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EXPLORERS

# I

APR / MAY 2019

**WOMEN'S EDITION**

## INTO THE WILD

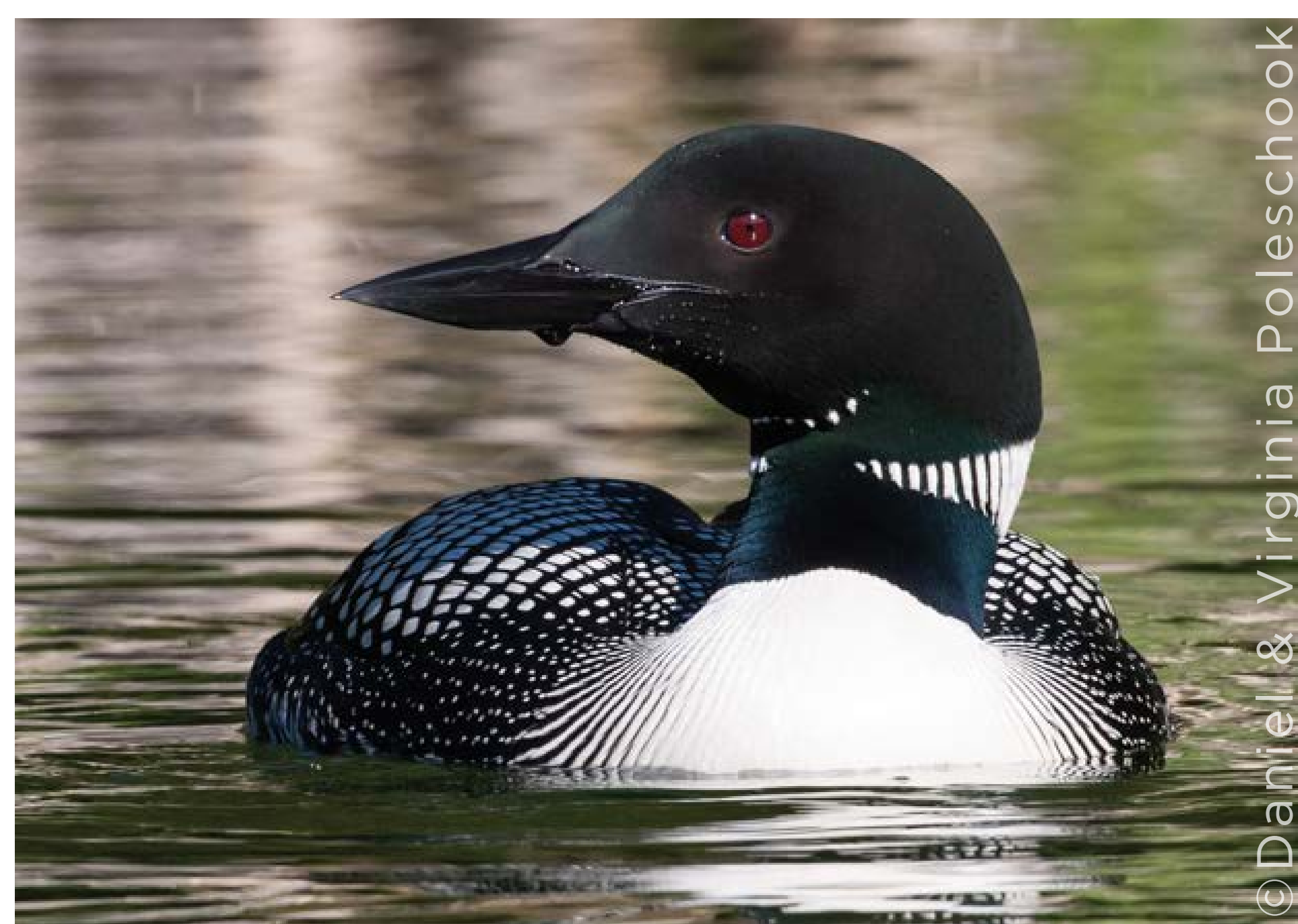
with RATHIKA RAMASAMY

## COMMON LOON

BY KATE TAYLOR



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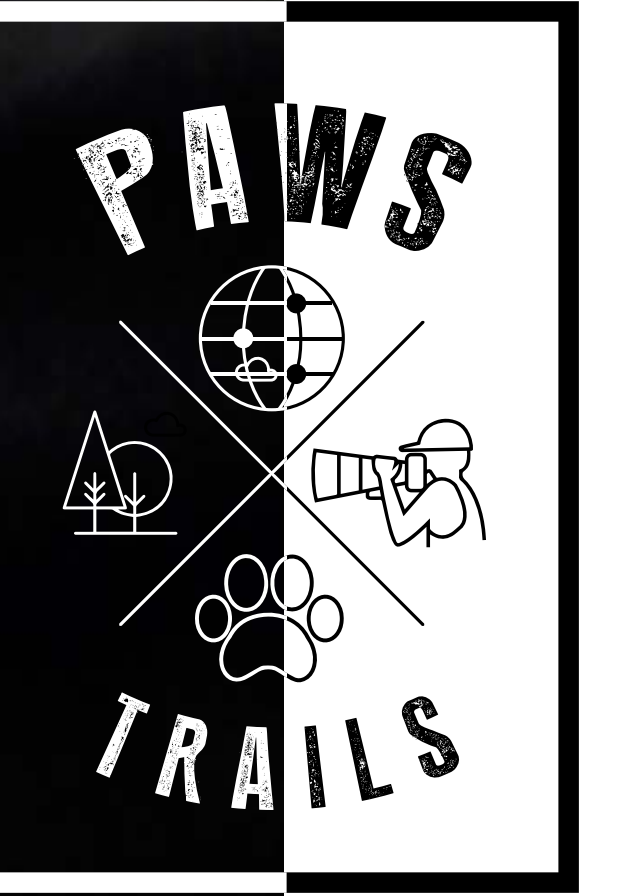
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# 008

Into the Wild  
with Rathika Ramasamy



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Cynthia Bandurek  
Editor

As a woman involved in conservation projects and nature photography for more than a decade, I have the honor to present this issue of PT Explorers magazine.

This issue is dedicated to the special women, who in their special ways contribute to environmental awareness and wildlife conservation. The articles in this edition are but a small sample of the impact and contribution that women around the world make to the cause of mother nature and our fellow beings.

The interview features Indian photographer Rathika Ramasamy. She chats on her interesting forays into the wildlife, bird photography and tips and techniques to employ in the field.

Kate Taylor from Maine spent 12 years overseeing the scientific program for the Loon Preservation Committee in New Hampshire. She describes in her article the life of Loons, specially their behavior, illustrated with amazing photography by Daniel and Virginia Poleschook

Dr. Megan Davidson in Australia tells us about the dramatic situation of kangaroos, especially the smaller species, and explains the effort of Wildlife Victoria to protect them.

Also, in Australia, Nadia DW writes about the impact of climate change in the increased frequency of forest fires, in an environment already complicated by the dry characteristic of its vegetation

An Art exhibit, with a special topic: Linking Science and Art. The perfect combination, Knowledge and the power of art to mobilize in an emotional plane. Deborah McKew tells about this inspiring project, in Portland, Maine.

Athira Mohan Krishnan explores the picture-perfect locales of Malawi and the amazing wildlife.

PT thank all the women contributors of this Volume for sharing their experiences and spreading the knowledge.



**PHOTOGRAPHY DIRECTOR'S CHOICE**



**Kimti Sagar**  
Green Sea Turtle  
(*Chelonia mydas*)





# FOUNDERS' NOTE

PT Explorers is carrying on the tradition we started in 2018, of designating the April-May issue a women specific edition. The 8th of March was celebrated as international women's day and it is only befitting that we use the occasion to salute the gallant lady warriors who have shown the willingness to take up the fight for mother earth. Today more and more women are entering the realms of environmental activism, conservation, animal rights and wildlife, conservation photography. We also take this opportunity to join our voice for equal rights and equal job opportunities for the fairer sex. Our experience teaches us that women in conservation and wildlife photography are easily the equal of men in the field. Hence, it is natural that they be equal in any field and as such should command equal rights, opportunities and remuneration.

Our thanks to all the ladies out there who are devoting time and effort to make the earth a better place.

Paws Trails is always on the look out for increasing our engagement with our viewers. It is our belief that the best hope for protecting mother nature is to bring people closer to nature. The way to achieve this is by promoting activities where people get out there in the outdoors and spend time in nature. It is with this primary objective that we launched our regular weekend bird photography workshops in Dubai, since February. The impact and awareness this group will make among their circle of influence through their photographs is the sweet bonus of this initiative. We have eager new joiners every week along with the regulars who turn up week after week, raising our hopes of nurturing a thriving community of nature lovers in Dubai.

#CommunityPhotography #CommunityConservation

[www.pawstrails.com](http://www.pawstrails.com)

**Hermis Haridas & Nisha Purushothaman**

Founders - PT Explorers



COVER STORY

# Into The Wild

with Rathika Ramasamy





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Rathika was born in a village near Theni in the south of India. She has always had a fierce connect with nature and turned this morphed into a full time career in nature photography while on a visit to Bharatpur Bird sanctuary in 2003. Rathika is arguably one of India's foremost wildlife photographers and has a fondness for bird photography.

A member of Nikon's professional services, her work has been appreciated and featured in several national and international publications as well as exhibitions. She was selected as one of the top bird photographers in India by 'Birds of India' in 2008 and has published two photo books.

[rathikaramasamy.com](http://rathikaramasamy.com)

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

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







Sarus Crane (*Antigone antigone*)



**A hearty welcome to PT Explorers!  
Rathika, we are thrilled to have you  
join us.**

Thank you for the invite, it is my pleasure. I am Rathika Ramasamy, Wildlife Photographer from Chennai, India. I grew up in Venkatachalapuram, a small town in Theni district in Southern Tamil Nadu, India. Much of my childhood was a traditional upbringing focused on going to school and studies that led to a Bachelor's degree in Computer Engineering (B.E) and a Master's in Business Administration (MBA) after that. I have been in this field for last 15 years. I specialize in birds, though I love to shoot mammals like Elephants and big cats. I've been to most of the National parks in India, and to those in Africa. For, wildlife photography is not only my passion, but a powerful medium to help conserve nature. I regularly conduct wildlife photography workshops and hold talks all over India.

**How did your journey from a Software Engineer to a Wildlife photographer?**

For me, Photography is an interest that started as a hobby way back in school and has since developed into a passion. It started with my father gifting me a camera when I was in high school and back in those days it was a film camera. I would shoot everything I saw - trees, flowers, whatever I could capture, mostly in my backyard. Camera was my constant companion wherever I traveled. My parents were very supportive of my interest in photography and their encouragement was a key factor in sustaining my

interest. In 2003 I had an opportunity to visit Bharatpur, maybe better known as the Keoladeo Ghana National Park. After seeing the birds, I wanted to capture images of the birds so that I could enjoy seeing those again. Being in nature was a feeling that was absolutely fascinating. It was after this first experience that I invested in my first tele lens and did a lot of reading on animals and birds, their habitats and everything else I could know about them. There is no substitute for field work though and being self-taught, spending hours shooting in the field was an invaluable part of this learning curve. New Delhi, where I lived, is surrounded by many bird sanctuaries and national parks, and is the main route for migratory birds. This gave me plenty of opportunities to shoot birds, and I started to specialize in bird photography. I think they are the most beautiful living species in God's creation. I am in love with them.

**We find it rare to see professional female Wildlife Photographers based in India. Is it challenging in this field in that part of the world? What are the challenges that you face?**

When I started wildlife photography, it was a nascent profession. Monetary benefits were very less. Of course, it is very challenging to be a wildlife photographer, with costly forest safaris, expensive equipment's. It took me four years to buy my 600mm prime lens. Initially I did other genres of photography - Travelling and Concept photography for publishing firms, as I had equipment and time to do that. Fortunately, with my family's support I could continue even though the returns were nothing at times. It took years to establish. Wildlife



Green Bee-eater (*Merops orientalis*)





Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)





©Rathika Ramasamy

Rufous Sibia (*Heterophasia capistrata*)

teaches you how to have patience and perseverance.

**You’ve released two books - “Bird Photography” and “The Best of Wildlife Moments”. Can you tell us more about them please?**

In those days there were very few good coffee table photo books by Indian photographers. In 2010, I published my first photo book on “Bird Photography”. It was my first attempt to bring out the good photos of Indian birds in a book, that had a collection of my best bird profile images. In 2014, I published “The Best of Wildlife Moments”, a photo book of Wildlife moments from my collection. This book has over 150 images of 75 species. All images were taken in their natural habitat. While the first book was all about profile shots, this one featured all action images of birds and animals, part of my favourite wildlife moments I have seen and captured.

**How would you describe your photography style ?**

Wildlife photography for me is a medium to connect with nature. I always look for a story in the subject I want to shoot, and I try to capture some emotion or interaction in my subjects. I love to shoot them in their best moods and unique characteristics. Even in simple profile shots, I look for different lighting or some interesting posture of the subject. I make sure all my images are high on technical quality and aesthetical composition.

**How did you feel when “The Birds of India” (an Indian based bird-lover community) chose you as one of the**

**top 20 best photographers of India, in 2008? Not to mention that you were the only woman to receive the distinction in its entire existence.**

Bird photography is my passion and I am enjoying it. I was very happy, as any appreciation and recognition from your own community is special. I was even more motivated to do good quality work.

**You have some breathtaking photographs of birds and mammals. What are some important factors to consider while taking action or intimate photographs of wildlife? (i.e. Behaviour for example).**

Most of the shoot will be in the wild and natural habitat. As wildlife won’t give us much time to think, we should be very fast to shoot them.

It is very important to have in-depth knowledge of animals and birds, and their behaviour pattern and habitats. When waiting to capture shots which show action, one must anticipate the action and click at the right moment before the action happens. If one waits to see what will happen, we will miss capturing the ‘decisive’ moment.

Never take the eye away from the viewfinder. While waiting, check your camera settings, and take a test shot. Don’t go very close to the animals; always give some space around the subjects so that if it takes off or any action happens, you can frame them without cutting off any part of the body. Respect your subjects; never ever enter beyond their comfort zone. If you feel they are disturbed, give them some time to get used to your presence. For close-up









Indian Elephant (*Elephas maximus indicus*)

shots, wait for eye contact, which gives a special connection between the subject and viewer.

**Can you give our readers your best wildlife & bird photography tips?**

*\*Technical knowledge should be your second nature*

*\*Plan your shoot well in advance.*

*\*If it is bird photography, get a checklist of the birds; if you target any particular species, find out where and when is the best time to photograph.*

*\*If it is a big cat safari, book a good driver who has knowledge of photography, because he is going to give you point of view in the field.*

*\*Always check the settings and take one test shot*

*\*Once you are done with the documentation shot, watch through your viewfinder*

*\*Focus on eye, for birds try to catch light in the eyes*

*\*Wait for the right moment to capture them in action*

*\*For birds, first try to capture a habitat shot, then go for close-up. Try different POVs and move around to get the best POV.*

*\*Check all possible locations for the best image.*

*\*Don't lose your subject, keep it clutter free, avoid featureless sky.*

*\*For animal portraits, try for eye contact*

*\*Keep the composition simple, fill the frame*

*\*Check your histogram and be aware of blinked highlights*

*\*Meter for highlights, and in case of tricky lighting, use spot metering*

*\*For sharp images use a tripod or monopod.*

*\*Visualise few possible frames in mind and frame your shot aesthetically.*

**Do you have any recommendation on camera settings or gear for bird photography specifically?**

I shoot in raw format using manual exposure mode; for bird photography, I

use continuous focus.

I often use recall shooting functions and custom settings f1 (custom control assignment). I assign one button for grid display, and one button for F2 for group area AF. These settings help to capture the image with different lighting conditions, without taking the eye away from your viewfinder.

**What are your thoughts on keeping photography simple – such as shooting at eye level and taking the background into consideration?**

I always insist in keeping it simple; don't clutter your frame with distractive elements. Crouch down to animal's eye





Indian Elephant (*Elephas maximus indicus*)





Tiger (*Panthera tigris*) & Chital (*Rusa alfredi*)

©Rathika Ramasamy

level as eye level photography is one of the important rules in composing your animal shots. It helps to get eye contact from your subject, and images will become strong. While shooting water birds, one must keep the camera on ground, so that the background gives you creamy clear bokeh.

#### Do you have a single special highlight or moment in your encounters with birds?

Though I have many special moments, the one in which a Rose-ringed parakeet pair attacks a monitor lizard is my favourite. It was the most printed image of my works and received a lot of appreciation. I was once shooting migratory fowls in Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur. While I was kneeling on

the ground to shoot them, all of a sudden, I saw something hurrying towards me. I turned my lens to see what that was. I was astonished to find a Monitor lizard running for its life as a pair of Parakeets were fiercely attacking it and trying to bite its tail. Lizards are typically lazy and content with sun basking, and Parakeets are usually peaceful and keep to themselves. Here the Parakeet pair was driving away the lizard that was looking to steal the eggs. After the scared Lizard disappeared into nearby bushes, the Parakeets kept watch till they were sure that it would not come back. This was the first time I witnessed Parakeets being aggressive. It reminded me of how animals and birds too are protective of their babies.

#### What are the differences in photographing a single bird versus birds in pairs or in a flock? How do you make sure that you get that sharp focus?

Focusing and getting sharp images of a single bird is easy. If it is a flock, you must shoot with deep depth of field. If two birds or a flock is perching on the same focal plane, then you get all of them in sharp focus.

But when they are in different focal planes, increase the depth of field with a higher aperture like f /9 f/ 10 or at times, more than that.

#### What about missed opportunities in your wildlife photography journey - is there

#### anything you can recall in mind?

Many times. For example, in Corbett, I always wanted to capture a tiger in misty back ground, but missed the chance. In Bharatpur, I missed shooting six Spotted owlets sitting closely on a tree branch.

#### Having photographed in so many wildlife areas, is there an iconic location that you hold close to your heart that you keep going back to?

Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur, Rajasthan is one of my favourite places to photograph birds. It is very special to me; I fell in love with birds for the first time at this park. It is a paradise for bird lovers and photographers.



Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrceros birostris*)

**Let’s chat about your wildlife photography safaris for a minute. What is a typical one-day safari like?**

My day starts with waking up at five am. In Indian national parks, I will start the safari at six am and go around till ten am. Thereafter, I return and have my breakfast. I then download the images I had shot and do a quick check . I then have lunch, take some rest, and get ready for the afternoon safari, which is from two pm to six pm.

**Was there ever a time when you felt like you were in danger on a photography expedition?**

My trip to Jim Corbett National Park in 2005 was the most adventurous trip. I had a hair-raising experience when an elephant came charging at full speed towards our vehicle.

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

I have many favorites, and it is tough to choose one. If I have to choose one image, then it is that of a territorial fight between two Indian darters (*Anhinga melanogaster*) at Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur, India.

**What is your view on nature conservation and climate change? How can we, as wildlife photographers, help to protect our planet?**

Our health is dependent on pure air, water and food. These elements get affected when biodiversity of our planet is negatively impacted. It is OUR responsibility to keep the balance and maintain our biodiversity. Deforestation

and pollution and encroachment of water bodies and wetlands are all leading to destruction of the natural habitats of animals and birds.

I always believe that each and every nature or wildlife photographer is a wildlife ambassador. We must use our photographs to create more awareness about the importance of conservation. Top photographers can contribute their images for conservation campaigns and share beautiful images with social messages on social media. Along with their commercial workshops, they can give free talks on conservation to school and colleges. They can also give their photographs free to NGOs working towards conservation.

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

I am already conducting wildlife photography workshops and talks at colleges/universities and sharing the importance of wildlife and habitat conservation. I will be visiting more colleges and schools and continue this activity. As the next generation, if the youth realize the value of our natural resources, it would be in safe hands in the future.

**What would you say is your greatest achievement in your photography journey?**

In the year 2017, among photographers popular on the internet across the world, I was cited as the number one woman photographer. Most of my photographs are shot in India, and I am happy that our animals and birds are liked and



appreciated globally. (Source Top 100 photographers on the web- [www.xxlpix.net](http://www.xxlpix.net). As per the xxlpix website, the Web Popularity Index (WPI) takes into consideration the three key factors of the social web: reach, interaction with users, and external references. Thousands of social media and web indicators for popular photographers of the present day were collected during the survey period and evaluated for the creation of the index. We analysed: fans, followers and subscribers on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, Flickr, Tumblr, 500px and other social networks, ratios for interaction with subscribers, fans and followers, as well as references for the photographers' publications.

**Finally, what kind of equipment do you use and is there a specific reason why you choose it over other possibly similar equipment?**

My main camera is Nikon D5, and second bodies are Nikon D4s and Nikon D3. All are full frame cameras, and their ISO performance helps me to shoot in low light conditions, which is the case in the early mornings and late evenings. Good auto focus system of D5 and higher FPS (frame per second) helps to shoot action. For bird photography, I use a telephoto Nikkor AF-S 800mm F/5.6G ED VR & Nikon TC-14E II. And I use a Nikkor AF-S 80-400mm f/4.5-5.6G ED for shooting wild animals.



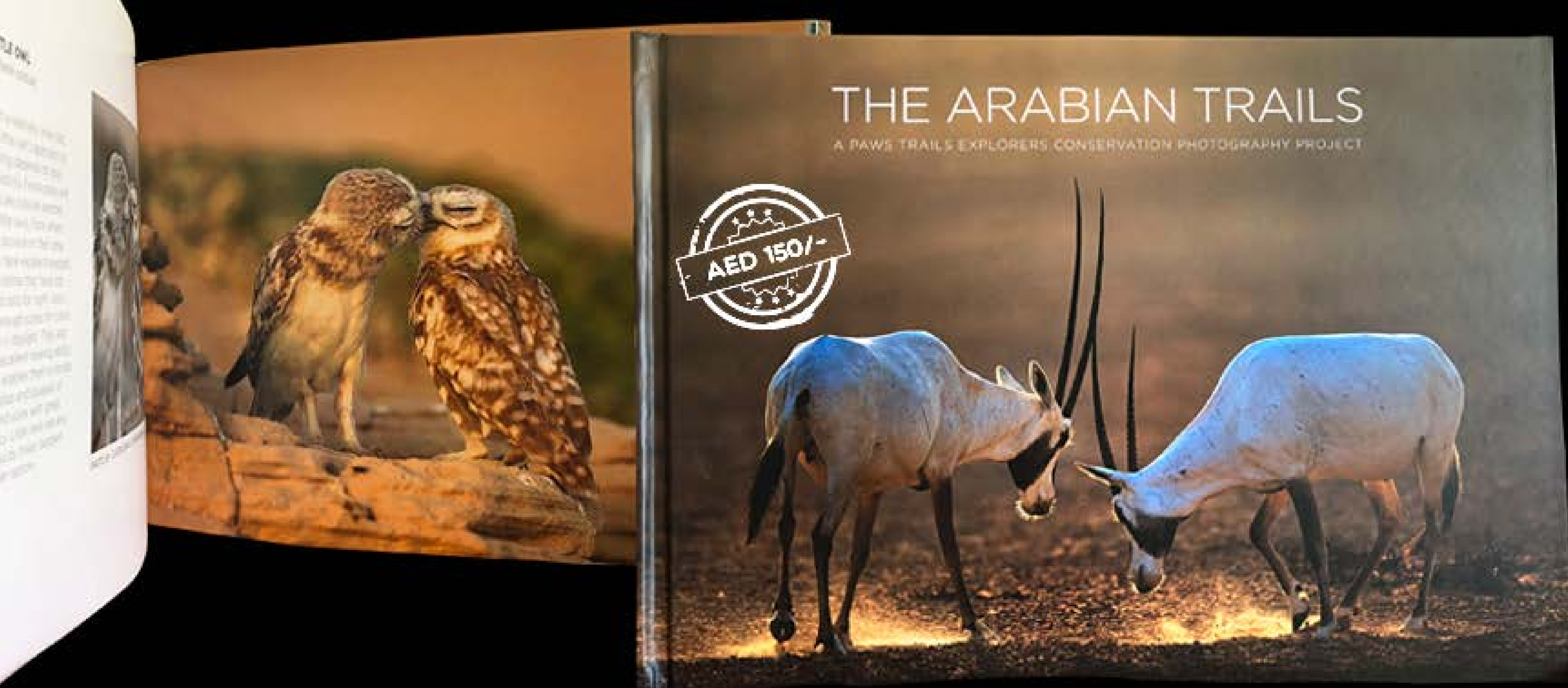
Purple Moorhen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*)





Blackbuck (*Antelope cervicapra*)





We, team Paws Trails **thank you for your participation** in Paws Trails International Wildlife Festival.

Paws Trails' vision and mission is to **spread awareness** on **conservation** using **photography** as a **tool**.

We **require your support** in accomplishing this mission.

Our new book "**The Arabian Trails**" is a great collection of **101 species** photographed from the Arabian Peninsula along with **key information** on each species.

It will add a **great value** to your collection.

We appreciate your support to spread the light and help build a **nature loving community**.

**Gift/Buy** a book and "**Be The Voice For The Voiceless**"

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

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# Kangaroos & The Struggles

By Dr. Megan Davidson







**Dr Megan Davidson is the CEO of Wildlife Victoria, an organisation dedicated to the rescue of sick, injured and orphaned Australian wildlife.**

**She is particularly interested in bat conservation, and raises orphaned Grey Headed Flying-fox pups to be released back into the wild.**



A kangaroo that has been hit by a car will usually need to be euthanised. Photo Credit: Wildlife Victoria



**Kangaroos – struggling for space in a highly urbanised and fragmented landscape**

The arrival of Europeans on the Australian continent in 1788 changed the future for indigenous wildlife. Fast forward a little over two centuries and Australia has an inexcusable record of species extinction due to human caused habitat destruction, hunting, and the impacts of introduced species such as foxes, cats, rabbits and cane toads. Thirty mammals are known to have become extinct, the most famous being the Thylacine or Tasmanian Tiger. However, it is an ill wind that blows nobody any good, and some indigenous species have benefited from habitat modification, and those that have adapted to an urban environment, such as the Brushtail Possum, are common in suburban backyards, parks and gardens.

When people think of Australian wildlife,

they often think of kangaroos as the most iconic emblem of the unique fauna of this continent. Kangaroos are part of a family of marsupials known as Macropods, an appropriate name meaning “big foot”. This family of marsupials includes kangaroos, wallaroos, wallabies, pademelons, bettongs, potoroos and quokkas. There are about 70 macropod species.

Many smaller macropod species have been severely impacted not only by human-caused habitat destruction but also by predation by introduced cats, foxes and dogs. Eleven of the 28 mammals already listed as extinct (Australian Government, EPBC Act List) are smaller macropods. The lovely Toolache Wallaby (*Notamacropus greyi*) survived just 85 years after the arrival of Europeans.

Some surviving macropod species that

were once widespread, such as the Bridled Nailtail Wallaby (*Onychogalea fraenata*), and the Brush-tailed rock-wallaby (*Petrogale penicillata*) now have an uncertain future. Gilbert’s potoroo (*Potorous gilbertii*) is Australia’s most endangered mammal: it was ‘rediscovered’ in 1994 after being thought extinct for almost a century and clings on in a small area of southern Western Australia.

Some larger macropod species, such as the Eastern Grey Kangaroo (*Macropus giganteus*), Red Kangaroo (*Macropus rufus*) and Western Grey (*Macropus fuliginosus*) remain reasonably widespread in their range. In the state of Victoria, an aerial survey in 2017 estimated the population of Eastern Grey Kangaroos to be somewhere between 1 and 2 million (Moloney, Ramsey & Scroggie, 2017). Kangaroos live in an extended family group called a ‘mob’.

Australians have a rather conflicted relationship with kangaroos, valued as quintessentially Australian, they are also “harvested” for meat and pelts and “culled” for competing with livestock. Sometimes they are “culled” to reduce impacts of overgrazing on local biodiversity (Howland & Driscoll 2016). The honest word to use in place of “harvested” and “culled” is simply: killed.

As the relentless march of urban development devours previously open grassland and woodlands on the fringes of cities and towns, mobs of kangaroos on the urban fringes are displaced. They are sometimes encircled or landlocked by new developments. Developers are

rarely required to consider the wildlife that will be displaced by their activities. The outcome for these animals is never a happy one, with most eventually being killed by cars or dogs. Relocation of affected mobs is challenging, because kangaroos can suffer from capture myopathy (a life threatening stress reaction), the cost of sedating and transporting large animals is high, and there may be a lack of suitable destination habitat.

One study (Brunton, Srivastava & Burnett, 2018) reported that even in urbanised areas where sufficient habitat remained, sharp declines in local populations of kangaroos occurred over a two year period, and vehicle collision accounted for 73% of mortality.

The urban fringe and country roads are dangerous places for kangaroos that are most active once the sun goes down. Risk can be mitigated to some extent by reducing speed, and by installing appropriately designed and placed fencing and crossing structures (Rytwinski et al. 2016).

Kangaroos can be large, with an adult male Eastern Grey Kangaroo weighing as much as a person. A car collision with such an animal typically causes substantial injuries or death to the animal, damage to the vehicle and frequently injury to the car’s occupants as well. Animals can remain mobile with severe injuries, making it difficult to euthanise a suffering animal.

As marsupials, kangaroo young are born in a foetal stage that then crawls into the



The paint sprayed on the body of this kangaroo hit and killed by a car indicates that the pouch has been checked for a surviving joey. Photo Credit: Emily Small





Kangaroos rarely survive a vehicle collision, and those that do are terribly injured. Photo Credit: Wildlife Victoria



mother's pouch where it attaches to a teat and continues its development. The unfurred joey is known as a 'pinky'.

A joey can survive in its dead mother's pouch on the roadside for several days. This makes it imperative that all marsupials hit by a car, or found dead, have their pouch checked for live young. Wildlife rescuers may need to cut the dead mother's nipple off to remove a surviving kangaroo joey from the pouch, as the young are so strongly attached that attempts to get it to let go may injure the joey's jaw. Older joeys may be thrown from the pouch when the mother is hit by a car. A clue for rescuers is that there is an elongated teat in the pouch, but no joey. The lost joey will die unless it can be found, captured and taken into care until it is old enough to survive independently. Some rescuers wait for hours for the joey to return to its dead mother. Fences pose another risk to kangaroos. Although they are excellent jumpers and most can easily clear a standard agricultural fence, sometimes they get a hind leg under rather than over the top wire and then momentum causes them to 'hang' on the fence by the leg. When the wire is barbed, horrific injuries can occur. Unless a wildlife rescuer is called, the animal will die a slow and painful death.

Wildlife Victoria provides a state-wide wildlife rescue service through a dedicated call centre and network of volunteer rescuers and an associated network of veterinarians and wildlife shelters. Between 2014 and 2018 Wildlife Victoria assisted over a quarter of a million animals, and 18% (over 36,000 animals) of these were kangaroos. In the

past year almost half of all animals called in as being hit by a car and requiring assistance were kangaroos. Predictably, the majority of calls about kangaroos in need come from suburbs on the urban fringes, where mobs have been pushed out by development and busy roads intersect the landscape.

Like most wildlife rescue organisations, Wildlife Victoria relies on donations from caring people to continue their service. If you have used a wildlife rescue service, or just because you value wildlife, please make a donation to support your nearest wildlife rescue or care organisation.

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A joey tries to rouse its dead mother who was hit by a car. Photo Credit: Wildlife Victoria





A kangaroo joey may survive for several days in its dead mother's pouch. Photo Credit: Wildlife Victoria





SPECIES

# A Seasonal Journey with the Common Loon

By Kate Taylor

Photos

By Daniel &  
Virginia Poleschook





**Involved in loon conservation since 1995, Kate Taylor is currently the wildlife outreach specialist for Biodiversity Research Institute's Center for Waterbird Studies in Portland, Maine, US. Before joining BRI, she spent 12 years overseeing the scientific program for the Loon Preservation Committee in New Hampshire.**

**She is a contributor to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Status and Assessment Plan for the Common Loon in North America and co-authored the Common Loon Species Profile and Loon Recovery Plan for the New Hampshire Fish and Game. She is the co-author of a series of books by Willow Creek Press about the Common Loon and the Northwoods.**

Biodiversity Research Institute's Loon Program is dedicated to assessing current and emerging threats to loons, and to collaborating with the many agencies and organizations that work to conserve loon populations across the Northern Hemisphere. The Institute's research and conservation projects contribute to understanding basic ecology and strive to unravel the impacts of ecological stressors and how they can be lessened.

At nearly dusk on an August evening in 1998, my research partner and I set out in a canoe to capture and color-band loons on a secluded lake on Mount Desert Island in Maine. We hoped the quiet of night and carefully chosen recordings of loon calls would draw the pair and young chick close. The sky shimmered white

with northern lights, mirroring the low spiraling layers of mist that had formed over the water. In the deepest parts of the lake, the air felt cool, turning rich and earthy with stirred sediment as we poled through shallower areas. We moved slowly in the direction of the natural loon calls, noting the flights of bats overhead, their movements curving with the arc of our paddles in the water.

Silently hidden in the scene, we followed the haunting sound of the loons throughout the night—across the pond and into darkened coves, sometimes chasing the sudden slap of water made from a dive in the shadow of our canoe. At dawn, we were forced to quit, the early light exposing both our intent and our position. Although we did not succeed in capturing



© Daniel & Virginia Poleschuk







the loons that particular night, we left feeling rewarded. This is the gift of sharing space with these inspiring birds, and is a reminder of the importance not only of loons, but of the places in which they live. Sigurd Olsen, a naturalist and writer of the North Woods, once wrote of loons as a symbol of wildness, reminding us of our own connection to nature. We have found this to be very true.

### The Allure of Loons

Loons have been charted through history in cultural myths and legends, and continue to richly characterize the woodland waters and landscape. Depicted here in selected photographs is the seasonal cycle of loons—from their twice-yearly migrations, to claiming territories and mates in the spring, through the hatches of summer and fledges of fall, and finally, to the solitude of winter. These images by wildlife photographers Ginger and Daniel Poleschook, our colleagues in loon research, offer a rare opportunity to witness the private moments of loons.

### The Common Loon—Distribution

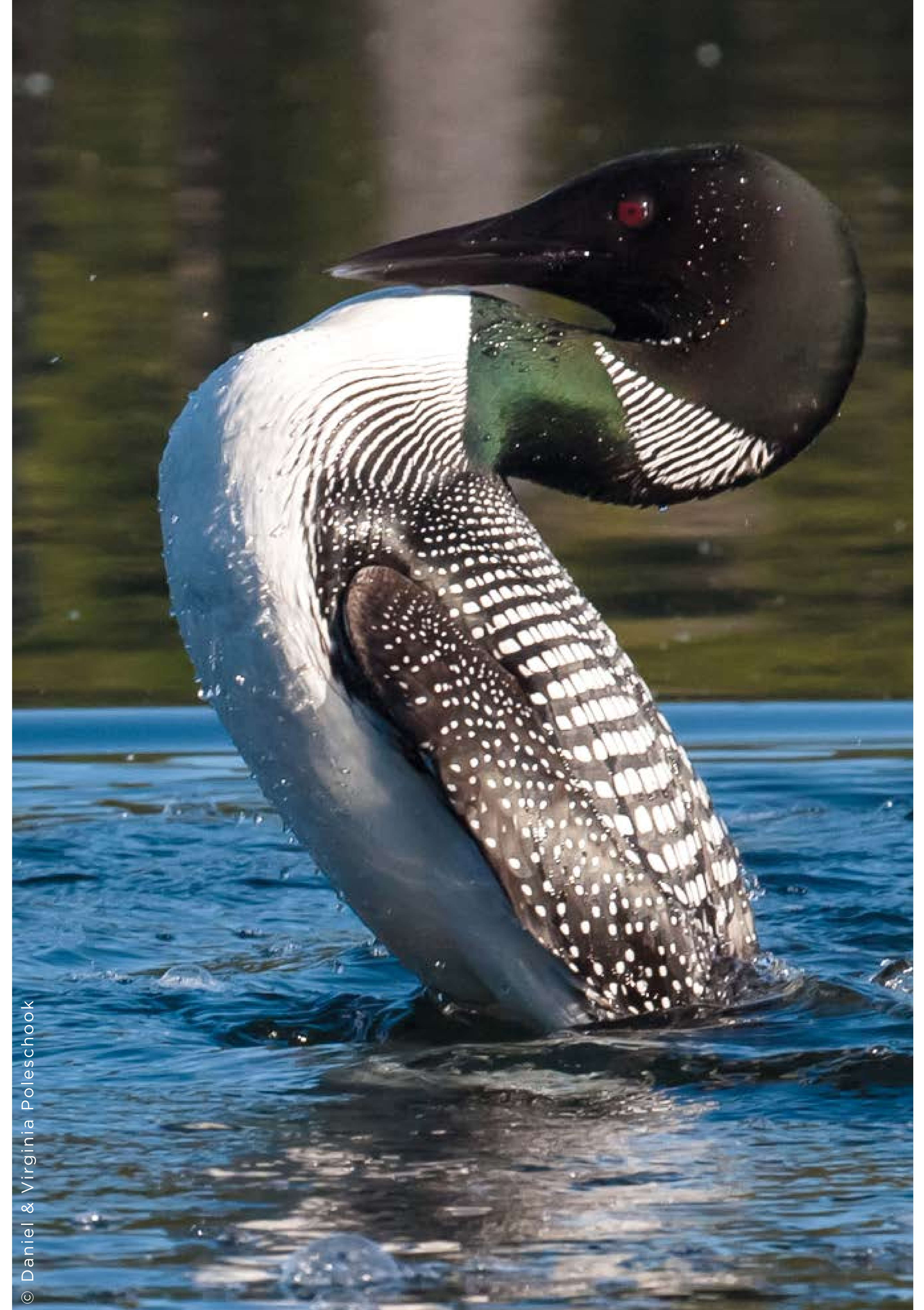
The Common Loon (*Gavia immer*), one of five loon species that exist worldwide, is the only loon species that breeds in the contiguous United States. The closely related Yellow-billed Loon (*G. adamsii*) is a strictly tundra and coastal plain breeding species and is the rarest loon species (around 3,000 individuals in Alaska). Pacific (*G. pacifica*) and Arctic Loons (*G. arctica*) are smaller than the Common Loon. The Pacific Loon is mostly restricted to North America, while the Arctic Loon is primarily a breeding

species found in Europe and Asia. Lastly, the Red-throated Loon (*G. stellata*) has the widest range of all loon species and is found across the Northern Hemisphere. An estimated 620,000 loons call North America their summer home, with their numbers growing in the fall to more than 725,000 with the addition of summer's chicks. The core part of the loon's breeding range is in Ontario and Quebec, with other large breeding centers in the Northwest Territories and British Columbia. The largest U.S. breeding populations, with more than 12,000 adults, each occur in both Alaska and Minnesota.

### Spring Migration—Arrival on the Breeding Lakes

The lengthening days trigger Common Loons to start moving from their wintering areas on marine waters toward their breeding lakes, where they appear in full breeding plumage. While some individuals arrive in the southern periphery of their breeding range as early as mid to late March (typical in Washington, the lower Great Lakes, and southern New England), most loons will initiate migratory flights in early to mid-April, continuing along either the Atlantic or Pacific coasts.

As loons finally reach their breeding lakes, experienced male loons arrive on territory first. Seasoned loons have already successfully held territories and raised young. Their early arrival gives them an advantage; they now have the time to feed and regain energy reserves after the long, taxing migration and before the need to reclaim a mate and defend a territory. The arrival of



© Daniel & Virginia Poleschook







established males can precede similarly experienced females by several days, followed later by those less experienced, including first-time breeders sometimes four to six weeks later.

While loons carry a strong reputation for returning to the same lake each year, scientific studies of banded loons have shown that this is not always true. On average, eight out of ten adult loons return to territories held in previous years. Some adults return to the same lake, but move to new coves after losing their territory to a rival. Others may relocate to a neighboring lake after losing such a contest. Rarely do adult loons venture to lakes more than two to three miles from their former territories.

For loons, fidelity lies with their territory, not with their mate; this attachment to a site by both male and female drives regular pairing of the same individuals from year to year. It is rare, however, for the same pair to remain together for more than seven years.

### Lake Ecology

The primary goal of loon pairs during the spring season is to acquire and maintain a territory in optimal habitat for raising young. Ideal lake size varies. Some loons nest on lakes as small as 13 acres, but most loon pairs select waterbodies greater than 60 acres. When lakes exceed 200 acres in size, there may be enough room for two pairs. Much larger lakes may have 50 or more pairs of loons. Lakes and reservoirs with clear water and an abundance of small fish provide the best habitats because loons are visual

predators primarily focused on fish. Other features such as irregular shoreline configurations, presence of isolated coves, and multiple nesting islands contribute to habitat quality.

### Breeding Ecology

During the courtship period, the male selects a site where both adults work together to build their nest. Loons prefer to nest on the shoreline edge of small islands or quiet coves, favoring sedge hummocks or floating bog mats. They construct their nests with whatever materials are readily available such as grass, moss, twigs, and mud. Some loons fashion elaborate nest bowls with piles of vegetation, while others assemble coarse stick structures. Depending on the territory, loons may simply lay their eggs in shallow scrapes in sand or even on hard rock.

When the nest is ready, the female lays one to two eggs, each about five inches long, olive colored, and speckled for camouflage. The loon pair shares the rigors of a month-long incubation period; during the day, the partners exchange sitting duties every four to six hours. Females tend to sit for longer periods in the early days of incubation, especially at night when the males are often patrolling on the water, their distinctive yodels punctuating the night sky to warn other loons away.

At the end of incubation, chicks emerge from the shell within a day of each other (known as an asynchronous hatch). Sequential hatching gives the first chick a head start at successfully attracting







© Daniel & Virginia Poleschuk

parental attention and securing food. Newly hatched chicks are buoyant during their first few days and have difficulty maneuvering. Protection by the adults is essential for survival, and therefore loon families stay close, softly hooting to one another to maintain contact. In these early days, loon chicks seek rest and refuge from cold water and predators by riding on the backs of the adults. Adults catch small fish and insects, such as dragonfly larvae, and transfer prey from their bill tip to the chick. Until chicks molt completely out of their downy feathers, they tire easily and are susceptible to predators such as pike, bass, snapping turtles, and Bald Eagles. After six weeks of age, chicks display more advanced skills, including capturing prey underwater. By summer's end, they can feed and fend for themselves, and have begun the first steps toward full flight.

### Fall Migration—Return to the Ocean

By early fall, chicks are cloaked in smooth gray feathers instead of the downy brown of new chicks. The contoured feathering of young loons is more streamlined, further enhancing their ability to dive and catch fish.

Like their chicks, adult loons change appearance in the fall. The lustrous black and white feathering of the summer loon, also known as the breeding or alternate plumage, is replaced by the gray-brown of winter, or basic plumage. The timing of this process, referred to as molting, is likely dependent on changing hormones, individual age, and even environmental stressors. The first signs of molting appear as a silver-gray shadow at the base of a loon's bill, and then progresses across the head and over the upper back. Flight feathers remain unaffected

during this fall transition since they are necessary for the migration ahead. Loon pairs are territorial through the summer. As the leaves turn, chicks become more self-reliant, allowing the adults to relax their vigilance. They leave their young for periods of time to socialize with other adults on their lake or nearby lakes.

We know that one adult loon leaves the family first, usually followed by the second adult within a few weeks. The chicks are left to migrate by themselves. Some adult loons, especially those without young, leave their breeding lakes in late summer, but most begin their journey south in the latter part of September or October.

### Conservation

We place value on the things we care for, and that compels us toward further study

and action. Grassroots organizations dedicated to loon conservation have brought concerned citizens together with biologists to document and safeguard the natural cycles and places of loons. The importance of loons, however, is much older than science. For many of us, a starry night and a chorus of loons is nourishment. To care about loons is to fully know we are less without their companionship.

In the fall of 2020, BRI will host an International Loon/Diver Symposium in Portland, Maine. We invite loon researchers and conservationists, state and federal employees, wildlife rehabilitators, students, and loon enthusiasts from across the northern hemisphere to share knowledge and expertise.

To learn more, visit: [www.briloon.org/loons2020](http://www.briloon.org/loons2020)







*“I love a sunburnt country, a land of sweeping plains, of ragged mountain ranges, of droughts and flooding rains”*

Dorothea McKeller penned this sweeping epic about the Australia’s characteristically ‘sunburnt’ landscape. It tells of the land’s rugged countryside, dry dusty roads and temperamental weather. Yet much has changed since she wrote this national treasure in the early 20th century. Australia’s frontier has since become much wilder, with deadly consequences.

## The Nation’s Worst Fire

On February 7th 2009, the nation was on high alert as bushfires ravaged the east coast from New South Wales all the way down to Victoria. 1,100,000 acres of land were brutally scorched while 173 individuals lost their lives.

Many more lost their homes. The amount of animal casualties was even more exorbitant, with the destruction of every ecosystem caught in the direction of the fiery juggernaut. Livestock perished, and the effort taken to rebuild communities fortunate enough to escape death’s choke hold have still struggled to revert to their former lifestyles.



# The Fiery Call of the Burning Bush

By Nadia DW



Events like “Black Friday” aren’t considered isolated events amongst local Australians. Bushfires are a harsh reality that still loom in public consciousness every summer. Radios are kept on in case of fire bans, and backyard BBQ’s are always well organized to avoid any chance of disaster.

## What Causes Bushfires?

Australia, in comparison to its Australasian neighbors, is an extremely dry country. Whilst it’s arid land and drought prone locales have always been dry, climate change has seen the country

suffer under fluctuating weather patterns as well as more intense water shortages.

Bush fires occur at the end of hot summers when surrounding bushland is exceptionally dry. If the temperature reaches 40 C and lightning strikes, a full force fire can ignite, growing into a deadly sea of flames, consuming everything in its path. Many bush fires occur around Victoria State’s most eastern portion which is heavily forested. Furthermore, 2018-2019 has seen the hottest southern hemisphere summer ever recorded in Australia.



Australia has suffered no less than 4,595 recorded bushfires in 2013, as caught by NASA satellites. Clearly, bushfires are national threat to safety and public welfare, but what is being done to curb these alarming statistics?

### Fire Bans:

As mentioned prior, local governments are implementing more and more bans across the nation during times of volatility. Country fire authorities maintain a tight watch on vulnerable locations, ascertaining the likelihood for bushfires to occur and in turn, placing prohibitions on certain activities that may prove cataclysmic.

Bans range from hindering local BBQs to stopping local traffic travelling to susceptible spots.

At any given time, you may hear authorities broadcasting on local radio stations, urging the public to avoid outdoor fires or worse, warning them to evacuate due to nearing flames.

No matter the caveat, Australians always keep a radio nearby to stay informed

### Climate Change Action:

While secondary measures such as the above do assist in hindering the negative impact of bushfires, they by no means stop them from occurring. Herein lies the biggest hindrance to stopping them in their tracks; Government inaction on climate change.

Dr. Andrew Dowdy, senior research

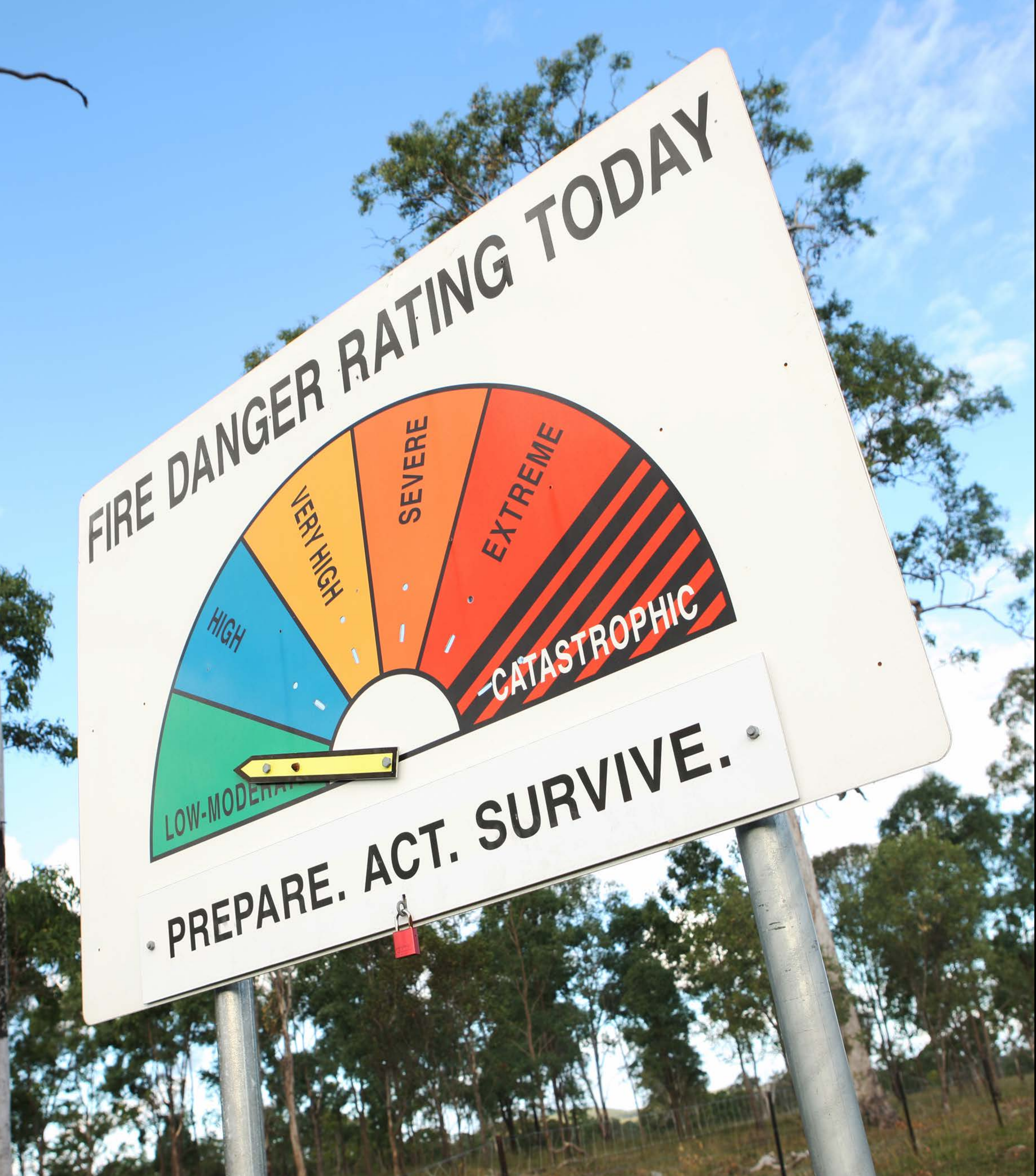
scientist at BoM, stated on SBS News, “Our research has shown that these trends are attributable at least in part to human-caused climate change from greenhouse gas emissions, including due to increased temperatures.”

In recent weeks, protestors have marched on parliament, demanding more action in regard to issues of climate change and sustainability. Many of these protestors have been survivors of the bushfires. Survivors who haven’t just lost their homes, but even the lives of their loved ones. These are individuals who have faced the reality of climate change head on and are demanding a safer future for the planet and generations ahead of them.

The public sentiment is that the government isn’t taking this genuine threat more seriously. Despite the richness of research showing that climate change is a reality with deleterious consequences, little is being done in the way of mitigating its damage on the planet.

### In Conclusion:

If improvements are to occur within Australia, more needs to be done in improving climate change conditions the world over. Government bodies need to be held accountable for regulating corporate practices as well as implementing cultural practices the public can execute. Subsidies and educational programs are a great means of empowering the community to make small changes that have a big impact on the planet.



While more is being done in light of past tragedies, many are worried that more lives may be lost before regulatory bodies take serious action. We hope that McKeller’s most poignant stanza doesn’t occur as a result of our hubris.

“Core of my heart, my country!  
Land of the rainbow gold,

For flood and fire and famine  
She pays us back threefold.”

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



CUB'S CORNER

# Wild Trails

By Pallavi Radhakrishnan



CUB'S CORNER

© Pallavi Radhakrishnan



## CUB'S CORNER



**Pallavi Radhakrishnan is a student at Christ Nagar school, Trivandrum. Growing up in Malawi for most of her life, she has an attachment towards nature and animals unlike no other.**

Her love for dogs in particular allows her in her spare time to volunteers at local adoption agencies. She also enjoys drawing out artistic sketches of problems she sees with the world. Conservation and animal rights is a topic close to her heart, and one day she hopes to be able to help out in the same.

Tigers. They strut around the jungle proudly and elegantly, showing off their tattooed skins and a mouthful of their latest conquests; a fresh catch soon to be relished and devoured after a hard day's work. Their beauty remains unseen, hidden within the depths of the forest and camouflaging amidst the crowding trees. Their powerful gaze bites and consumes all who are weak; be it an honorable hunter or a frightened rabbit, the eye of the tiger instills a cold fear into one's soul.

A tiger in a zoo is like a fish out of water. It's suffocating and painful. It doesn't belong. The tiger falls in a void of darkness where no ray of light sheds upon it. Caged and imprisoned in a tiny cubicle only to be presented to civilians as a trophy, but no one will be as satisfied and entertained for the tiger will have

lost its majestic traits. If you look into the eye of the tiger, you will feel the agony it goes through. The gaze, still intense, but sorrowful. It longs for the days it will finally be free. It longs for the air to be fresh and crispy, for the cool breeze to kiss its nose, for peace

and quiet, for a place it can call home. It dreams of running down endless paths, silently preying over other beings, fighting fearlessly and fiercely for dominance. It dreams of having a life of its own. Through the bars of the prison cell, the tiger looks out to see that no

© Pallavi Radhakrishnan









one is petrified; the children jump and scream from excitement rather than fear, everyone else stands before it and watches, but doesn't run. The tiger feels weak. It fails to send shivers down the spine. It no longer feels powerful. The glass wall or the cold metal bars shield the people and exposes the shy feline. It is exposed and naked; stripped of its pride. A tiger deprived of its soul.

The tiger I painted was found in a zoo in Prague. Having never seen an actual tiger in its natural habitat, I still knew for a fact that this was not how it was supposed to be. Keanu, as I named him, paid no attention to the outside world. Yet at the same time, he wasn't living his own either. He lost his soul and there was no hope shining in his eyes. He had accepted his fate and with every day passing by, he merely lived. Where is the entertainment in witnessing something so depressing?

Zoos are expected to educate the world about the various species they accommodate by spreading awareness and enlightening everyone about the fascinating features and characteristics of the animals. They are believed to provide the animals with basic medication, to ensure that they are healthy. Those endangered will undergo breeding programs, or so we believe, to guarantee the perfect offspring. Some may be lucky enough to be rehabilitated into the wild, but some aren't. And what about them? They continue to spend the rest of their lives cooped up in a cage where even a hummingbird would feel claustrophobic, because "they can't survive the wild." If they are lucky enough, they get a slightly larger enclosure. Yes, some zoos must be

doing all that they can for the animals, but some just see it as an opportunity to fill their pockets. These zoos associate with circuses rather than breeding programs. Precious lives are being treaded upon like dirt and just being thrown away like garbage. Instead of focusing on the main aspects of survival, the animals are taught different tricks like leaping through a ring of fire. From this, it is no surprise that animals reside in a zoo all their life. They are oblivious to their natural instincts.

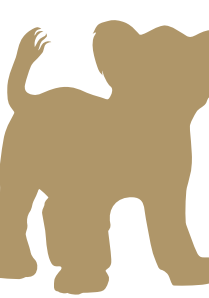
Conservation, I believe, is to ensure that the animal's rights must be fulfilled. Health, protection and prevention of extinction. All that matters, but so does its happiness and freedom. Breeding programs are for the purpose of a guaranteed future for the species, but what about the present individuals? What about their future? Their future should not lie the dark cold cells. What is a tiger without its freedom? And for that matter, what is any animal without its freedom?

It is for this reason that I adore national parks. The looks in the animals' eyes are entirely different. Their strides are more confident. They are free and protected from the vicious poachers. When in dire medical need, health is provided, but nature is also allowed to take its course.

The equilibrium is maintained. More than anything else, I hope that more national parks are introduced, as compared to zoos. It is extremely difficult, especially when it comes to preventing poaching even with all these legislations, but their joy is worth it.



© Nisha Purushothaman











# Her Views & Visuals

By Diana Rudenko





**Diana Rudenko (Kyiv, Ukraine) is a wildlife and landscape photographer, WWF volunteer, conservationist, experienced solo-traveler and poet. Finalist of international photo contest HIPA (Dubai, UAE) with the work “Orphaned Home.”**

**Graduated from the local photo school, experimented with industrial photography but love for animals and risky travels defined her main passion – wildlife and landscape photography.**

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**[facebook.com/DVRPhotowild/](https://facebook.com/DVRPhotowild/)  
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# Her Views and Visuals





### How did your interest for wildlife arise?

As a student, I was an active participant of ecological and wildlife-related projects and represented my school on republican and international forums held in Ukraine. I have always loved animals and birds, felt a deep connection with their world and wanted to understand their behavior more. My parents bought me many books about wildlife, encyclopedias and magazines. I watched the famous TV program “In the world of animals” (popular in the former USSR countries), went to the library to read scientific articles about wildlife, so I have always been close to Nature.

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

My journey as a photographer started in 2015 when I bought a camera to fix the moments during vacations. However, I decided to try to capture something specific and create a visual story. What attracts me in photography and life is suddenness. I need to explore new places and sometimes risk my health and safety to find something really special. Back in the day, industrial photography seemed a perfect genre for me to fulfill my creative ideas: abandoned factories, railways, warehouses...But later I understood that photographing still objects was not the limit. Wildlife photography satisfied my love for risk, readiness to stop that special moment, observe my “models” in their natural habitat and learn from them. It is a relief to the soul after a hectic city life. Wildlife photography teaches to live in harmony, respect every creature and be a guest, not an intruder.



Hippopotamus (*Hippopotamus amphibius*)





Great Egret (*Ardea alba*)





© Diana Rudenko

**What is your view on Nature Conservation? How can we, as wildlife photographers, help to protect our Mother Nature?**

Wildlife photography is a perfect educational platform to spread the mission of a peaceful coexistence with all creatures. Through this art, we show the beauty that surrounds us, its fragility and challenges Nature faces to call for action and help. As a WWF Ukraine volunteer, I feel a necessity to tell what we do and involve more people into volunteering. The art of photography only helps to create a powerful visual side.

**Can you give our readers the best bird or wildlife photography tips? Do you have**

**any recommendation on settings or gear for bird photography?**

I would recommend to start with self-education. Read more, watch programs about the life of animals and birds. I often ask zoologists about the peculiarities of animal behavior to know the scientific background. And of course, spend more time in the field, observe the life in the wild with your eyes and heart open. Speaking about the gear for wildlife photography, use tele lens 300mm and more. Build shelters in the forest from branches, moss, leaves and other natural materials and stay there for a while so animals won't feel the danger and come closer to you. If you don't have a tripod, everything can help to fix your camera: a big stone, log etc.

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

Currently I am working on a big photo project about national parks in Ukraine - landscapes, endangered species and challenges we face in wildlife conservation. Hope that this project will result in a big photo exhibition.

Last year I presented my debut photo exhibition “Fragile beauty” - wildlife and sceneries of Ukraine, UAE, Tanzania, Kenya and Sultanate of Oman. In addition, I am planning to collaborate with international wildlife organizations and donate my photos for charitable events. I am always eager to participate in wildlife-related events in Ukraine and abroad.

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

My philosophy is simple when it comes to photography itself: create with your heart and then comes the gear. When in the wild, I always know what species I may come across in a certain area, I try to see the images in my mind before capturing them with my camera, predict animal's behavior and prepare my settings accordingly. For wildlife photography, I use Canon EOS 600D since 2015 and several lenses: Canon EF 75-300mm f/4-5.6 IS USM and Canon EF 300mm f/4L IS USM. The last is a professional lens with a fast focus, which allows me to receive sharp pictures with deep colors and a smooth background.







THROUGH THE LENS

# A Fishing Story

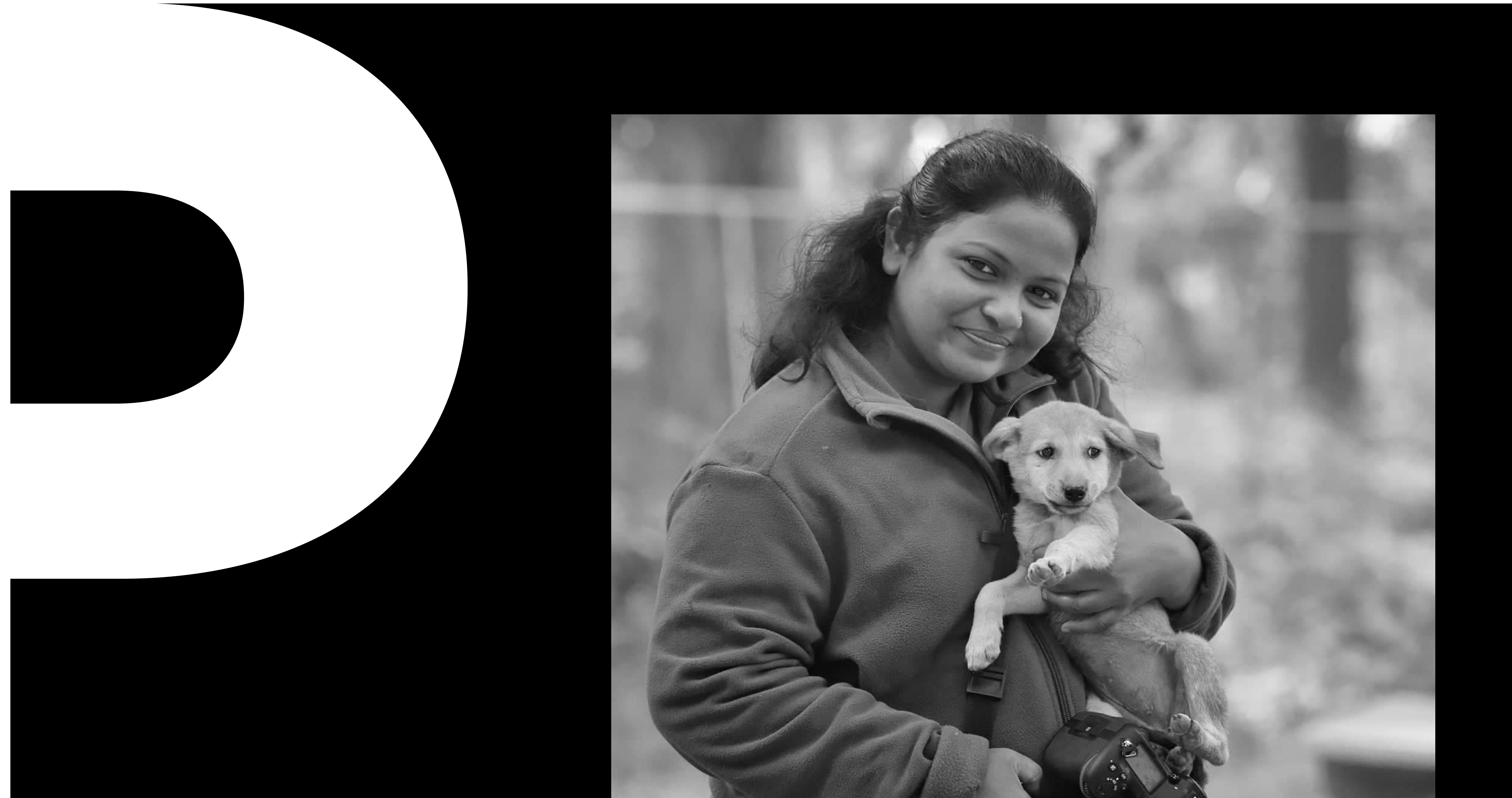
By Poonam Nayaka



©Poonam Nayaka

THROUGH THE LENS





Wildlife photography is all about patience, skill and luck. If one masters the skill and inculcates patience, then luck favours. Bird and animal images look good, but when you capture action, it looks amazing.

We were in Keoladev Ghana National Park, Bharatpur (India) during the month of March, at the fag-end of winter. Water levels of the lake had receded considerably while most of the migratory birds had flown. However, national parks still hosted numerous resident birds and late migrants thus providing ample opportunities to bird photographers. The beauty of this sanctuary can only be experienced as it is difficult to put into words. Misty mornings, magnificent sunrises, glaring waters and picturesque vegetation make Keoladev Ghana

National Park really a birder's paradise. The birds here are fearless, accustomed to humans and hence one can get a closer shot.

It was 8 o'clock in the morning; the sun was already up and the birds has started their daily activities. The shallow water of the lake had so much to offer, ranging from insects to tadpoles, frogs and varieties of fish for all. I was trying to get some action shots of intermediate egrets and pond herons. Suddenly there appeared a beauty, the purple heron with its long necked and slaty-purple coloured body, gliding to a graceful landing. It surveyed the water before settling to a calm spot.

The heron stood still, focusing on the water for nearly 15 minutes. Suddenly

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**Poonam S Nayaka is a nature enthusiast based in Lucknow, India.**

Birding and photography which were hobbies initially, have now become her passion. She loves wildlife and macro photography.

**facebook.com/poonam.nayaka**  
**instagram.com/poonam\_nayaka**

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©Poonam Nayaka



something caught its eyes. To take a closer look it stretched its neck and stayed in the same position with minimal movement for another 10 minutes. At this moment I was sure, that I will get some good action shots. The more time you spend in the field watching birds, the more knowledge you gain about its behaviour. After a few minutes it plunged its neck into the water, but it was bad luck.

The bird stood motionless again, stretching its neck, but this time it was more focused and was closely stalking its prey. After another five minutes with lightning speed it striked into the water and caught a huge fish. The fish struggled in the water for some time, but the heron manipulated it.

The fish was speared, and blood was oozing out from the wound. When the prey did not show any resistance, it was washed in the water several times.

Well, we were not lucky enough to see the last act and the climax of this episode, as the bird moved away from our sight. This is such a great memory we have as we were fortunate to witness an episode of the heron catching a fish.









# Sir Bani Yas

By Mithu Agarwal  
Photos by: Zelda Soares



©Zelda Soares



THROUGH THE LENS





**Mithu Agarwal, commercial manager with Seawings, the Middle East’s only seaplane operator.**

**Brought up in the UAE Mithu is very passionate about the different exotic locales in the country especially where one can find natural wildlife. Luckily Seawings flies to many of them giving her an opportunity to showcase them to other nature enthusiasts**

**seawings.ae  
anantara.com**

Sir Bani Yas Island tours are a must-do for wildlife lovers and outdoor enthusiasts. This unique island was established as one of the first wildlife reserves in the United Arab Emirates, and is now home to more than 13,000 indigenous animals.

Named after the Bani Yas Tribe, the original settlers of Dubai, the Island has a unique heritage, with more than 40 historical sites including the remains of a 600AD old Christian Monastery. The Island was established as a nature reserve in 1977 by the late ruler and founder of the United Arab Emirates His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan.

Nature lovers will be able to get up close to free-roaming animals native to the UAE, such as the Arabian Oryx, and others from more distant lands such as

the African giraffe. The island is a joy to explore thanks to its unique landscape including mangroves, savannah as well as unique hilltops formed by salt domes from millions of years ago.

There is also a wide range of activities for outdoor enthusiasts such as kayaking, scuba diving and mountain biking. The Anantara Resort also offers more traditional pursuits such as pearl diving, Abra cruise and falconry encounters.

**Getting to Sir Bani Yas Island**

Sir Bani Yas Island is part of the Al Gharbia region of the UAE, 250km southwest of Abu Dhabi and 370km southwest of Dubai, and can be reached by either car and then boat from Jebel Dhanna on the mainland or directly by







©Paws Trails

boat or plane, with docks at Sir Bani Yas's Royal Bay Moorings, and seaplanes or small aircraft able to land on the 87sqm island's runway.

Seaplanes to Sir Bani Yas are operated by Seawings ([seawings.ae](http://seawings.ae)), and private return charters with up to nine seats are available from Dubai for AED 11,500 plus VAT, and from Abu Dhabi for AED 14,500 plus VAT.

### **The Arabian Wildlife Park**

The Arabian Wildlife Park is the highlight of any visit, if you are a nature enthusiast or not. Open-sided Land Cruisers accommodate 6 guests each to make leisurely 90-minute drives. Wildlife-spotting opportunities are nearly constant, including reticulated giraffes and the park's cheetahs, who sometimes linger over a kill.

The island is home to many species, from Arabian Oryx, Somali Ostrich, Gazelle and Deer to reticulated Giraffes, Dolphins and Sea Turtles. Many of the more than one-hundred species of wild birds which can be found on the island are indigenous to the region. The island is home to around 30 species of mammals, including a variety of antelope and one of the world's largest herd of endangered Arabian Oryx. The Arabian Oryx, a species of antelope, was formerly extinct in the wild, but the island is home to a herd of over 400 who roam freely on the island.

Taking up about half of Sir Bani Yas, the Arabian wildlife Park provides an environment for wild animals to freely roam while the island remains open for



visitors. The Park houses some 13,000 animals indigenous to the Arabian Peninsula including the endangered Arabian Oryx, Sand Gazelle and Mountain Gazelle as well as free-roaming predators and scavengers such as the Sudan Cheetah and Striped Hyena. While research and conservation efforts are a major part of the park's current development, a number of wildlife and adventure activities are already available for visitors. These include game drives, nature trails, mountain biking, and outdoor dining.

Sir Bani Yas is home to many animals that the International Union for Conservation of Nature classifies as critically endangered or vulnerable, including Sea Turtles, Sand Gazelles, Urial Sheep, Barbary Sheep, and Arabian Tahr and Oryx. Therefore, the island plays a significant role in protecting these animals for future generations. More than 10,000 animals from Sir Bani Yas have been released into wildlife reserves such as the one in the Liwa Desert, on the Abu Dhabi mainland. This programme has been carried out in conjunction with the Environment Agency Abu Dhabi.

**Other Activities to Try**

- Culture & History Tour - Learn about Sheikh's Zayed legacy & local history. See different archeological sites such as the Christian monastery from 600 A.D.
- Discover Conservation - Discover the breeding and conservation efforts on the island. Take a look in the nursery area where the plants and trees start their lives. Meet a few animal species that are involved in these projects.

- Little Green Footprint - Letting the younger ones (4-12 yrs) learn about more about the environment in which we are living in and having the chance to improve it with planting of mangroves. Wear clothes which you don't mind them getting wet and dirty.

- Land Sailing - Enjoy riding land sail karts and experience a thrill that you have never experienced before! Wear comfortable clothing, closed or sports shoes. Helmets and safety equipment will be provided. Activity is subject to weather & wind conditions.

**The History of Sir Bani Yas Island**

Around 600 million years ago, salt deposits from the sea formed a dome, which was later layered with limestone and sandstone to become the Sir Bani Yas Island we see today, one of the few natural islands in the region. Opposite Sir Bani Yas Island, on Jebel Dhanna on the mainland, elephant fossils dating back six million years have been found, suggesting these creatures were among the first to leave their footprints in the sand.

The earliest evidence of human activity on Sir Bani Yas dates to around 5,500BC. From the 1600s to the 1900s, salt mining and pearl diving would have been the main occupations of the islanders, but by 1940 the natural water supply had dried up and the island's villages were abandoned, with the tribes moving to the mainland.

So when planning your next wilderness adventure, consider one close to home.











TRAVELOGUE

# Malawi: The Warm Heart of Africa

By Athira Mohan Krishnan

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TRAVELOGUE

Mumbo Island (Beach)





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

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

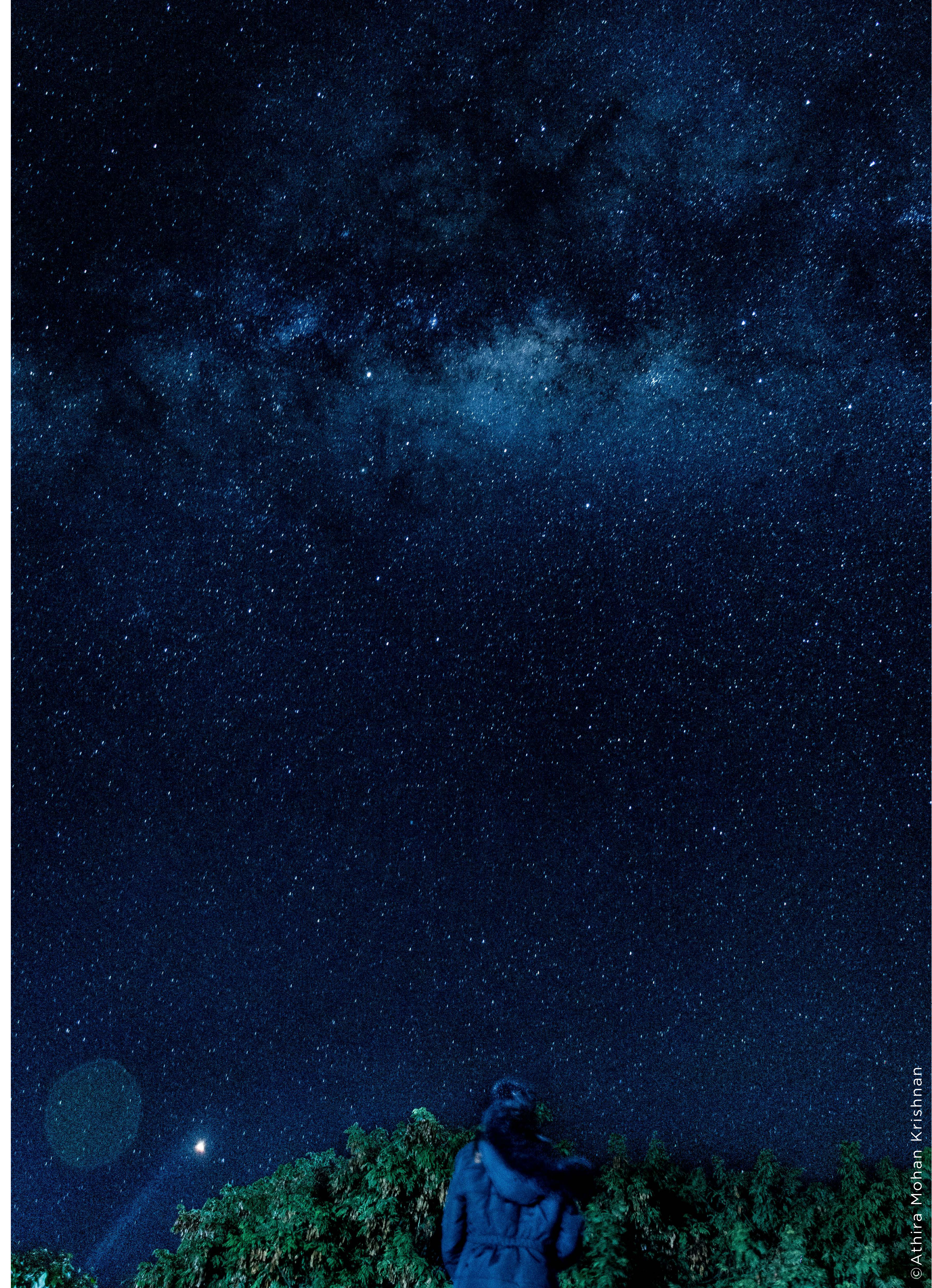
**facebook.com/thisgirlfrommalawi**  
**thisgirlfrommalawi.com**  
**instagram.com/thisgirlfrommalawi**  
**instagram.com/thefoodshutterbug**

### **The increase in wildlife and a growing tourist destination**

Imagine yourself surrounded by golden sands and blue waters. Looking around, you have this beautiful beach all to yourself. Perhaps you're on an island, sipping on a sundowner, idly watching the clouds pass by as you relax by the oh-so-blue waters.

This is how I start describing Malawi to those who haven't heard of it. Known as

the 'Warm Heart of Africa', Malawi is a landlocked country between Tanzania, Mozambique and Zambia. Standing with an area of about 120,000km<sup>2</sup>, a fifth of this country is made up of Lake Malawi; which is the third largest lake in Africa and the ninth largest in the entire world. It's widely known for this sparkling lake, stretching across the country, with its fishing villages spread across the shores, and popular budget-friendly lodges as well as luxury resorts on the mainland.







Lake Malawi

The popular annual concert that occurs every October – the Lake of Stars – gathers tourists and artists from across the globe to the Southern shores of Lake Malawi.

The nickname ‘The Warm Heart of Africa’ stems from the happy hearts and friendly personalities of the locals in Malawi. If you’re looking for a new and pristine destination to travel to this year, Malawi is your go-to. Let’s dive into Malawi, first for what it’s not known for– it’s wildlife.

### **The increase of wildlife in Malawi**

Truth be told, Malawi is an unheard spot when it comes to wildlife. Whenever people ask me what there is to see in the National Parks, I do mention to them that it is not as popular as the well-known Masai Mara and Kruger National Park. The reason for this is the unfortunate poaching incidents in the 1990’s cutting through the wildlife species across the country.

Now, with the help of African Parks Network since 2003, a fair amount of the wildlife is definitely returning back. For the first time in 20 years, Liwonde National Park saw cheetahs being brought back in 2017 (African Parks, 2019). Both here and at Majete National Park, breeding lions were brought in from South Africa after two decades, and the latter park has become a hugely popular destination for wildlife seekers (African Parks, 2019). The biggest news of all is the restoration of elephants in the National Parks in Malawi! In the 90’s at Nkhotakota Wildlife Reserve – an expansive landscape with streaming rivers, wetlands and rolling hills – there

were 1500 of these beautiful animals. As mentioned earlier, poaching had been a serious problem, and according to African Parks, there were less than a hundred in the same reserve in 2003 (2019). The numbers are hard to believe. However, over the span of two years, Nkhotakota Wildlife Reserve saw the homecoming of 500 elephants from Liwonde National Park and Majete Wildlife Reserve.

For the birders, there’s plenty to see in Malawi. As per findings by Malawi tourism, there are about 650 species of birds alone in Malawi, depending from location to location. If you head over to the Lake or in between the depth of the woodlands, you’ll find yourself spotting a wide variety of beautiful birds

Apart from wildlife safaris, here’s what else you can do...

### **The Lake**

Other than just the Lake and relaxing on the beach (which is wonderful on its own!), there are multiple water sports that you can take part in. For the more adventurous; kayaking, motorized water sports, and snorkelling or scuba diving are popular activities that the lodge provides. The latter underwater sports in particular are worthwhile expeditions. With the vast array of cichlids, you can find yourself surrounded underwater amongst colourful schools of fish, undisturbed in your presence, and in the midst of true nature. Given the unspoilt flora and fauna that Malawi is known for, the underwater experience in the lake is truly a visual treat! No visit to Malawi is complete without a trip to the lake, whatever your goals may be.









### Explore the Islands

Additional to the lake are well-known island getaways. For the luxury experience, Likoma Island is known to be a honeymoon spot, idly spending the days and nights away. Then you have Blue Zebra Island, situated off the coast of Senga Bay, a mere hour’s drive from the capital, Lilongwe. There are lovely trails around the island, some wonderful opportunities for bird watching, and motorized water sports to satisfy the adventurous soul.

### Then there’s Mumbo Island.

I think of Mumbo Island and my heart warms. This eco-friendly lodge is situated within Lake Malawi National Park amongst crystal clear waters and a pristine beach. With beautiful trails around the island, there are some truly scenic spots for sunrises and sunsets. Mumbo Island is a tranquil location, where you can idly lay outside your bungalow on a hammock with the lake spread across your eyesight. Just imagine... Another speciality about the lake and these islands is the lack of light pollution, allowing for some wondrous star-gazing experiences. For those interested in astrophotography, the Lake Malawi in its entirety will allow for some gorgeous sights of the night sky.

### Hike Mulanje Mountain

Mount Mulanje is the largest mountain in Malawi, towering at over 3000m in height, and a popular destination for hikers. About an hour’s drive from the prior capital, Blantyre, Mulanje is a well-liked spot for a day trip, or a three to









©Athira Mohan Krishnan

four-day hike. As you delve through the forests, you can find yourself amongst Cedar trees (unfortunately under threat of deforestation); some pretty picnic spots, and even stumble upon views of waterfalls. The highest peak, Sapitwa Peak, boasts of expansive views amongst the clouds, and is a well-liked hike amongst tourists and locals.

#### **Wander through forests and tea estates**

Spread across the Southern region of

Malawi is Satemwa Tea Estates and Zomba Plateau. Imagine yourself walking through evergreen tea estates, or taking treks to spots where you can view these estates as far as the eye can see. Don't expect to have any signal to post those Instagram stories though; it'll be just you, and nature. Situated nearby is Zomba, a half hour drive from Blantyre. Winding roads will take you further up to lodging areas and the famous Zomba Plateau, unveiling scenic views of the town below, and on a possibly clear day, the lake

further off in the distance... You can either hike to the viewpoints or take a 4x4 up to the top, depending on personal preferences and time constraints.

To end this long passage about why you should visit Malawi, let me finish with a quote. "I went to sleep dreaming of Malawi, and all the things made possible when your dreams are powered by your heart" – William Kamkwamba (you can find his memoir and movie based off him; 'The Boy who Harnessed the Wind', one

winner from the Sundance Film Festival of 2019).

When you'd like to make your trip to this pristine destination, you can fly in from Nairobi, Addis Ababa, or Johannesburg, each of which are hubs for further international flights.

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[www.africanparks.com](http://www.africanparks.com)  
[www.malawitourism.com](http://www.malawitourism.com)





Böhmer's bee-eater (*Merops boehmi*)



# Linking Science and Art A Creative Partnership to Inspire Conservation

By Deborah McKew



Red knot

WILD ARTS SHOWCASE





**Deborah McKew is the communications director for Biodiversity Research Institute, Portland, Maine, US**

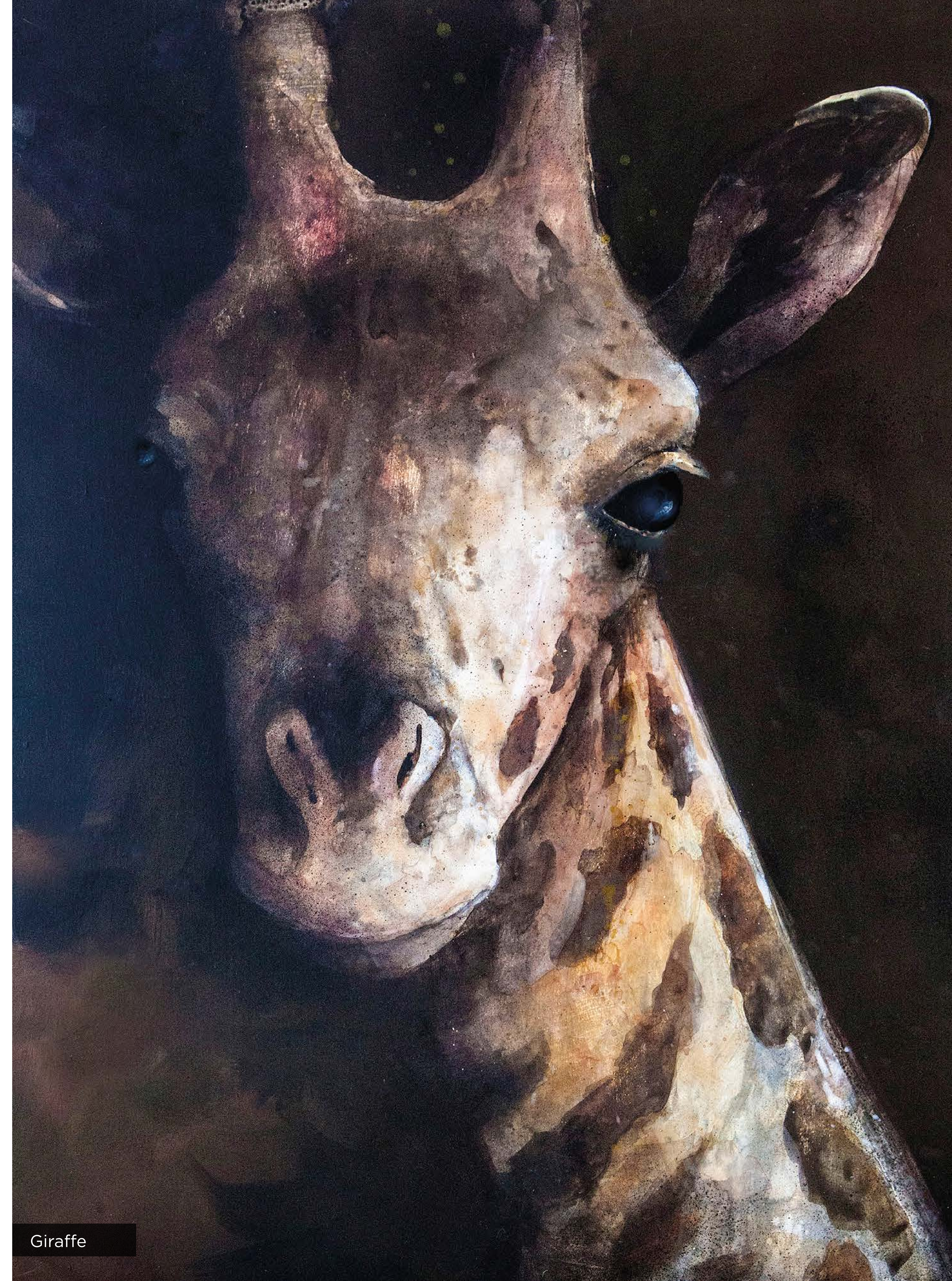
**visit:**  
**[www.briloon.org/artexhibit](http://www.briloon.org/artexhibit)**

Ten American wildlife artists have collaborated on an art exhibition to highlight the plight of endangered species. A Critical Balance: Artists Take Action, an exhibition of 23 wildlife paintings will be held at in Portland, Maine, US from April 5 to May 25.

When the Merlin was placed in Linda Mirabile's hand, something visibly shifted in her entire being. She stood in awe—of the biologists who captured and banded the falcon, of the magnificent

bird she held, of the sheer beauty of nature. She knew she had to release the bird, but she hesitated, knowing this moment would never come again.

Mirabile was one of a group of photographers, artists, and writers who had gathered for a unique creative retreat on Block Island, Rhode Island, US. Every fall, the teardrop-shaped island 13 miles off the coast of Rhode Island becomes a place of refuge for countless numbers of migrating



Giraffe





Atlantic cod



songbirds and raptors that stop there to rest and refuel before continuing their journeys to distant southern latitudes. For one week in October 2015, the island also became a refuge for those who would give voice to their creative inspirations. During that week, participants of the retreat, sponsored by Biodiversity Research Institute (BRI), came to fully understand the idea expressed by Ansel Adams (perhaps the world's first conservation photographer) in his book *Letters and Images*: "I believe the approach of the artist and the approach of the environmentalist are fairly close in that both are, to a rather impressive degree, concerned with the affirmation of life. Response to natural beauty is one of the foundations of the environmental movement."

Mirabile has been painting for more than 40 years, with a particular interest in birds. The owner of a graphic design firm in Vermont, US that specializes in environmental nonprofits, she especially enjoys working for BRI, a group of wildlife biologists whose research focuses on birds. To help with some of the illustrations for BRI's scientific communications, Linda enlisted fellow Vermonter, friend, and colleague Adelaide Murphy Tyrol, a botanical and natural history illustrator and painter. Thus began an ongoing creative collaboration between the artists and the scientists.

On a pristine island with the biologists and the birds, both Mirabile and Tyrol witnessed how such intimate experiences with nature could awaken a deep affinity and inner knowledge.

As Tyrol says, "With due respect to the importance of viewing nature with a scientifically accurate eye, I find the power of nature to lie beyond the caliper. Upon close inspection, the natural world reveals truths other than analytical ones. A random moment fully recognized can embrace the spirit and lead us to a deeper understanding of life. For me, the source is contained in the natural world; the process of painting is an attempt to communicate with and understand its well-spring."

Through painting, photography, or poetry, artists can tell the stories of birds and animals in a way that reaches people on an emotional level. Once captivated, one can begin to gain an understanding of a given environmental concern such as the extinction of a bird or a fish or a wildcat. With knowledge and understanding comes empathy, which can lead to action and support.

"The story of animals and birds facing extinction is a gut wrenching one," says Tyrol. "I paint these species to get to know them before they are gone. At the crossroads of art and science there is a wonderful opportunity to move forward the dialogue about conservation. The juncture of art and science may move mountains."

Committed to exploring nature through their art, both Mirabile and Tyrol realized that they possessed a powerful tool to help move some of those mountains.

#### **A Critical Balance: Artists Take Action**

Scientists estimate that 150-200 species of plant, insect, bird, and mammal



Kiwi





NorthAtlantic Right Whale Calf





Rock Hopper Penguin

become extinct every 24 hours. This is nearly 1,000 times the “natural” or “background” rate and, according to many scientists, is greater than anything the world has experienced since the vanishing of the dinosaurs nearly 65 million years ago. Today many of the creatures that are familiar to us are at a critical balancing point. They might not be here for future generations to experience.

“As a bird watcher,” says Mirabile, “I have always valued the common chickadee as much as the majestic Great Blue Heron. But, as a painter, I often chose subjects that interested me from an artistic perspective, tending toward the more colorful or striking bird. That all changed when I discovered that a bird I had painted years ago, the Snowy Owl, was endangered. Was it possible that my eight-year-old granddaughter would never see one of these owls outside of a zoo? The thought breaks my heart.”

Perhaps the Merlin Mirabile released that day on Block Island sparked an idea. “Our week at BRI’s raptor station introduced me to the heroic efforts being done by scientists all over the world to help protect these beautiful birds and the critical need for public understanding and support,” says Mirabile. “I was determined to spread the word in my own way.”

Over the following months and years, Mirabile and Tyrol worked together to fan the flames of that spark until it became a burning mission, and they knew they must use their talents

to bring attention to the plight of threatened and endangered species. They invited eight other artists to help tell the stories of these species, to engage the public in a way that would inspire positive action. Their mission manifested into A Critical Balance: Artists Take Action, an art exhibit featuring life-sized paintings of animals that are in trouble.

Each of ten artists, all of whom share a dedication to the natural world, chose one or more species listed as endangered or threatened by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Painting in their own artistic style, their intent is to use art to inspire and educate in ways that will reach beyond statistics, policy, and politics.

“This opportunity to work with other artists who share my love of and concern for the natural world has been so cathartic,” says Mirabile. “I know our work is just a small drop in a large pool. But, with luck the drop will become a ripple.”

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The exhibit opens on April 5 at the Lewis Gallery, part of the Portland Public Library, in Portland, Maine. The exhibit will include 23 pieces of art painted to life-size and a catalog of the work. All work will be available for sale and a percentage of proceeds will be donated to the conservation of endangered or threatened species. For more information about the exhibit, please visit: [www.briloon.org/artexhibit](http://www.briloon.org/artexhibit)





Sumatra Elephant



Siberian Crane

Musikis 77





## YOUR GALLERY



Anjali Singh

Sloth Bear (*Melursus ursinus*)





YOUR GALLERY



Nithya Purushothaman

Black Swan (*Cygnus atratus*)





YOUR GALLERY



Alby Sebastian

White-cheeked Barbet (*Psilopogon viridis*)





## YOUR GALLERY

Salma Ali Alsuwaidi

Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)







YOUR GALLERY

Manisha Michael

Leopard (*Panthera pardus*)







YOUR GALLERY



Shalini Binu

Jungle Owlet (*Glaucidium radiatum*)





## YOUR GALLERY



Priyanshi Bachhawat Nahata

Cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*)





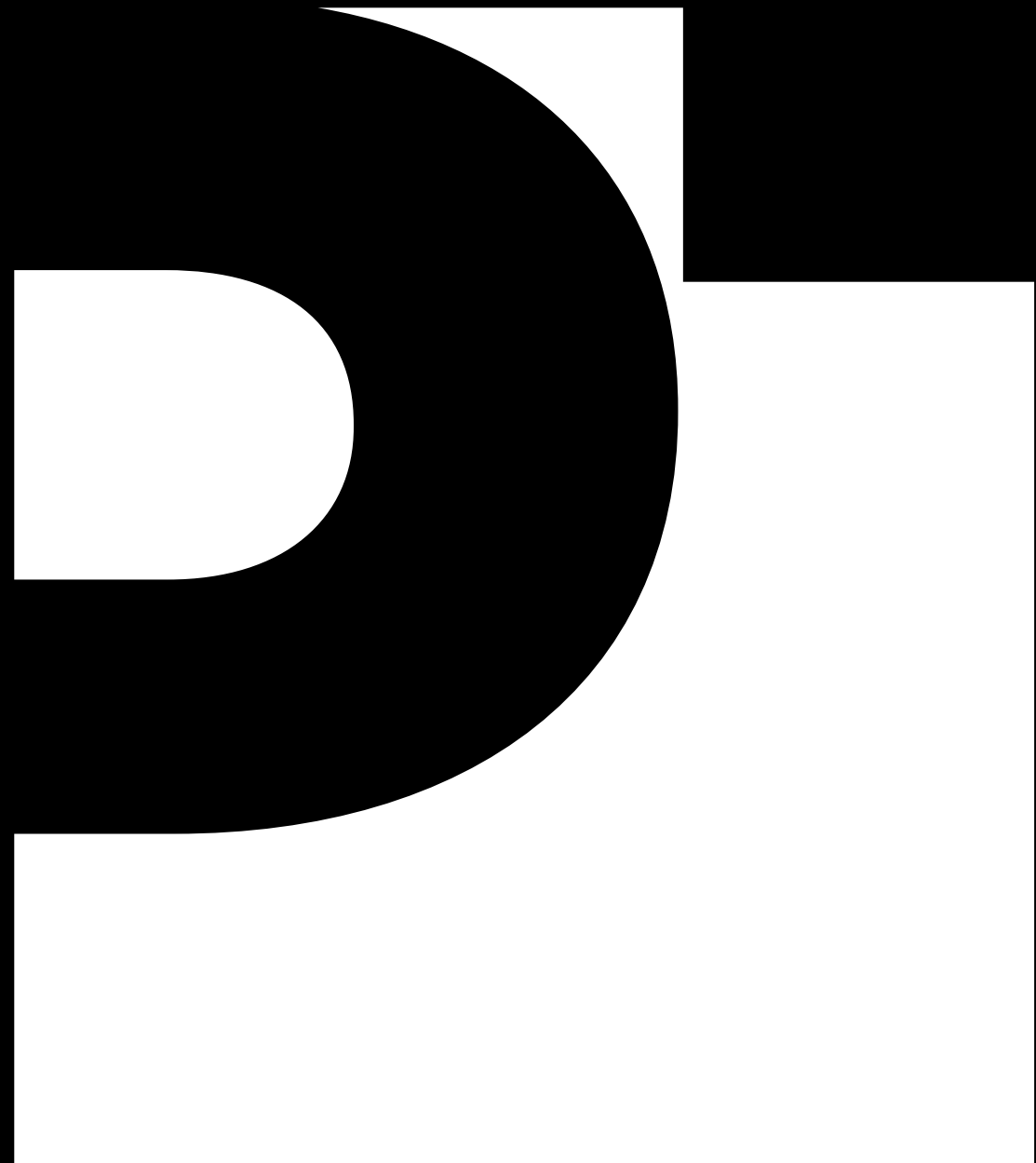
## YOUR GALLERY

Athira Mohan Krishnan

Leopard (*Panthera pardus*)







EXPLORERS



UPCOMING  
FEATURES



## POLAR BEARS & HUMANS

By Ole J Liodden



## Fishing cat

By Vipin Sharma



## HER VIEWS & VISUALS

By Cynthia Bandurek