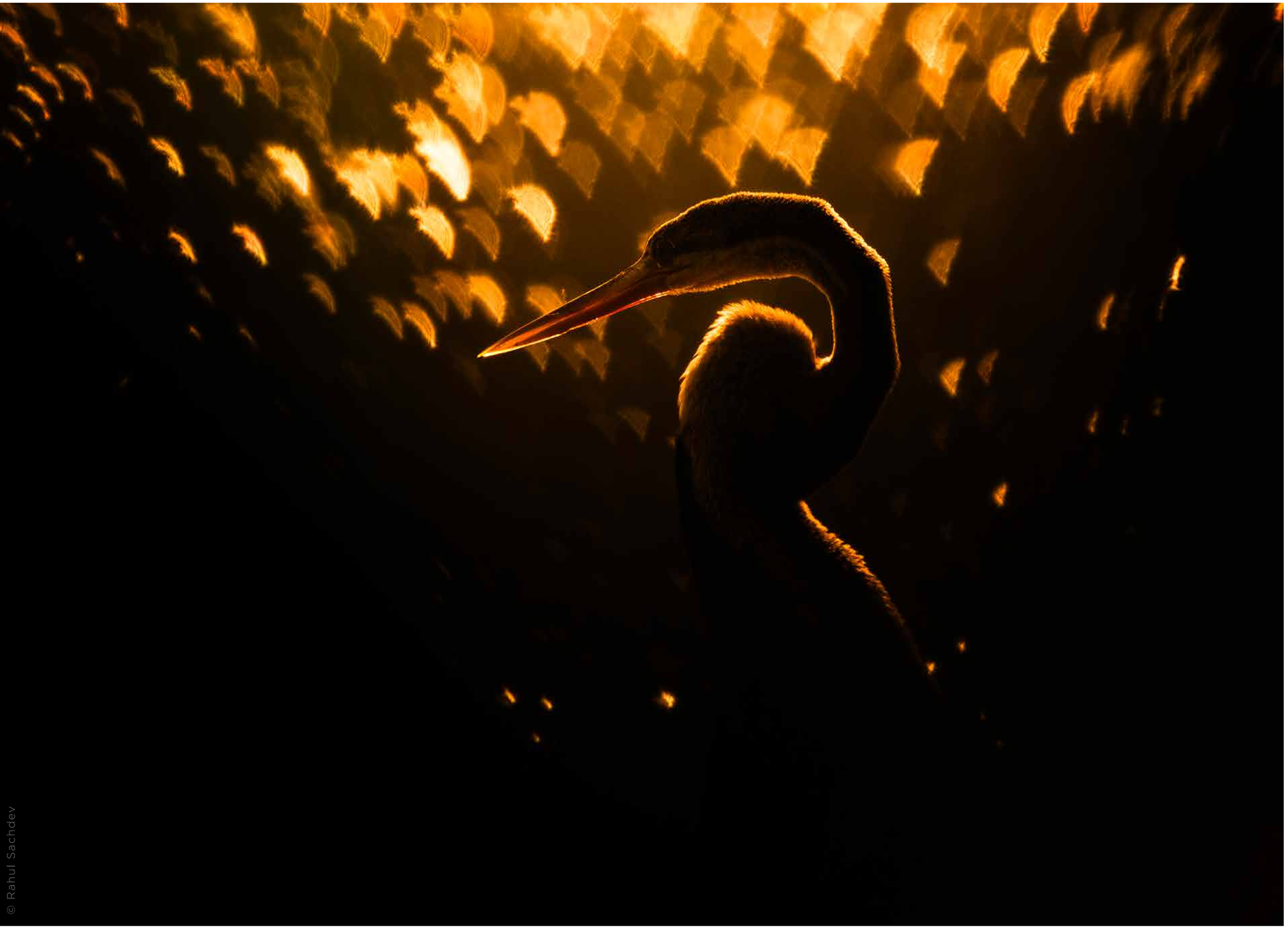

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a trip to the Masai Mara during what was historically to be one of the rainiest months. My goal was to photograph animals in the rain, capturing the dramatic interplay of wildlife and weather. Despite spending nine days in the Mara, there were only 30 minutes of rain during the entire trip. Experiences like these highlight the growing unpredictability of weather, which I believe is increasingly influenced by human impact on the environment.

So yes, I can confidently say that weather—and its indirect connection to human activity—has been one of my toughest challenges to navigate.

Have you had any dangerous encounters in the wild? How did you handle them?

While wildlife is inherently unpredictable—a convenient term acknowledging our limited understanding—it is often human actions that precipitate dangerous encounters. I recall a particular zodiac excursion in a Svalbard fjord where we observed a male polar bear attempting to hunt a harp seal near a glacier wall. The bear was unsuccessful and continued its search for food. From our vantage point, we noticed its path was leading directly toward a group of tourists who had landed near the glacier.

We tried shouting to warn them, but our voices couldn't reach that far. Acting swiftly, we navigated our zodiacs toward the shore to alert their guide, as they likely hadn't noticed the bear approaching. Fortunately, we reached them just in time, and they retreated to the safety of their cabin in the fjord. The

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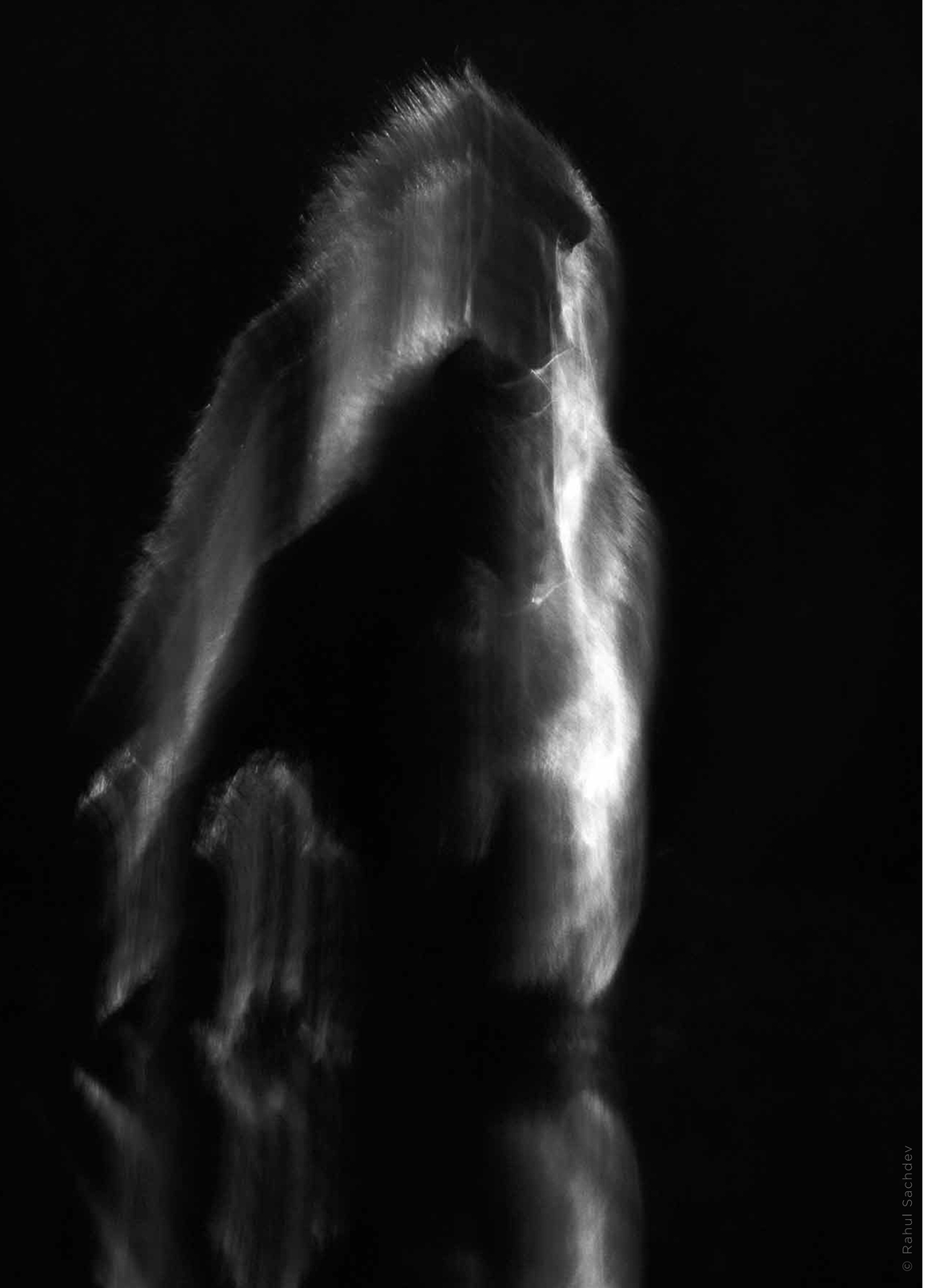
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most concerning aspect of such encounters is that, had we not intervened promptly, the situation could have ended tragically for the bear. The guide might have been compelled to kill the bear to protect the tourists.

Incidents like these sometimes make me question if we should even be allowed near wildlife as our lives always seem to take precedence in times of conflict. It is a difficult question for me, one that I am not completely sure I want to think about.

What lessons have you learned about patience and persistence from photographing wildlife?

I'm so glad you used the term persistence—I truly believe that is where the essence lies. The drive to keep improving, to push harder, stems more from persistence and perseverance than from patience. Patience, for me, feels more innate, especially when I'm out in the wild, immersed in the natural world.

Over the past two decades of being deeply engrossed in wildlife photography, I've come to realize just how crucial persistence is in building meaningful connections. In my case, it is the bond I have formed with nature—a connection that deepens with every challenge and triumph. But the lesson extends beyond the wild; it is equally relevant to relationships in the human world. Persistence fosters understanding, trust, and depth in any bond, and that is a truth I hold close.

Conservation and Impact

How do you think wildlife photography can contribute to conservation efforts?

Wildlife photography is a powerful tool for conservation. It has the power to evoke emotions, create awareness, and inspire action. A compelling image can transport viewers into the heart of a wild habitat, showcasing both its beauty and fragility. For me, it is about telling stories—stories of resilience, vulnerability, and the interconnectedness of life. For example, my award-winning photograph of a southern white rhino at Solio Game Reserve was not just about capturing an image but about shedding light on the ongoing battle against rhino poaching. Such images can serve as a bridge, connecting people to nature and motivating them to support conservation initiatives.

Have you worked on any specific projects or initiatives aimed at wildlife preservation?

While I haven't spearheaded large-scale conservation projects, I've contributed in ways that align with my photography. One example is donating prints to initiatives like **Prints for Wildlife** and the **Giraffe Conservation Foundation**, which use art to raise funds for local communities and wilderness preservation efforts.

These collaborations have been incredibly rewarding because they allow my work to directly support causes that matter deeply to me. It is a small but meaningful way to give back, helping to protect the habitats and wildlife I love to photograph while also uplifting the communities that live alongside them.

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How do you balance the ethical considerations of photographing animals in their natural habitats?

I believe that with love comes care, and I hope this holds true for wildlife photographers. Most of us, I like to think, are deeply in love with the subjects we photograph. With that love, and the right knowledge, I trust that no one would intentionally harm wildlife for the sake of a photograph—though, of course, there are exceptions.

To foster this sense of responsibility, I place immense value on working with experienced local guides on all my trips. A knowledgeable guide doesn't just help you find the perfect shot; they provide invaluable insights into the behaviour and needs of the wildlife and their environment. Over time, collaborating with such guides can profoundly shape your ethics and values, enriching your understanding of the natural world and deepening your respect for it.

Personal Insights

What role does storytelling play in your photography?

What story are we really talking about here—their story or mine? It is something I have reflected on deeply. Not all photographs are solely about the subject's story; there's always a piece of the photographer woven into them. For documentary photographers, the ability to dissociate from their own narrative is essential. But for me, I prefer to immerse myself in the story that unfolds within the photograph.

Every image I choose to process carries a story—a blend of the subject's narrative and my emotional connection to it. It is never just about creating the prettiest picture; it is about crafting something that resonates on a deeper, emotional level. I connect with my images in a very personal way, and my hope is that they evoke similar emotions in those who view them. For me, a photograph isn't complete unless it stirs something within the heart.

Is there a species or location that you dream of photographing but haven't yet?

There are quite a few but I believe high on the list, very high would-be Penguins. In particular, the emperor penguins at Gould Bay, Antarctica. The environment they inhabit is nothing short of extraordinary—the vast, icy expanse, the relentless blowing winds that add an element of drama to every frame, and the magical light that paints the scene with an almost otherworldly glow. Ahh, it's an absolute dream of mine to witness and photograph that.

How do you stay motivated and creative in such a competitive field?

I don't think I consciously do anything to stay motivated—it simply flows from my love for what I do. Motivation feels effortless. My creativity, though, stems from a deeper desire: the urge to infuse a part of myself—my emotions, my perspective—into every frame. I'm constantly drawn to locations with dramatic light, tempestuous weather, and breathtaking landscapes, as these elements allow me to weave my thoughts

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and feelings into the image. Conducting workshops and tours in these incredible settings not only keeps my creativity alive but also inspires me through the fresh perspectives and interpretations of those I guide.

Ultimately, I remind myself that wildlife photography isn't about competing with others—it is about building connections. It is about connecting with the subject, with the environment, and with oneself. By focusing on personal growth and my ever-evolving bond with the natural world, the creative spark not only stays alive but thrives.

Advice and Future Goals

What advice would you give to aspiring wildlife photographers?

Focus on building a connection with nature before worrying about creating the perfect shot. Spend time observing, understanding animal behaviour, and learning about the environment you are in. Photography as an art form isn't just about creating sharp and crisp images. Work on mastering your craft by experimenting with light, composition, and storytelling, and remember, it's not just about the technical aspects; it is about capturing the emotion and essence of the moment.

Lastly, invest in the journey—travel to places that inspire you, collaborate with experienced guides, and don't be afraid to make mistakes. Every misstep teaches you something valuable.

What are your future goals, both as a photographer and as a conservation advocate?

As a photographer, one of my primary goals is to champion wildlife photography as a legitimate and powerful form of art. I feel it is often underestimated, seen solely as documentation rather than a medium that can evoke deep emotions and tell profound stories. I want to push creative boundaries and inspire others to see wildlife photography as an art form capable of standing alongside any other.

On the conservation side, I aim to use my work to support meaningful initiatives, such as raising awareness about endangered species and fragile ecosystems That could be through collaboration with organizations to conduct workshops on their behalf or by simply donating prints. Expanding my workshops and tours is another goal—helping others connect with nature, embrace ethical practices, and see the artistic potential in their work. Ultimately, I want to leave a legacy that elevates wildlife photography and fosters a deeper, more conscious relationship between people and the wild.

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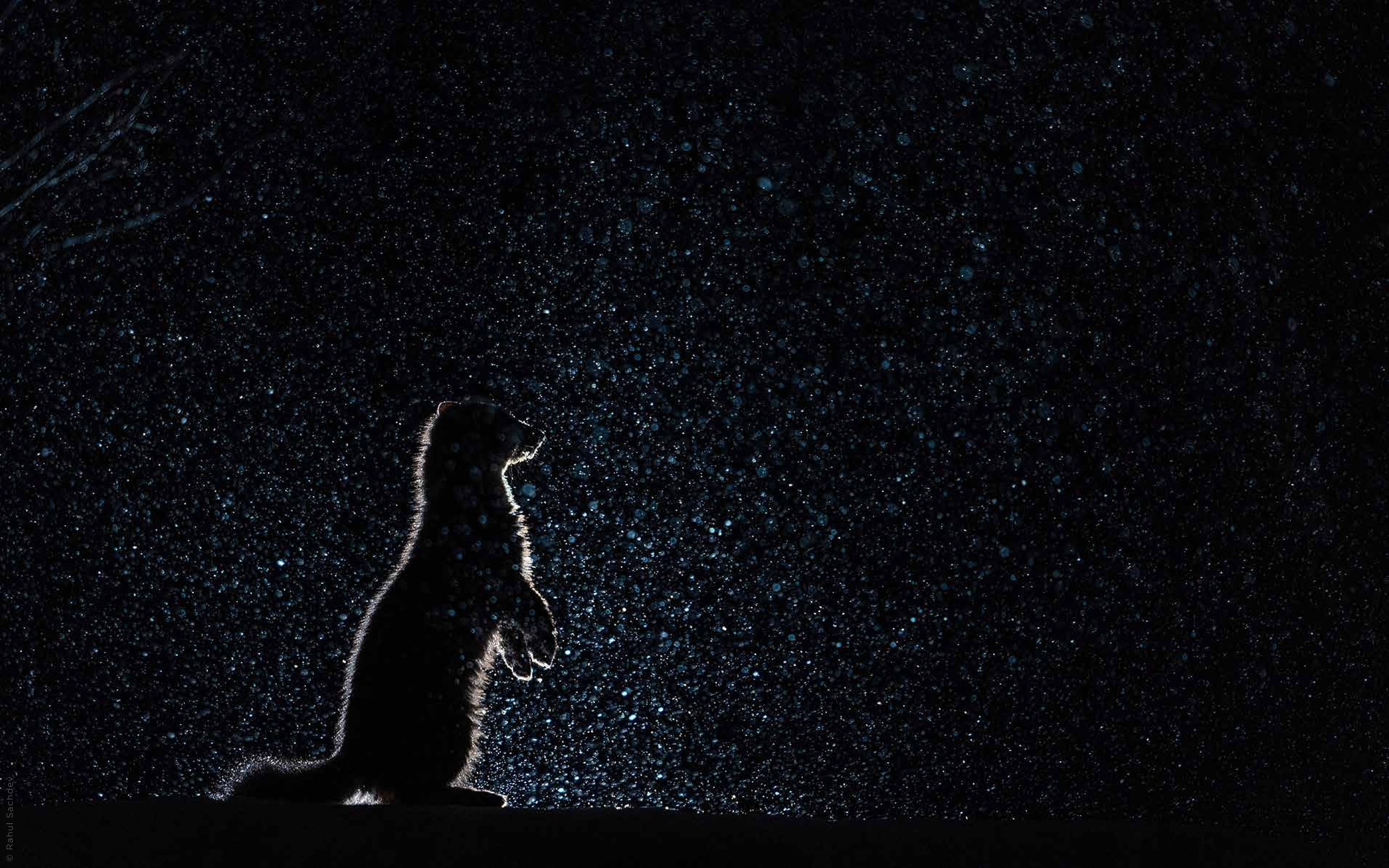

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CONSERVATION

The Majestic **Black Rhino**: *Life*, *Conservation*, and *Impact* in **Masai Mara**

By **Nisha Purushothaman**

©Nisha Purushothaman

Nisha Purushothaman, a wildlife photographer and co-founder of PAWS TRAILS EXPLORERS & MARA TRAILS, is a prominent conservationist inspiring the next generation. An avid traveler, she uses her photography to raise awareness about the planet's fragility and advocates for exploring and conserving our delicate ecosystems. Nisha's journey spans the backwaters of India, Masai Mara's plains, Ngorongoro Crater, North America, and the Middle East. With 14 years of experience, she has passionately tracked wildlife and conducted workshops worldwide.

As co-founder of Paws Trails Explorers, Nisha promotes global conservation awareness. Through Mara Trails in Masai Mara, she trains storytellers and supports the Maasai community. With a fine arts degree in applied arts and photography, Nisha's work champions the beauty and preservation of nature.

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The black rhinoceros, a symbol of resilience, stands as a testament to both the grandeur and vulnerability of Africa's wilderness. Nestled within the sprawling plains of the Masai Mara, these remarkable creatures play an indispensable role in maintaining the delicate balance of the ecosystem. In this article, we explore the life cycle of the black rhino, delve into the tireless conservation efforts within the Mara, and highlight the positive ripple effects these initiatives create for wildlife and local communities alike.

As someone passionate about wildlife and dedicated to conservation through photography, my goal is to spotlight the extraordinary importance of preserving these majestic animals for future generations.

A Journey of Survival: The Black Rhino's Life Cycle

Black rhinos (*Diceros bicornis*), with their robust build, prehensile upper lip, and formidable horns, are marvels of evolution. Yet, beneath their tough exterior lies a life fraught with challenges, making every stage of their journey a fight for survival.

Birth and Early Days

The journey begins after a gestation period (about 15–16 months) when a female black rhino gives birth to a single calf weighing 35–50 kilograms. The calf's survival is entirely dependent on its mother, who provides nourishment and unwavering protection.

For weeks, the newborn stays close,

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nursing frequently and cautiously exploring its surroundings. The mother's fierce vigilance ensures the calf's safety in an environment where threats are ever-present, ranging from natural predators to human-induced dangers.

Growing Independence

As the calf reaches two to three years of age, it begins its transition to independence. During this period, it learns vital survival skills like foraging and recognizing potential threats, under the continued supervision of its mother. This phase of exploration and play is critical in preparing the young rhino for the challenges of adulthood.

Adulthood and Reproduction

Females reach maturity at four to five years, while males mature slightly later, at six to seven years. The mating process involves intense competition, with males often engaging in fierce battles for access to females. Once a pair mates, the cycle begins anew, with the female embarking on another lengthy gestation.
With females giving birth every two to three years, the black rhino's slow reproductive rate underscores the need for sustained conservation efforts to ensure population stability and genetic diversity.

Conservation in Masai Mara: A Vision for Nature

The Masai Mara is more than a heaven for black rhinos; it is a hub of relentless conservation efforts aimed at pulling this species back from the brink of

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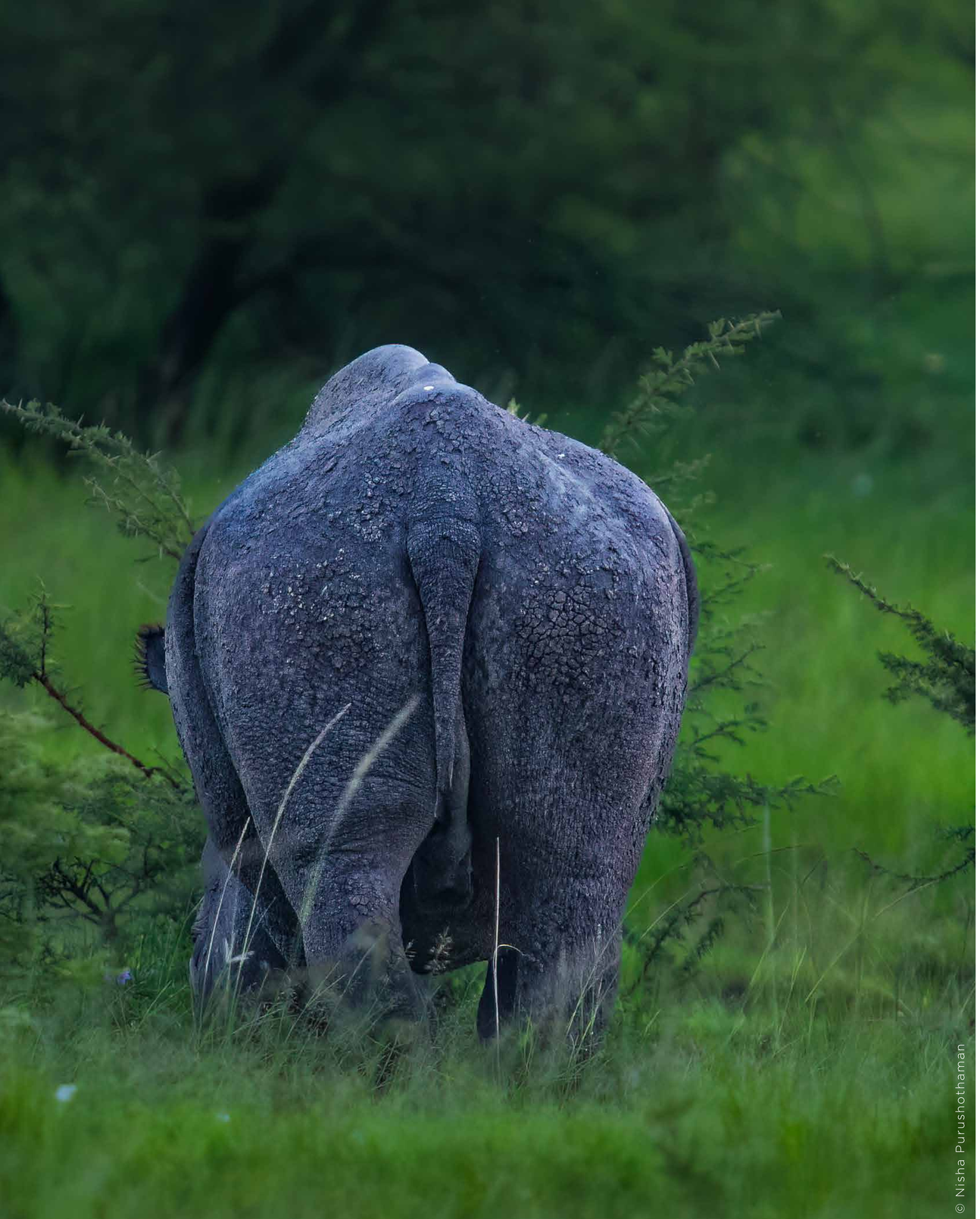

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extinction. The success seen here serves as inspiration for global conservation initiatives.

Anti-Poaching Strategies

The greatest threat to black rhinos is poaching, driven by the illegal trade in rhino horns. In the Masai Mara, advanced surveillance technologies, well-trained rangers, and community collaboration have dramatically reduced poaching incidents, creating a safer environment for these animals.

Habitat Preservation

Protecting and restoring habitats is a cornerstone of conservation in the Mara. Efforts to maintain the health of grasslands and water sources ensure black rhinos have access to the resources they need, while also supporting a wide variety of other species within the ecosystem.

Community-Led Initiatives

Local communities play an integral role in the success of conservation programs. By fostering education, promoting eco-tourism, and providing alternative livelihoods, initiatives have empowered communities to take pride in safeguarding their natural heritage.

Scientific Research

Comprehensive research underpins effective conservation strategies. Through tracking rhinos, studying their behaviour, and monitoring health and population dynamics, conservationists in the Mara continually refine their efforts to better protect the species.

The Far-Reaching Impact of Conservation

The benefits of conserving black rhinos extend far beyond the species itself, impacting ecosystems, local economies, and even cultural traditions.

- Ecosystem Health: Black rhinos, as keystone species, shape their environment by browsing on woody vegetation, promoting biodiversity and supporting other herbivores. Their presence is vital for maintaining a balanced ecosystem.

- Economic Growth: The rhino's allure draws eco-tourists to the Mara, generating funds that are reinvested in conservation and community projects.

- Cultural Significance: For the Maasai, wildlife conservation resonates with their traditions of living harmoniously with nature, strengthening their cultural identity and commitment to protecting the Black rhino.

- Climate Resilience: Healthy ecosystems contribute to climate stability, with well-preserved habitats playing a role in carbon regulation and water conservation.

A Call to Action

While great strides have been made, challenges persist in the fight to secure the future of black rhinos. Habitat encroachment, human-wildlife conflict,

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and persistent poaching require ongoing vigilance and innovation. The collective effort of governments, conservation organizations, and individuals is crucial. By supporting conservation through funding, advocacy, and sustainable tourism, we can amplify local successes and create a global impact.

Conclusion

The black rhinoceros, with its strength and vulnerability, embodies the struggle for survival in an ever-changing world. In Masai Mara, the dedication of conservationists and the resilience of the rhino itself offer hope for a brighter future.

As a wildlife photographer, capturing the essence of these creatures is both a privilege and a responsibility. Through imagery and storytelling, I hope to inspire others to cherish and protect these extraordinary animals.

By championing the conservation of black rhinos, we are not just preserving a species—we are safeguarding the intricate web of life that sustains us all. Let us work together to ensure that future generations inherit a world where these magnificent animals roam free.

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SPECIES

Journey Through Laikipia: An Unforgettable Adventure

By Kiran Ranga

© Kiran Ranga

Kiran Ranga, Director of N. Ranga Rao and Sons, is a leader driven by creativity and a love for the natural world. As a creative perfumer, he blends art and science to craft authentic and innovative fragrances, reflecting his dedication to excellence in the family business.

An avid nature and wildlife photographer, Vasu uses his lens to capture the beauty of the wilderness and highlight the need for conservation. For him, photography is a powerful tool for storytelling and raising awareness about preserving our planet.

Balancing his passions for perfumery and photography, Vasu embodies a harmony between creativity and conservation, advocating for both innovation and nature's preservation.

instagram.com/kiranranga_
threads.net/@kiranranga_

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Hidden in the heart of Kenya, Laikipia offers some of the country's most diverse and stunning landscapes. The region presents a unique mix of rolling hills, dense riverine forests, and open plains. It's a realm of contrasts, home to extraordinary wildlife, distinctive vegetation, and sights that linger in memory. Among its many wonders, few are as enigmatic and captivating as the black leopard—a creature steeped in legend and rare beauty.

Laikipia's flora is as diverse as its terrain, featuring everything from acacia woodlands to dense groves of African olive trees. This rich vegetation provides the perfect cover for elusive creatures, including the black leopard. Known scientifically as melanistic leopards, these animals owe their dark coats to a genetic mutation that produces excess melanin. In certain light, their rosette patterns are faintly visible, but their dark fur gives them an almost ghostly invisibility in Laikipia's dense forests and shadows.

The Elusive Black Leopard

The Black Leopard has long been a creature of intrigue and mystique. Spotting one is a rarity, often regarded as a once-in-a-lifetime experience by both locals and travellers. During a five-day visit to Laikipia in July 2024, I had the extraordinary opportunity to observe and document Giza, a striking female black leopard whose presence seemed to embody the essence of the wild.

Giza is a master of her environment. Primarily active during the twilight hours of dawn and dusk, she avoids the midday heat that could make her dark coat uncomfortable. Her melanistic coloration gives her an unparalleled advantage as a predator, allowing her to blend seamlessly into her surroundings.

Her hunting abilities were nothing short of remarkable. One unforgettable moment was watching her silently stalk and capture a Vulturine guinea fowl in daylight—a rare sight. That same evening, under the cover of darkness, she skilfully hunted a Hare and a Dik-dik. Each movement showcased her agility, patience, and precision, a testament to the adaptations that make black leopards such efficient hunters.

Encountering Giza was like uncovering a secret, hidden deep within the wilderness. Her existence in Laikipia speaks to the region's rich biodiversity and the importance of preserving it. She is also a symbol of conservation success, as black leopards are highly sensitive to environmental disturbances and human activity.

Understanding Melanism

The genetic trait of melanism, which gives black leopards their dark coats, is a rare occurrence. Scientists believe it offers advantages, such as improved camouflage in dense forests, enhancing hunting success. However, this same rarity has made them vulnerable to human threats, including poaching, due to their striking and unusual appearance. While black leopards are reported in various regions of Africa and Asia, photographic documentation remains scarce. Laikipia has emerged as a vital

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refuge for these elusive animals, thanks to its intact ecosystems and community-driven conservation initiatives. These efforts ensure not just the survival of black leopards but also the myriad other species that call this region home.

Beyond the Black Leopard: Laikipia's Wildlife

Though black leopards steal the spotlight, Laikipia is teeming with other fascinating wildlife. During my visit, I encountered reticulated giraffes, their intricate coat patterns making them a mesmerizing sight as they moved gracefully across the plains.

Equally memorable were the African wild dogs, whose cooperative hunting tactics and unique social bonds left a deep impression. Watching them communicate and move as a unit was a fascinating glimpse into the intricacies of predator behavior.

Another highlight was spotting Grevy's zebras, distinguished by their fine, narrow stripes and regal presence. These endangered animals added yet another layer to the rich tapestry of life in Laikipia. Each sighting underscored the critical need to preserve the region's unique ecosystems.

Conservation Efforts and Challenges

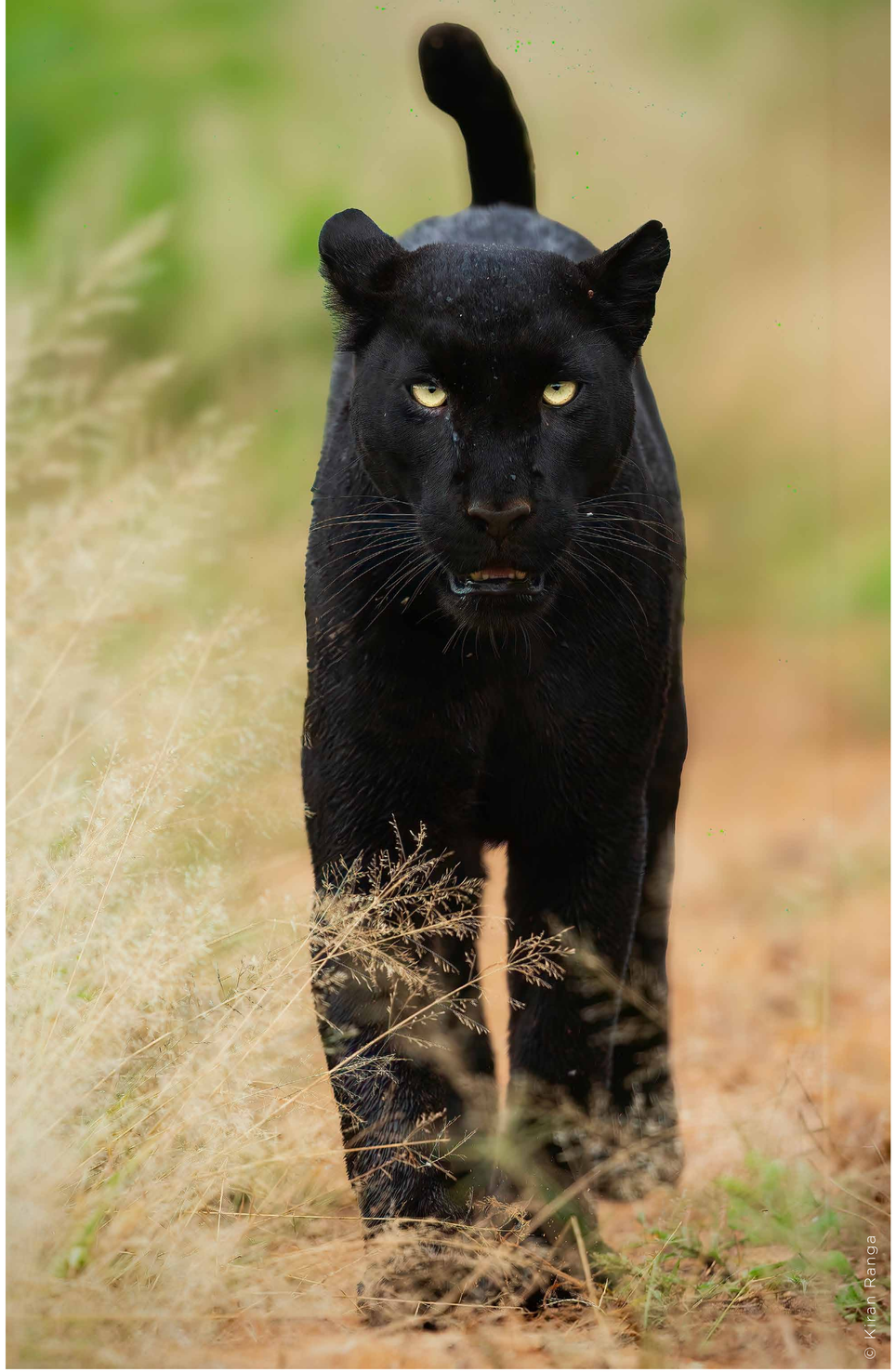
The presence of species like black leopards and Grevy's zebras in Laikipia highlights the success of ongoing conservation efforts. Yet, challenges such as habitat loss, human-wildlife conflict, and climate change remain significant threats. Conservation organizations, in partnership with local communities, work tirelessly to address these issues through sustainable land-use practices and education initiatives.

Ecotourism plays a vital role in these efforts, bringing visitors from around the world to experience Laikipia's natural wonders. This not only generates crucial funding for conservation but also creates economic opportunities for local communities, fostering a shared commitment to protecting the region's biodiversity.

A Personal Reflection

Spending five days in Laikipia, observing Giza and the region's other wildlife, was a humbling and unforgettable experience. Watching Giza navigate her world—stalking prey, resting in the shade, or melting into the shadows—felt like a privilege. It was a poignant reminder of the delicate balance that sustains life in the wild and the immense responsibility we have to protect it.

Laikipia is more than a destination; it's a symbol of resilience and the power of collaboration between humans and nature. The black leopard, with its elusive grace and enigmatic beauty, represents what can be achieved when conservation efforts are driven by passion and purpose. My time in Laikipia has inspired me to continue advocating for the protection of our planet's most precious creatures and their habitats.



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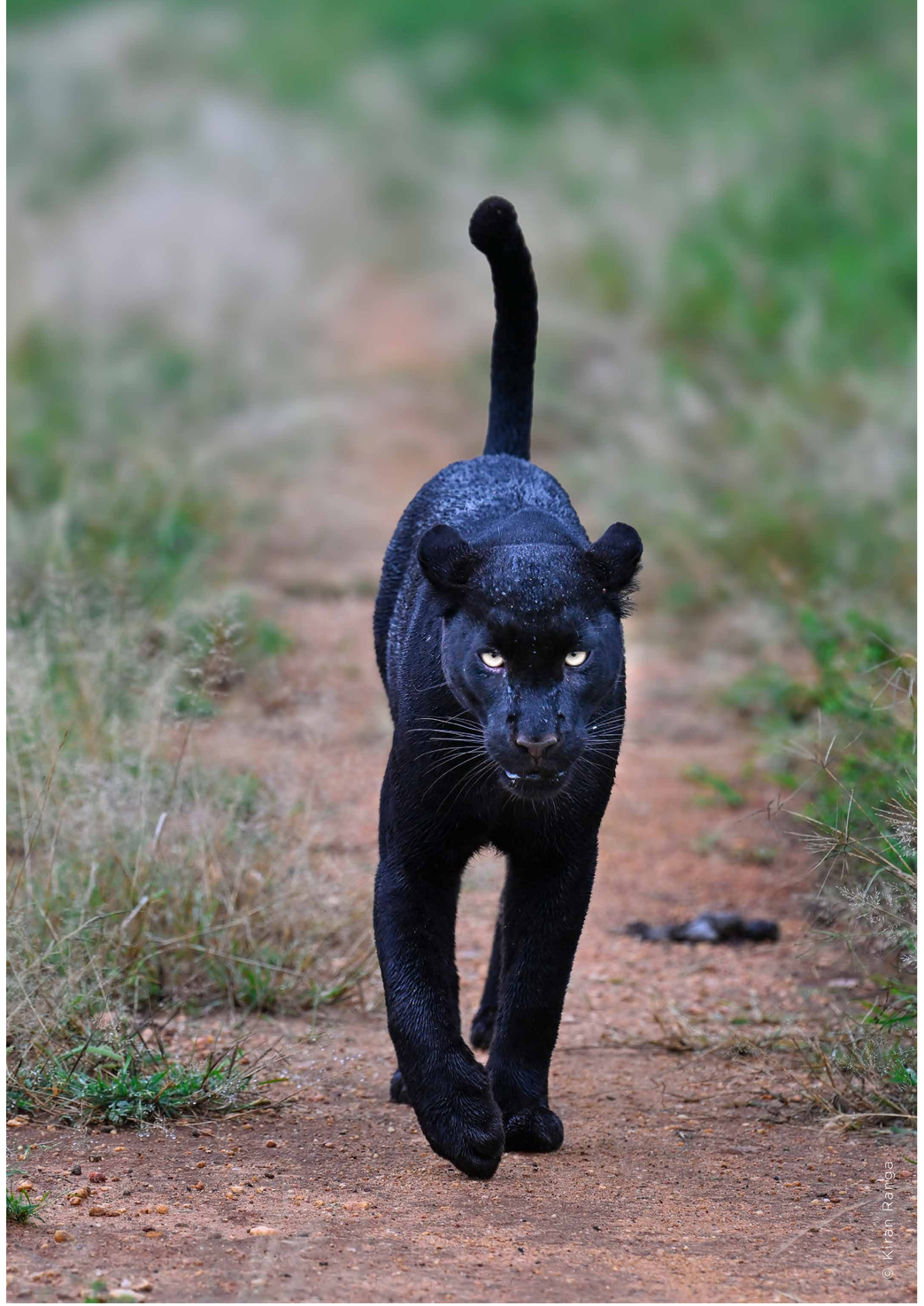
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Her Views & Visuals

By Kriti Walia

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Kriti Walia is a hotelier, baker, English language tutor, yoga teacher, and now a passionate wildlife photographer. Born and raised in India, she has lived and worked in Egypt, Russia, Germany, and the UAE, proudly embracing the title of a global citizen. Currently based in Dubai, UAE, Kriti captures the beauty of the natural world using her trusted Canon photography gear.

instagram.com/kritiwaliaphotography
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Her Views and Visuals

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How did your interest in wildlife arise?

Wildlife photography came into my life in 2022 when my 17 year-long baking career ended abruptly due to the pandemic. Seeking a new meaning and purpose in my newfound emptiness, I took a holiday to Rishikesh, where, coincidentally, I chanced upon a Crimson Sunbird that was perched on a Mulberry bush just outside of my room. I had never noticed such a beautiful bird before; mesmerized and fully present to its unique beauty, I wanted to know all about it and explore more such beautiful birds in that region. This incident ignited my curiosity in the wildlife and compelled me to pick up a camera to present these stunning creatures of our planet to the world through my pictorial narratives.

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

If I were to choose a word for both, I would say 'Enriching'. I have seen a palpable transformation in the way I understand and approach photography, which keeps growing and evolving with each time I go out into the wild with my camera. Not only have I learnt about the technicalities of operating and optimizing the camera to enhance my photography skills but also about the animals, their behavior and the way they coexist to maintain a natural equilibrium in their ecosystem.

At a personal level it's been mostly about patience, perseverance, acceptance and humility. Spending time in nature and pursuing photography has added a spark and structure to my quotidian existence which was pretty much freewheeling in many different directions.

Each wildlife photography experience makes me aware of how privileged I am to be able to share space with these magnificent creatures of our planet and humble to realize how insignificant my own existence is in the larger spectrum of this universe.

What is your view on wildlife conservation? How can we, as wildlife photographers, help protect our Mother nature?

Spending time in nature has made me conscious about respecting, protecting and conserving our environment which is fast depleting due to human carbon footprints. Climate change that is threatening the survival of many species and deforestation leading to habitat loss are realities that we can't shy away from anymore, therefore it has become imperative to become a voice of reason, not just for us as wildlife enthusiasts but also as a human race. I believe as wildlife photographers we have the visual medium to create awareness by bringing stories into the urban world from the wild, starting with our own families, communities and eventually reaching a larger audience through various social media platforms.

At a personal capacity my motto is 'walk the talk'. To that effect, leading by example is the most impactful way of preaching.

Can you give our readers the best wildlife photography tips?

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Object Knowledge: I would say knowing your gears to optimize them optimally.

Subject Knowledge: Understanding animal behavior to maximize the sighting.

Self-awareness: To be fully present to the moment and approach it with equanimity without getting carried away.

What plans do you have in the future related to wildlife photography?

I feel like I have barely scratched the surface in this field, there is so much to explore and discover! My plan is to travel to as many wildlife sanctuaries in different parts of the world and beautiful and pristine locations that are off the beaten track. On my wish list is Pumas of Patagonia and Birds-of-Paradise in Papua New Guinea!! Let's see when that happens!!! My plan is to continuously grow and evolve as a photographer by observing and learning about the animals and enhance my photography and presentation skills.

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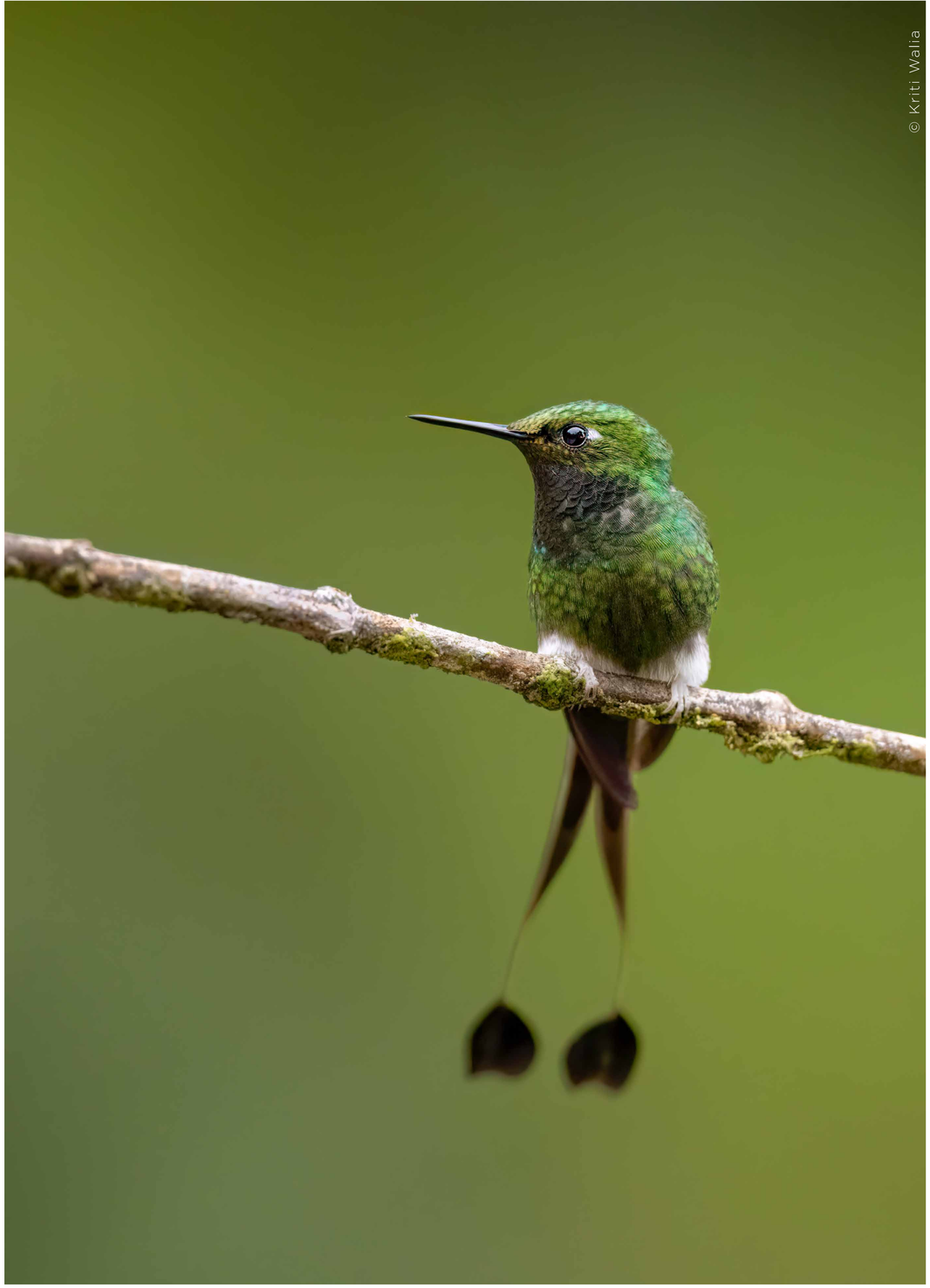
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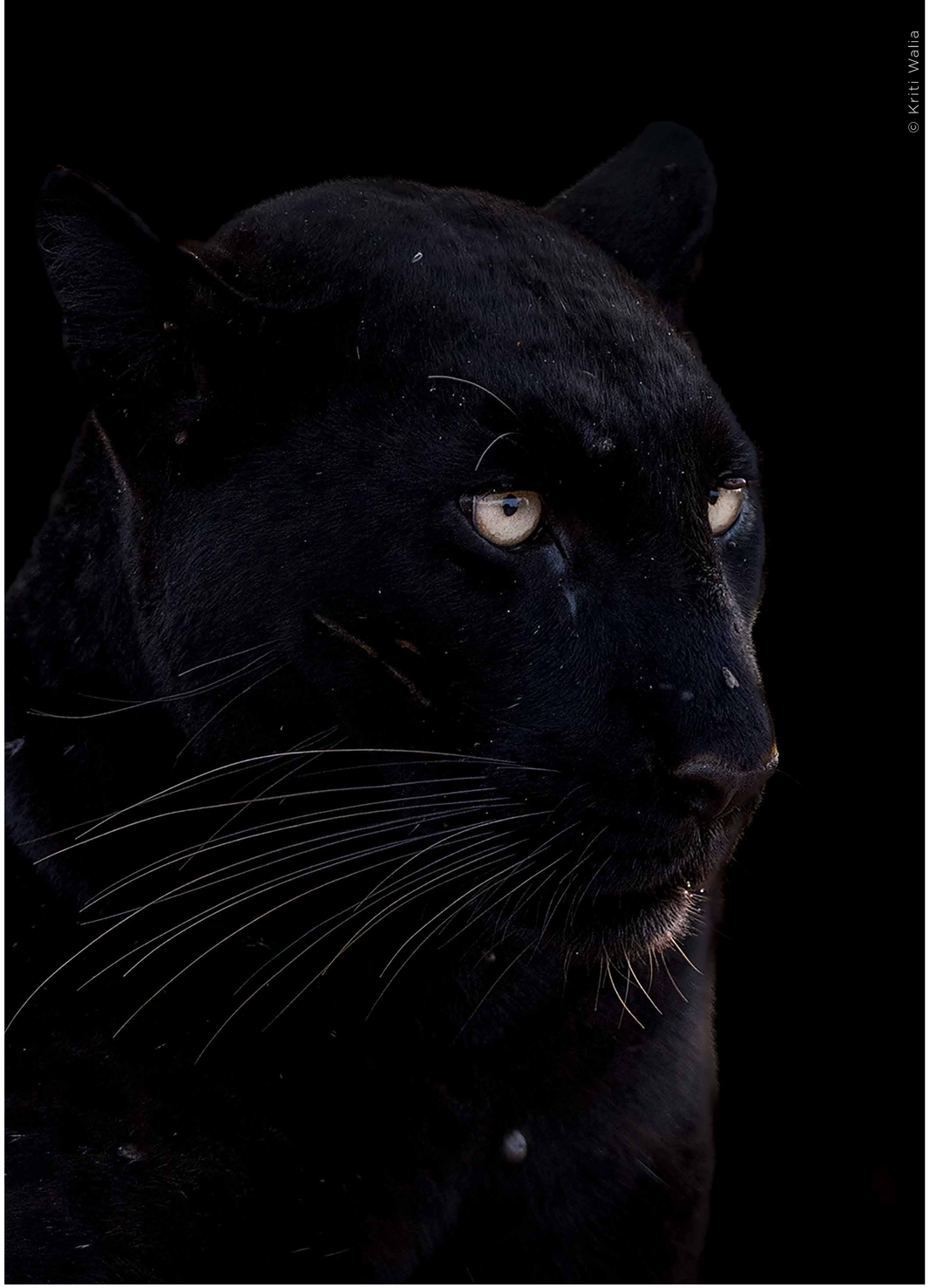
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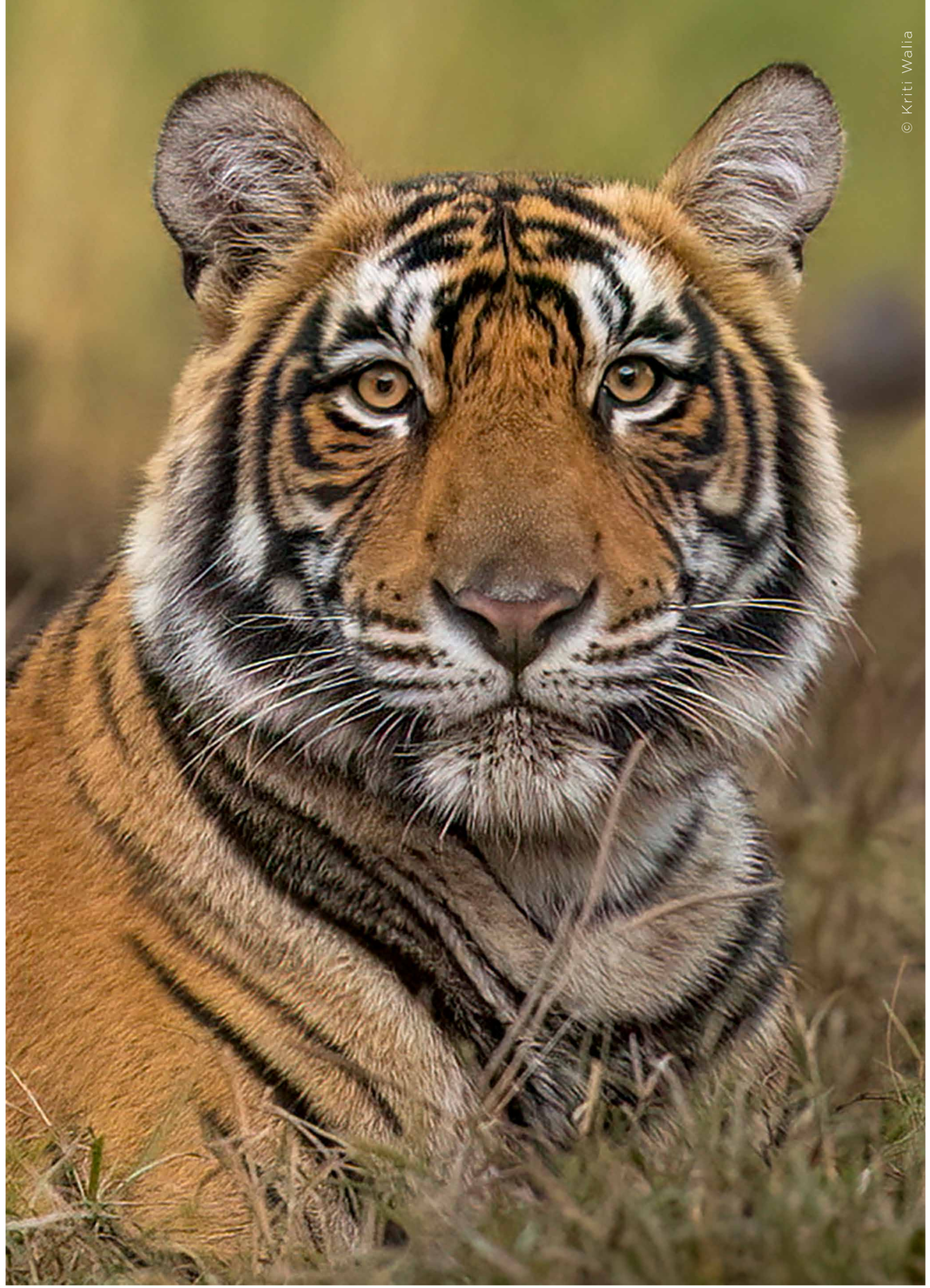
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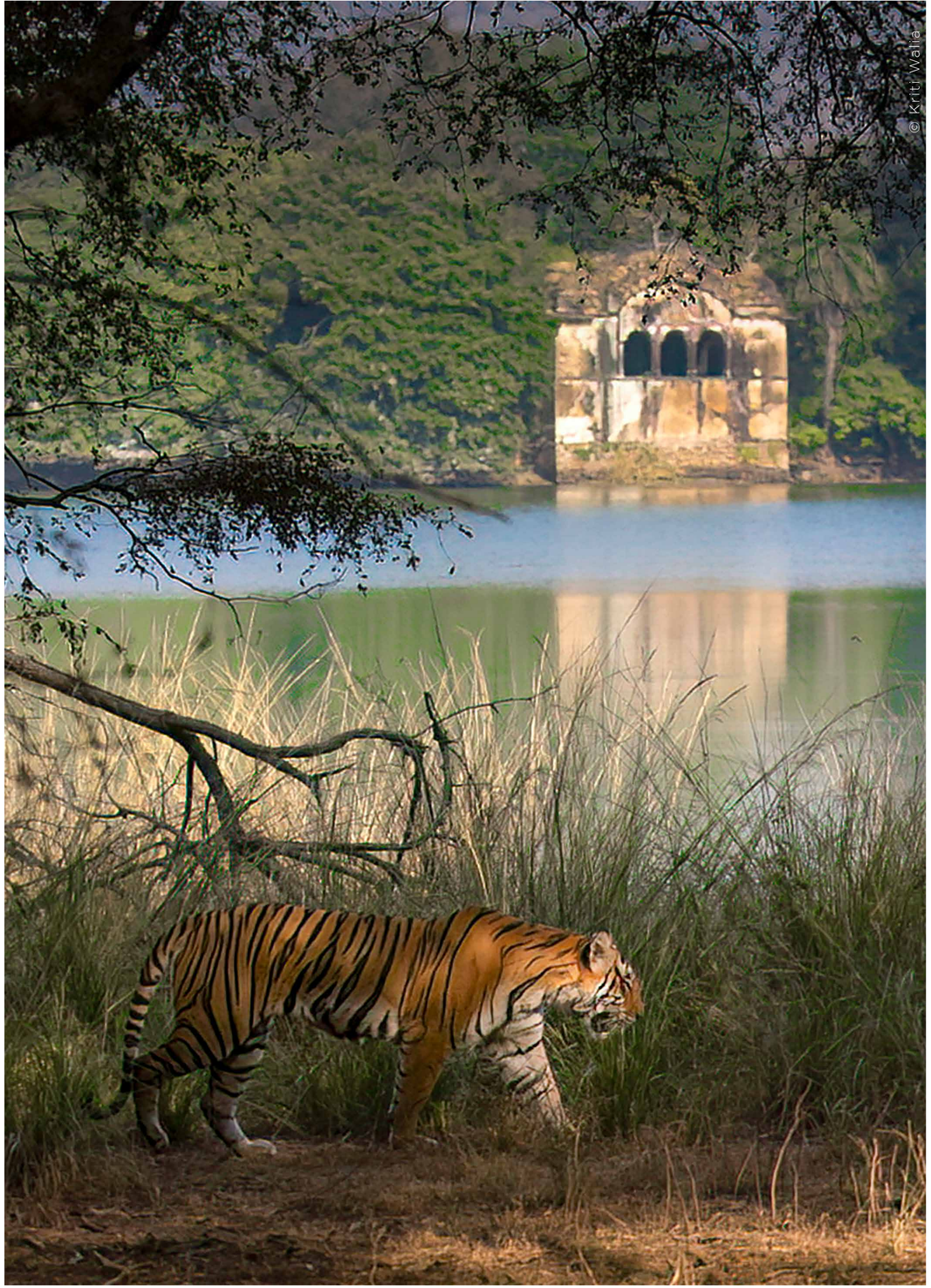
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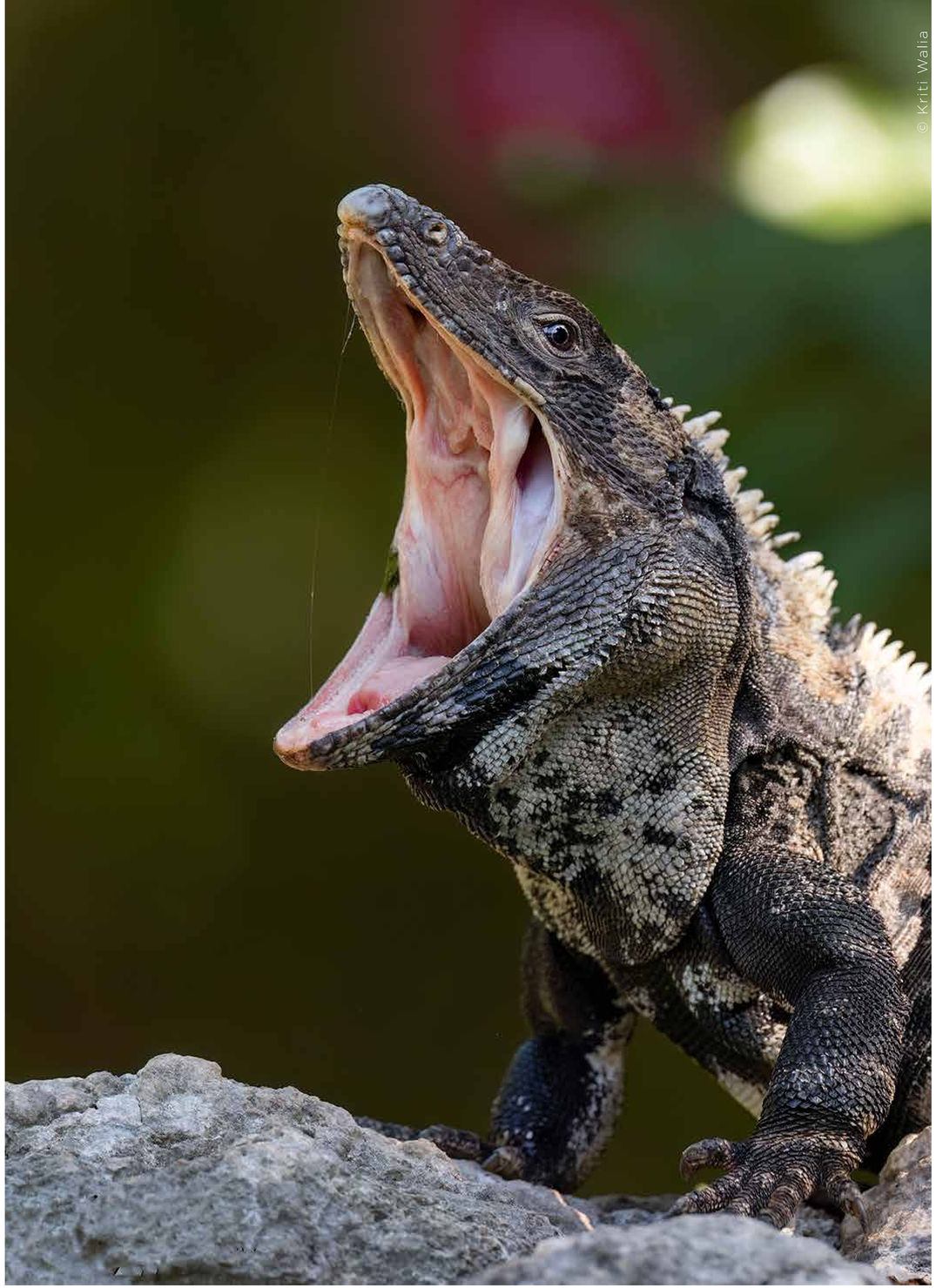
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NATURE THROUGH MY EYES

Shaurya Pratap Bisht

© Shaurya Pratap Bisht

CUB'S CORNER

By age nine, Shaurya Pratap Bisht's love for wildlife blossomed through summers spent watching Australian Zoo episodes. Now 13, his journey into wildlife photography began with an old Nikon D3400 during a family trip to Jim Corbett National Park. Capturing his first image, The Ghetaro Wali Tigress, in 2021 ignited his passion for the unpredictable beauty of nature.

Frequent safaris have taught him patience, perseverance, and respect for wildlife. Through his Nikon Z8 and D850 cameras, Shaurya captures majestic tigers, leopards, and birds, hoping to inspire conservation and a deeper appreciation for nature's wonders.

By the age of nine, I had already developed a deep love for wildlife. Watching the Australian Zoo episodes was my favourite holiday pastime for many, many summers.

My name is Shaurya Pratap Bisht and I turned 13, I am in grade eight and live with my family in Delhi. My journey as a wildlife photographer began when my father handed me his old, unused Nikon 3400 camera on one of our impromptu family trips to the jungle. At the time, I didn't know much about photography, but something about the way the sunlight danced through the forest canopy and

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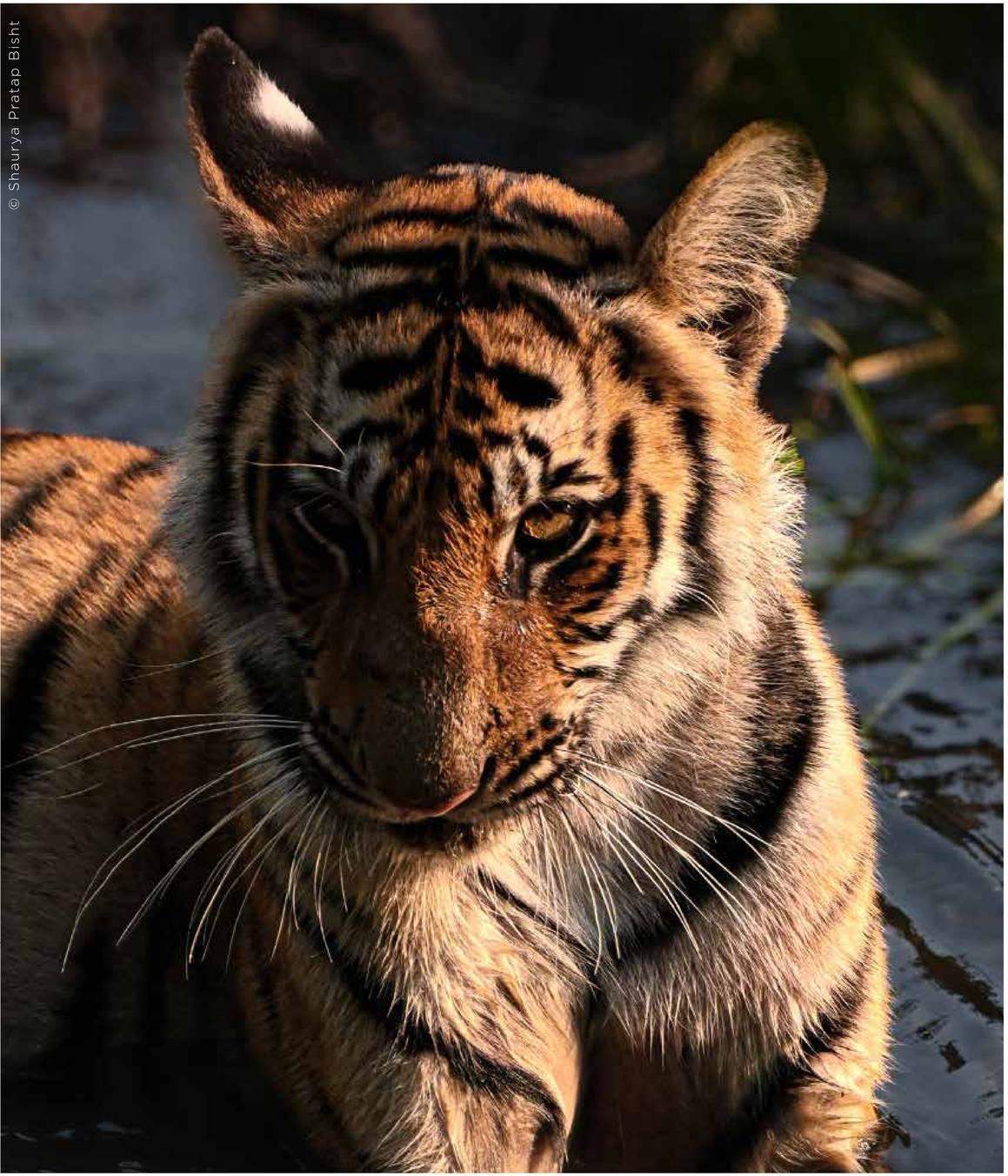


long deep silence stirred a sense of excitement in me. I never knew that, that one trip to the famous Jim Corbett National Park in Uttarakhand, India would be the start of a thrilling adventure as a wildlife photographer.

On that very trip I was naive at operating a big camera. I began experimenting, pointing, clicking, and capturing what I saw. My first decent shot was of The Ghetaro Wali Tigress in 2021. The image was not that perfect, but the feeling of freezing that moment in time was magical.

The jungle has since then become my second home. I frequent the National Park almost every month. Every safari is a new tale, every moment a chance to witness the raw beauty of Mother Nature. I have been lucky to see tigers, leopards, elephants and many other animals and birds in their natural habitat. Each encounter has deepened my respect for these magnificent creatures and the ecosystems.

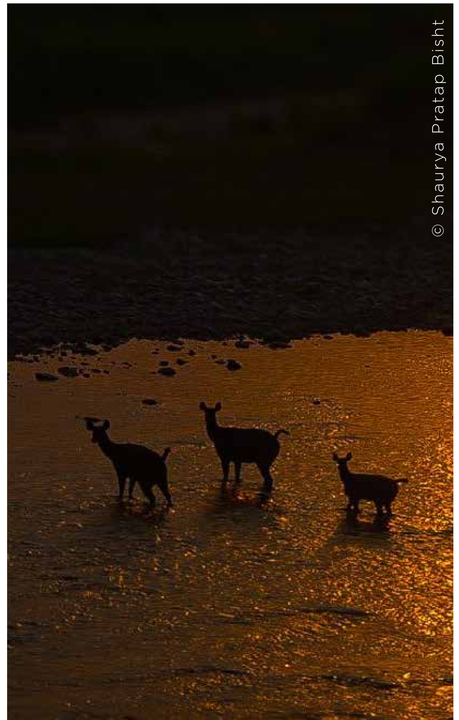
What keeps taking me back is the unpredictability of wildlife photography. No two days in the jungle are ever the same. On one safari, the highlight might be tiger behind the tree against a fiery sunset. On another, it could be a bird ready to take off.

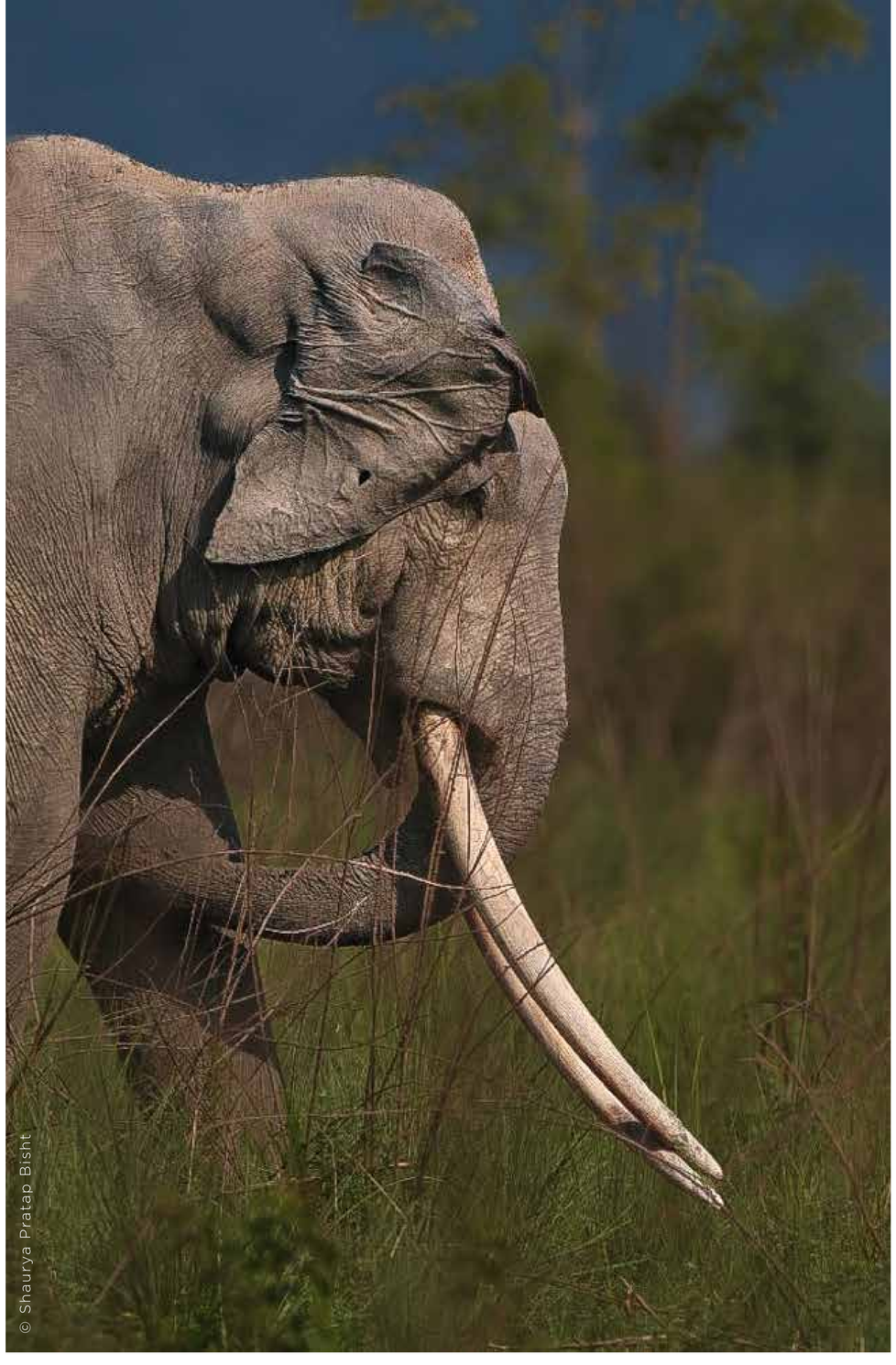
Photography has taught me patience and perseverance. Waiting for hours in the scorching heat or biting cold for that perfect shot isn't easy, but the reward is always worth it. There have been times when I have missed a shot because the subject moved too quickly, or my settings were not right. Instead of feeling discouraged, these moments motivate me to learn and improve.

Being a Wildlife photographer has taught me to appreciate the delicate balance of nature and the importance of conservation. I hope my photography inspires many and gives them a sense of responsibility to protect nature and their natural inhabitants.

For anyone who dream of exploring the jungle with a camera, my advice is simple: start small, stay curious, and never stop learning. Every click of the shutter is a step closer to discovering the wonders of the natural world.

The equipment I use are
Nikon Z 8 with 400 mm lens
Nikon D 850 with 70-200 lens





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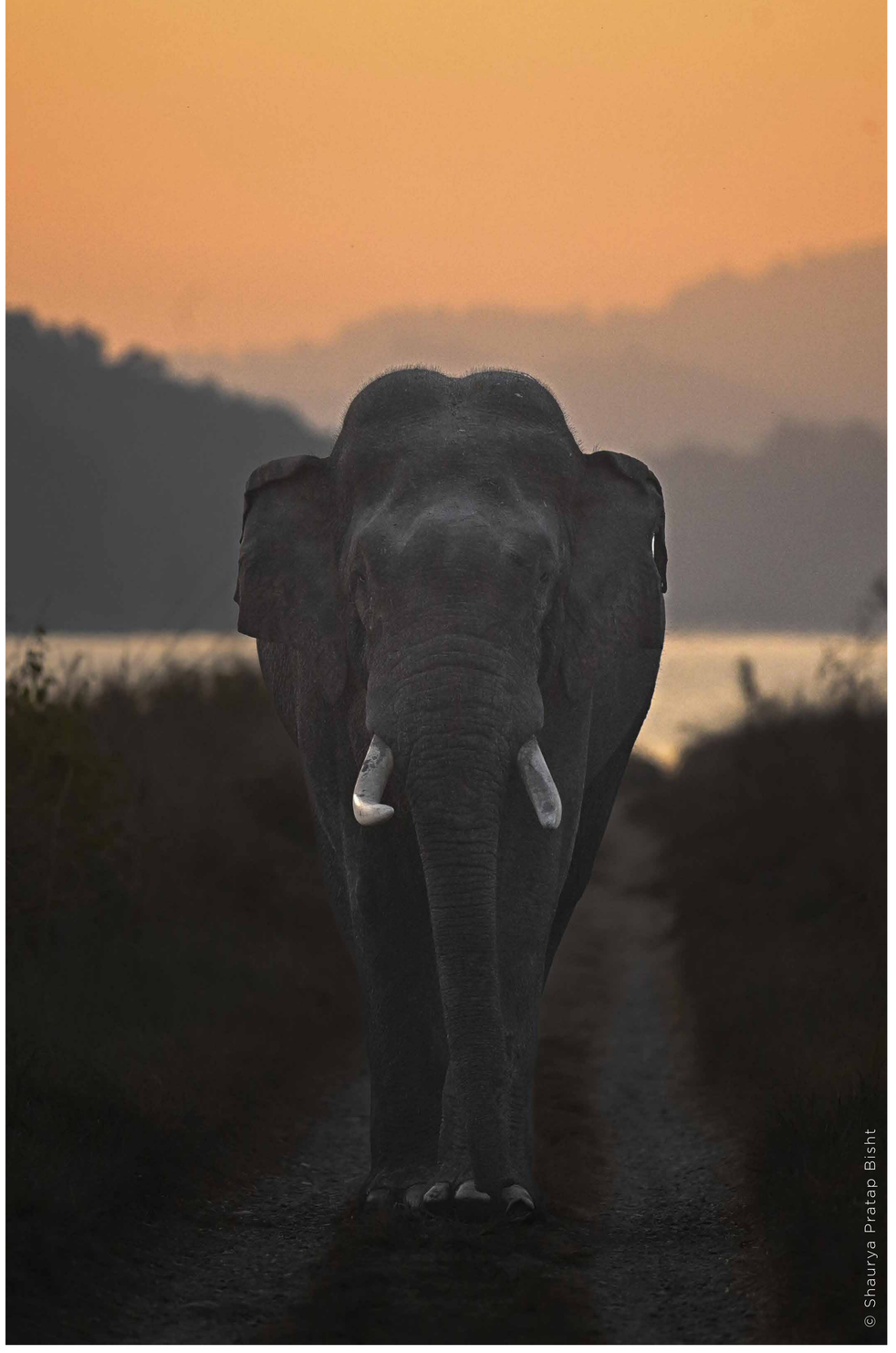

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TRAVELOGUE

The Sundarbans: A Journey of Birds, Mangroves, and Serenity

By Deepa Girish

© Deepa Girish

Deepa Girish is an award-winning and internationally published photographer based in Dubai. Her diverse portfolio spans travel, events, portraiture, wildlife, macro, minimalism, street, and fashion photography. Known for her artistic finesse, Deepa captures the essence of her subjects with elegance and depth.

Her work has been showcased in exhibitions across the UAE and India. A passionate mentor, she has guided young talents through Nikon workshops and has served as a judge for several photography contests.

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My trip to the Sundarbans was unlike anything I've ever experienced. It wasn't just about spotting birds or catching glimpses of its famous wildlife; it was about soaking in the tranquil beauty of the mangroves, marvelling at the vibrant life they nurture, and feeling the genuine warmth of the people who call this enchanting place home.

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Nature's Gentle Welcome

The Sundarbans greeted me with a sense of calm that's hard to put into words. As our boat drifted through serene waters, the dense, green mangroves embraced us. These forests, with their tangled roots and hardy trees, are the very heartbeat of the region. They shield the land from storms, clean the air, and provide a safe haven for an incredible array of creatures.

It is no wonder this place is a UNESCO World Heritage site. The Sundarbans span across India and Bangladesh, forming the world's largest delta. Around every corner, a new surprise awaited me. I couldn't get enough of the brilliant kingfishers—the common, black-capped, and stork-billed—darting over the water. Overhead, Brahminy kites soared effortlessly, while on the mudflats below, waders like sandpipers and plovers danced gracefully. The air was alive with the calls of unseen animals, adding to the mystery.

Exploring the Heart of the Mangroves

Mornings in the Sundarbans were magical. The soft light of dawn reflected off the water as birds filled the air with their melodies. Alongside local guides, I boarded a small boat to journey deeper into the mangroves. Every turn of the narrow channels revealed hidden wonders. Crocodiles lounged lazily on mudbanks, while mudskippers hopped around, making us laugh with their quirky antics.

When we paused, I found myself marveling at the ecosystem's delicate balance. The mangroves stood firm, their

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roots—pneumatophores—stretching upward like sculptures, allowing them to breathe in the oxygen-poor soil. These forests aren't just trees; they're a testament to resilience. Though I didn't cross paths with the elusive Royal Bengal tiger, knowing that it roamed somewhere nearby was enough to send a thrill through me. The Sundarbans' magic lies in its sense of mystery and its quiet yet vibrant life.

Meeting the People of the Sundarbans

But it wasn't just nature that made this trip unforgettable; it was the people. The locals, who have learned to live in harmony with their challenging environment, left a deep impression on me.

Their resilience and connection to the land were inspiring. Even in the face of storms, rising sea levels, and limited resources, they have an unwavering commitment to protect and preserve their home.

During my visit to a small village, I was moved by their stories. They spoke of their daily lives—fishing, collecting honey, and coexisting with the wildlife around them. Their respect for nature was palpable, and it was clear how intertwined their lives were with the ecosystem. Women, in particular, play a pivotal role here, balancing farming, household responsibilities, and community efforts. Witnessing their strength and spirit was humbling.

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A Feast for the Senses

The food in the Sundarbans was another highlight of my journey. Every meal was simple yet bursting with flavor. Freshly cooked dal, an assortment of local vegetables, and other dishes made from the region's resources told a story with each bite. For seafood enthusiasts, the freshly caught fish and prawns would be a dream come true. As a vegetarian, I still found plenty to savor, all lovingly prepared by the locals who take pride in their culinary traditions.

What made it even more special was the way the meals were served—often on banana leaves, a nod to sustainable and traditional practices. Sharing these meals in a rustic setting with the people of the Sundarbans felt like celebrating the heart and soul of their culture.

The Magic of Sundarbans Sunsets

And then, there were the sunsets. As the sun sank below the horizon, the sky exploded into hues of orange, pink, and gold. The reflections on the water were nothing short of magical. I found myself standing still, completely captivated by the beauty before me. It was one of those moments where time seems to stop, and all you feel is gratitude.

Nights in the Sundarbans were equally enchanting. Under a star-filled sky, the gentle sounds of the forest took over—the chirping of crickets, the distant hoot of an owl, and the soft rustle of leaves in the breeze. It was a lullaby from nature itself, wrapping me in a cocoon of tranquillity.

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Lessons from the Mangroves
My time in the Sundarbans reminded me why it is so vital to protect places like this. This isn't just a beautiful destination—it is a lifeline for countless species and communities. But it is also fragile, under threat from climate change, deforestation, and human interference. Preserving it is a responsibility we all share.

The Sundarbans also taught me about resilience. These mangroves thrive in some of the harshest conditions, adapting and flourishing where most plants couldn't survive. Their strength was a poignant reminder that we, too, can find ways to adapt and grow, no matter how tough the circumstances.

A Place That Stays with You

The Sundarbans is more than just a place; it is a feeling. It's a sanctuary of peace, inspiration, and quiet wonder. This journey gave me more than just stunning photographs. It gave me a renewed sense of connection—to nature, to people, and to myself.

As I left this remarkable place, I carried with me memories that I'll treasure forever. The Sundarbans is proof of the incredible beauty that exists when nature and humanity find harmony. If you ever get the chance to visit, take it. It's not just a trip; it's a soulful experience that will leave you changed in the best possible way.

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Art of Nature!
By Cecilia Segal

Cecilia Segal is a 34-year-old illustrator from Buenos Aires, known for her captivating naturalistic illustrations. With a lifelong passion for art, she initially explored various artistic fields, including acting and set design within the theater world. She also participated in several book illustration workshops, where her love for drawing flourished. Cecilia's current work focuses on blending her fascination with nature and her artistic skills, creating intricate and vibrant illustrations of wildlife. In addition to her artistic pursuits, she is a psychology student at the University of Buenos Aires, where she continues to explore the intersection of creativity and human understanding.

instagram.com/mantarraya.ilustraciones

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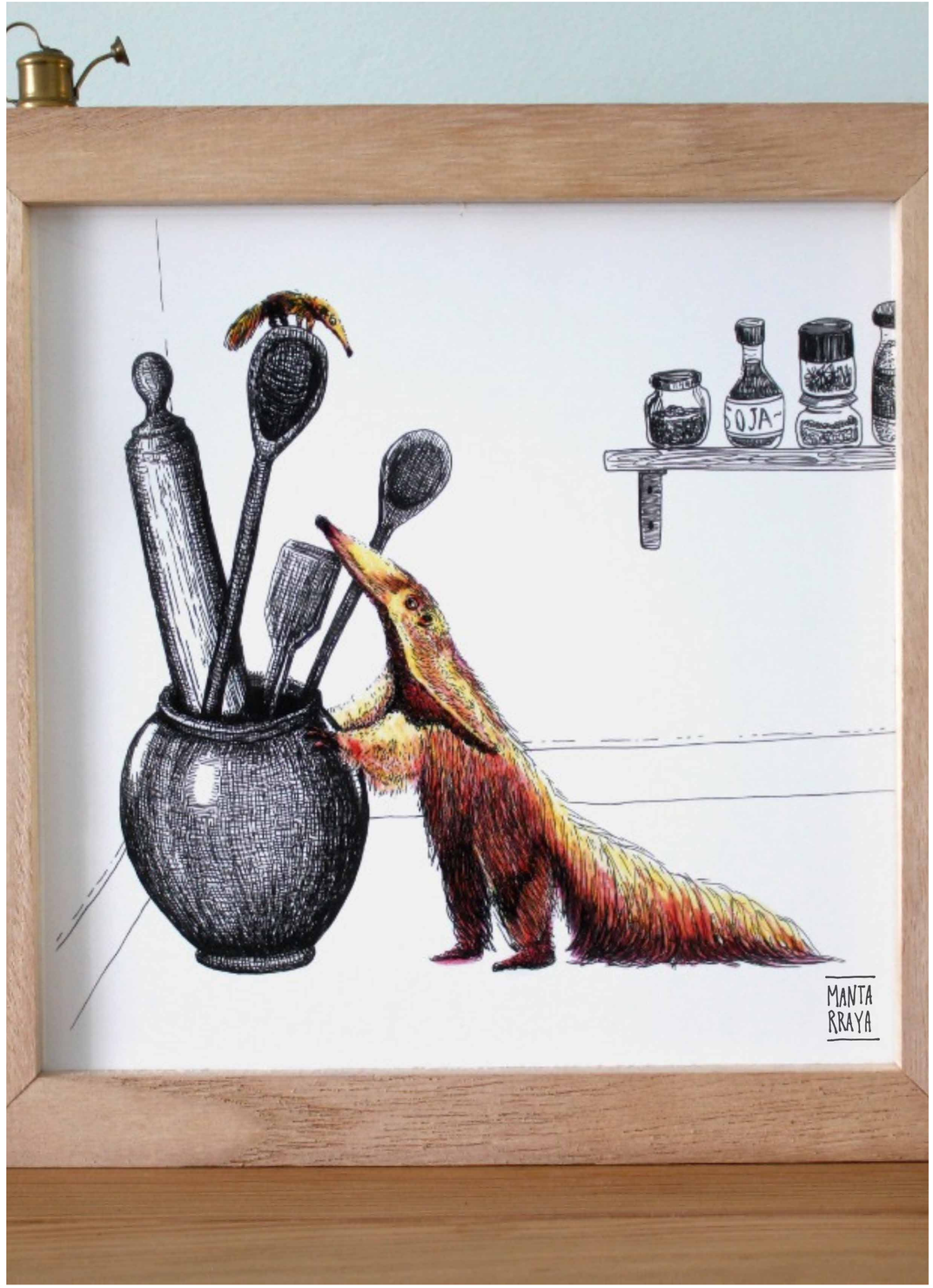
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My name is Cecilia Segal, and I'm an illustrator, born, raised, and still living in the magnetic and impossible city of Buenos Aires. This fact is crucial to tell my story with art, and pretty much everything I love in this world. Today, with my aquatic alter-ego (Mantarraya), I do naturalist illustration with a few poetic licenses here and there. I'm also studying psychology at the University of Buenos Aires. I come from a family of artists—musicians, filmmakers, and painters—except for my mom, who is a psychologist.

As a kid, I watched nature documentaries, read encyclopedias, and enjoyed assembling that knowledge. I also loved trying to draw by copying the photos from those books, obsessing over every spot on a feline's fur, sketching it in my notebook. I didn't know it then, but this was a preview of my current life: observing and analyzing references and then drawing, is what I do today.

Although I had been drawing all my life, as a confused teenager, I thought my path was acting, so I started studying at a theater conservatory. As any illustrator would do, I felt terrified by the exposure and quit. But something about theater still pulled me in (and it still does), so I signed up for scenography at the same conservatory. That one, too, I left halfway through (getting a degree? I don't know her!), but I met great teachers and amazing classmates along the way. For the first time, I had a university framework for learning plastic arts. I got to explore drawing more deeply, the materials, and design. I didn't finish it because I realized what I loved most

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Chrysolina Sturmi
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about scenography was drawing. Three dimensions overwhelmed me; two were enough.

So, for a few years, I participated in book illustration workshops and courses, another passion that, along with theater, Buenos Aires gifted me. This is one of the cities hosting the highest number of theater shows running every weekend in the world. I believe it should be on the podium for its bookstores too. Both in quantity and quality, the bookstores in Buenos Aires are amazing.

While studying book illustration, I realized I always found a way to draw animals. It didn't matter what the story was about; I would always create an animal version, or, if I couldn't, sneaked animals into the plot through the illustrations. So, I took all the knowledge I had acquired over the years and returned to what I had always done: drawing animals.

After years of existential crisis and while already exploring naturalist illustration, I decided on 28 to enroll in psychology at the University of Buenos Aires. When I tell my story like I'm telling it now—from the artistic perspective—it might seem like my interest in psychology is unrelated, coming from a different place. But that couldn't be more misleading. Art and psychology share the same raw material: the human soul. Both disciplines study a mystery. Psychology (psychoanalysis) aims to unravel it, fully aware that it's impossible. It's a paradox: trying to explain the unexplainable, and because it's unexplainable, it's irresistibly attractive to try.

Art also circles around this mystery. But instead of trying to understand it with analysis and words, it tries to pierce through it, armed with some kind of medium. In my case, paper and pencil.

During quarantine (with no classes at school), I took an online naturalist illustration course. One of the exercises turned out quite well, and the professor advised me not to leave those drawings forgotten in a sketchbook—he told me to do something with them. That was when I decided to start a business. I opened an Instagram account, made prints of those drawings, framed them, and at the same time, I launched a website offering nationwide shipping in Argentina. That was in May 2021.

It was a big deal for me to take my drawings out of the intimacy of my sketchbook and show them to the world, to sell them. People started commissioning personalized pet portraits, and I kept adding products to the online store.

Pet portraits, by the way, are one of the most fun and touching parts of my work. People share their stories with their furry companions, send me photos—It is an absolute privilege, even before I start the main task of drawing them, which brings me immense joy.

Besides these pet portrait commissions, I really enjoy drawing wildlife. Throughout my entire adult life, I had only drawn

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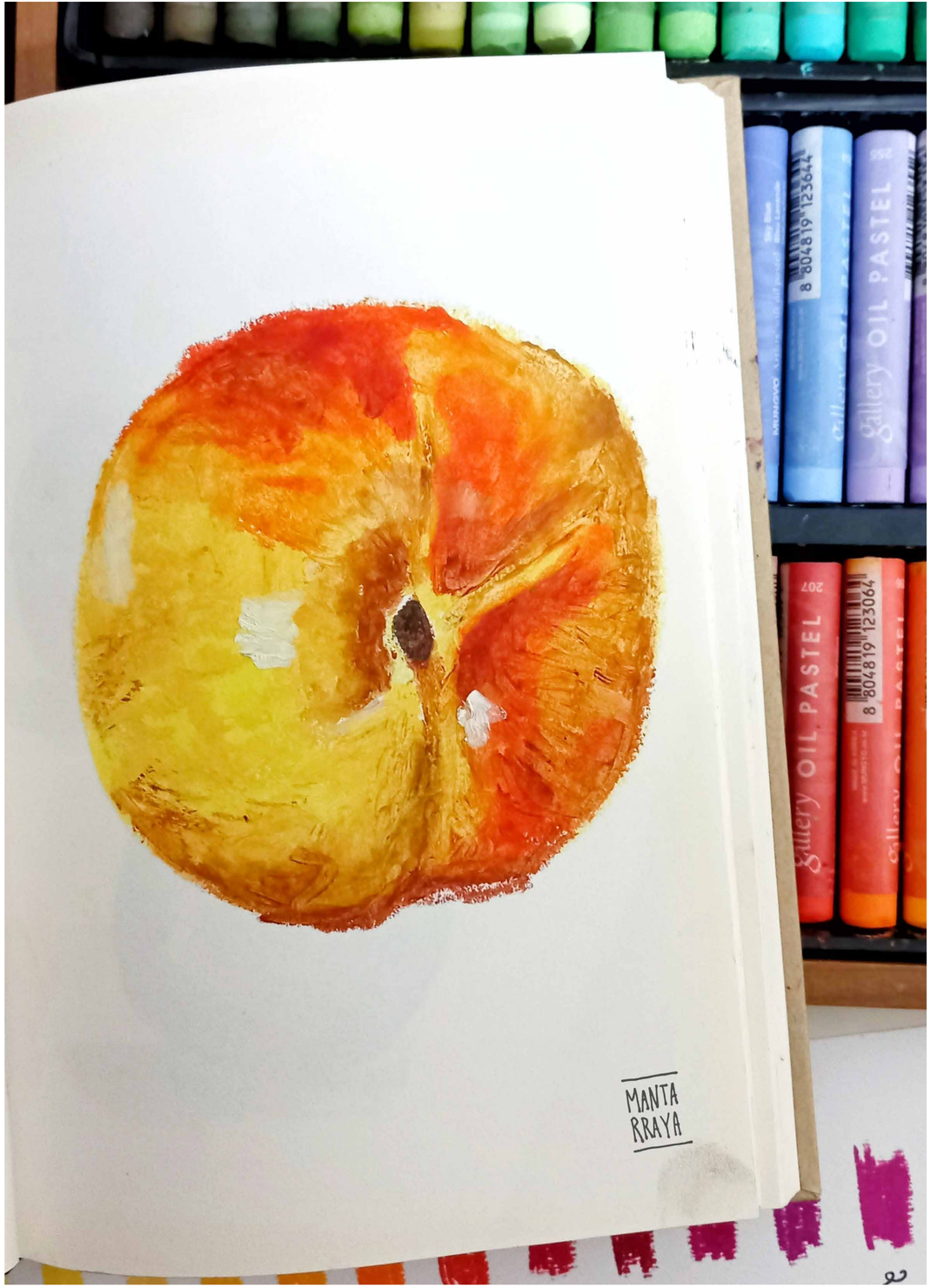
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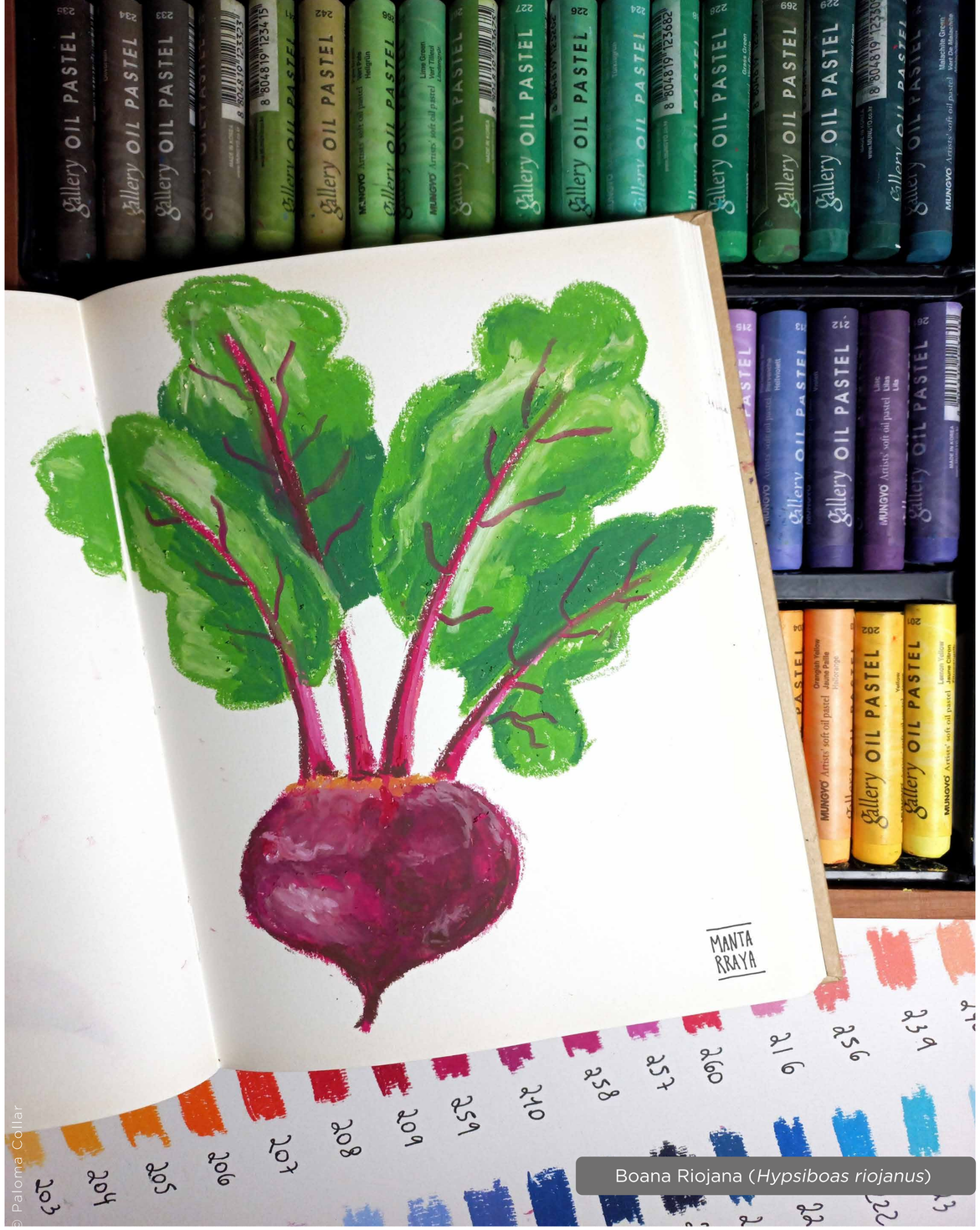


Boana Riojana (*Hypsiboas riojanus*)

in black line, without any color. But one day, I got curious and decided to try out some alcohol-based markers I had bought. I couldn't wait to finish sketching a complex mammal, so I remembered someone once told me insects are "simple" to draw because of their symmetry. I found a cute beetle on Pinterest and started sketching it.

I quickly moved on to coloring, and it was a one-way trip from there. I was used to lines, textures, and values, but suddenly, I was exploring tones, colors, shapes, and planes. It was so much fun, and I started a series of beetle drawings that continues to this day. They are one of the most fun creatures to draw, so diverse in their shapes, textures, colors, and shiny surfaces.

I think a big part of the fun in experimenting with color comes from the fact that I draw everything 100 percent by hand. I don't want to sound snobbish: It is not that I am unwilling to explore digital mediums; rather, my only technological resource is an old laptop that struggles even to run Netflix.What could initially be seen as a limitation is actually the opposite: a strength.

It allows me to keep exploring and refining traditional techniques. Besides, we all know that nothing in the world compares to the joy of opening a huge box of colors to paint with (pencils, markers, or oil pastels). Those are my favorite materials.

At the beginning, I mentioned how being from Buenos Aires is crucial to my story. Now I come back to that idea when I think about my connection to nature.

What fascinates me about nature, like the unconscious, is its mystery. What we know, I love, but what we don't, I'm passionate about. I think it is a very urban thought, very much from the analyst's couch.

In fact, unlike my fellow naturalists, being in nature doesn't always suit me. My ultra-sensitive skin can't tolerate the sun, I get strange allergies, and I suffer from the whims of the weather. It feels like if I expose myself to the elements, I degrade too

quickly. That is why I sometimes think my love for nature is an apartment love, a shy love. A love that happens in my sketches.

Drawing is something spectacular; it can turn any random night into a fantastic plan. Intimate, introspective, mysterious, magnetic, cryptic, playful. It requires the courage to know that with every stroke, you might mess it up.

The flexibility to surf along the line and resolve things in the moment. The calmness of spirit to patiently look at everything like a scanner. And the opposite: the freshness to capture the general essence in the blink of an eye. It also demands precision to create the details where the entire world is folded up. When you draw, your way of seeing and connecting with things changes. They no longer come through your eyes; they flow out of your hands. I don't draw to express myself—I draw to understand.

MANTA
RRAYA
2022

Lamprotornis Chalybaeus
MANTA
RRAYA

PHOTO GALLERY

YOUR GALLERY

PI EXPLORERS

Anoop KM

Mugger crocodile (*Crocodylus palustris*)

Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary,Mysore, India

YOUR GALLERY

Sarah Loweree

Coke's Hartebeest (*Alcelaphus buselaphus cokii*)

Masai Mara, Kenya

YOUR GALLERY

EXPLORERS

Vanessa Bravo
Lion (*Panthera leo*)
Masai Mara, Kenya

YOUR GALLERY

EXPLORERS

Grace Miller

Leopard (*Panthera pardus*)

Masai Mara, Kenya

YOUR GALLERY

EXPLORERS

Evelyn Murphy

African buffalo (*Syncerus caffer*) & Red-billed Oxpecker (*Buphagus erythrorhynchus*) Masai Mara, Kenya

YOUR GALLERY

Tito Vidal
Lion (*Panthera leo*)
Masai Mara, Kenya

YOUR GALLERY

Beatrice Bello
Lion (*Panthera leo*)
Masai Mara, Kenya

YOUR GALLERY

Caroline Gommel

African buffalo (*Syncerus caffer*) & Cattle egret(*Bubulcus ibis*)

Masai Mara, Kenya

YOUR GALLERY

PT EXPLORERS

Jeremy Winter

Hippopotamus (*Hippopotamus amphibius*)

Masai Mara, Kenya

YOUR GALLERY

Emma Schilling
Leopard (*Panthera pardus*)
Masai Mara, Kenya

YOUR GALLERY

EXPLORERS

Serafina Szarmach
Lion (*Panthera leo*)
Masai Mara, Kenya

YOUR GALLERY

EXPLORERS

Hannah Gadpaille

Coke's Hartebeest (*Alcelaphus buselaphus cokii*)

Masai Mara, Kenya

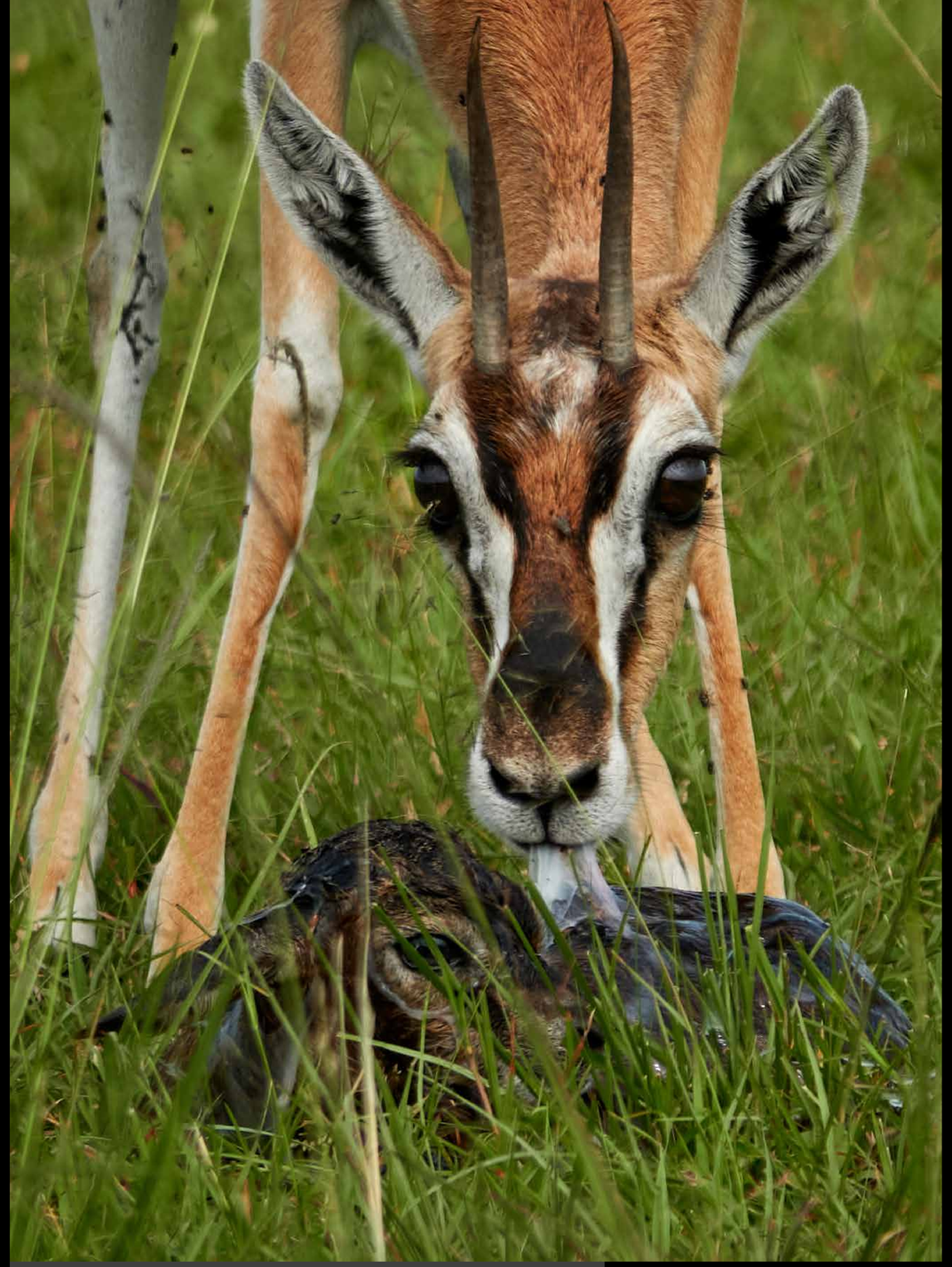
YOUR GALLERY

Hermis Haridas
Tiger (*Panthera tigris*)
Dhikala, Corbett, India

YOUR GALLERY

EXPLORERS

Samantha Stashower
African elephant (*Loxodonta*)
Masai Mara, Kenya



YOUR GALLERY

EXPLORERS

Ava Gabrys
Thomson's gazelle (*Eudorcas thomsonii*)
Masai Mara, Kenya

YOUR GALLERY

EXPLORERS

Sienna Hartley
Lion (*Panthera leo*)
Masai Mara, Kenya

YOUR GALLERY

EXPLORERS

Rosalyn Towler

Hippopotamus (*Hippopotamus amphibius*)

Masai Mara, Kenya

YOUR GALLERY

Daniel Lipps
Lion (*Panthera leo*)
Masai Mara, Kenya

YOUR GALLERY

Bridget Reheard
Leopard (*Panthera pardus*)
Masai Mara, Kenya

YOUR GALLERY

Peter Hudson

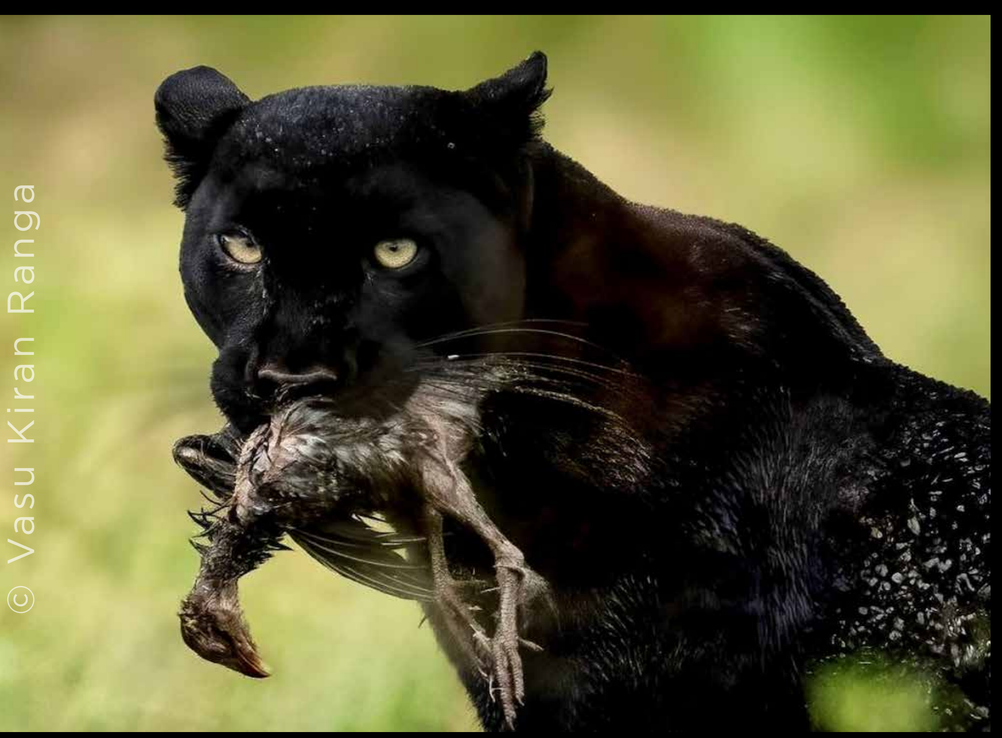
Hippopotamus (*Hippopotamus amphibius*)

Masai Mara, Kenya

EXPLORERS

UPCOMING FEATURES

INTO THE WILD
with Harshad Karkera



BLACK LEOPARD
By Vasu Kiran Ranga

KODIAK BEAR TRAILS
By Nisha Purushothaman