# EXPLORERS

APR 2021 / MAY 2021

**WOMEN'S EDITION**

# INTO THE WILD
WITH
# MARINA CANO

## RESPECT IS THE KEY
## BY MELISSA SCHÄFER

©Marina Cano

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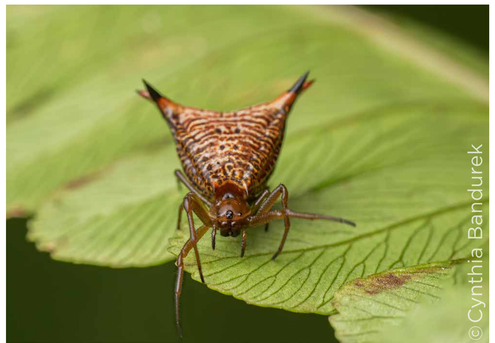

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**008**
**Cover Story**
Marina Cano

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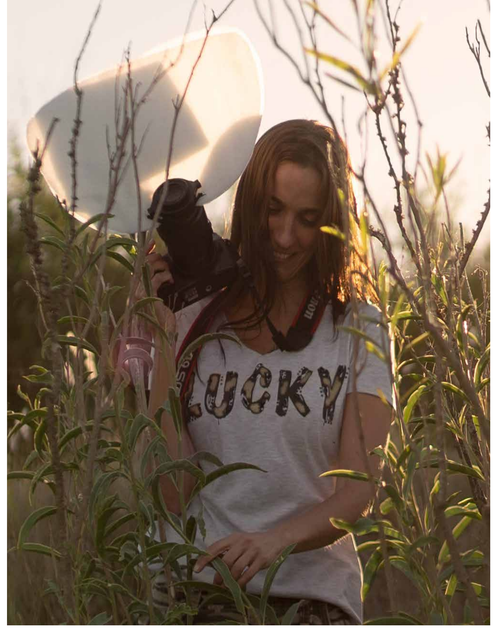


Cynthia Bandurek
Editor

# EDITOR'S DEN

Volume 28 is our fourth edition dedicated to women, highlighting the impact their work generates in the field of conservation and wildlife photography around the world. Women play an important role in photojournalism, photography, wildlife conservation and wildlife arts – all subject matters in our bimonthly volumes. Women make significant contributions to PT Explorers with women generally contributing about half of our published articles. We dedicate Volume 28 to the women in conservation & photography.

In this edition we will enjoy and learn about the outstanding work of Marina Cano, an international award-winning wildlife photographer based in Cantabria, northern Spain.

Melissa Schäfer is a conservationist photographer working with Polar Bears in the Artic. In this article, she makes us reflect about the need to be aware that whatever we do, we do cause an impact on the planet.

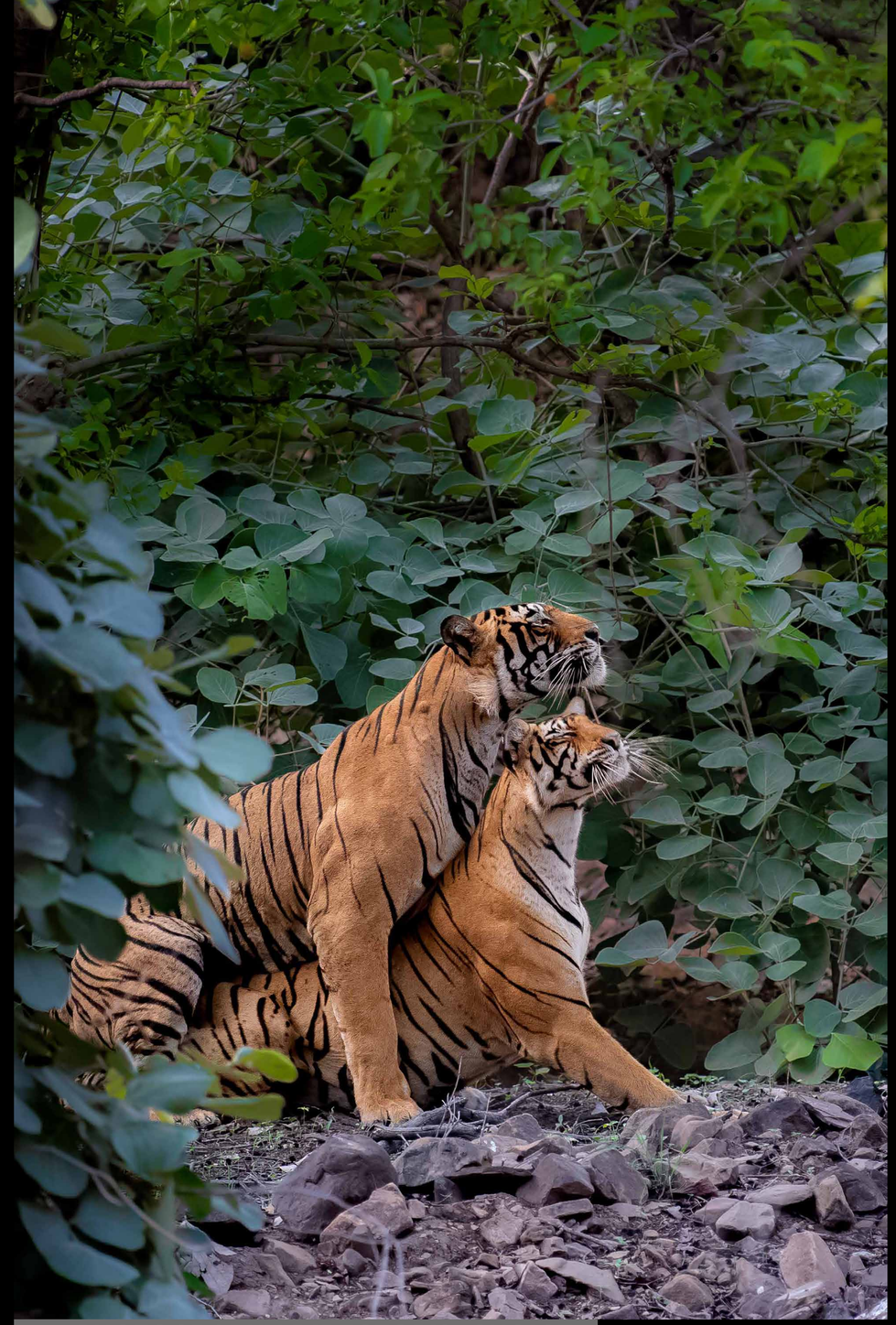
German wildlife photographer Monika Mansell shares tips on how to create black background in photography. American wildlife photographer, Donna Brok talks about the resources we can use to bring impact to an image.

Shruthi Kori a young wildlife photographer shares her amazing travel experience of Masai Mara, Kenya. From south western Australia Heather Throning shares her experiences of nature photography in the amazing Bibra and North Lakes. Silvina Acosta, an Argentinian photographer writes about macrophotography with stunning photos of insects found in Córdoba province.

Anagha Mohan, a 14 year old award winning young photographer shares her journey through the Indian wilderness. Spanish artist Bruna Roqué delights us with her crisp and sharp artwork. We look forward to seeing more of the young artist's work.

From my new home in Costa Rica, I share with you my experiences with the magical world of spiders, a group of animals that I love to work with.

So, women of the world, grab your camera and head out into the bush, wetlands, lakes, and oceans to be creative and capture some spectacular photos to share with PT Explorers. Macro or long lens, your choice. Enjoy the world of nature photography.



**PHOTOGRAPHY DIRECTOR'S CHOICE**

**Lisha Patel**
Tiger
(*Panthera tigris*)

# FOUNDERS' NOTE

Welcome to this edition of PT explorers. For the fourth year in a row, we are sticking with our custom of dedicating the next edition of PT Explorers after the International Women's day as a Women's edition. Every article in this edition has been contributed by an amazing woman, who has shrugged off the comforts and dared to dive into the lesser-explored world. While doing so, these ladies have contributed immensely to the conservation of the planet and aided all life on earth.

Thank you ladies for your contribution to the wellbeing of mother earth. Paws Trails salutes your courage and determination.

We thank the pioneers like Dame Jane Goodall, who with her pioneering work on Chimps, not only threw open the gates to a lot of women to enter into life sciences but even inspired men to take up careers in conservation and natural research.

Today it is a well-known fact that the world of natural history, biology, conservation, wildlife & conservation photography, and wild life arts are indeed richer from the contribution from the fairer sex.

At Paws Trails, we are committed to giving good coverage to the work done by women photographers and artists. Please reach out to us through our website or any of our social media handles if you are/know of a woman who is doing fantastic work in conservation, photography, or wild arts and wish to be published. We will be thrilled to work with you.

To the global Paws Trails community-

Always remember – A world that is better for a woman is indeed a better world.

Please support organisations that support equal opportunities and equal pay for women.

Let us create a better world...

**Nisha Purushothaman**
Founder - PT Explorers

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COVER STORY

# Into the Wild

with MARINA CANO

© MARINA CANO

**Marina Cano, Spanish wildlife photographer, Canon Ambassador, with more than 25 years of photographic experience and international prestige, of which 16 have been dedicated to nature photography, where she received extraordinary recognition in this field. During her career she has published four books: *Cabárceno, Drama & Intimidad* (both sold out), *Inspiration + Naturaleza,* and her most recent book *Wild Soul***

**Her work has been several times cover of the prestigious National Geographic. In 2015 she was a finalist in the BBC Wildlife Photographer's recognition contest of the year. That same year she was appointed Canon Ambassador in the specialty of wildlife.**

**Her unique style together with a sensitive and intimate approach to wildlife make her work admired by half a million followers on Facebook, and more than 31,000 on Instagram.**

**She runs African safaris, she has been member of juries in national and international competitions, organizes workshops around the world, specially her wildlife workshops in the Nature Park of Cabárceno for professionals and fans of all levels and throughout the year. Her exhibitions and seminars have been held in places like South Korea, Cuba, Mexico, Israel, Spain, South Africa, Norway, Finland, Portugal, Iceland, England and Namibia.**

**In love with the African continent and committed to its conservation, she collaborates with different associations that protect and preserve threatened species.**

**marinacano.com**
**instagram.com/marinacano**
**facebook.com/marinacanowildlifephotographer**

© MARINA CANO

**What does photography mean to you?**

Photography means so much to me, that I recently wondered who I am when I am not a photographer. What is left out of me if not for photography. There is so much of photography in my life, that I have no idea what is life without it. And I don't want to know.  I have a degree in music, I was a musician, and it was a passion in my life. But photography is a fire. Photography is my entire life.

**What inspires you and how do you mentally prepare yourself for next project?**

I find inspiration everywhere. Of course, in other photographer's, in their work, their lives, but also in music, in films, in theater, in every single art expression, in beauty, in nature, in animals.

I am not a kind of person who prepares meticulously. I am very meticulous on my photography, but not specially in projects. I like adventure in the literal sense of the word.

**What defines a good photograph to you?**

A good photograph can be one that shows a difficult moment to capture, an aesthetic image, a very rare species, one technically perfect, but for me on top of all is one that captures and shows emotions. One image where technique is not the most important thing, but it has a

© MARINA CANO

© MARINA CANO

story that moves the viewer. The one that impacts with emotions.

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

My photography is about feelings, emotions.

**With passing time and gained experience, have you ever wanted to go back and re-do a project? If yes, which one?**

Yes, I do. Every place I've travelled I wish I could return. to start again, to spend more time to photograph animals in the environment I now know. The behavior I have learnt through the 20 years I have been photographing wildlife.

**Which professional photographer have influenced your work the most?**

I have to name three photographers that I've been amazed by. Steve Bloom, through his books, a world that was like a science fiction film. Some kind of unreachable professional world, that was even more attractive because I didn't know anything about it.

Nick Brandt, a very intimate style, black and white, wild, simple and very emotional work; I felt in totally syntony with his work.

Gregory Colbert, I was totally in love with his website design; it was magic together with the images, the music, the voice; the whole experience was delightful.

**What details do you believe make the best photographs? How do you go about focusing on them in your work?**

There are some "little" details that can make a big difference. To know what we are looking for, the kind of moments we want to capture and be aware of it. It is also very important to be careful in the moment we select the images we show. We have to be very demanding, look for the exceptional ones, and if we don't find any, try again, go back and photograph again. Every single thing in the image is important, and we have to know and be aware of all the elements we include in our frames.

**As a wildlife photographer, how do you cope with the so called "the dark side" of the wild?**

I'm not sure about what this dark side of the wild means. If it is about how nature and wildlife is being destroyed by us humans, and our needs and demands on water, land and energy. Our lack of empathy, our shameful behavior with the animals and with nature. How many more species have to be extinct, how many more lands destroyed, how much more the planet can survive with our embarrassing life style.

**Why you selected wildlife photography over other genres of photography?**

I have been thinking about this question before. And I think it is because I' am shy and introverted, and with animals I feel very comfortable. I don't have to talk, unless I want to. I just share my time; I feel a connection beyond the words. And then, animals are beautiful, wild, unpredictable, they live in the most magnificent, the most beautiful and untouched places.

© MARINA CANO

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**What were the challenges that you most commonly faced and how did you deal with them?**

The worst challenge is the lack of trust, the fear of uncertainty. To not trust in myself before, delaying my career, but with help I built confidence to make it.

Then also not having money enough, my daughter being too young, didn't make it easier.

**Have you ever faced a difference of opinion of your work? And how do you approach criticism?**

Not really many times, mainly at the beginning of my career. I started photographing in a wildlife park near where I live in Cantabria, Spain, animals live in semi-freedom conditions and it was the perfect playground to learn about wildlife and photography. It was the time I couldn't travel to Africa, and some people criticized me because of that, and I think they still do it. Then I felt hurt about it, but now I encourage people to feel free about things like this. I know many people who cannot afford to go to Africa or to other exotic destinations, and their dream is to photograph big mammals there. Nowadays I run wildlife workshops in this wildlife park, that is the largest in Europe.

**Do you think post-production is as important as the actual shoot?**

I think the shoot is very important, but post-production adds a very important value. In this I include the selection of images we are going to show, either online or for a exhibition, a book, etc. That moment we are selecting is critical because it determines all the result. We

© MARINA CANO

need to identify the images that has potential, that are “the ones.” Then to know how to process those pictures is vital, and also subjective and it is determined by our own aesthetic, in the same way as the way we photograph.

**What do you believe makes your images successful?**

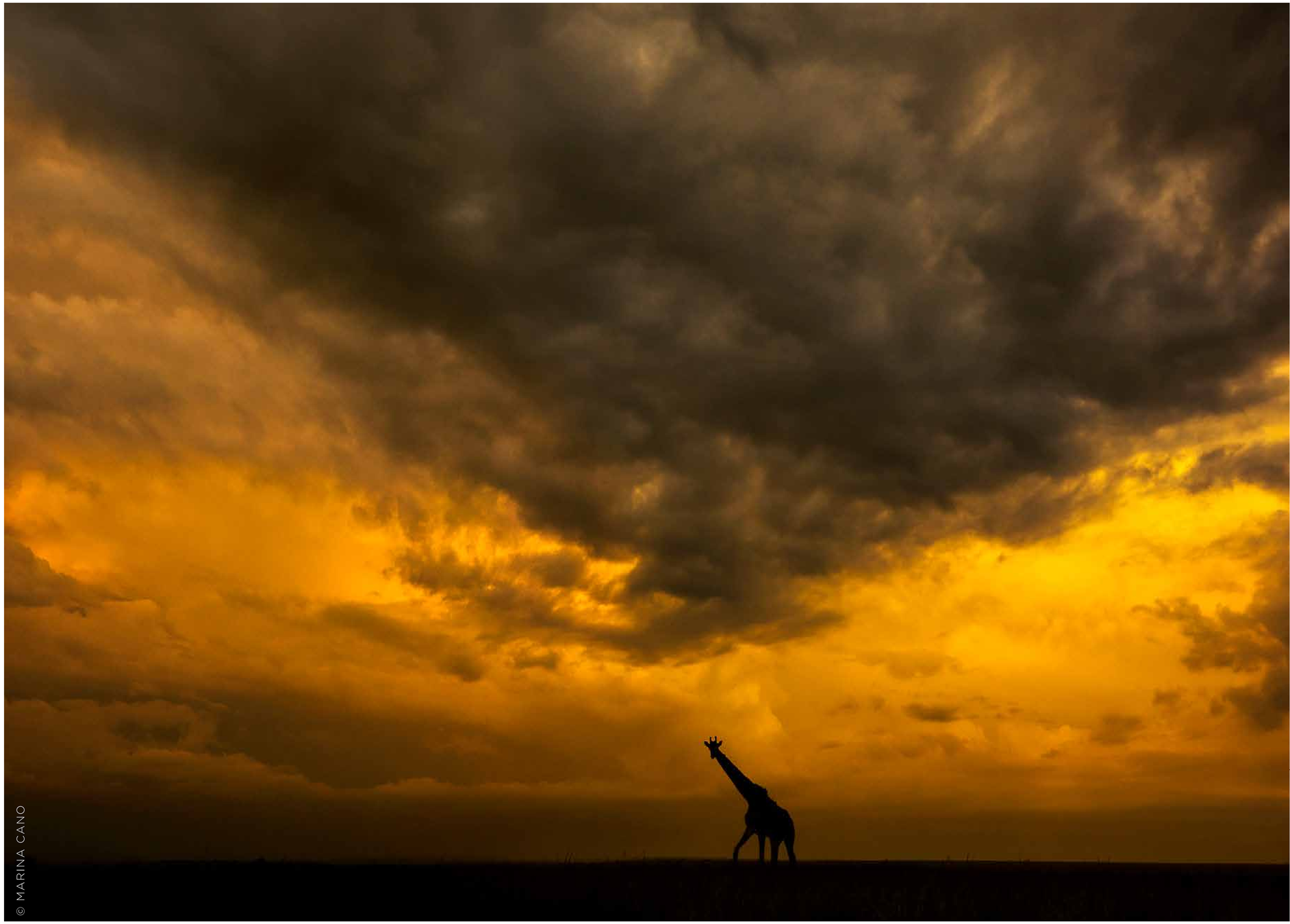
Emotions. Emotions create a strong connection with the viewer because it is about us in the pictures, our feelings as humans, our feelings for them. Emotions together with a very well thought and cared aesthetic, together with the beauty of the wildlife and the beauty of nature. The two key words are emotions and connection. We delivered a message, and we decide the content.

**Is there one animal you’ll happily photograph again and again?**

I can be obsessive photographing, I can do it with elephants, lions, cheetahs, gorillas, giraffes, zebras, leopards, baboons, bears, birds... there is always something new to photograph, a different light, a different moment, a different behavior, it’s infinite.

**How did you get into wildlife photography?**

I got into wildlife because of the wildlife park near to where I live, actually 20 minutes away from home, a second home for me. I went there at the beginning just to catch some good photographs, I usually went with friends, but there was a moment that something clicked in my head, and then I felt in love with the animals, and every other thing



© MARINA CANO

disappeared. I used to go almost every day, for years and I have enjoyed every single one.

**Have you had any formal photography training and how did you get to where you are today?**

I never had any formal photography training. I never planned to become a professional wildlife photographer. I had passion and I loved to photograph. I started on Facebook (I think this is 11-12 years ago) and I enjoyed it very much, uploading pictures, making comments and the page was growing and growing and I got many followers. I think it helps that many people pay attention to your work, and I was asked to publish on magazines, to do talks, trips... I reached 620,000 followers gaining more visibility for my work. Together with passion and love for wildlife, I came to become a European Canon Ambassador, to be in the final of the Wildlife Photographer of the Year, to have covers on National Geographic...

**Among the gears that you own, is there something that you wish you hadn't bought?**

I bought very expensive filters thinking to keep doing landscape photography, and I didn't use them at all.

**What is the most difficult animal you have had to photograph?**

The pangolin. I was commissioned to present the Canon 1DX Mark III (just before the pandemic started) we had very limited time to photograph the pangolin in the Kalahari, and we were filming in the day and looking for the pangolins in the night. It has been one of the more intense five days of my life. The last night before we left, our tracker found the most beautiful nocturnal animal I have ever seen.

**What advices can you give to a new and enthusiasts wildlife photographers?**

The first advice is trust in themselves. After that, to work hard. Followed by perseverance because difficulties probably will arrive. Be patient, not to wait for the animals, but to keep trying because this is not an easy world, but it is not impossible. Follow your passion and always keep learning.

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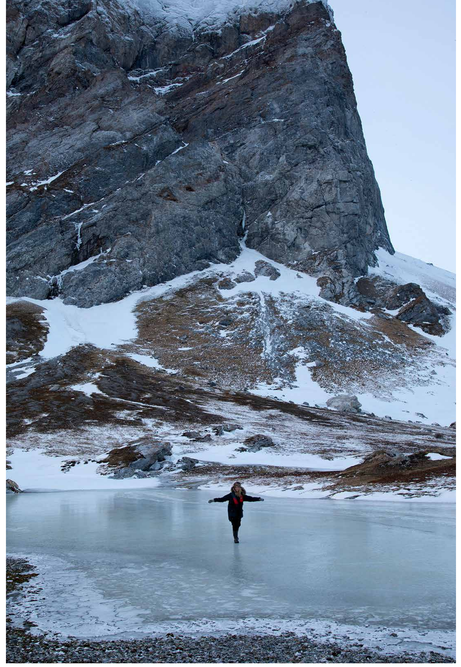
© Melissa Schäfer

CONSERVATION

# Respect is the key

By Melissa Schäfer

Polar Bear (*Ursus maritimus*)



**From her early childhood days in Hamburg, Germany, Melissa has viewed the world through her camera lens. With a background in creative and portrait photography she has always had a unique eye for the surroundings. A deep love for the Arctic and polar bears as well as a strong commitment to nature and the environment is a foundation for all her work.**

**themotherbear.com**
**instagram.com/melissa_schaefer**

It is a fast paced world, and it is an era where we also want to explore every part of it, leaving footprints behind.

We work with polar bears in Svalbard, an island in Norwegian Arctic and also organise expeditions in the region bringing guests. The most important task is to be able to learn from nature and learn about ourselves. You need to realize that you will leave behind footprints the moment you set foot in nature. There is a need to balance ones wishes and needs with sustainability and work with nature for conservation.

We see the beauty of nature and we try to document it for the world  to share our experience, but your own desire for the perfect photo can not always be your top

© Melissa Schäfer

Polar Bear (*Ursus maritimus*)

© Melissa Schäfer

priority. Always ask yourself: why am I doing this? Why do I do, what I do?

We intend to protect and restore habitats, to learn about ecosystems and protect biological diversity.  We want to document the natural life of polar bears over time and we want to tell their story. And for that, we need to respect nature and everything that lives or comes with it.

We often see our own actions in black and white, some of us think that travel is bad for the environment and our climate and others don't see the link between, or say is the adverse impact is negligible.

The question you should ask yourself is not "yes" or "no", it's "how, where and when?" Conservation and our planet benefits or are impacted by what choices we make and how we do things, where we go and the travel options we choose. And we should always ask ourselves "why?"

When we work with bears we know that we are disturbing them, even when they don't show any sign of stress. We basically broke into their homes to watch them. This is how I try to see it, how would you feel if someone comes into your home to watch you? You want the intruder to respect you and your space. If the intruder is rude, then your hand is forced, to show them that they are not welcome. This is perfectly agreeable if the 'you' in question is human, but if the 'you' is apolar bear, then the intruder reserves the right to shoot bullets at you. We humans need to realize that it is not for us to decide how far we can go. We need to be mindful about balance and respect nature.

© Melissa Schäfer

Polar Bear (*Ursus maritimus*)

© Melissa Schäfer

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The fascinating part of working with nature is that you never know what is going to happen, you can plan to an extent but you can never develop a fool proof plan for your dream photo. My job is to document the moment nature gives me.

We share this planet with so much life, so much beauty that wants nothing but to live and being part of the natural world, and part of ecosystems that are in perfect balance until we step in and mess it up.

Everything we do matters and affects not only ourselves but everyone and everything on this planet. Every ounce of ice, every drop of water, every single life on this planet is connected.

We have seen people chasing mothers with cubs to make their own dreams come true, the photo they had wished for.  We should at all costs avoid disturbing the equilibrium of nature to take a photo, and at best we should avoid labelling the very photo as one about saving nature or conservation.

We should not chase bears or any other animals and then talk about their extinction. What we can do as a photographer is to watch and learn, to listen and act in a good way.

And it's not always easy to know where and when we have to take a step back. But it's important to know this and to think about it. This is not our world, we share it with so much wildlife and beautiful nature and it is on us not to destroy it.

© Melissa Schäfer

Polar Bear (*Ursus maritimus*)

© Melissa Schäfer

We do leave footprints out there, however.
It's impossible to take one single step outside civilization without disturbing wildlife. But we should do everything we possibly can to minimize it.

The current polar bear population around Svalbard is between 2,000 to 3,000 bears. The population was stable for quite a long time, but with the sea ice vanishing at an alarming rate in the arctic, the population decline of polar bears is high. Polar bears need sea ice for their day-to-day survival, to hunt, mate, and even to sleep.

We are in regular contact with the Norwegian Polar Institute who works with the Svalbard polar bear population. Their studies with a solid foundation in science, teach us a lot and is important to us. Sometimes we also share our observations with them that helps their research as well.

This is the polar bear's land after all and everything has to happen on their terms. No matter how much time we have spent on the ice - we are just visitors.

Respect is the key to most things in life!

Moment: "Through the mist of blowing snow, something moves...the air looks like it is on fire, while the sun is going down behind the hills. The silence gets loud. You close your eyes and just listen. You can hear the wind, you can hear them breathe. You can hear them walk... you can hear the snow under their paws. The greatest predator on Earth is so powerful and beautiful, yet at the same time so vulnerable.

When I was a child I believed that one day I would walk with polar bears. I believe they are kind and wise. Polar bears - They are wanderers. In  constant search for food and life, they are endlessly on the move, most of the time alone. I am thankful for every minute they allowed me to be with them on the ice, I know now I don't belong there, but I love to be."

© Melissa Schäfer

Polar Bear (*Ursus maritimus*)

© Melissa Schäfer

© Melissa Schäfer

Polar Bear (*Ursus maritimus*)

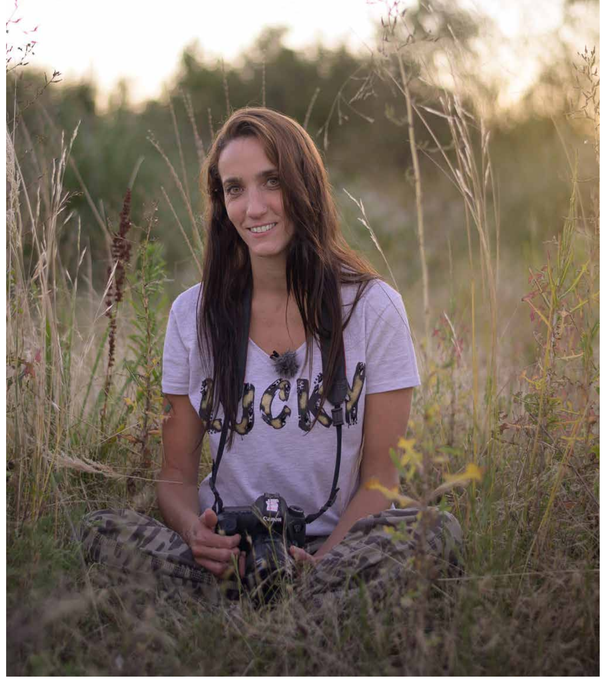
SPECIES

# Spiders – Amazing World of Eight Legged Animals

By Cynthia Bandurek

Crab Spider (*Thomisidae*)

© Cynthia Bandurek



**Cynthia Bandurek is an Argentinian conservation ecologist, field naturalist, nature photographer and wildlife artist. She has worked for more than eleven years at the Natural Science Museum and two years at the Darwinion Botanical Institute in Buenos Aires. In January 2021, Cynthia moved to Costa Rica to pursue work in conservation biology. And now she is living and working at La Cotinga Biological Station in the Osa Peninsula.**

**She participated in conservation projects in Argentina. She is author of the Book: *The world of small, An approach to the universe of arthropods from an artistic, visual, and evolutionary perspective*.**

**Cynthia is PT Explorers' Contributing Editor for South America.**

**cynthiabandurek.com**

**instagram.com/ cynthiabandurek_artphotography/**

**facebook.com/cynthia.bandurek**

*Orb-weaver Spider (Araneidae)*

© Cynthia Bandurek

Jumping Spider (*Salticidae*)

© Cynthia Bandurek

I enjoy photographing spiders. However, spiders usually produce an revulsion in most people, but if we start to know them a little more, surely our perception of these living beings will be slowly replaced by respect and admiration.

Spiders belong to the subphylum Chelicerata. They are characterized by having four pairs of legs - except for mite larvae, which have three pairs of legs, and a group of plant-feeding mites that have just two pairs of legs. Spiders are called Chelicerata because of the Chelicerae, a mouthpart that they use to eat.

Within this subphylum we have three types of Chelicerata, two of them are strictly marine species: The sea spiders and horseshoes crabs. And the third class is Arachnida, home to the most majority, 99.99% of chelicerates. They are mostly terrestrial. And they are divided into 16 orders. The most common are: scorpions, pseudoscorpion, harvestmen, whip spiders, spiders and six orders of mites.

Spiders are one of the most diverse groups of animals with more than 100 families and more than 45.000 species named around the world. Spiders are found worldwide on every continent except for Antarctica and have become established in nearly every habitat with the exceptions of air and sea colonization.

Spiders are predators, and they  basically use two ways to get their food. Many spiders are active hunters and others passive ones. While all spiders produce silk, not all use it to produce webs. The active hunters mainly wander looking for their prey.

Jumping Spider (*Salticidae*)

© Cynthia Bandurek

Jumping Spider (*Salticidae*)

© Peter Hudson

© Cynthia Bandurek

The silk is also used for making sacs or oothecas to protect eggs, to line a burrow or other retreat, to wrap up a prey, and to produce a dragline that holds the spider.

Spiders use a wide range of strategies to capture prey: trapping it in sticky webs, lassoing it with sticky bolas, mimicking the prey to avoid detection, or running it down. Most detect prey mainly by sensing vibrations, but the active hunters have acute vision. Spiders' guts are too narrow to take solids, so they liquefy their food by flooding it with digestive enzymes. They also grind food with the bases of their pedipalps, as arachnids do not have the mandibles that crustaceans and insects have.

Beyond all the general characteristics that make a spider a spider, they are an amazing group of animals with a complex set of adaptations and strategies, making them for me, outstanding creatures.

With the aim to raise some empathy in the people about them, I will give you some astonishing facts that I believe will make you think about spiders in a different way.

There are spiders with "maternal instincts" that care for their eggs, some even carry them wherever they go in a kind of bag they weave called ootheca. Other species carry their offspring on their bodies from birth until they grow up and become independent.

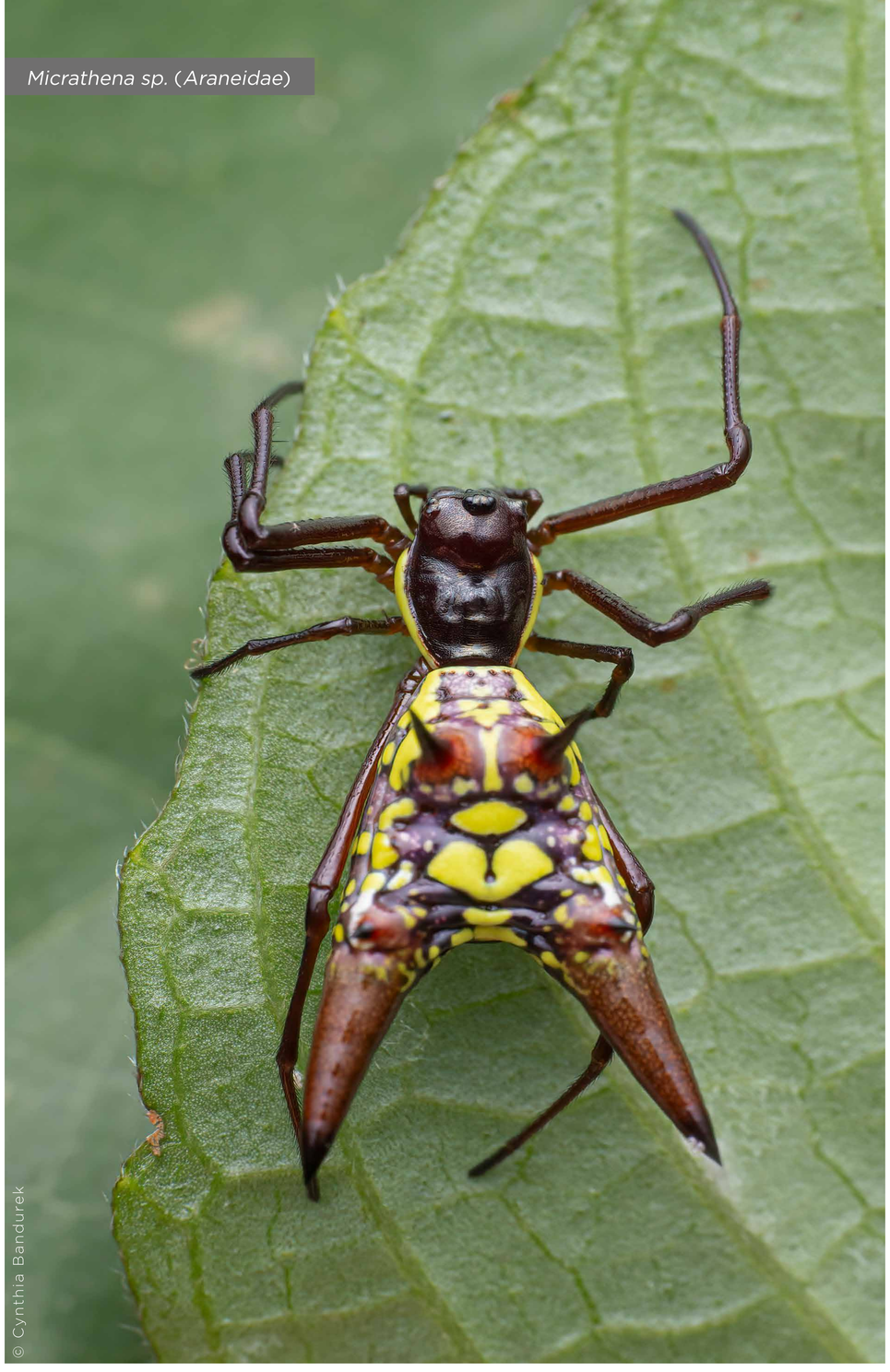
We can also think of their magnificent fabrics, some of them with almost perfect, orbicular, structures, including some of exceptional sizes, especially when compared to the size of whoever builds them.

Another curiosity is that it is probable that the ability to make orbicular webs evolved just once, in the ancestors of orb web spiders, but scientists are still not sure if all the orb web spiders belong to a unified group.

Some spiders use dry adhesive silk, but most of the orb-web spiders employ wet sticky droplets.

Another peculiarity is the resistance of the silk, as in the case of the imposing spider golden silk, which is now under investigation in laboratories for being tougher than a steel wire of the same thickness, a property that suggests many uses and applications in engineering.

Some species of orb weaver make some decoration on their webs. Some of them can have the shape of X, a simple line, or a circle. Scientists are not completely sure about the function of the web's decorations. But they have some hypotheses about it. One of them refers to the possibility that the extra component provides some kind of camouflage that could help to avoid predators, other potential functions can be that make the web more visible in order to warn off large animals that could damage the web. And the third idea is that it can serve to attract prey to the web. Nature is so complex that sometimes it is not easy to interpret it and know the functions behind every adaptation or every behavior.



*Micrathena sp. (Araneidae)*

© Cynthia Bandurek

Crab Spider (*Thomisidae*)

© Cynthia Bandurek

Anyone who has seen a jumping spider once, will have realized that they can seesee us even from the back.  In these jumping spiders (family Salticidae) they have four pairs of simple eyes (unlike the compound eyes of insects), arranged in the front area and on both sides of the head, allowing them to have a visual field practically of 360 degrees. This extraordinary visual acuity is due largely to their two, characteristic, central large mobile eyes.

This excellent vision serves them for hunting, as they are active hunters, which means they do not catch their prey by producing fabrics but lurk in wait of food. But this visual feature is also essential for dating, where once the male finds its possible partner, it starts a complex dance spreading its front legs and abdomen with the sole aim to impress the female, while avoiding being eaten during copulation.

Another feature of jumping spiders are their jumps (hence its name), not only forward but also sideways and backwards. The jump occurs as a result of an internal pressure of the hemolymph (equivalent to blood) which is discharged violently, while the eight legs energetically push.

Other kinds of spiders that have evolved vision  are called wolf spiders or wandering spiders. These spiders are also active hunters and for that they needed not only to have good vision, but also to be able to develop night vision. They have in some of their eyes a reflective membrane called “tapetum”, which reflects external light and allows them to improve vision in low light conditions.

In spiders you can recognize males

Jumping Spider (*Salticidae*)

© Cynthia Bandurek

Orb-weaver spider (Araneidae)

© Cynthia Bandurek

and females looking at its pedipalps (its “arms”). Males’ pedipalps look like a “boxing gloves”. Both the male and female reproductive organs are at the rear of the abdomen, but spiders do not mate by coupling these organs. Instead, the male deposits some sperm onto a small web and picks it up on the end of his pedipalps. When the female is in position, the male deposits the sperm in the female’s genital opening.

The female stores the sperm in receptacles near the ovaries. When she is ready to lay her eggs, months down the road in some species, she uses the sperm to fertilize them. Some spiders may lay hundreds, even thousands of eggs in one shot.

Many spider species do make a once-in-a-lifetime move to a new location, primarily in the late summer and early fall of their birth.

Most species of spiders are solitaries but a few of spider species that build webs live together in large colonies and show social behavior, although not as complex as in social insects.

Spiders were represented in some cultures as potentially dangerous animals, even in movies appearing as monsters, but the fact is fewer than 1% of all species represent danger for humans.

For example, tarantulas have a bad reputation and people believe that they are fatal to humans, but the fact is that most species of tarantulas do not pose a threat to humans. Just two genres that live in Australia, Atrax and Hadronyche.

Jumping Spider (*Salticidae*)

© Cynthia Bandurek

*Phoneutria sp.*(*Ctenidae*)

© Cynthia Bandurek

But unfortunately, around them there are a lot of myths that do not do them justice, and many people kill them when in fact they are harmless living beings.

There are an amazing number of stories and facts about the spider's fantastic lives. While we are just knowing them and discovering new species especially in the tropical forest they are being affected by the actual situation of the planet, mainly by habitat alteration such as deforestation, agriculture, grazing, and urbanization.

For example, clear-cutting of forests reduces spider abundance and changes spider community composition drastically. As happens with all arthropods they are also affected by pesticides, which decrease spider populations in agro-ecosystems, affecting the ability of spiders to control pest species.

I invite you to learn more about spiders. I am sure you will discover a universe of adaptations and ecological stories that make you see them in a different way with respect and admiration. Even with your cell phone you can increase the magnification to get a closer look at spiders you spot.

Now I am living at La Cotinga Biological Station, so I enjoy spotting some amazing natural history moments of these amazing creatures every day.

Orb-weaver Spider (*Araneidae*)

© Cynthia Bandurek

Orb-weaver spider (*Araneidae*)

© Cynthia Bandurek

© Anagha Mohan



# Wild India

By Anagha Mohan

# CUB'S CORNER

**Anagha Mohan is 14 years old young nature photographer from Bangalore, India. She is studying in 9th grade at Poornaprajna Education Center.**

**Her images have been recognized in many international competitions and have been exhibited in international photography exhibitions too.**

**instagram.com/anagha_mohan_photography**

Bush Crickets (*Tettigoniidae*)

© Anagha Mohan

© Anagha Mohan

Bicolored Frog (*Clinotarsus curtipes* )

I developed an interest in wildlife photography or wildlife in general, due to my father K.S Manju Mohan, who also happens to be a wildlife photographer. We always used to go to National parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries for all my vacations. I finally started wildlife photography in the year 2014. I attended a ‘Kids photography Workshop‘ at Toehold and learnt the basics.

I started off by shooting Elephants, Langurs, Deers, Tigers and Leopards. A few years back, I went on a Western Ghats Exploration tour with Philip Ross, who introduced me to the world of Macro and Herping. And ever since, frogs and snakes are my favourite subjects to shoot.

Over the past 8 years I have been to various National parks across India. Among these, Corbett national park will always remain my favourite. It is the landscape of this park that attracts me the most.

Other than this, I have recently become a member of youth photographic society and with the guidance of the senior members of this club and Mr. H Satish, I have been exploring other genres of photography like glassware, landscape and astrophotography

In 2018 I won the ‘Special Mention‘ in Nature in Focus awards. In the same year my image was exhibited in the ‘Macro Trails‘ exhibition organised by Paws trails in Dubai. In 2019, I won the emerging talent award in Canon Wild Click Live Photography contest. In the same year I won the Askary Award.

For my photography, I use Nikon gear. I mainly use the Nikon D5 with the 500mm lens and the 105mm lens for Macro photography.

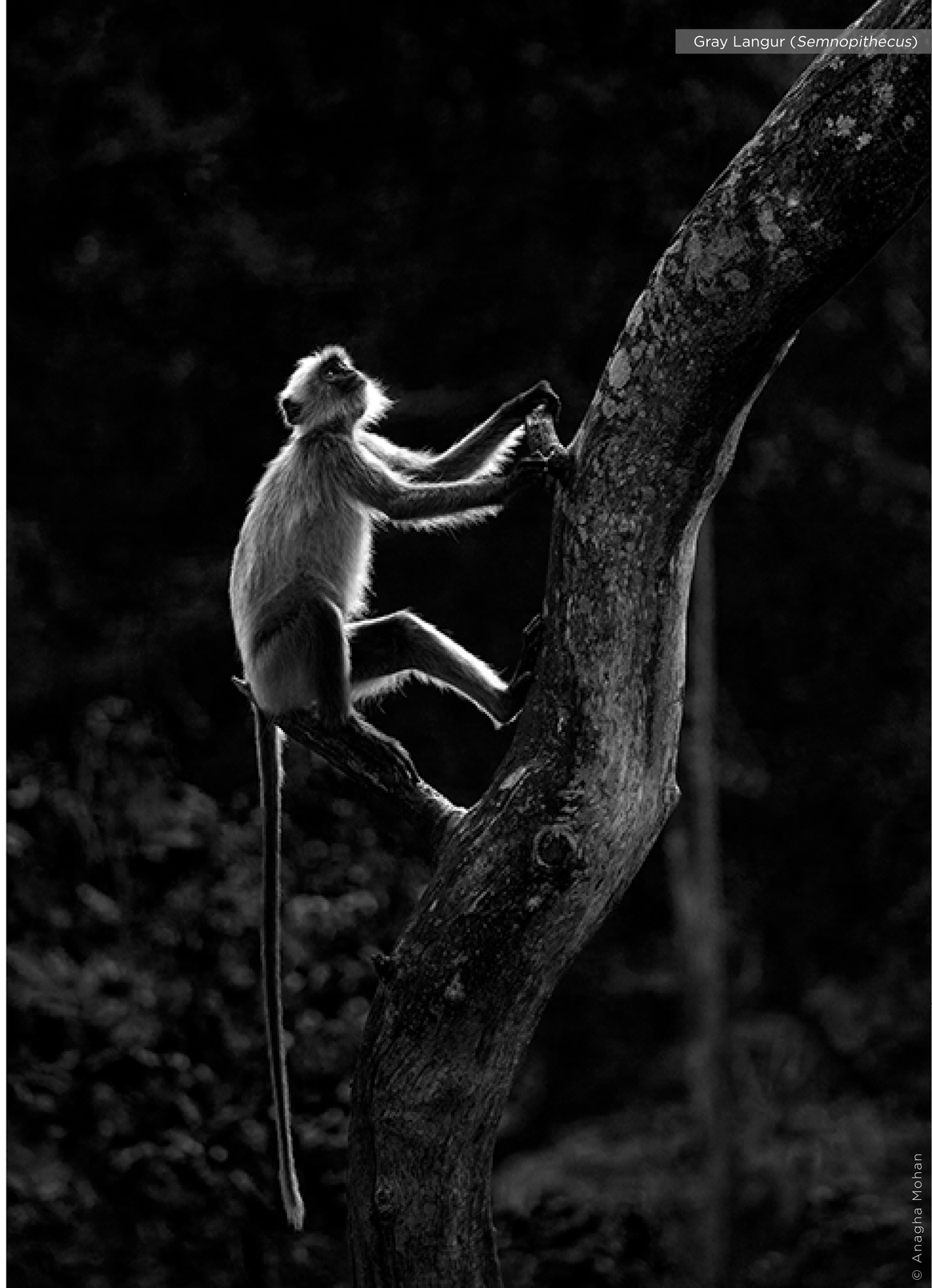
Photography has become an integral part of my life. It has changed me as a person and has taught me patience, courage, perseverance, dedication, quick thinking to name a few. But, the real teacher for me is nature.

Nature and animals have a lot of lessons to offer and being in the wild one can learn and observe many things. But some people are destroying this pristine natural habitat for monetary benefits.

I want to contribute towards the conservation of lesser-known species like frogs, snakes, fishes which are bio indicators and tell us about the quality of environment we are living in.

In order to do this, we have to spread awareness about these species. A lot of people do not know that these species exist, so they will not try to conserve them. So, the first step towards conservation is educating people. The photographs we click are great educational tools. I also aspire to explore the western ghats for many more species of frogs and snakes.

This has been my journey so far in wildlife photography. I wish to pursue this passion and achieve my goals, and hopefully be able to educate people about the smaller lesser-known species.



Gray Langur (*Semnopithecus*)

© Anagha Mohan

© Anagha Mohan

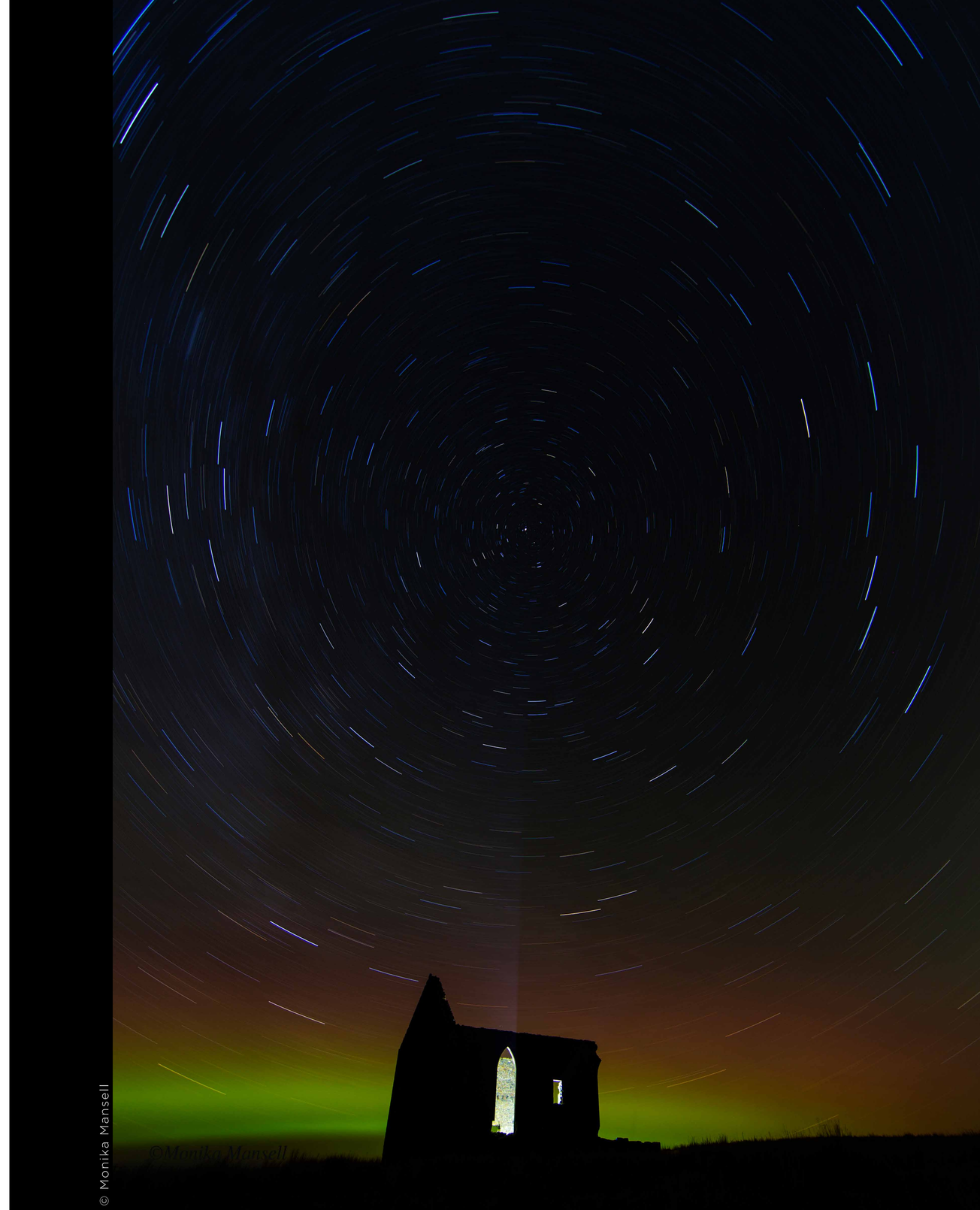
Glandular Bush Frog (*Philautus glandulosus*)

© Anagha Mohan

# Shooting for Black Backgrounds

By Monika Mansell

© Monika Mansell



**Monika Mansell, a German photographer, was always fascinated by natural history and the biology of native birds and plants. As a child, she dreamed about becoming a lepidopterologist, spent hours identifying caterpillars and chrysalis, and could name all the local butterflies, regardless of their state of metamorphosis. In reality, she became a complementary health practitioner, physiotherapist, and chiropractor. Monika is lucky that her home boasts a wild garden sheltering a variety of birds, where she has established a small sanctuary for injured animals, like birds of prey, hedgehogs.**

**mansellphotos.smugmug.com**
**facebook.com/monika.mansell**



There is nothing more appealing than a simple photograph and one of the best and simplest ways to do this is to take a photograph with a black background. Portraits are invariably much better with a simple, single coloured black background and if you turn the photos into monochrome this accentuates the greys and the whites in the face. The photograph of my Granny's hands were taken soon after her passing, I placed a rose in her hands and the black cloth behind shows the texture and structure of a life well lived, and the black back ground accentuates this well.

Not just portraits of people but of pets and photos of plants are special. Plants

© Monika Mansell

© Monika Mansell

© Monika Mansell

with a black background are often used as “specimen shots” and look really special and of course you don’t pick or dig the plants up, just take the shot in the field.

I should add that some people are totally obsessed with black backgrounds so if you go onto Instagram and look at #blackbackground you will see more than 200,000 photos with this tag, mostly simple portraits, although there is also a big following for people who take food photos with black backgrounds.

In this short article, we are going to look at the black backgrounds in wildlife photography, how to make them and how this can turn difficult photographic opportunities into a creative fun time.

As with all photography, this is all about the light and how you utilize the light. Unlike a portrait photographer, wildlife photographers are somewhat limited by the fact that you cannot run up behind the snarling tiger and drop a perfect black background sheet from the tree behind it and then rush back to the safety of your safari vehicle and take a photograph. Please don’t try it - much safer for all if you learn to use the light with your camera.

In terms of what camera to use there is a great advantage of using a mirrorless camera because what you see through the viewfinder is what you get as a photograph. With the normal DSLR you can play around with the settings take a few trial shots and then with a bit of chimping decide if you need to dial down your compensation and go -1 stop or more.

***Point exposure: harsh conditions are your creative friend***

If you are a wildlife photographer and been on safari in Africa, India, Central America or other places you will know that you must get out early to capture the golden light, a period of little more than 15 minutes when the sun breaks the horizon and everything is bathed in the most glorious golden light. Once it is over, you rush around trying to utilize every drop of good light to capture nice images and by 11:00 am the conditions become so harsh that you might as well go back to the camp for some lunch and a rest. Of course, the animals also slow down at this time seeking the shade and their activity levels drop, so not much is happening, and you may well justify this to yourself that the sunlight is so harsh with very dark shadows and very bright overburnt highlights that getting a good exposure is just about impossible. There is some truth in that, but – and this is the but you need to embrace - now is the time to put on your creative hat and use what light you have to accentuate aspects.

Put your camera on aperture priority with a shallow depth of field (f4), low ISO and a single spot exposure and focus on the part of the body in the sun, usually the eye. With such good Denoise software these days made by Topaz (Denoise AI) why not set your aperture low and speed high and leave ISO on automatic – seems such an easy way to go even if your ISO goes shooting over 6400. The exposure will be set for the eye and the rest of the background will be underexposed and black so the subject looks great.
Some of the most difficult places to get

© Monika Mansell

good photographs are in deep rainforest where the animals are moving between harsh beams of sun light into areas that are almost totally dark. Once again – wait till the head comes out of the shadows and set your exposure and focus on the eye while it is in the sun and you will have a creative shot even if you can only see they eye and part of the head.

Be ready to dial down your exposure and quite often you need to go -0.7 stops or even as low as -2.0 stops and this will make the image snap in with a beautiful black background.

There is no hard and set rule and I just go straight to -0.7 and go back further as need be – just taking a range of shots at different exposure compensations can get those creative juices running and you see things in an image you hadn't expected.

The black background arises because you have a beam of good strong light that hits the animal at the eye or side of the face and gives you an opportunity to make an interesting and insightful portrait. You can take this further and be creative – maybe using artificial light or a flash with a snoot on the end to produce a focused beam of light.

The options are endless, the creativity exciting and the results rewarding.
You will also find yourself looking for black backgrounds whenever you are out, sometimes these are simply dark shadows in vegetation, and water often provides a beautiful black background for waterbirds. I have even used the black of a railway embankment as a black backdrop when the light hits a bird.

***Back-lit***

While we are always taught the first rule of photography is to take your photo with the light coming over your shoulder, this is a rule made to be broken. Take your photos straight into the light so that a halo of light appears around the animal to accentuate the shape of the animal – much like Picasso would use 1 or 2 simple lines to capture the essence of a person or an animal you can use the light to expose the animal in a special beauty. As with the beam of sunlight in the rainforest, your exposure is not set for the dark side of the animal but set to expose for the highlights. Let all the dark parts of the photo go black and get the highlighted outline of the animal exposed correctly. With some animals, such as Red-footed boobies or frigate birds, the sun will come through the red feet or the pouch and you should bring this into focus leaving a line of light to accentuate parts of the body. The trick is don't fight the exposure just expose for the highlights and let the background go black and then give it a bit more. In all of this, it is the wise use of light that creates what appears to be a black background.

***Post processing***

Not all your black background photos are going to come out of the camera perfect for posting and many will need some processing.

*Wiggle your curves:* the first thing you should always do is use the luminar curve to accentuate the blacks and the highlights – make the curve S shaped and experiment

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*Contrast:* play with the contrast slider carefully to just see how this helps

*Blacks:* play with the black slider to make some of the blacks consistently black with no greys and take out the complexities in the background

*Layers:* use layers to reduce exposure of backgrounds a little bit and even desaturate areas while use a layer on the face to bring up sharpness and clarity a little.

*Background removers:* some software even include background removers (e.g. Luminar) which will make the process even easier. In other software (Capture One, Photoshop) its pretty easy to select the background as a layer and play around with it.

Finally consider turning your image into monochrome – you will lose any golden light or colour in the highlights, but it can make a cracking image. Most of all have fun and go and play – break the rules and be creative.

© Monika Mansell

# Her Views & Visuals

By Silvina Raquel Acosta

© Silvina Raquel Acosta

Bee. Megachilidae (*Hymenoptera*)

**Silvina is an Argentine nature photographer, focus on the microfauna, microflora and miscellaneous of the natural world. Some of her photos contributed to the books - *Insects in the forest... and where you look* and *Complete guide insects to explore your world*.**

**silvinaacosta.fotonat.org**
**instagram.com/silvi_f5**
**facebook.com/silvina.acosta.564**

# Her Views and Visuals



© Silvina Raquel Acosta

Fly (*Diptera*)

© Silvina Raquel Acosta

Beetle. Chrysomelidae (*Coleoptera*)

**How did your interest in wildlife arise?**

Since my childhood in the Pozo del Molle, province of Córdoba (Argentina) I was curious about that small nature, which exceeded my entertainment, the capacity for wonder, just to observe and hear the Cicadas that abounded in the trees, a debate arose, questioning of doubts and conclusions, perhaps ... accurate at our ages: did the cicadas live on earth or did they only appear in summer? We were strongly struck by finding the “container” of only some, making conjectures from our innocence.

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

Each trip is with expectations that there is something, there is an encounter before my observation, even behind the leaves, also in seeds, spider webs, textures, insect eggs, pests, fungi, wildflowers, a small world to discover that always pleasantly surprised if we observe the environment and are careful.

**What is your view on Nature Conservation?**

Many crops depend on the pollination of insects but due to climate changes, deforestation, fumigation, there has been a notable decrease in insects and biodiversity, but insects play an important role in ecology, so it is necessary to conserve the ecosystem, knowing the role and the positive impact they have on the world, many of the insects are pest controllers.

Damselfly (*Zygoptera. Odonata*)

© Silvina Raquel Acosta

Crab Spider (*Thomisidae*) with Honey Bee (*Apidae. Hymenoptera*)

© Silvina Raquel Acosta

© Silvina Raquel Acosta

Bee. Megachilidae (*Hymenoptera*)

**How can we, as wildlife photographers, help to protect our Mother Nature?**

Through photos we can educate the viewers of the many species that exist, their enormous variety of functions in the environment, their defense mechanisms. Viewers can get amazed and marvel at the shapes, colors and designs of a tiny world and the need for its conservation, and get to know a world that, although it exists, we cannot appreciate it without macro photography.

Behind each photo there is a lot of sweat, patience, you wait, all that is the sum expressed in photos to raise awareness of the importance of consequences of the degradation of wetlands, mountains, that without them the life of these tiny beings would not be possible, and for those who believe, see the work of a great Designer and Creator of the universe.

**Can you give our readers the best macro photography tips?**

Macro photography of insects in their environment, with living organisms, is possible without manipulation. If you know the native plant species, we know which are the nutritional plants and what insects they host.Be patient and persistent, walk slowly and stop to observe in suburban areas, on the edges of the fields, in a yard or among weeds.

**Do you have any recommendations on setup or equipment for macro photography?**

A Macro Lens must be handy, versatile for when the opportunity arises, the immediacy of photographing, configuring with possible values, before our model leaves.

Use a flash with low flash power and with a diffuser, so that the surface of your aqueous bodies, with sparkles, is a mirror and does not affect a photo.

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

Continue admiring and knowing the many species that exist, their enormous variety of functions in the environment, their defense mechanisms, colors, designs, forms of communication of miniature organisms, their fragility, their societies, mutualism, their non-life cycles, not only arthropods, but batrachians and birds.

**Tell us something about the gears you use.**

I use a Nikon Micro Nikkor 85mm f / 3.5 lens and a Raynox lens that I sometimes add to a 55-300mm lens, a Nikon SB700 flash with a diffuser, plus a cloth that attenuates its light.

© Silvina Raquel Acosta

Arctiidae. Lepidoptera

Antlion. Myrmeleontoidea. Neuroptera

© Silvina Raquel Acosta

Antlion. Myrmeleontoidea. Neuroptera

© Silvina Raquel Acosta

Moth. *Titya proxima.* Lasiocampidae. Lepidoptera

© Silvina Raquel Acosta

© Donna Brok



# IMPACT

By Donna Brok

**Donna Brok is an architect by profession. She is an avid traveler and wildlife photographer since the age of fourteen. Donna teaches photography classes, does presentations, and judges throughout camera clubs.**

**facebook.com/donna.brok**

Do you have a philosophy for your photography? I bet you do, but is it working the way you imagined? It needs to shape your intent, purpose and direction. So what does that mean for creating impact in your shots?  And what is IMPACT?

Simply it is the “wow” factor. And usually the “wow” factor has six important criteria.

1. The light is flattering on your subject.

2. You made a good exposure for the lighting on your subject.

3. The composition has balance and harmony.

4. You captured something unexpected.

5. The image has emotion, or some kind of drama happening.

6. If you use an artistic approach, you will have a better chance of capturing the viewer’s attention.

So how do you add art to a wildlife shot when we have a subject easily lending itself to a documentary shot? It can be a challenge. Use editing enhancements or shoot in a way that lends a different atmosphere helping to produce an impactful photo. Additionally...

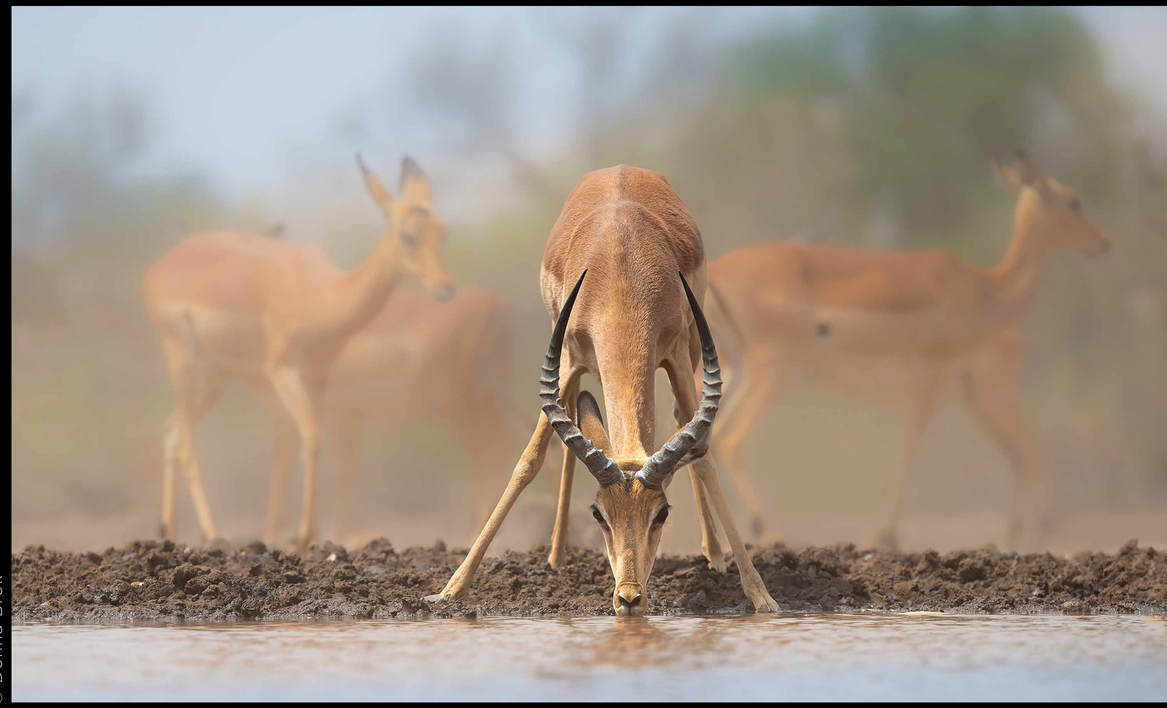
Great lighting, a panned subject, or the use of selective focus will help give images a longer look by the viewer.

Artists use both warm and cool color in an image. Of course an artist can go to the art store and purchase these colorful paints to skillfully use them. But we need situations where they occur.

Don’t you wish you could purchase a sack of inspirational colors, buy an eye for beauty, purchase a box of artistic talent? A few sprinkles and we have a great shot? I know that would be easier.

But you can take a cue from the artists, and lightly sprinkle those things in your editing.

· Artists create the hook that draws the viewer to where they want. A hook is more vibrant, brighter, has more contrast, is sharper, and is in focus. What is around



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the hook is less so in intensity. They control the intensity of these things.

· Artists aim to elicit emotion, or create mood. That can come from the subject or the lighting.

· Artists are masters of light. They use light selectively, or bathe the subject in light, defining the form.

· They create or control the atmosphere and backgrounds. These are all things a photographer can do and find.

When I teach, I like to have photographers look at their images differently, to find the artist inside themselves. They should ask themselves questions.

· Does the photo tell the viewer what you want them to know? That is purpose.

· Did you set up a story? Something that draws the viewer in and keeps them there. That is intent.

· Are there overlaps, mergers or edge distractions?

· Does light infringe on your subject, like unintended hotspots?

· Do you have depth in your image? If so, you have layers of interest in your shot.

· How is the background? You want a background almost as important as, and supportive of your subject.

· Did you follow your passion? That is direction.

© Donna Brok

To help bring impact to an image, you should balance the light to create a light, dark rhythm through the image. It gives movement which follows the brightness

To help bring impact to an image, you should balance the light to create a light, dark rhythm through the image. It gives movement which follows the brightness and tonal values, alternately keeping the eye moving through the space.

If you have a dark subject on a light background or vice versa, you achieve instant contrast. Contrast, used selectively, is very important in creating impact. Remember I mentioned balance and harmony?

© Donna Brok

Harmony can be the beautiful scenery or warm, golden evening light which creates a holistic feel. As the light flows around the form, warm and cool tones begin to alternate. That is another trick of artists, the use of warm and cool colors in one scene.

The contrast of the subject to the background and the colors, helps to give the image impact.

Create the stories that have meaning to you, the things you care about. Have direction, and explore your passion

Look at light differently, use selective light, good exposure, and an appropriate focal length for your vision. That is **photography**. See the lines, the figure ground relationships, the harmony, the balance, the light bathing the form,
**that is art.**

Impact is simply what captures the viewer's attention and emotions, using all the tools at your disposal. The feeling, the story, the depth, what you bring to the image, are what makes the viewer look deeper. It is not the subjects, but rather the moments we capture of the subjects. That is what elevates the impact.

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TRAVELOGUE

# Maasai Mara, Kenya

By Shruti Kori

© Shruti Kori

Shruti kori is an 18 year old Indian wildlife and nature photographer. There's nothing that makes her happier than being amidst nature with her camera.

Shruti's aim is to create visually captivating images that will make the viewers fall in love with nature.

**instagram.com/shrutikoriphoto**

Kenya has always had a very special place in my heart. I spent seven years of my childhood in Kenya after which I shifted to India for good. The only thing which was missing in India was visiting the national parks of Kenya. I visited Kenya once every year for holidays but that one month was definitely not enough for this beautiful country. So, when the pandemic hit the world and India was completely locked down, I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to stay back in Kenya for almost a year. 2020 has been a very difficult year for many, but honestly this year has allowed me to nurture a new skill.

From the very beginning, the wildlife of Africa has always fascinated me. The idea of being so close to nature and animals really excited me. I always thought just observing and watching animals in their habitat is what gives me happiness until I experienced the magic of capturing all the breath-taking moments I got to witness in nature. In November 2020 my mother insisted that I should accompany my brother on a photo safari. I went on safari with Pareet Shah, and those five days changed my perspective of wildlife photography. That was when I started my journey into photography and I couldn't have asked for a better start. My heart was filled with excitement to explore more about photography and wildlife. So, when my brother asked me in January this year if I wanted to go on another



Serval (*Leptailurus serval*)

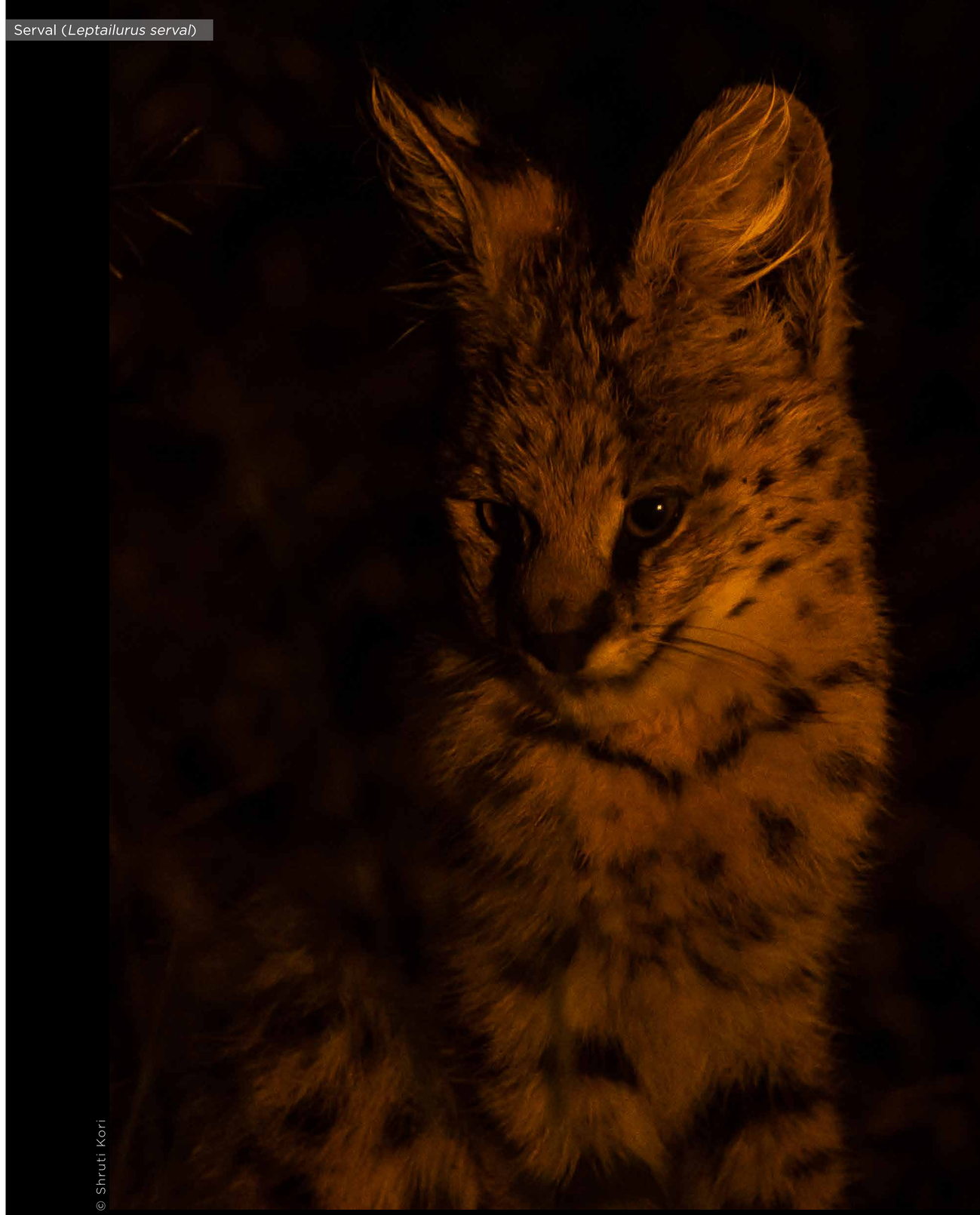

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photo safari with Nisha Purushothaman, I could not say no. I feel so grateful to have had the chance to learn from two people who are renowned for the work they have done in this field.

I have been to several wildlife places in Kenya such as Amboseli, Nakuru, Ol Pejeta conservancy, northern Kenya and my favorite of all Maasai Mara. I will always fall short of words talking about the Maasai Mara National Reserve. For me it is not just a place, it is a feeling. It's an experience that has taught me and keeps teaching me a lot every time. I have been to the Mara around 15 times and my experience is always different from the last time. Mara always has to offer something unique. I can guarantee you will always go on a game drive expecting something, but nature will always provide something even better, something you have never seen before.

Situated in south-west Kenya, Maasai Mara, which is spread over a large area of 1,510 sq km is one of Africa's Greatest Wildlife Reserves and is connected to the Serengeti National park in Tanzania. It is about 270 km from the capital city Nairobi and takes about four to five hours by road or 40-45 minutes by flight. The Great Migration is one of the most impressive natural events worldwide, involving a huge number of wildebeests, topis, zebras and elands. This happens every year starting from July until October and during this time you will find millions of wildebeests and zebras wandering in the plains of Mara. So, the best time to visit is July-October if you want to witness the migration. Also, December to February are great times as it is dryer and good for the Big Cats.

I recently was on safari in Mara for 16 days. What a surreal journey it was. Waking up in the vast grasslands of the savannah with the excitement of what that day holds for us. We'd start the gamedrives early in the morning so that we wouldn't miss the beautiful golden light. The feeling of the wind hitting my face, the rattling sound of the tall grass, and the undying spirit of the Maasai guides makes every safari worth remembering in Mara.

Every sighting in Maasai Mara is always exceptional. Especially when the sighting is of the big cats of Mara. Seeing the strength of the lions, the beauty of the leopards, the speed of the cheetahs has always astonished me. My favorite species undoubtedly has to be the leopard. These elusive big cats are tremendously difficult to spot. Most of the leopards are very shy and don't like to be in the presence of humans. But the bliss that you get after seeing a leopard cannot be put into words. I am very lucky to have had numerous sightings of leopards on my recent safari. We saw a total of seven leopards. The one sighting that will always be close to my heart was of Kaboso Jr. We heard on the radio of a leopard called Kaboso being spotted the day before. We decided to head there early in the morning the next day, we searched the entire morning but found no signs of her. However, we did not lose hope and after a short rest in the afternoon we were back in her territory searching for her. We had spent about two hours looking for her but in vain. The sun was about to set and we had started losing hope. Our guide suggested that we go to the spot where her cub was spotted last and then return to the lions who were seen close by. We

© Shruti Kori

© Shruti Kori

went to the spot but had no luck. Our guide started to reverse the vehicle and only then he spotted the tip of the tail of a leopard and pointed out her direction for us. We were filled with excitement but could not see her. On looking we finally saw her trying to run back towards the bush and there she was, Kaboso jr. Eight hours of determination and patience finally paid off. We were smiling ear to ear and couldn't believe what had just happened.

Another sighting which thrilled me was of a cheetah named Neema and her three cubs. We spotted her one evening and she looked really hungry but as it was getting dark, she decided to find a safe spot for them to spend the night. The next day we headed straight to her and within half an hour of searching we found them. The sun was just rising and the next thing we knew Neema and her cubs were covered in the beautiful golden light. We got some really stunning shots that morning. But the fact that cheetahs are near to extinction really bothers me. We need to save them before it is too late. We wouldn't want to face a situation in the near future where we will have to think that we had a chance and knew how to save the species, but we just let them go.

The Maasai community in the Mara are really working hard and putting as much as effort as they can to save the wildlife. I feel so much content seeing the human wildlife conflict end and the wildlife being conserved. These animals are truly a blessing and we have to strive harder to save them.

© Shruti Kori

© Shruti Kori

SNIPPET

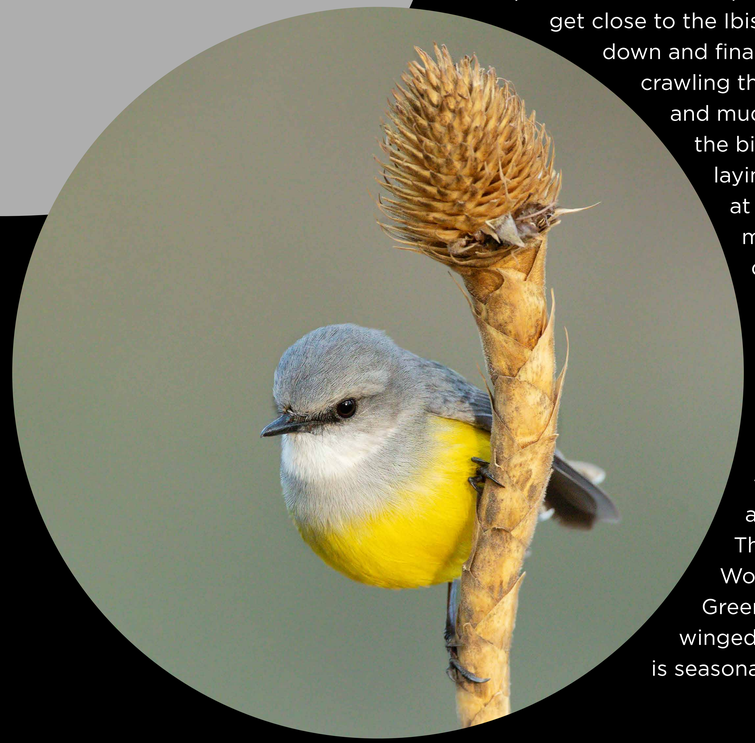
# Nature Photography in Southwestern Australia

By Heather Thorning

Southwestern Australia, around the city of Perth is my territory for nature photography -a narrow strip of land between the Indian Ocean and the central deserts of Australia.

For eleven years, I have been an avid amateur nature photographer of the bird and animals of WA's varied arid habitats. Bibra Lake and North Lake just south of Perth, are two of my favorite birding habitats. Both locations are significant Urban Wetlands. Some of the birds that inhabit these two locations include a variety of bush and water birds.

In January of this year when I visited Bibra Lake, early in the morning, I was excited to spot a small flock of Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – an unusual species to see in this part of the world. To get close to the Ibis, I first crouched down and finally ended up crawling through the reeds and mud as not to spook the birds and finally laying on my stomach at eye level. This made for a shallow depth of field. I was fortunate to spot and get close to a number of sandpipers and waterbirds during this successful adventure.. These included Wood Sandpiper, Greenshank and Black winged Stilt. Bibra Lake is seasonal with the start of spring when the lake is at a higher water level for numerous nesting duck species and stilts. Some birds prefer more shallow waters and exposed mud to feed so by mid-summer it becomes a feeding frenzy for other birds including Rails and Crakes, Glossy Ibis, Yellow Spoonbills, Red necked Avocets, Sandpipers, Purple Swamp Hens and Australian Pelicans. The different bird species at the lake can vary from year to year depending on food supply and water level. Photographers and walkers do need to be vigilant as Tiger Snakes and Dugites do inhabit the wetlands so protective gear is necessary. Also, many birds of prey feed on some of the local birds.



©Heather Thorning

Western Yellow Robin (*Eopsaltria griseogularis*)

©Heather Thorning

Black-shouldered Kite ( *Elanus axillaris*)

It is nature, so birds of prey do need to feed to survive. Some of the raptors seen around these lakes include Collared Sparrowhawk, Swamp Harrier, Brown

Goshawk, Black shouldered Kite, Nankeen Kestrel, Australian Hobby, White bellied Sea Eagle, Little Eagle, Square tailed Kite. Occasionally Wedge tailed Eagle and several vagrant species.

In January of this year when I visited Bibra Lake, early in the morning, I was excited to spot a small flock of Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) – an unusual species to see in this part of the world. To get close to the Ibis, I first crouched down and finally ended up crawling through the reeds and mud as not to spook the birds and finally laying on my stomach at eye level. This made for a shallow depth of field. I was fortunate to spot and get close to a number of sandpipers and waterbirds during this successful adventure..These included Wood Sandpiper, Greenshank and Black winged Stilt.

Extreme southwestern Australia is a biological hot spot for diversity, especially botanically rare and endemic species. Other locations I enjoy visiting are Herdsman Lake, Mandurah Estuary, and Woodman Point. Also, several forest habitats which include Lesmurdie, Jarrahdale and Dwellingup. This is just a small selection of the diverse habitats here in Western Australia.

Naturalists and photographers who visit southwestern Australia are always surprised and happy with our amazing biodiversity.

Heather Thorning is a nature photographer in southwestern Australia.
instagram.com/heather_thorning/

Red-tailed Black Cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus banksii*)

©Heather Thorning

SNIPPET

# SNIPPET

©Heather Thorning

White-bellied Sea Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*)

Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*)

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SNIPPET

# SNIPPET

Golden Plover (*Pluvialis apricaria*)

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# SNIPPET

Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*)

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# Spanish Wildlife Artist Bruna Roqué

Spanish Moon Moth (*Graellsia isabellae*), watercolour.

**Bruna Roqué was born in Barcelona in 1994. She is a natural history illustrator, wildlife lover, museum's collection freak and traveler.**

**Appearing and disappearing anywhere: currently living in Lofoten islands, Norway.**

**brunaroque.com**
**instagram.com/brunaroque_art**
**facebook.com/bruromu**

May 20th, 2020. Close to midnight under a bright arctic sun, I am writing on a floating dock in the gorgeous Lofoten islands, in northern Norway, The Covid19 global lockdown found me in this cozy Rorbuer located in Ballstad, a little fishing village. Originally coming for 2 months, I have been 'stuck' here for 6 months. Not a big deal, to be honest as I'm now where I always wanted to be: living the arctic dream in a veritable paradise. And because of the pandemic I have been afforded the amazing opportunity to live through three spectacular arctic seasons. Such a great personal moment to come back to the beginning of my story. Art, wildlife, and traveling are my passions.

I was born in Barcelona, 1994, in an architect family: my parents introduced me from a very early age to art: sculpture,

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Iberian bird feather's plate. watercolour.

©Bruna Roqué

Botanical illustration studies: Primula and Plum. Watercolour.

photography, painting, music and of course architecture. Visiting modern art exhibitions on weekends was common for me as a kid.

At the same time, we enjoyed a lot being outdoors: trekking, fishing, going to pick up berries and mushrooms... With the influence of my father, I started learning about bird and botanical identification. Taking the learning process of the latin names as a game, and a challenge.
He had some identification guides from Omega editorial, now truly classical, I remember watching all of those drawings over and over, before I knew how to read the text.

Arts was definitely my strength during my school years, but I finally decided to sign up for the scientific branch and join forest engineering in ETSEA, Lleida University. During my university years I fed my wildlife passions by participating in several bird migration campaigns throughout the Iberian Peninsula and Europe. In addition to my scientific interest in bird population and morphologies it was an excuse to intimately experience them in their natural environment.

During my third year of University, I met a professional scientific illustrator, and my sky was opened. The profession unifies art and wildlife, two of the things I am deeply passionate about. It was so perfect I just remember being in his studio and having the feeling that it was everything I ever wanted.

Suddenly realizing that being an engineer was not my goal anymore I packed my stuff, left the University, and scooted back to Barcelona, and applied to the prestigious arts school, l'Escola Massana. Two years later my final project was nominated for the coveted Junceda prize, and one of my works was exhibited in the Bologna Children's Book Fair, in Italy.

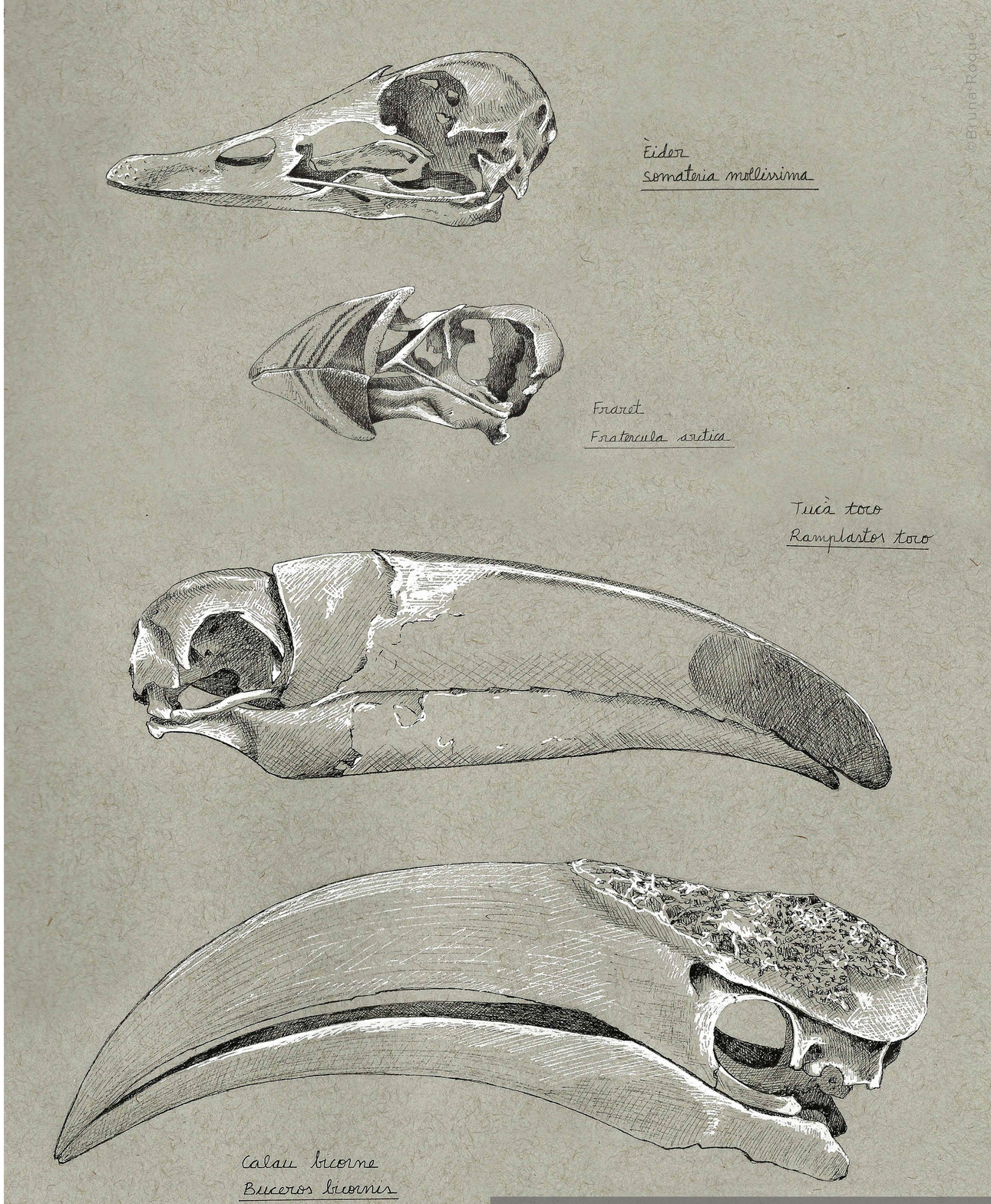
After Barcelona's arts school I studied at the Edinburgh Royal Botanical Gardens, arguably the Mecca for botanical illustrators with a faculty of the world's elites. Enthralled with my new artistic world, I backpacked my way over to the great city of London to spend four days in the Natural History Museum and Kew Gardens. During a metro change over, I reluctancy spent two hours walking along the Thames which was more than enough city time for my wildlife-oriented brain.

These past years I have taken every opportunity to attend courses and exhibitions by some of the most talented artists in Europe. With the help of social media, I have enjoyed reaching out to inspiring artists to expand and share knowledge. Some of my top inspiring artists on social media are: Erik Van Ommen, Catherine Hamilton, Deborah Kaspari, Robert Vaughnan and Darren Rees.

People are often surprised at how willing artists are to help, and I am grateful to be part of such a sharing community.

Varied environments, and global experiences provide new understandings.

Five years ago, I was immersed in the absolutism of scientific illustration with the demands for extreme accuracy without space for creativity. I believed that good illustration was predicated




Skull morphologies studies. Black and white ink on toned paper.

©Bruna Roqué

Cyclamen plate (*Cyclamen persicum*), watercolour.

Goldfinch (Carduelis carduelis), watercolour.

©Bruna Roqué

on accuracy and realism. Although my delight with detail renderings causes me to still love this type of artistic expression, today I am also thoroughly appreciating the wonderfully varied worlds of wildlife art with all of their styles. It is delightful to view the same subjects through the eyes of different artists. The astonishing interpretations, styles and media continue to open my mind in ways I would not have believed possible.

This realization helped me to stop being so rigid and start daring to work out of my comfortable and easy-going studio at home. By that time, I started my traveling journey. While working in Oryx, a wildlife specialized book shop in Barcelona, I saw a unique opportunity on Facebook to visit and discover Kyrgyzstan: I found myself riding a horse across a vast steppe in Central Asia. For 14 amazing days I experienced the nomad eagle hunters lifestyle including being one of the few tourists allowed to witness the World Nomad Games.

Totally unaware at the time that those two weeks would change my life forever I was enthralled at every moment. My exposure to that extraordinary breadth of physical beauty, traditional art and culture, isolation, and immense spaces inspired me artistically, mentally, and physically.

Back to Barcelona, feeling a bit nomadic and reveling from my new insights about my global home, it was not long before new adventures started beckoning. I started putting every extra penny of my income in my savings account to feed my new ‘experiences addiction’.

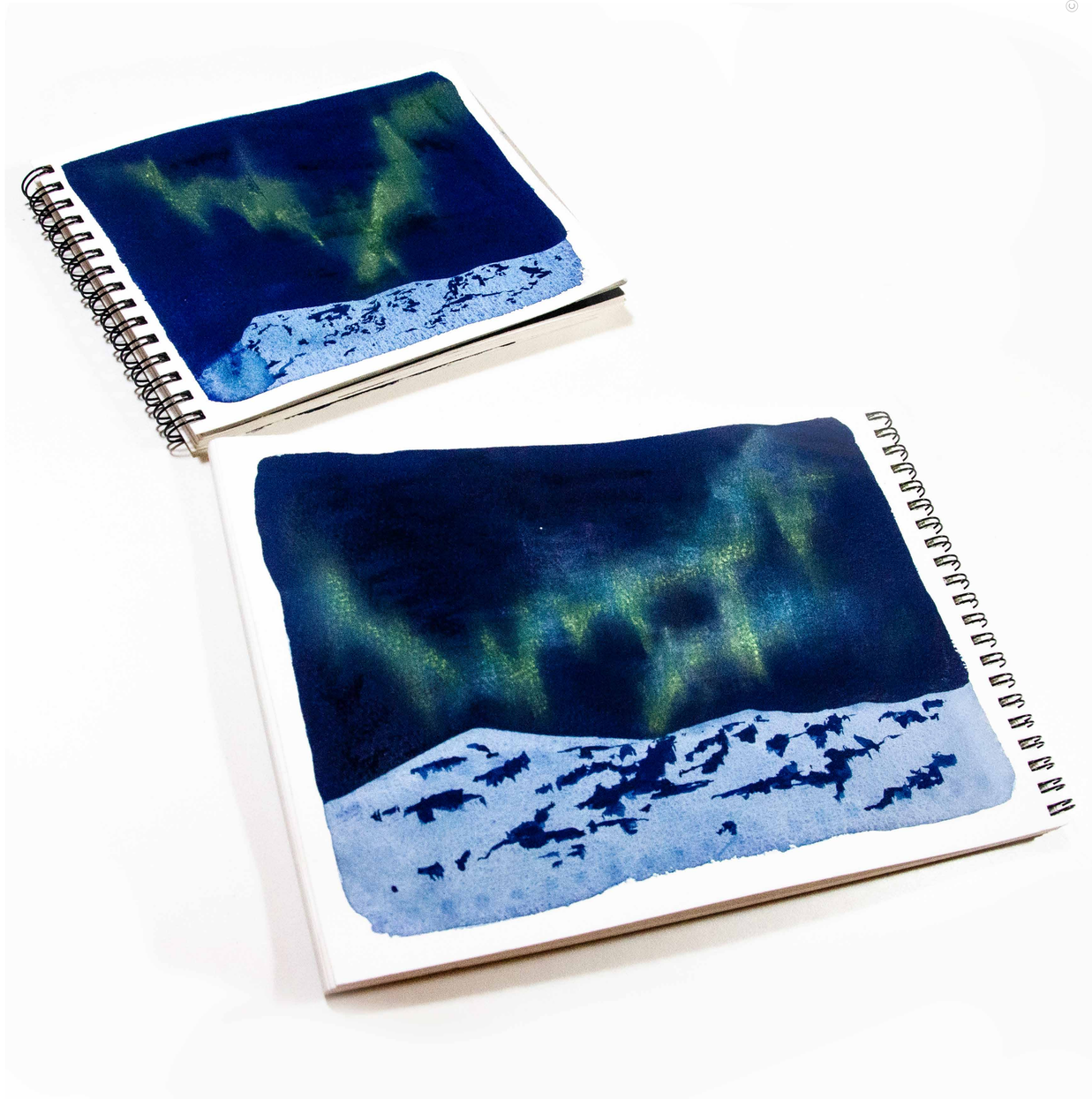
Since I was a child, number one on my bucket list was experiencing the aurora borealis or northern lights, so Iceland was my next destination. And of course, Iceland lived up to its reputation for amazing landscapes and wild weather. Fortunately, the weather cooperated. In that occasion I was forced to draw from the van, Iceland at mid-January is not for mediterranean sissies.

After that, crazy to experience the famous variety of life from the rainforest and hopefully see the famous quetzal, and hummingbirds for the first time in my life, I dragged my poor mother on a wildlife expedition through Costa Rica. Wild, humid, hot, and teeming with life, it was completely different from my European life experiences, and so like Kyrgyzstan it was a powerful mind opening experience.

Leaving behind all travel partners: Scotland welcomed me with the biggest gannet colony in Europe at the Bass Rock. The smells, noise, energy and sheer size of the colony were impressive. The people were welcoming and the landscapes enthralling.

Followed by Morocco, Italy, Portugal, and all-around Spain. As you can probably discern, my travels are rooted in wildlife and nature with the intentions of forging new realities and breaking the European lifestyle bubble. I relish experiencing new lights, weather, flavors, sounds and reflecting them in my artwork.

To finally land totally unexpectedly in Lofoten islands for 6 months, and consequently because of a net of coincidences drove me to spend the



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Northern lights sketches, Lofoten islands, winter 2020.

Atlantic puffin (Fratercula arctica), watercolour on paper.

next 3 months all around Canary Islands to come back, finally at the beginning of 2021 to Barcelona again, where I am continuing the writing of this article.

Of course, these past frenetic years made me develop a different working method. While traveling I take writing notes and sketches as well as photographs and videos.

I do enjoy a lot, as a totally amateur: wildlife photography and observation so I try to carry my camera and binoculars everywhere I go, also a small sketchbook and a travel watercolor set to take notes of details.

Once back to the studio I develop them as a final work. The biggest challenge for me is finding an interesting composition so I take some time to consider the elements position and playing with the most interesting points of views.

I always try to avoid working from a single picture so usually I take three or four different pictures of the same scene and work from that to create the one I think represents better my memory.

As the proper control freak I am, I like to work as clean as possible: I like hard graphite, white untouch paper, bright colours and pointing coloured pencils. I use Saunders Waterford paper for, basically, all the techniques I like. And Schmincke Horadam watercolours on double godets with natural hairbrushes from Winsor and Newton.
My palette has been growing the last years even I always try to keep it as small and simple as I can.

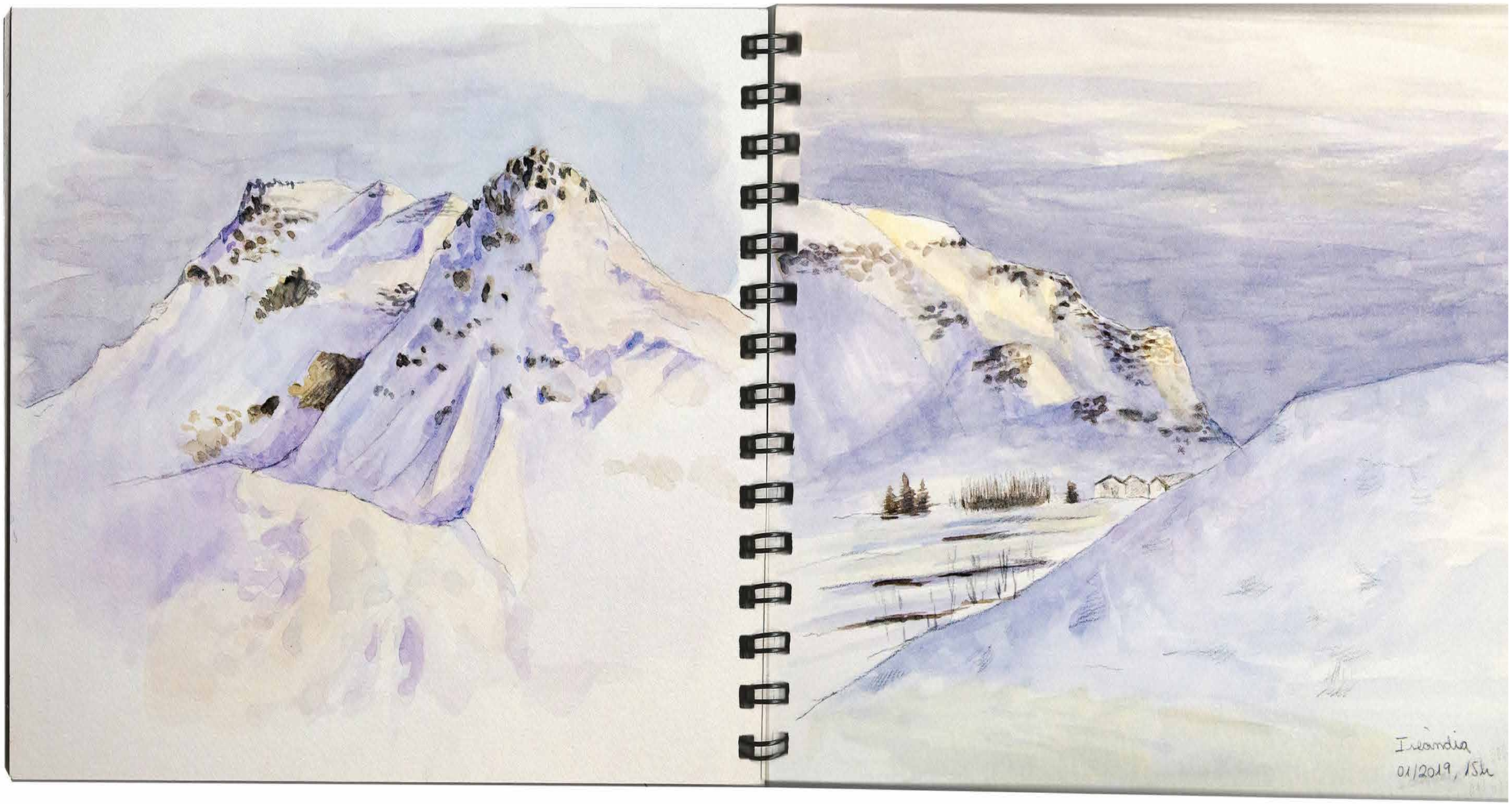
Used to be a watercolor freak, nowadays I am starting using oil paintings, pastels, ink, charcoal, and colored pencils. And I enjoy specially working on Strathmore grey toned paper with black and white ink, I think it is a great and fast exercise to practice lights and shadows.

Today, after collaborating on the illustrations for de European Breeding Bird Atlas (EBBA2) project finally published by Lynx editorial on December I am about to see the publishing of ‘Plumas. Introducción a las especies ibéricas’ (Tundra Ediciones) an Iberian feather identification guide.

Just jumped into a personal project of designing a Bio-bags collection, while exploring new ideas and exciting projects. Fingers are crossed that everything keeps going well although I am happily aware that things are always changing. When one door closes, hopefully another continues to open.

These strange corona virus times are generating new understanding about how I can combine my travel passion with my profession. Just brainstorming right now I don’t have any answers yet. I feel continuously challenged to try new techniques and alternative ways to work. As well as pushing my limits on new experiences, not necessarily far from home, as scuba diving, one of my recently discovered passions.

I am, of course, always planning new adventures including the option of crossing the Atlantic again, feeling extremely lucky to be able to keep allowing myself to follow my sixth sense.




Iceland sketchbook, January 2019.



©Bruna Roqué

YOUR GALLERY

Vaijayanti Gadgil

Keel-billed Toucan (*Ramphastos sulfuratus*)

YOUR GALLERY

PT EXPLORERS

Lisha Patel

Asiatic Lion (*Panthera leo persica*)

YOUR GALLERY

Shiny Jose

Hanging Parrot (*Loriculus*)

YOUR GALLERY

Nithya Purushothaman

Blue-banded Bee (*Amegilla cingulata*)

YOUR GALLERY

Bhavya Chikema

Mallard - Juvenile (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

YOUR GALLERY

Shiny Jose

Great Hornbill (*Buceros bicornis*)

YOUR GALLERY

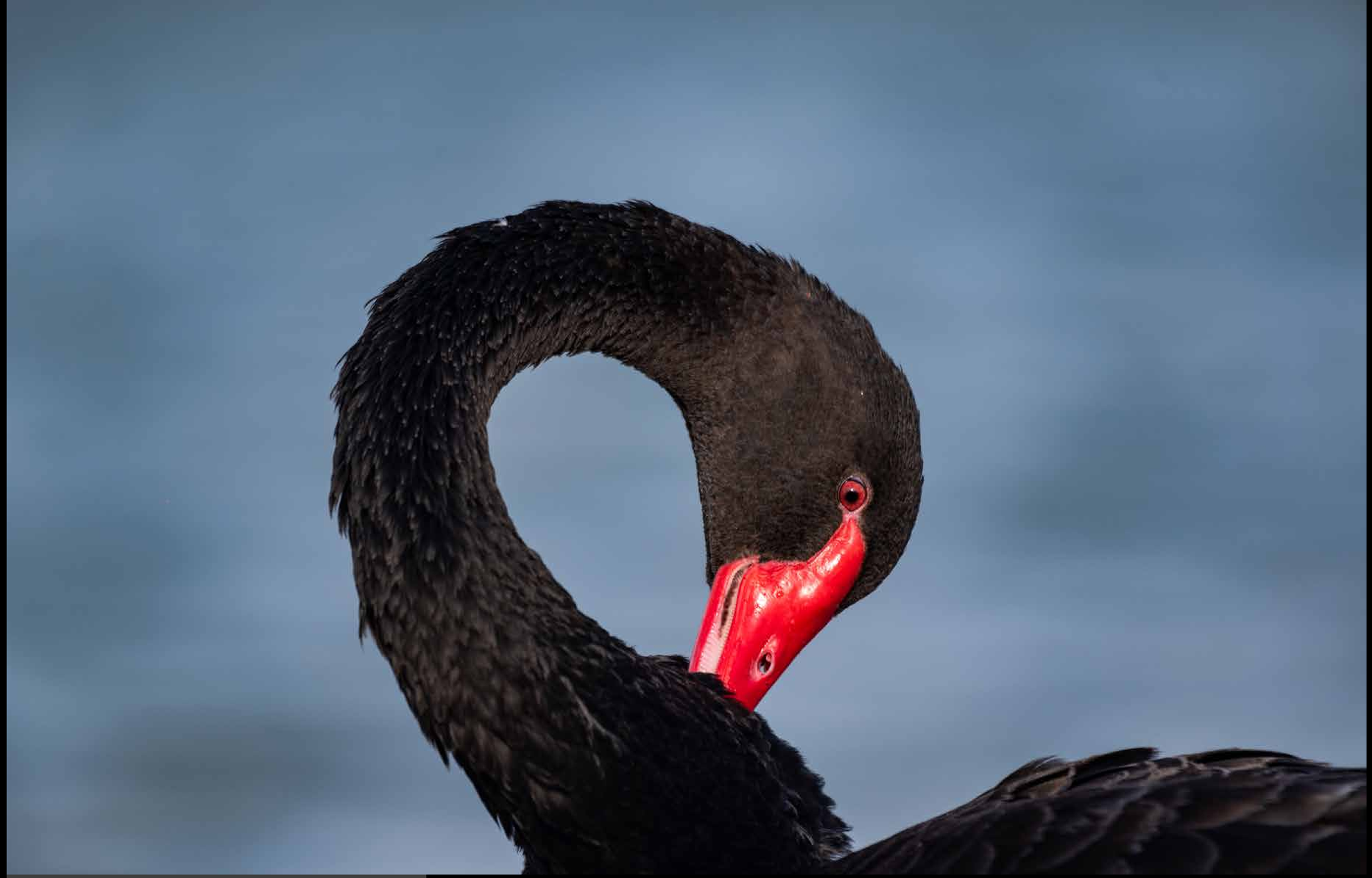
Vaijayanti Gadgil

Shining Honeycreeper (*Cyanerpes lucidus*)

YOUR GALLERY

Latha Prabhakaran

Whiskered Pitta (*Erythropitta kochi*)



## YOUR GALLERY

Sneha Kumari

Black Swan (*Cygnus atratus*)

YOUR GALLERY

Cynthia Bandurek

Jumping Spider (*Salticidae*)

YOUR GALLERY

Sangeetha Damodaran

Greater Spotted Eagle (*Clanga clanga*)

YOUR GALLERY

Meesha Desai

Asiatic Lion (*Panthera leo persica*)

YOUR GALLERY

Spincy Raj

Whistling Kite (*Haliastur sphenurus*)

# EXPLORERS

## UPCOMING FEATURES

## INTO THE WILD

With Jeffrey Wu

## WILD TENDER MOMENTS

By HERMIS HARIDAS

## ELIZBETH
## THE QUEEN OF QUDRA

By Kambiz Cameo Pourghanad