



EXPLORERS

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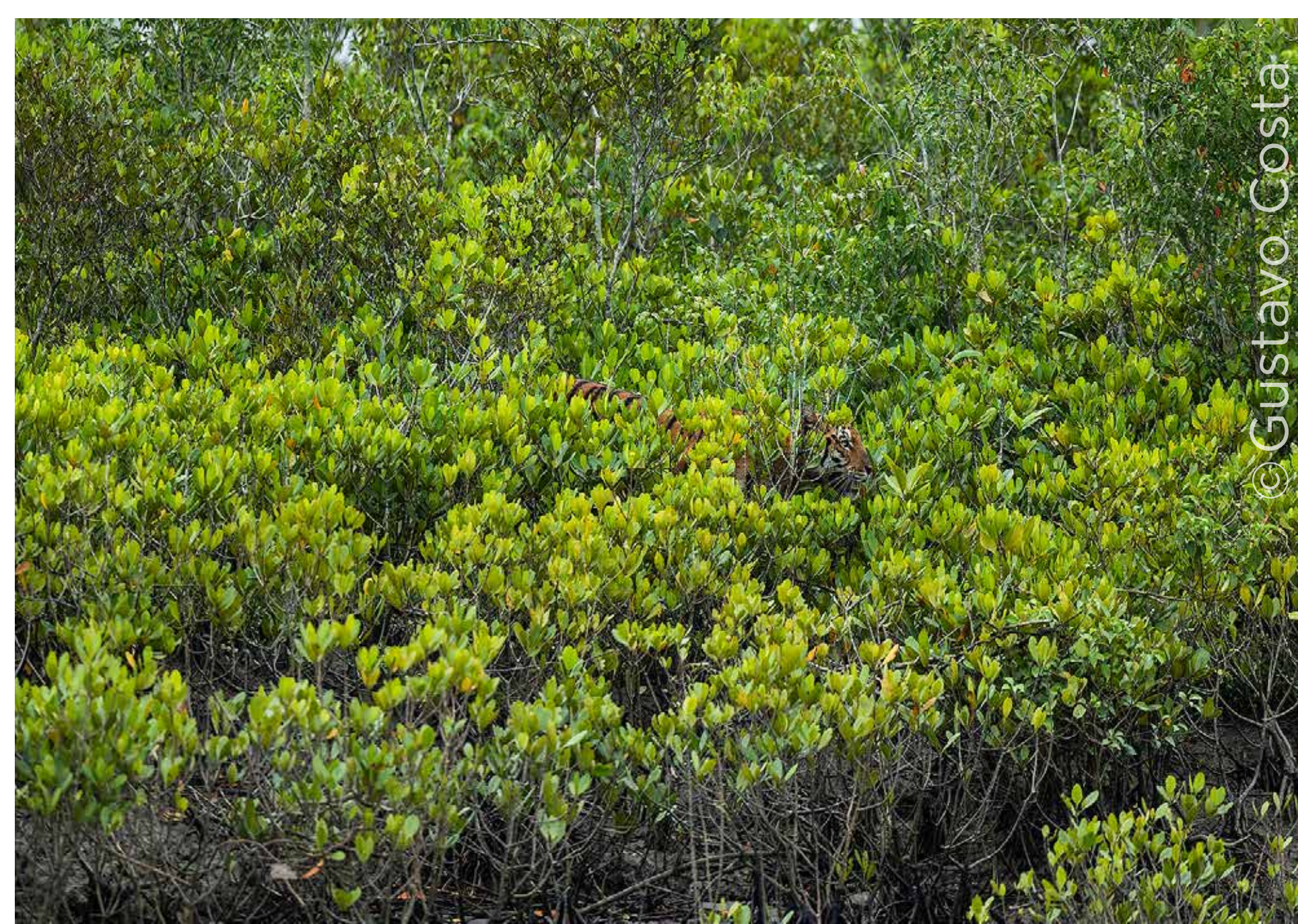


INTO THE WILD

WITH PRAVEEN P MOHANDAS

THE SANTA BÁRBARA ECOLOGICAL STATION
BY BRUNO FERRETO FIORILLO

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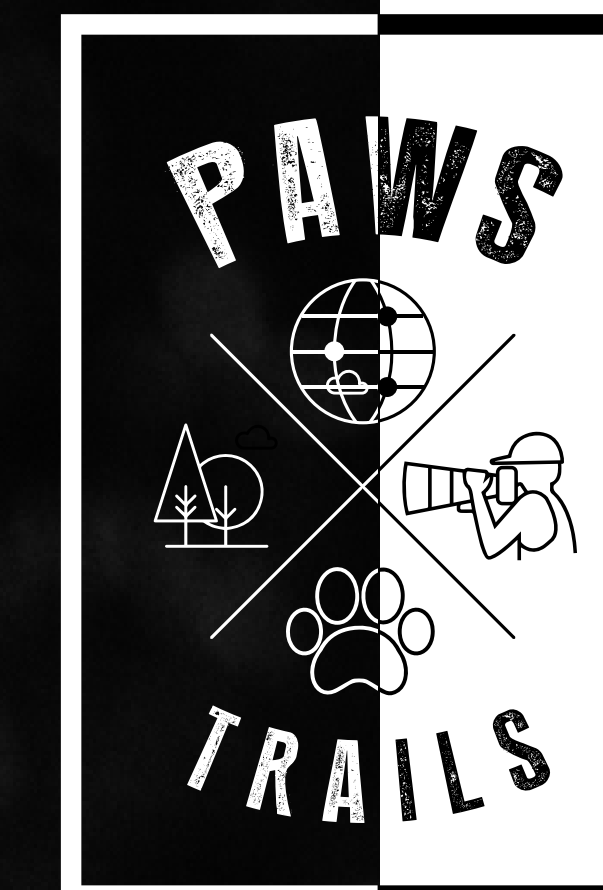
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Cover Story
Praveen P Mohandas



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Hank Tyler
Editor

PT Explorers celebrates six years of publishing with Volume 36. We have offered nature photographers and writers a global platform for publishing their photos and stories. Over 300 creative photographers and nature writers have contributed and shared with our worldwide readership. We thank all the generous folk that have taken the time to share their photography and stories. We look forward to bringing more of these amazing works to our readers.

Volume 36 showcases an amazing array of wildlife images.

From India, Praveen Mohandas tells his photographic story with a stunning series of black and white images.

Bruno Ferreto Fiorillo, from Brazil, shows images of reptiles and mammals from the Cerrado being studied at the Santa Barbara Ecological Station.

Wading Birds of Florida, USA are showcased by American professional photographer Donna Brok based on her March-April 2022 visit.

In our Travelogue section, nature photographer Johana Simonova from Costa Rica tells us of her recent visit to Columbia, a country with a very rich diversity of bird species. Johana's images of the Scarlet Ibis are spectacular.

In our Through the Lens section, Sumon Das tells us about his journey to India's Sundarban National Park to photograph the Bengal tigers in mangrove forests.

American wildlife artist, Barry van Dusen, relates his career as a wildlife artist working closely with a major non-profit conservation organization - Massachusetts Audubon Society. Barry is well known for his crisp watercolors of birds, especially warblers.

Our section, Your Gallery, displays wildlife photos contributed by our readers. Please submit your most outstanding photos you would like to share: <https://pawstrails.com/login>



PHOTOGRAPHY DIRECTOR'S CHOICE



Kambiz Cameo Pourghanad
Atlantic Puffin
(*Fratrula arctica*)
Iceland

FOUNDERS' NOTE

Welcome to this edition of PT Explorers.

July 29 is celebrated as the International Tiger Day to help protect the habitats of the tiger around the world and to raise awareness and support about tiger conservation issues.

Created in 2010, this is one of the events on the wildlife calender that is noticed around the globe.

Why did we get here- why a day for the tiger?

Tiger numbers fell dramatically last century from about 100,000 tigers in the 1900s to just 1400 in 2008 – a fall of 98.5%.

Why did we get here – mainly three reasons

- First is the destruction of habitat in a part of the world where the human population has increased dramatically and is encroaching into natural areas and replacing tiger forest with farmland and forestry.
- Second is the poaching of prey – tiger density depends on a good prey base and as the density of the prey falls, through poaching, so tigers need larger and larger areas.
- Third is the continued illegal poaching of tigers. Tigers are killed and almost every part of their body including bones, eyes, whiskers and teeth are used to treat ailments and disease.

Sustained conservation efforts have seen the tiger population improve, but still only a shadow of their former glory days. More money has been spent on tiger conservation than any other single species, still it inhabits only 7% of its former range.

India which is home to around 70% of the world's surviving tigers is crucial for tiger conservation efforts. Government of India had launched the Project Tiger as early as 1973 to aid in tiger conservation.

But in conservation, often we see that for better results, awareness building, and regulations are necessary in other regions as well. For example, China has shown a huge spike in demand for tiger body parts for traditional cures. This demand can be quickly controlled by support from the Chinese government and by social pressure to have this use of animal parts considered socially unacceptable. Kill the demand and the poaching invariably stops.

Let us take the pledge for a greener future!

Hermis Haridas & Nisha Purushothaman

Founders - PT Explorers





COVER STORY

Into The WILD

with PRAVEEN P MOHANDAS

Praveen is the founder and principal architect of Transform Architects, Thrissur, India.

He is a fine art, nature and architecture photographer, who has travelled and photographed across India.

Praveen is the Director of projects Photomuse Museum of Photography, Kerala, India. Among his many achievements and accolades the Kerala Lalithakala Academy award for photography and The 'Kari' series of exhibitions on Asian elephants are standouts.

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Chinkara (*Gazella bennettii*)

You are a well-established architect and an acclaimed wildlife photographer. What inspired you to become a wildlife photographer?

My journey into photography was a natural process. At a young age, my interest was primarily in drawing and painting. Art practice was always a part of my daily routine. The school I studied also helped to develop my art practice. My curiosity towards the camera brought me into contact with photography during my school days itself. But access to the equipment was virtually nil. The only means of learning photography was to depend on old magazines. But even then, I never got the chance to make images or use a camera. But my interest in the medium grew over time. My inspiration was all the fantastic images that got published through Malayalam newspapers those days. At that stage, my interest was primarily photography. I was not familiar with wildlife photography as exposure to that category was limited. But interest in the natural world was always a part of me as I lived in the fringes of a small town then. It was surrounded by paddy fields and the ambience was more or less that of a village. I am talking about Kerala in the eighties. Exposure towards wildlife photography began during my architecture studies at Hosur, near Bangalore. I had the chance to join an old organisation Youth Photographic Society at Bangalore. It had as its members, the masters of Indian wildlife photography like TNA Perumal, Hanumantha Rao etc. Through YPS, I got a chance to visit Bandipur National Park, Karnataka. That trip became a turning point in my photography journey. I, who was doing architecture, travel and pictorial images

stopped all other types of photography and started doing nature photography. That began my journey in nature photography. During those times, I didn't have long lenses or fancy cameras. All equipment used to be borrowed from seniors at YPS. My interest or passion in nature photography grew over time and I must acknowledge the support of the senior photographers at YPS. I was introduced to the fascinating world of animal behaviour and the techniques of nature photography those days.

Have you received formal photography training, and if not, how did you get to where you are now?

I was very clear that I wanted to do an art based profession. My alternatives then were either to be an architect or a cinematographer. My first attempt at learning architecture failed as I didn't get admission for the course I wanted. So, I decided to learn still photography before making an attempt to learn cinematography. I did a 6 months diploma in black and white still photography. And started working in a studio in Thrissur my home town. During that time, I got admission to architecture. I should thank my parents who always supported my decisions. While doing the diploma I got access to professional camera and darkroom. I started my technical studies of photography with a large format camera and then shifted to a medium format and later to a 35mm slr. This also helped me during my architecture studies in the documentation of architecture. Those days most documentation was done on slide film for the purpose of projection. The knowledge I gained from the diploma was into the



technical aspects of photography. The artistic approach to photography was self-taught. The exposure to painting and drawing helped me develop the creative aspect of photography. I studied the work of masters through books and journals. I got more exposure when internet became more accessible. This process of learning continues even today. I buy books of photographers whom I admire and study their approach in detail. I don't limit my learning process to nature photographers.

I also look into interesting works of fellow photographers and make sure I watch a good number of images each day. The learning process is an integral part of my daily routine. Learning alone isn't enough in making who you are. It is equally important if not more, to adopt the knowledge gained into a style of your own and express your inner voice and thoughts through your pictures.

In comparison to more wildlife documentary photographers, your work emphasizes creativity. Please share your thoughts with us on the merits or otherwise of this strategy.

Like every wildlife photographer I too started my journey by documenting wildlife - specie, behaviour, habitat, etc. But as time passed, I looked at my work and tried to see what was new/ unique in my work as compared to the earlier work done by me and others wildlife photographers. This is a process I always do even today. I would call it expressing oneself rather than creative approach. Creativity always has a comparative aspect. Analysis of any creative approach is subjective - a subjectivity that is bound

by our talent, experience and knowledge. An image may be creative by personal standards but unknown to us some other person may have created a similar image. So in reference to that, your image isn't creative or new. I believe that the challenge of an artist is to try and create something new or different.

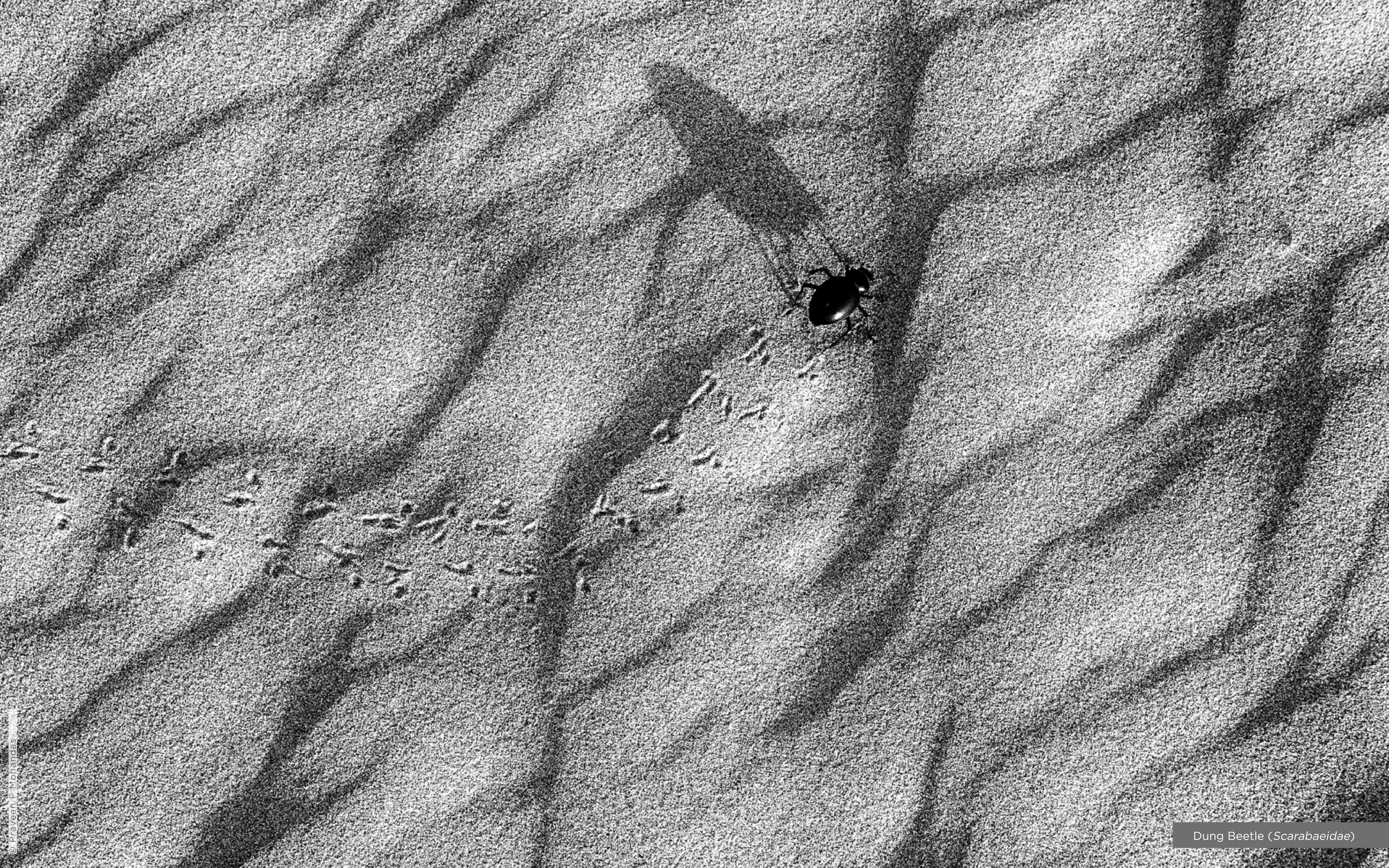
In my work, I try to bring in a different aspect by expressing my thoughts through images. This, I believe brings a unique, personal perspective into that picture. It's not just about what is there in the image. Though the subject is important, the emphasis is on the aspects which go beyond the mere depiction of the subject. Images should lead to thoughts beyond the obvious. This is the idea that I am currently working on. This approach of image making is there in other categories of photography but not much explored in wildlife photography. Since my interest is in nature photography, I use nature as a subject to express my thoughts about humanity, nature, abstract ideas like dream, movement, time, freedom, peace, emotions like care, sorrow, belonging etc. I have been on this personal journey for some time now.

As time passes, the process of making images also changes, likewise my thoughts as well. My evolution as a human being also reflects in my art as a photographer. I also think that nature photography all over the world is getting to be stagnant because it is getting restricted into mere documentation. The only difference to be seen is perhaps in the usage of technology in the process. For example, remote photography using



Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

© Praveen P Mohandas



Dung Beetle (Scarabaeidae)



Great Indian Bustard (*Ardeotis nigriceps*)



Gavi, Kerala, India

detection sensor, drones that give a different perspective etc. This is nothing new if we look into the history of nature photography. The first wildlife images that were published were made by using trip wire remote triggering and the artist was George Shiras III. Many photographers used helicopters and smaller flying machines to make aerial images of wilderness. So then, how is present day work conceptually different. I believe in an approach which captures images, that is one's response to a situation. This is not about depicting what one sees but what one feels about the situation. It can also be images that can trigger universal thoughts. I am sure, this present approach of mine is also temporary.

What kind of photography do you like, colour or black and white, and why do you prefer one over the other?

My journey into photography started with black and white. As mentioned before, I did my diploma in black and white photography. During the earlier days I had access to darkroom. When I went to architecture school, there was no facility for doing black and white photography. Then my work shifted to colour negative film and transparency. My film negatives were printed by a renowned print maker Mr.B Srinivasa from Bangalore who was a senior YPS member. Later in 2004, I shifted to digital photography. The chance to learn the craft of digital imaging was very difficult during those days as information was scarce. Later when internet became common, more information was easily available and the learning process became faster. The style





Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*)

I followed was more or less documentary and pictorial type of wildlife photography. Later when I gained enough knowledge about the digital process, I slowly shifted my practice to monochrome imagery. I then realised that if I didn't consciously do this process, I will never get enough hold over the craft of making images in its required perfection. So, I continued the process of making black and white images. Also, my approach towards image making shifted over time and monochrome images helped me to express my ideas more effectively than in colour. Monochrome photography gave an instant abstraction in images by removing the layers of colour which depicts realism in the images. The absence of colour breaks down the images into shapes, texture and light. Composition becomes more evident. It becomes the language in the image. My monochrome journey still continues. I also do some work in colour these days. Colour not for the colourfulness but for the expression of colour. Colour and what it expresses becomes a part of the imagery. Even when my practice is monochrome, I look into work of eminent masters in colour photography like Ernest Haas, William Eggleston, Alex Webb, Frans Lanting, Saul Leiter, etc most of whom are not wildlife photographers.

Tell us about your journey to becoming a world-renowned professional. What were the major turning points in your career that propelled you forward?

Frankly speaking I have not become a world renowned professional as I make no earning from wildlife photography. What propels me forward is my love for nature

and the art of making images. I like spending time in nature, It gives me lot of peace and energises me as well. It has also helped me to become what I am today as a person. The act of making images is a very intense meditation. The whole world at that point of time comes down to a small viewfinder. Obviously, the thoughts that go in my mind during the process are also very enriching experiences. I mean the intellectual aspects and not the technical. Definitely there will be technical challenges that need to be addressed.

What is your greatest achievement as a photographer so far?

I do not participate in photography contest any more. Earlier days I did but not anymore. One of the events I did recently was an exhibition of my 15 years' work on elephants named KARI which mean black in Malayalam. The first exhibition was held in 2020 December at Lalithakala Academy, Thrissur. It was a collaborative exhibition with an artist. Some of the works were installations combining painting and photography. The process helped me to put a temporary stop on a long time project that I was doing. The second exhibition was done in 2021 march as a solo exhibition at Long Time Art Gallery, Trivandrum.

These don't in my reckoning account for greatness or achievements. More than achievements I value the time spend with nature and making images. I also feel that the moment an artist feels that his art has achieved greatness that can't be surpassed by any future creation of his; it sure means the end of his serious work. I am compelled to explore more by the



© Praveen P Mohandas

Greater Spotted Eagle (*Clanga clanga*)



Giant Wood Spider (*Nephila pilipes*)

imperfections I see in my work. It drives to think in depth about the process of making images. On one hand, efforts will be to avoid the errors made previously and on the other hand push my own boundaries to newer realms. This is what keeps me going as an artist.

In terms of visual representation, what do you consider to be your crowning image? Tell us more about the history of this image.

I would say that there is no specific picture that's crowning. I approach all my images with the same intensity. But the end result may be rewarding or an utter failure of the thought process or execution. This can happen due to various situations that develop on the field or lack of clarity about what I am trying to portray. There have been many situations where the idea was perfect but the necessary elements to build the narrative were not there. Then the idea can't be translated effectively. There will be situations that pose technical challenges as well. One image if needed to give as an example of success is that of the lone tusker in the background of mountain ranges made in Corbett National park, Uttarakhand. The early morning, mist laden landscape was perfect in terms of lighting and setting. But there was nothing other than the landscape and atmosphere. When the last layer of mist was about to vanish, I saw a lone tusker walking into what I thought was a perfect position or frame. The composition became complete only when the tusker walked into the frame from nowhere.

What has been the most amusing thing that has happened to you during your

wildlife photography journey?

Engagement with nature is a very emotional and spiritual act for me. Nature expresses its valour and glamour at all times but always unpredictably. These surprises also engage me. But I also value the subtle expressions of nature like the grass dancing in the wind, the music created by flowing water, or the birds calling, the smell of blooms and first rain etc. All these have a reason to be doing what they do but to me it is very spiritual and emotional. I try to include all these moments as a part of my images.

Is there someone you admire, a role model, in wildlife photography?

I don't have a role model as such. As mentioned earlier, learning or discovering new things is an on-going process for me. I follow not just photographers but other artists from different genres of visual art. I get inspiration from all these and that has moulded my visual language over time. For example I study works of war photographers for the reason that both wildlife and war photographers have no control over their subject and situations. There is an anticipation of what may happen from observation, experience and presence of mind. I study the paintings of medieval artists to see how they use light, study contemporary artists to see how they address current issues in an abstract way. One photographer who influenced me during the early days of my nature photography was Vincent Munier from France. The images he produced at that time had a lot of space in them. I also liked making images with a wide canvas of blankness. Some of his award winning images gave me confidence to continue

Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*)

© Praveen P Mohandas



my journey. This was some 20 years back.

Is there a specific message you want to convey with your photography?

There is a saying that every photograph speaks 1000 words. But in present times, if every photograph was to speak 1000 words then, there would be too much noise. Sometimes it is good to be silent. I mean, visuals can be silent. Not say anything, but try and give an expression through the visual. Consider listening to

musical instruments playing a musical composition. If asked at the end what we understood from the performance, what would be our response? The music said nothing but gave us a feeling that may have touched our inner being at various levels. A visual also can evoke similar feelings perhaps with less intensity. What I try to convey through my images are not loud but subtle emotions. Questions that stay in your mind long after your engagement with the image - subtle aspects in nature like harmony,

coexistence, differences, sharing common space, respect etc. I also believe that we need not do anything for nature to survive other than leave it as it is and not disturb the harmony.

What animal have you yet to capture that you would like to?

Rather than a specific animal, I would like to say that I wish to visit the polar region and observe the landscape and life there. I have not visited any national parks outside the Indian subcontinent.

A lifetime is not enough to observe our Indian wildlife and varied habitats.

According to you, to be a good wildlife photographer, what are the most difficult obstacles one must overcome?

Curiosity and observation should be a continuous part of the process. Even when you study and get influenced by other photographers, copying them shouldn't be taken as an easy way to success .With the influx of information





Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*)

© Praveen P Monandas

available today, particularly in social media, it is very difficult, particularly for beginners not to get influenced. I feel that the new generation of photographers are easily attracted to these new trends and as a result lose focus. More time should be spent in understanding finer aspects of the subject that we choose to work on. Gaining technical knowledge is the easiest part in the image making process today. Listening to one's own voice and developing an individual style should be the focus. Not all may develop individual style, but it is more important to develop an aesthetics which is not influenced by mass media or trends. Approaching the subject should be based on the aesthetics that we have developed on our own. There is an inherent aesthetics in everyone. But finding it and enriching should be worked on.

What are your best tips for photographing wildlife in its natural environment?

Understanding animal behaviour is the first process in wildlife photography. All animals connect to their macro and micro atmosphere. That's how habitats are developed. Not all animals can survive in every habitat. The immediate habitat is their world. Without enough knowledge of these basics, we cannot venture in to making images. Even if made, it will lack in serious content. The ideal way would be to keep away from photography that involves feeding and baiting animals. It not only affects the natural behaviour of the specie that is being photographed but also the person who is photographing it. He forgoes the highest reward of nature photography which is forging an intimate bond with nature in its deepest

expressions. No photograph is more important than the well-being of the specie that is being photographed. Even when we are in wilderness, one has to take care not to disturb the environment in the least way possible. Disturbing or provoking an animal for the purpose of photography will never yield good results. I personally don't photograph charging animals or animals looking into the lens or animals running away in fear because of the presence of the photographer. We have to be calm and quiet with minimal movement while in the field. Initially the animals will be curious or wary about our presence. But once they realise that we pose no threat, they go back to their natural behaviour. That's when real photographic opportunities open up. Spending long time with animals gives more opportunities. Revisiting places during various seasons also gives better results and varied perspectives.

We conduct wildlife photography workshops. According to you, what is the main point you want your students to remember in wildlife photography?

Becoming a good human being is the first thing that every individual should aspire for. Being compassionate to nature comes next. Care for nature comes only out of this compassion. Nature doesn't want to be photographed. Photography is our need. So our photography process should not be a hindrance to the wellbeing of nature. Pay less attention to techniques and equipment. Don't try to take the easy way, like looking for tips and tricks. Understand the requirement and work towards the solution. That brings a strong foundation for your photography. It is easy to build over this foundation than



Indian Elephant (*Elephas maximus indicus*)

the short cuts we take to ease our way. Focus and dedication to art and craft of the medium is very important. Studying the history of the medium is also an important aspect. It is good to know what has been done before for us to venture forward in our own journey. Such journeys alone give immense and true satisfaction as an artist.

What advice would you give to young photographers just starting out who are thinking about a career in wildlife photography?

I would like to tell them that they should take time and make lot of images and not to look for instant success during the early stages of their journey. Failing in a new path is more rewarding than following successful paths. Build a strong foundation in the medium. Gain as much as knowledge about the subject that one is interested in working. Make long time projects and work with focus on them. Never try to fit into someone else's shoes. Listen to your own voice. Winning contests should not be set as benchmark for success.

What kind of gear do you have in your kit bag?

Presently working with Nikon digital cameras and lenses. Both mirroless and DSLR. Various lenses ranging from 16mm to 600mm.

© Praveen P Mohandas

Gaur (*Isurus oxyrinchus*)







Indian Elephant (*Elephas maximus indicus*)



CONSERVATION

The Santa Bárbara Ecological Station: An island of Cerrado Biodiversity

By Bruno Ferreto Fiorillo

Anole (*Norops meridionalis*)



Bruno is an ecologist who is currently associated with Instituto Manacá. He is also the founder of Herp Trips, a company focused on the observation of amphibians and reptiles from the Atlantic Forest in southeastern Brazil. He sees photography not only as a powerful research tool, but also as one of the best ways to show nature in its entire splendor.

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Fig 1 - Professor Marcio Martins



Fig 2 - Calango (*Ameiva* aff *jacuba*)

A few kilometers from the city Águas de Santa Bárbara, the Santa Bárbara Ecological Station (SBES) is an “island” of biodiversity amid the agricultural sea of the state of São Paulo, Brazil. In just over 3,000 hectares, maintained under the care of four or five workers, more than 500 native species of plants, among different inventories, an enormous variety of vertebrates among amphibians, birds, reptiles, and mammals have already been found. A relatively high portion of these species is classified as regionally threatened, according to the São Paulo state red list of threatened species. Such tremendous biodiversity is probably related to the typical landscapes of the Cerrado biome that prevail in the area, ranging from scrublands to woodlands and gallery forests.

The name Cerrado is intended for the large region that covers the entire Brazilian open diagonal, except for the Caatinga and Pantanal biomes. It can be classified as a savannah, which originally designates landscapes dominated mainly by grasses and few trees. However, the Cerrado biome comprises several types of vegetation. Among them:

- Grasslands (campo limpo): a landscape completely covered by grasses, without trees, including some areas that are occasionally flooded.
- Grassy scrublands (campo sujo): also dominated by grasses but with a certain number of shrubs, palms and sparse trees.
- Grassy scrublands with scattered trees (campo cerrado): presents a greater number of sparse trees than the grassy



Fig 3 - Professor Ana Paula Carmignotto (left) and Giovana Felicio (right)



Fig 4 - Adult Lindbergh's Oryzomys (*Cerradomys scotti*)



Fig 5 - Juvenile Lindbergh's Oryzomys (*Cerradomys scotti*)

scrubland (comprising about 15% of the vegetation cover).

- Typical cerrados: complex landscape in which trees (from 3 to 8 m height) fill the scenery even more but do not form a continuous canopy, the understory contains heterogeneously distributed shrubs and grasses covering the ground.
- Woodlands (cerradão): forests dominated by taller trees (from 8 to 12 m), almost continuous canopy and almost no grasses.
- Gallery forests: forest landscapes that necessarily present a source of running water, such as streams or creeks.

Several studies have suggested that Cerrado's biodiversity is strongly associated with vegetation cover. Such association was shaped by ecological and evolutionary processes that coined the current distribution of these species. However, in the state of São Paulo, the Cerrado has been continuously degraded by agricultural expansion. Consequently, many open-habitat dwellers have been pushed to the brink of extinction. Additionally, a new problem has arisen in the southern portion of the biome, the woody encroachment.

Unintuitively, in many cases, the advance of forest cover can be harmful to many members of the Cerrado's native fauna and flora. The research project led by Professor Marcio Martins (Fig. 1), from the Universidade de São Paulo, and of which my Ph.D. research took part, sought to portray the variation in the diversity of different groups of vertebrates along the



Fig 6 - Broad-headed Spiny Rat (*Clyomys laticeps*)



Fig 7 - Broad-headed Spiny Rat (*Clyomys laticeps*)



Fig 8 - Chacoan Gracile Opossum (*Cryptonanus chacoensis*)

vegetation cover gradient of the SBES. The studies developed during this and other projects revealed that the diversity of plants, mammals, and reptiles tend to decay from grasslands to woodlands in the SBES. Fire suppression (which should occur naturally in the Cerrado) in the last 15-30 years has led to a woody encroachment process and the advance of the woodland vegetation type. Such a change represents a major threat to endemic species (found only in a specific region) typical of open areas of the Station.

Under the supervision of Marcio, I found that lizard diversity declines sharply along the vegetation gradient and that most species found in the Station are not found in woodlands, or at least are much less abundant there. This is especially the case of the emblematic blue-tailed lizard (*Micrablepharus atticolus*; Fig. 9), an endemic species widely distributed throughout the Cerrado and highly dependent on open areas. This species is categorized as Vulnerable according to the São Paulo state red list of threatened species. Other lizard species seem to be under the same threat, such as the species *Ameiva aff. jacuba* (Fig. 2), which barely has a scientific name, since it does not fit perfectly *A. jacuba*, which was originally described from specimens collected in the Emas National Park (Goiás state, more than a thousand kilometers from São Paulo). *Ameiva aff. jacuba* can be a new species, possibly as endangered as the blue-tailed lizard.

The threat of woody encroachment is not restricted to reptiles. Professor Ana Paula Carmignotto (Fig. 3), a specialist in small mammals' ecology



Fig 9 - Blue tailed lizard (*Micrablepharus atticolus*)

© Bruno Ferreto Fiorillo



Fig 10 - Neuwied's Lancehead (*Bothrops pauloensis*)



Fig 11 - Rainbow Boa (*Epicrates crassus*)

and systematics from the Universidade Federal de São Carlos, has conducted some studies on these animals at SBES and found several habitat specialists. An example is the Lindbergh's Oryzomys, an endemic rodent that received its genus name in honor of its biome, *Cerradomys scotti* (Figs. 4 and 5). This species is also currently regionally threatened with extinction according to the most recent São Paulo state red list of threatened species. In the same way, the Broad-headed Spiny Rat (*Clyomys laticeps*; Figs 6 and 7), considered as threatened as the Lindbergh's Oryzomys, was found only in the most open landscape of the SBES, the last remnant of Grassy scrublands (campo sujo) in the reserve. Besides the rodents, Carmignotto also documented how marsupials behave in terms of habitat use across the station. Some species of this group follow quite the same pattern as rodents. For instance, the Chacoan gracile opossum (*Cryptonanus chacoensis*; Fig 8), belongs to a poorly known group of species (genus *Cryptonanus*) and it is only found in open habitats

On the other hand, species like the Anole (*Norops meridionalis*; Article cover) and the Neuwied's lancehead (*Bothrops pauloensis*; Fig. 10) seem to be affected differently. Both species are also endemic to the Cerrado and highly dependent on the typical landscapes of this biome. In these cases, we often found these species in the typical cerrado, a vegetation type moderately covered by low trees. However, even though they were able to colonize denser habitats, almost no individual of these species was found in woodlands.

Other species don't seem to be affected at all. The rainbow boa (*Epicrates crassus*; Fig. 11) is widely distributed across the Cerrado, however, it marginally occupies regions of the Atlantic Forest and was found at both open and forest environments of the station. We often found the false-coral (*Apostolepis dimidiata*; Fig. 12) in woodlands but in other studies it was primarily captured in open habitats. The only species of rattlesnake (*Crotalus durissus*; Fig. 13) found throughout Brazil, has extremely generalist habits,

Fig 12 - False-coral Snake (*Apostolepis dimidiata*)



© Bruno Ferreto Fiorillo



Fig 13 - South American Rattlesnake (*Crotalus durissus*)



being able to tolerate high levels of habitat disturbance (it can occur in extremely disturbed environments such as soybean or sugarcane plantations, which are impenetrable environments for many species). This was the most abundant snake in woodlands.

For managing woody encroachment, specific measures are necessary. Although difficult to accept, both by the general public and stakeholders, fire management (Fig. 14) is the most suitable way to contain the advance of woodlands and thus prevent the disappearance of typical open landscapes of the Cerrado and their associated fauna. Indeed, a study coordinated by a researcher from the São Paulo state Instituto de Pesquisas Ambientais, Giselda Durigan (Fig. 15), and colleagues demonstrates that, in the short term, prescribed fires do not harm local biodiversity (including small vertebrates), in addition to contributing to the maintenance of open areas.

Containing the advance of the woodlands is not the same as eradicating forest areas. Although there is a great number of species that rely on open habitats, several others inhabit forests. Among forest dwellers are the Brazilian lancehead (*Bothrops moojeni*; Fig 16), the false-coral snake (*Phalotris mertensi*; Fig 17), and the white-eared opossum (*Didelphis albiventris*; Fig 18). Thus, the researchers suggest that management should be carried out to keep the mosaic of landscapes as diverse as possible, consequently contributing to the support of most of the local biodiversity.

Acknowledgements

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Fig 15 - Dr. Giselda Durigan



Fig 16 - Brazilian lancehead (*Bothrops moojeni*)

Fig 17 - False-coral Snake (*Phalotris mertensii*)





Fig 18 - White-eared Opossum (*Didelphis albiventris*)



SPECIES

Wading Birds of Florida, USA

By Donna Brok

Great Egret (*Ardea alba*)



Donna is a professional wildlife photographer from Niagara Falls, NY. Traveling extensively for new and visually exciting images, she teaches photography and gives presentations in camera clubs in the US and Canada.

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Florida is one of the few states in the US where birds are found in astonishing abundance. With this great influx of birds, the birders and photographers follow. They come for a plentitude of native and migratory birds passing through or residing in areas of Florida year round. The variety of species is unsurpassed, with a number of birds on critical watch, federally threatened or endangered.

The best time to go birding in Florida is during spring and fall when migrating species pass through. This is the same schedule in my northern US area as well, but just a but later and far more sporadic, hence why I travel to places like Florida.



Great Egret (*Ardea alba*)



Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*)

In the Western New York region, we get warblers, wading birds, songbirds, water fowl, a world renown amount of gulls, and a variety of various raptors. But Florida gets this and more, acquiring the mother load of birds, especially in late March and early late March and early April 2022 when I visited.

Parts of Florida are located on the **Atlantic Flyway, a major bird migration corridor**. It is a key resting stop for many migratory bird species. I visited a few of these hot spots for migrating, breeding, and nesting birds. Every year more than 500 recorded species of birds stop in Florida for at least part of their long, arduous migration, some nesting and breeding. The second reason of bird numbers attributes to careful conservation and maintenance of sensitive habitat in Florida. The coastal areas and estuaries attract shorebirds, waders, terns and gulls. While the interior locales offer warblers and native sparrows to name a few, I started my journey south to St Augustine, Florida in late March to the land of the American alligators.

Zoological Park - St. Augustine

First stop was north Florida. There is a wonderful bird rookery at the Alligator Farm and Zoological Park in St. Augustine Florida that every birder and photographer should experience. Just across the bridge from downtown St. Augustine lies this zoo full of colorful, noisy birds, exotic mammals and a host of reptiles. It is a zoo which you might find curiously interesting.

Why do birds like to nest at a zoo? The



Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*)

alligators make it safe for the birds from other predators that have them, their eggs, and chicks on the menu. Marauders like snakes, lizards and small hungry mammals are scared off by the alligators. Native herons, egrets, spoonbills, and wood storks are assured safety to roost and raise their chicks with the hundreds of alligators swimming beneath the oak branches of the Alligator Lagoon, safe from tree-climbing predators they might encounter elsewhere. The chicks must be wary when fledging though, one slip or miss step and they fall into the wide open mouth of a gator. This is the second Zoo I visited that had a rookery both in a zoo, and over a waterbody filled with alligators. It makes one question the obvious in asking - why do birds congregate at these types of places?

You are safe though as you stroll along a wooden walkway around the Alligator Lagoon for incredibly close views of the wading birds on their nests. In late March, you might find Great Egret chicks starting to hatch out, Wood Storks incubating eggs, Roseate Spoonbills (*Platalea ajaja*) and the Snowy Egrets (*Egretta thula*) laying eggs. The Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*) Yellow-crowned Night Heron (*Nyctanassa violacea*), the Black-crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*), Little Blue Herons (*Egretta caerulea*), Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) and Tricolored Herons (*Egretta tricolor*) start to arrive in late March. The best time to visit is March through June, when you will see nesting of all these birds, and much more. The rookeries in south Florida will be more active in January and February than those in north Florida, but so much is to be seen, come March.



Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*)



Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*)

© Donna Brok

We had extended photography hours at the Alligator Farm with a purchased Photography Pass. We started our shoot at 8 am when the light was less harsh. We had stormy skies our first day which made for good photography later in the morning, along with opportunities throughout the day. Great photo ops were had of birds breeding, sitting on eggs, and gathering branches for building nests. There were territorial disputes, protection of mates, and tender moments between mated pairs, giving way to very expressive photos of birds.

The Alligator Farm hosts the Birding and Photo Fest in April, and the swamp boardwalks fill with loads of photographers and birders! They extend hours during this event as well. It is a very popular event.

On a conservation note, the Alligator Farm made improvement to the boardwalk to improve the safety conditions for park guests and the animals within the Alligator Lagoon. Safety cabling was added to help prevent the loss of equipment and other items that fall from the elevated boardwalk into the alligator swamp below. It is quite dangerous to recover dropped camera equipment, sunglasses, flip flops, baby bottles, hats, and phones from the many alligators that congregate below with open jaws. Plus the health of alligators could be compromised because many of these items do not break down in their system, resulting in a medical emergency for the gators.

The live oak island in the Lagoon receives detailed attention yearly, so the oaks can

thrive too. This island in the Lagoon has a high soil pH from all the bird droppings. It suffers from soil compaction when the multitude of alligators bask en masse, and occasionally suffers saltwater encroachment. The park started an air spade compost treatment for the compaction and added a fence line to keep the alligators off the roots of the live oak trees.

These oak are the homes to nesting birds. The park works hard on conservation to maintain these important habitats. They collect tubers from the highly invasive Asian Air Potato (*Dioscorea bulbifera*), introduced to the area in 1905. This plant spreads rapidly, vining its way through the island and dropping more tubers. Invasive plants are removed and are replaced with native plants like fakahatchee grass, yaupon holly, wax myrtle and they broadcast a coastal riparian seed mix. Much can be learned from the conservation efforts at this facility.

Circle B Bar Reserve - Orlando

This is a remarkable park between Orlando and Tampa in Polk County, Florida. The Polk County Environmental Lands Program and the District established legislation to protect the floodplain of the northwest shore of Lake Hancock and to restore the Banana Creek marsh system. It is a former cattle ranch that was donated and put to better ecological use. Restoration projects were developed and completed to the pastures to restore and rehabilitate much of the original hydrologic function of the area, enabling and supporting the vast





number and variety of birds. If you want to see birds, look at places designed and maintained to protect their habitat.

Like many parks in Florida, it is home to a wide variety of plants and animals, and it is free to visit. It is birds that draw those that love to see and photograph them, but the habitat is amazing as well. It hosts large populations of shorebirds, wading birds, eagles, osprey and a variety of interesting waterfowl. The unique property has oak hammock, freshwater marsh, hardwood swamp and a lakeshore are among the characteristics of this unique park. You will likely see and run across alligators crossing the trail, squirrels scampering about, and the occasional bobcat as well. If you see a gator, just turn around and walk the other way. The park doesn't track the big reptiles, nor do they move them along for you! Luckily, it is not as congested with gators as was the Alligator Farm.

Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge

This is a very productive and essential estuary, but the refuge was experiencing an outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) when we visited. The disease primarily affects waterfowl, so when we visited, there was a decrease in the amount of birds. The refuge is located near the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's John F. Kennedy Space Center.

Wildlife conservation is at the heart of this and many other refuges and reserves in the coastal estuaries and wetlands of Florida. As I mentioned, places with conservation in mind produce the best concentrations of birds.

Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1963 for the protection of migratory birds and as a buffer to the Space Center. It sits on 140,000 acres of varied habitat conducive to hosting a wide variety birds. Habitats consist of: coastal dunes, saltwater marshes, managed impoundments, scrub, pine flatwoods, and hardwood hammocks. These habitats provide homes for many species of plants and animals.

The refuge's habitats support large numbers of endangered and threatened species found within the refuges of the National Wildlife Refuge System. In fact, it is one of the best places to see these rarity species.

It has seven distinct habitat types representing the subtropic and temperate zones. These habitats help as a major wintering area for migratory birds. Over 500 different species of wildlife inhabit the Refuge, with 16 currently listed as federally threatened or endangered. Several wading bird rookeries, active bald eagle nests, numerous osprey nests, even manatees and breeding Florida scrub jays can be found on the Refuge. This is a place I hope to visit again when I have the more time. We spent such a short amount of time here, but it was time well spent. We drove the seven mile Black Point Wildlife Drive. It takes you through the refuge where you have interesting and unique places to explore.

There are countless places to see and photograph wading birds in Florida, and I only visited a small number of the important sites in 2022. Nature photographers are always thrilled by the abundance of wading birds in Florida.

Tricolored Heron (*Egretta tricolor*)



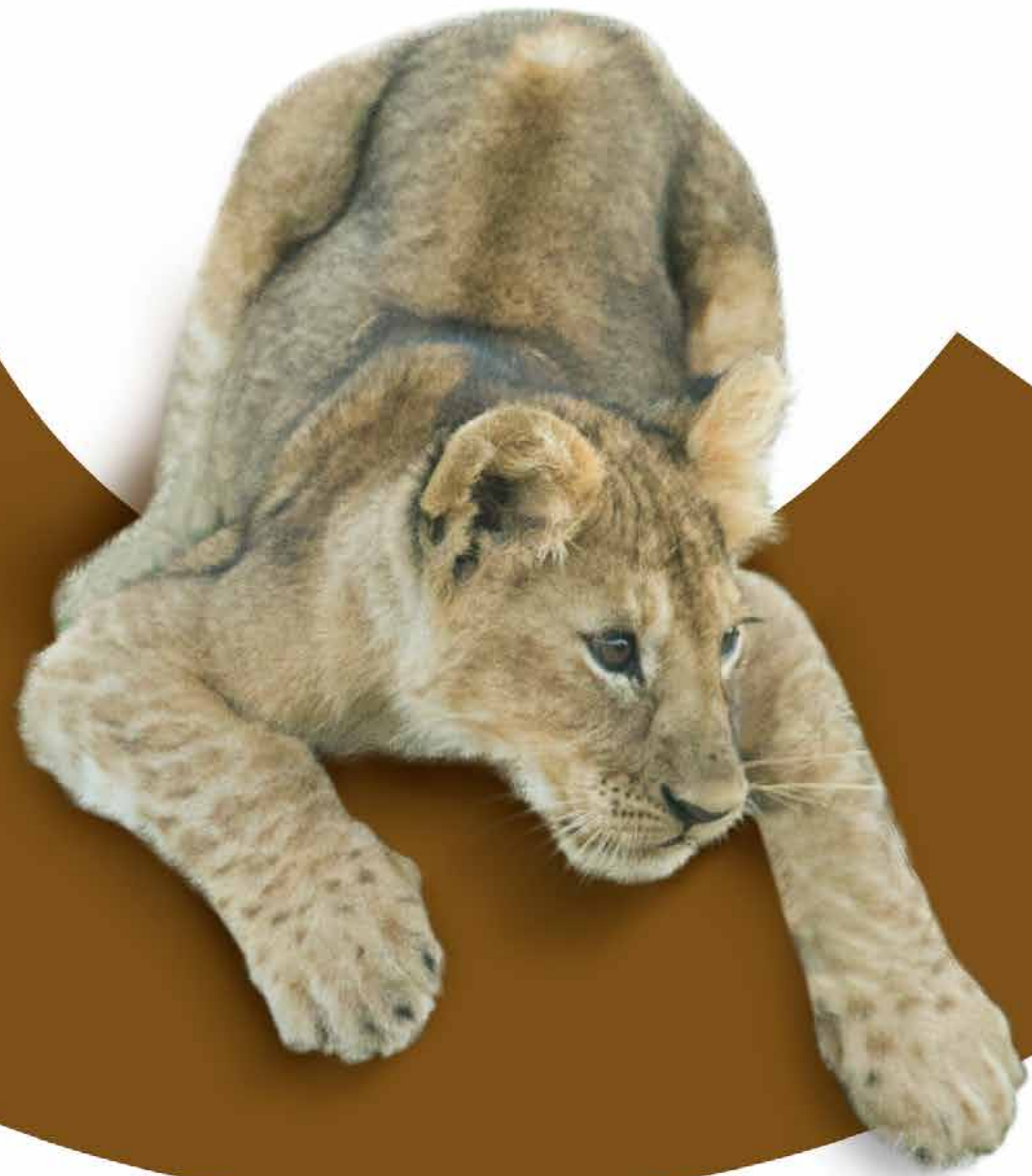
CUB'S CORNER

NATURE
THROUGH
MY EYES

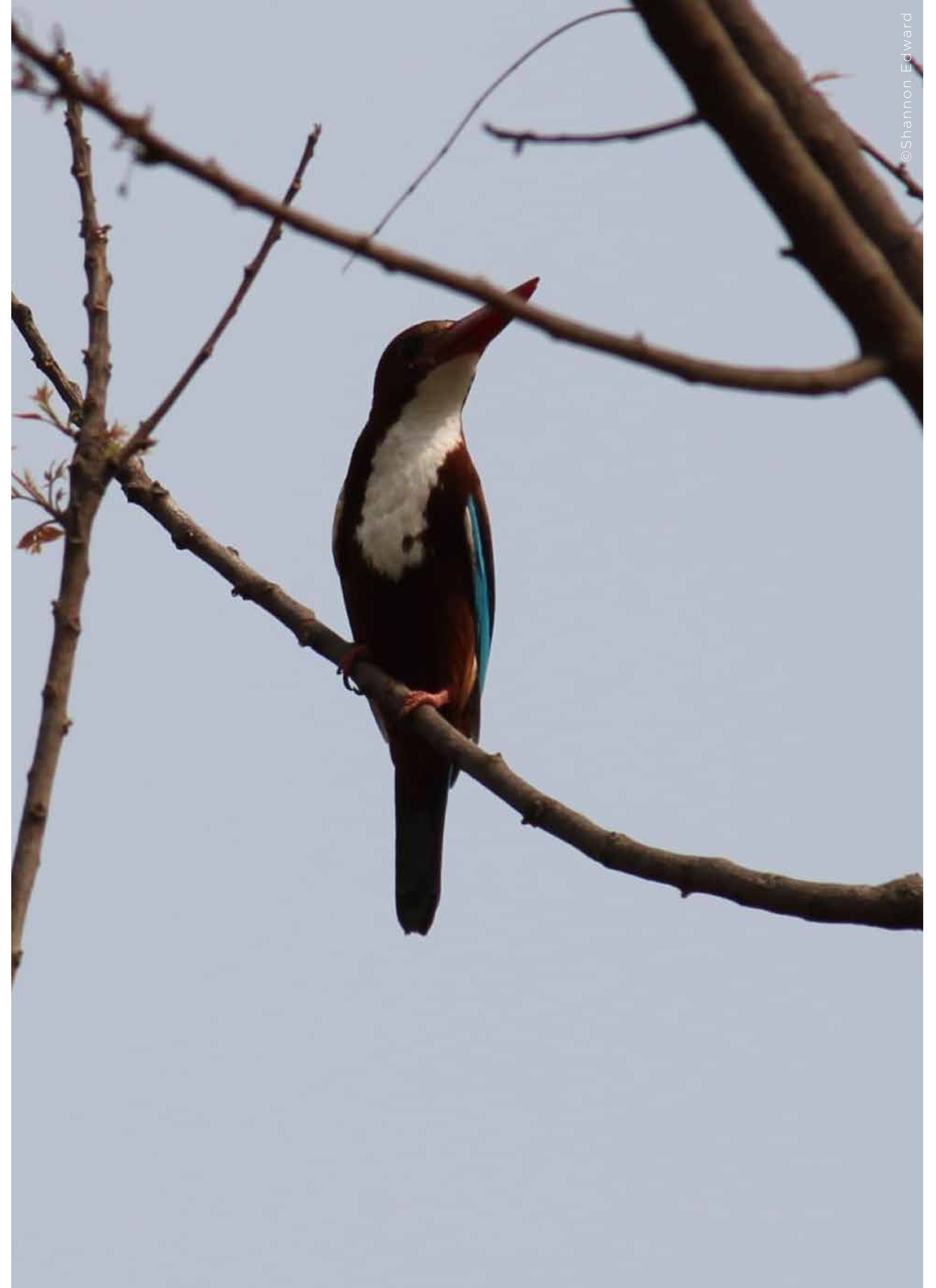
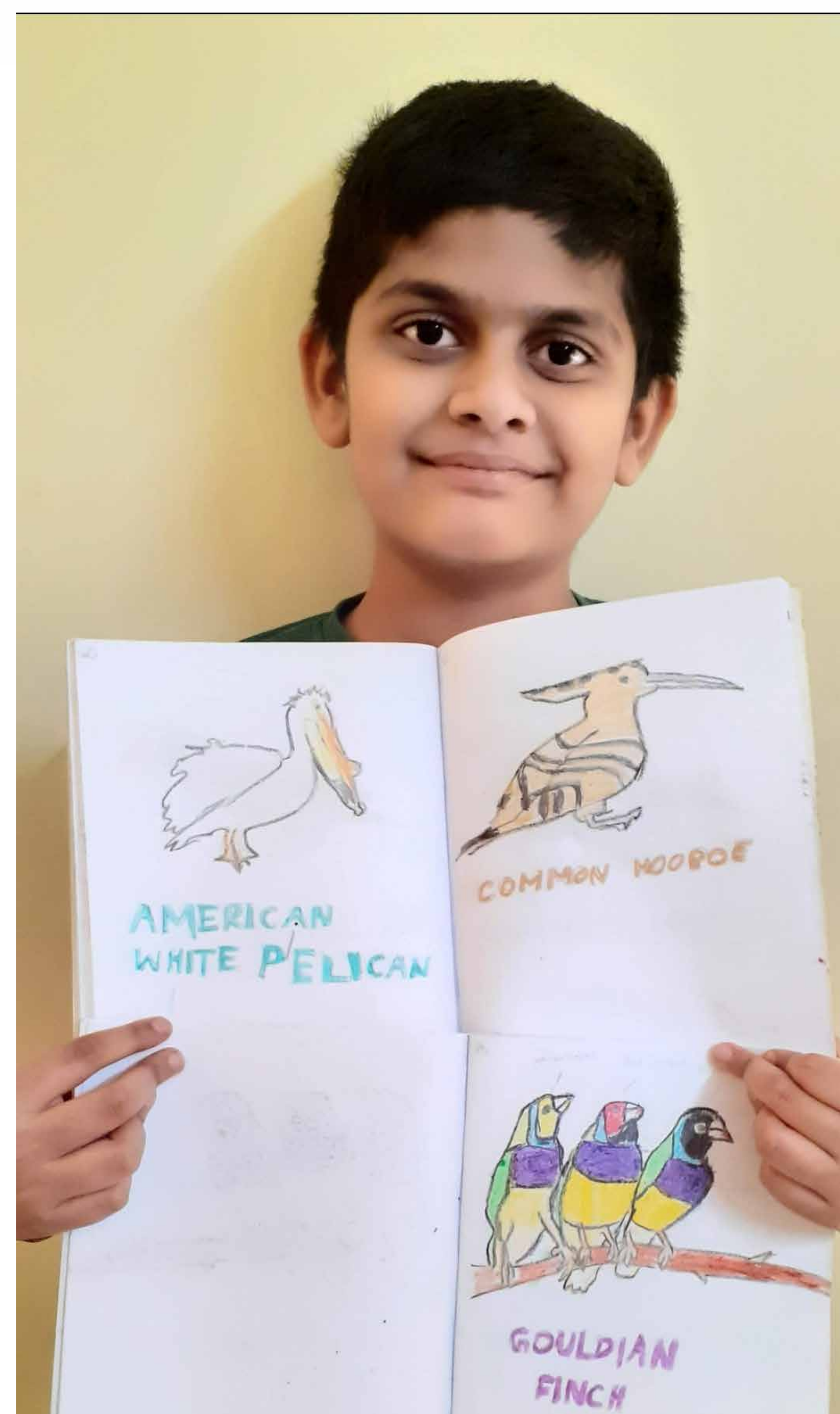
Sanmit Dalvi

CUB'S CORNER

CUB'S CORNER



12-year-old Sanmit Dalvi is an aspiring birder and a young male member of Pune Ladies birders group who interacts on the PLB WhatsApp group through his mother's account. Sanmit Dalvi's journey in birding began in the lockdown of 2020, he knew he couldn't venture out on field for birding decided to carry on with his newly developed passion for birds sitting at home. He resorted to books and Google for virtual birding and in no time had his was a noteworthy mention in the India book of records for reciting the names of 505 bird subspecies. This feat got him fame with his name and photos published in newspapers all over Maharashtra. With the support of PLB and its members, Sanmit has participated as a young speaker in a number of their events . Alongside birding Sanmit loves marine life, wildlife, snakes, forests and foresees himself working as a conservationist in the future. Sanmit keeps honing his talent and updating his knowledge by following birding accounts on social media and reading various books.



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@Liliana Amico

Her Views & Visuals

By Liliana Amico

Big Hairy Armadillo (*Chaetophractus villosus*)

HER VIEWS & VISUALS



Lili was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina. She is an accountant by profession. She took several courses about wildlife photography and macro photography. Through her camera she can feel free and find the peace that her profession does not provide. Currently She is living in Ciudad de Buenos Aires.

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Her Views and Visuals



Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia*)

@ Liliana Amico



Sally Lightfoot Crab (*Grapsus grapsus*)

How did your interest for wildlife arise?

I have been in touch with nature since I was born. Until ten years ago, my family lived in the middle of the countryside. After that they moved on to a little town called Norberto de La Riestra in Buenos Aires province, Argentina. Because of that all my childhood passed between these two places, full of nature. I spent a lot of time there, in contact with the wildlife although at that moment I did not realize it. I remember playing with my brother in the middle of the forest, climbing trees, riding a horse for leisure or to go to school, or swimming in a lagoon in the summer.

I am currently living in a big city, and I am really sure that all those special moments of my childhood are the ones that made me return to nature through my camera. Certainty that this is the place where I enjoy spending my time the most.

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

In 2012 I bought my first DSRL camera and without too much knowledge I began to study the manual and taking pictures of everything around me.

In 2014 I had the opportunity to travel to the Galapagos Islands in Ecuador for the first time, the reason why I decided to take a course exclusively on nature photography.

Before the trip, I spent a lot of time learning about to the behavior of every different species that I wanted to take pictures, the place where they lived, in



Striped Owl (*Asio clamator*)

Common Potoo (*Nyctibius griseus*)



Striated Heron (*Butorides striata*)



which time I would have more chances to find them and any other data necessary to not miss anything. It was an amazing experience in an incredible place. After that I knew great Argentinian photographers who shared their knowledge, and I took the advantage to take every course I could with some of them.

That allowed me to improve the pictures I have been taking. From that moment every trip I make, no matter how short it can be, the camera travels with me and the places I visit always are related with nature, wildlife and the desire to continue learning and discovering the beauty that surround us.

That is how I started to feel like a passionate photographer of nature, and I never stopped.

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

As I see it, wildlife photographers have in our hands a powerful conservation tool. Now a days, it is very easy to share a picture with a lot of people living in different places of the world almost in the same moment that it was taken. Using it together with the increasing use of social networks and other current digital media can help us to quickly spread the problems facing Mother Nature.

The essential point is people take care of what they know about. We can take a beautiful picture and share it with

friends, however if we use it to tell a short story with interesting data about the animal, the species or the place in the photo, perhaps this will help more people to know about it and they will be able to understand why it is important to preserve it.

Speaking from my own experience, I was able to confirm this by sharing photos taken in my town with people who have lived there all their lives and they were surprised because they had never seen it before or didn't know about a certain characteristic about the animal.

Can you give our readers the best wildlife photography tips? Do you have any recommendation on settings or gear for wildlife photography?

Be patient and Study! These are the best tips that someone has ever given me, and I try to remember every time I am in a photographic trip.

We can have the best photographic equipment in the world, but if we are not able to know how to use them, or we do not have enough information about the species we are going to photograph, we will return home with nothing, that is for sure. Wild animals show themselves to us only when they really want to. Due to that we need to be patient. If we add knowledge about the animal behavior, its environment, what is the best time of the year to find it, what hour of the day it prefers to rest or feed, then we are closer to take the desired photo.

Another good recommendation may be to explore areas around us. Not always



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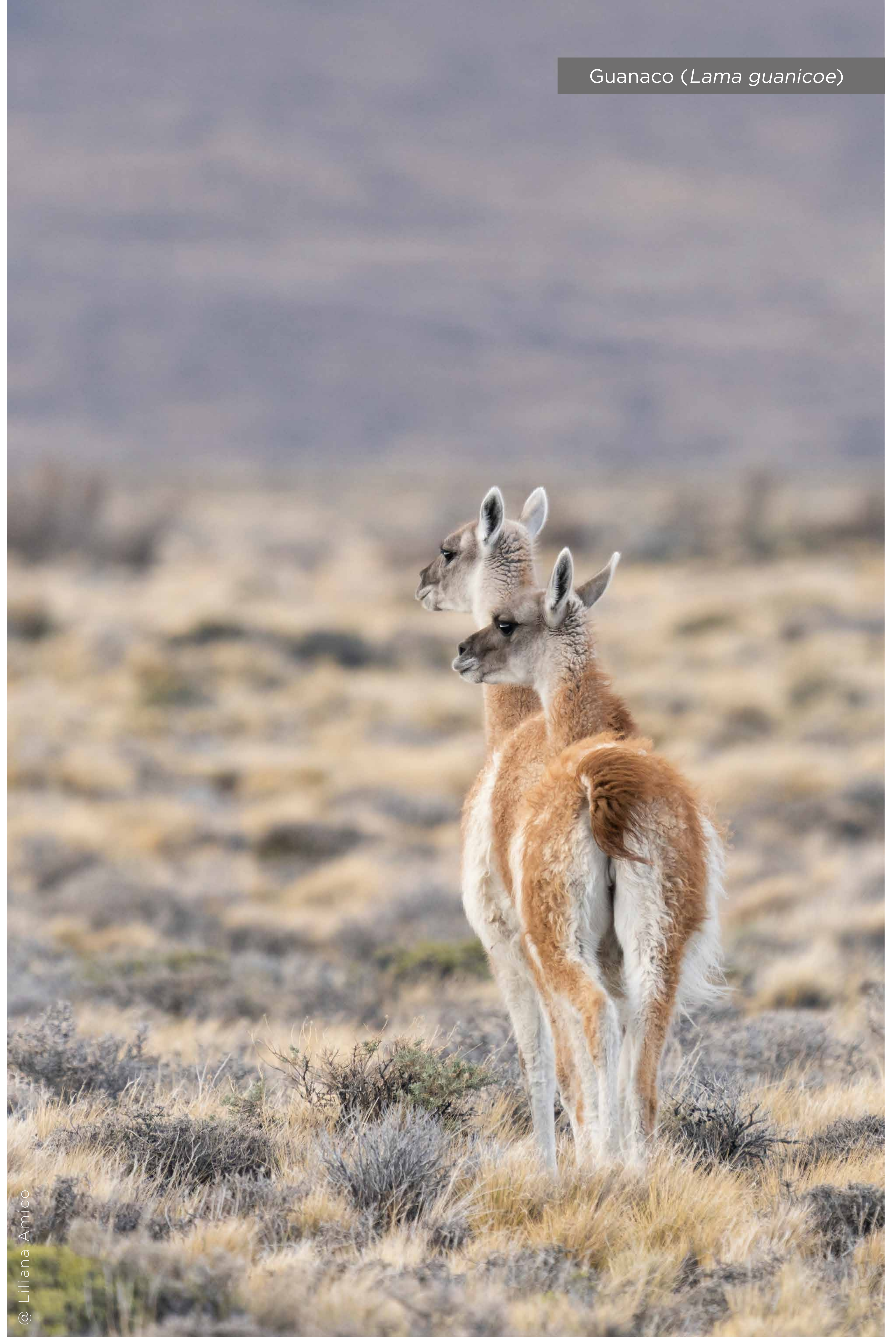
Black-necked Stilt (*Himantopus mexicanus*)

Maguari Stork (*Ciconia maguari*)



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Guanaco (*Lama guanicoe*)



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Grey Fox (*Lycalopex griseus*)

is it necessary to go far to take a good picture. After the coronavirus quarantine I began to visit Costanera Sur Ecological Reserve. I had never gone there before. I discovered there a lot of new species of birds and every time I go, I came back home with a “lifer”, this in the middle of Buenos Aires’s City!

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

For now, I will continue traveling through my country every time I can. I really enjoy being surprised by each new discovery and I am looking forward to the next trip no matter where it is.

If we are talking about dreams I have too much. I would like to know Central and South America rainforest, like Costa Rica, Colombia, Guatemala, Peru and Brazil, the Big five in Africa, India, Borneo...the list is very, very long.

Tell us something about the gears you use?

I use a Sony A7RIV camera with a Sony FE 200-600 mm F5.6-6.3 G lens. This is what I use the most. For macrophotography I use a Sony FE 90mm F2.8 Macro G Oss and for landscapes I use a Sony FE 24-70mm F2.8 GM.







Wattled Jacana (*Jacana Jacana*)



TRAVELOGUE

Breathtaking Colombia

By Johana Simonova

Spectacled Caiman (*Caiman crocodilus*)

TRAVELOGUE

Johana is 20 years old wildlife photographer. She grew up in a small village in the south of Czech Republic surrounded by nature and wildlife. In 2016 her family moved to Costa Rica, where her love for the natural world deepened even more. Now she is traveling the world taking photos of animals and nature in the wildest places on Earth.

In September she is going to start studying at the University of Reading, where she will be attending the course of Ecology and Wildlife Conservation. She has already taken part in a conservation project working on protecting the endangered sea turtles in Costa Rican Osa Peninsula.

Her life mission is to show people the beauty of our planet and the creatures inhabiting it. To make people realize how important it is to preserve nature and all the animals with it for the next generations. She also wishes to inspire women to start their journey in wildlife photography and conservation.

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White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

I loved nature and animals since I was small and visiting Colombia was always my dream. But reading about it in books could never depict, how beautiful this place is. We have traveled quite a lot through the country, but there are still so many places I still have to explore, but I would love to tell you more about the small parts that I have seen with which I fell in love.

Traveling to Colombia was a last minute idea. We had to change planes in Bogota, so it was “why not spend a few days there” kind of idea. But after researching the natural beauty of Colombia, few days became six and six days became fourteen. So a week after making this plan we set off on this new adventure.

Our trip started in Bogota, the moment we landed I started looking for exotic birds, but not with much luck. There we met our guide, now a dear friend, Alejandro, a man who knows birds more than any other person I have ever met.

Our first stop was Chingaza National Park which was a place my suitcase was not ready for, mostly because it was just 11 degrees Celsius, so my cute hiking shorts did not really cut the deal there. Chingaza National Park is located close to Bogota in roughly 3,000 meters above ocean level.

The prevailing ecosystems are High Andean, Sub Andean and moorland, a heaven for many species of flora and fauna. Sadly, this day was not as lucky as we had hoped and we did not see almost anything except for hundreds of hummingbirds. Seeing these birds there



surprised me, because I always thought they could never survive in these freezing conditions. One of the species we have seen was the Sword-billed Hummingbird (*Ensifera ensifera*) whose bill is longer than the rest of its body, which makes it a very rare bird.

We set off for a new location, in the afternoon, called Los Llanos. The trip took several hours and the entire landscape has changed in front of my eyes. From green beautiful forests to pastures and pastures only. I could not imagine, how such a beautiful country can be so devastated by animal agriculture. I tried to lighten the situation by playing a game, if somebody could guess what product is being produced on this part of land, but after a few rounds the game became quite predictable, because the answer was always beef or milk. Being raised in Europe I have always heard about the negative effects of animal agriculture on our planet, but I could have never imagined the destruction I have seen in Colombia. It was seriously an ecologist's worst nightmare.

After driving for around 8 hours we arrived to our destination Los Llanos. When we arrived my first thought was that I now understand, why some people believe that earth is flat. These beautiful wetlands are huge. They stretch through Colombia to Venezuela and if you wanted to, you could walk the entire way to midland Venezuela without crossing any hill. That's how flat Los Llanos is. Unfortunately Los Llanos is not a natural park even though it should be, it is more like a huge pasture for millions of cows. There are farms or fincas that have over



© Johana Simonova

Crab-eating Fox (*Cerdocyon thous*)





Egyptian Goose (*Alopochen aegyptiaca*)

hundred thousand hectares. Each is owned just by a single family who raises cattle for meat and milk. Luckily many of the wild animals live with the cattle in quite surprising peace, living side by side without causing harm to one another.

We arrived to these wonderful Colombian wetlands in the best time possible, in the time when the wetlands were turning green, but not so late, that we had to cross the pastures on a canoe.

First day we took a small boat and went up the river. That was the first time I have ever seen Capybaras (*Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris*), a moment I will never forget. We have also seen Hoatzins (*Opisthocomus hoazin*), Spectacled Caimans (*Caiman crocodilus*), Orinoco Geese (*Neochen jubata*) and much more. You would have thought that I will have hundreds of amazing photos from that day, but taking photos from a shaky wooden boat is probably a discipline I will never master.

The other three days we were going on a safari by huge off-road cars. Even though we have arrived at a great time. There was already dirt everywhere and after driving through it for a few hours I felt the dirt even in my nostrils and ears. We were so lucky that the first animal we have seen was actually a Giant Anteater (*Myrmecophaga tridactyla*), but it was still too dark to photograph it.

Over the next few days we have had so much experiences that I had to pick just a few of them or you would finish reading this article in a few months. One of the first and strongest experiences was



seeing the Burrowing Owls (*Athene cunicularia*), those little birds have nests underground, they hunt during night, but during the day they are standing around the nest guarding it, which makes them fun and an easy target for amazing photos.

One day we stopped next to a lake, where I spent many hours taking photos of Capybaras (*Hydrochoerus hydrochaeris*), Caimans (*Caiman crocodilus*), Jabirus (*Jabiru mycteria*) and other animals typical to Los Llanos. We have even seen the critically endangered Orinoko Crocodile (*Crocodiles intermedius*) that were almost wiped out, because they were hunted for their skin. When the sunset came, we started to see hundreds of Scarlet Ibises (*Eudicimus ruber*) and other water birds flying to two huge trees on the other side of the lake. It was wonderful seeing those pink clouds of birds quickly flying towards the trees to find a place to sleep before other individuals would take their favourite place. This was the best and most beautiful ending to the wonderful wetland experience.

Leaving Los Llanos was one of the hardest moments I have had on this expedition, but the idea of arriving to our next location made it a little bit easier. After hours of driving through Colombia the view from the windows has not changed much this time. There still was a pasture next to a pasture, but at least there were small houses and restaurants between them. We arrived to Villavincencio, where we spent the night in a beautiful small hotel. In the morning before the sun came up we were already on the road again with destination I can't



Harpy Eagle (*Harpia harpyja*)

© Johana Simonova



Double-striped Thick-knee (*Burhinus bistriatus*)

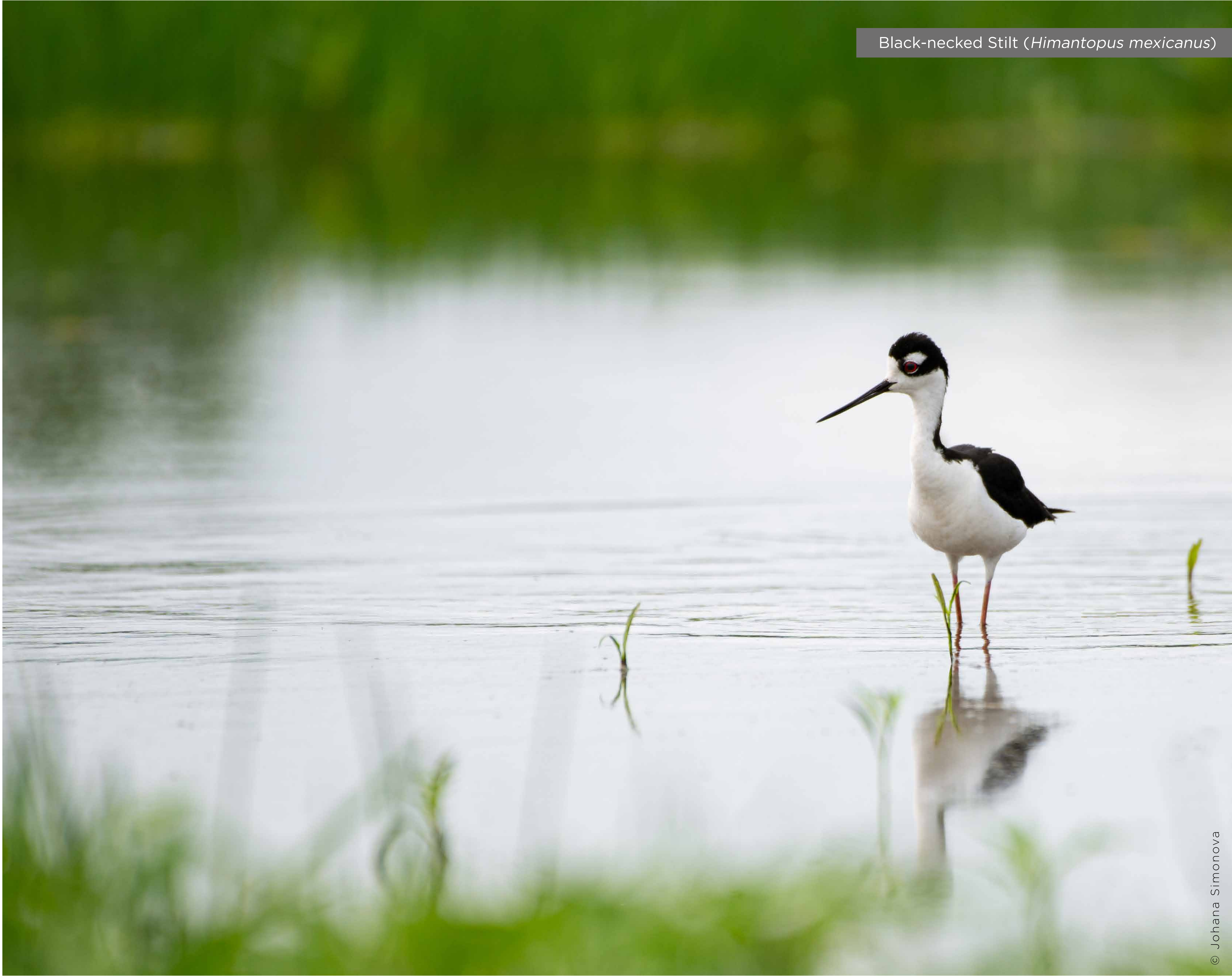
yet share the name of, but the one thing I can say is that the people there have never seen a tourist in their life. In the village we changed cars to get a little bit closer to our destination.

We drove for another 20 minutes through terrain that I thought was impassible. After getting out of the car we have walked for another hour through a beautiful Colombian rainforest. I was red and sweaty, once Alejandro screamed “The mum is there too. We have to run!” Even though I felt like dying from the hot weather I ran with him to the top of a small hill and there it was. A Harpy Eagle nest in which were two huge Harpy Eagles (*Harpia harpyja*) a mum with its not so “little” baby. I could have never imagined how magnificent these creatures are, they are huge with beautiful grey feathers, enormous claws and with beautiful double crested crown. Our little *Pichón* (Spanish term for chick), that’s how the magnificent fledgling was named, was playing in its nest with a prey, it mother brought from the forest. Probably a monkey or a sloth, those are her favourite. Harpy eagle fledglings stay in the nest for over nine months until they learn how to fly and catch prey on their own, after they leave the nest they stay close by for another two years. Therefore it will be possible to see Pichón for another two and a half years around the nest.

Unfortunately, we are quickly losing our Harpy Eagle populations mostly because of the loss of their habitat. Luckily this “small” chick will be safe, because my friends from Manakin tours had made the place a Harpy Eagle reserve, which will soon be open to tourists, which will help conserve these magnificent animals and even help the people of the village to live more comfortable lives.

I will never forget this adventure and I will be forever grateful for seeing all those animals and meeting all those wonderful people that made this expedition the most special. Colombia is the most charming place I have ever seen and we should do what we can to preserve the natural beauty of this Latin American gem. The biggest thanks must go to Manakin Tours who made this whole experience possible.

Black-necked Stilt (*Himantopus mexicanus*)





Scarlet Ibis (*Eudocimus ruber*)



Jabiru (*Jabiru mycteria*)



Harpy Eagle (*Harpia harpyja*)

THROUGH THE LENS

In Search of The Swamp Tiger

By Sumon Das



Royal Bengal Tiger (*Panthera tigris tigris*)

THROUGH THE LENS

© Sumon Das





Sumon Das is a wildlife photographer based in India, who intends to spread awareness regarding the conservation of endangered species and also desires to enlighten about the ethereal biodiversity of India. His major goals are to capture the defining behavioural aspects prevalent in the animal kingdom and make compelling story telling images.

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It was October 2021, when I decided to go in search for the elusive swamp tiger. Sunderbans National Park, the largest mangrove on earth, derives its name from the Sundari trees and also in the local language “Sundar” means Beautiful and “bans” mean forests. Not knowing the exact reason for the nomenclature, once I did make a trip to Sunderbans, I understood that both the reasons are

valid enough. Spread across 40,000 Square Kilometers, 60 percent of it lies in Bangladesh and 40 percent in India, it is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The specialty of Sunderbans are the mangrove trees which stand lazily on the mudflats. Sunderbans is also known for the play of the tides. Each day there are three tidal cycles, that is there are three high tides and three low tides and the breathing



Royal Bengal Tiger (*Panthera tigris tigris*)



Royal Bengal Tiger (*Panthera tigris tigris*)



Royal Bengal Tiger (*Panthera tigris tigris*)

roots of the mangrove trees are visible during the low tides.

Residing in Kolkata, India, it is only a 100-kilometer drive to Sundarbans and from there we get our boat rides. Sunderbans is not only a National Park but a Tiger Reserve as well and so on 25th October 2021 my trip started from the Sajnekhali Camp at Sunderbans. From there it actually takes around one hour to enter the forest. After completing all the necessary formalities with the documents and permits we entered the forest after lunch and from there on I was hooked to the boat for five Nights and six days. Every day we started our safari at Sunrise and it will continue till Sunset. On the first afternoon the sightings were Ok to start with. We got an Osprey and a Peregrine Falcon. But my tour operator/ team leader Mr. Soumyajit Nandy had been giving me all the information which I desired. I kept asking him questions regarding the mudflats, human animal conflict (Sunderbans are infamous for it), the geography, various camps, the fauna which he has sighted in his long career and so on, and he tirelessly answered all my queries.

It is from the 26th Morning when our chase for the Swamp tiger began. We spotted salt water crocodiles, collard kingfishers, rhesus macaques, black capped kingfishers, mudskippers and brown winged kingfishers as well but not a tiger. The weather was hot and humid, Mr. Nandy told me that if we get some rains the chances of spotting a tiger would increase. In the afternoon though the weather began to change and by the day end it started raining. I got some nice



Royal Bengal Tiger (*Panthera tigris tigris*)



Royal Bengal Tiger (*Panthera tigris tigris*)

images but not a tiger. As mentioned before, the swamp tiger is elusive and sightings are not very common, but so is any forest animal. I kept my fingers crossed and hoped for the best.

On the 27th Morning things started to change. At 5 in the morning, I was up on the deck and started my day by capturing some kingfishers. It was drizzling and the weather was cool. Near the Dobanki camp we spotted some fresh tiger foot prints and my heart skipped a beat. Our boatman informed me that the chances of tiger sighting increases tremendously if fresh pug marks are spotted. The terrain of Sunderbans is such dense that one can often miss a tiger. But my crews' eyes were trained and I kept praying. After crossing a few canals, we stuck to one where according to Mr. Nandy a tiger may cross. And it did. We spotted a tigress walking and I was ready with my Camera. She came out and gave us a stare. That was my shot. Getting a tiger head-on in Sunderbans is something which I could only dream off. And dreams do come true at times. I had framed the tiger to my liking after she decided to move inside the forest. We concluded our day with some nice landscape shots.

On the 28th things got better in terms of sighting. We spotted two different tigers and had a total of three sightings. On all the three occasions we were predominantly depending on the tiger foot prints. We got our sightings and I got my shots. I couldn't believe my luck and I was informed by my crew that such sightings hardly happen. I would like to mention the efforts put forward by Mr. Soumyajit Nandy, our boatman Mr. Gopal



© Sumon Das

Royal Bengal Tiger (*Panthera tigris tigris*)



Royal Bengal Tiger (*Panthera tigris tigris*)



Royal Bengal Tiger (*Panthera tigris tigris*)

Mondol, Our Guide Mr. Bikramaditta Mondol. They kept on scanning the area with their respective binoculars and if one missed something the other had it covered. Without their inspired genius these sightings would not have happened. Even the boatman's assistant and our cook were excited and they also helped us whenever they could.

On 29th as well we did spot tigers twice but I was unable to frame them because they were very far away, I managed to see them only with binoculars. But having said that I was highly satisfied with the sightings I got and the images I made. A trip which I will cherish throughout my life. On the 30th nothing interesting happened but that is how forests are. I ended my trip feeling ecstatic and with a promise to myself. I need to get back to this largest mangrove on earth soon.



Royal Bengal Tiger (*Panthera tigris tigris*)



Cardinal in Norway Spruce

Barry Van Dusen
from Massachusetts, USA

WILD ARTS SHOWCASE

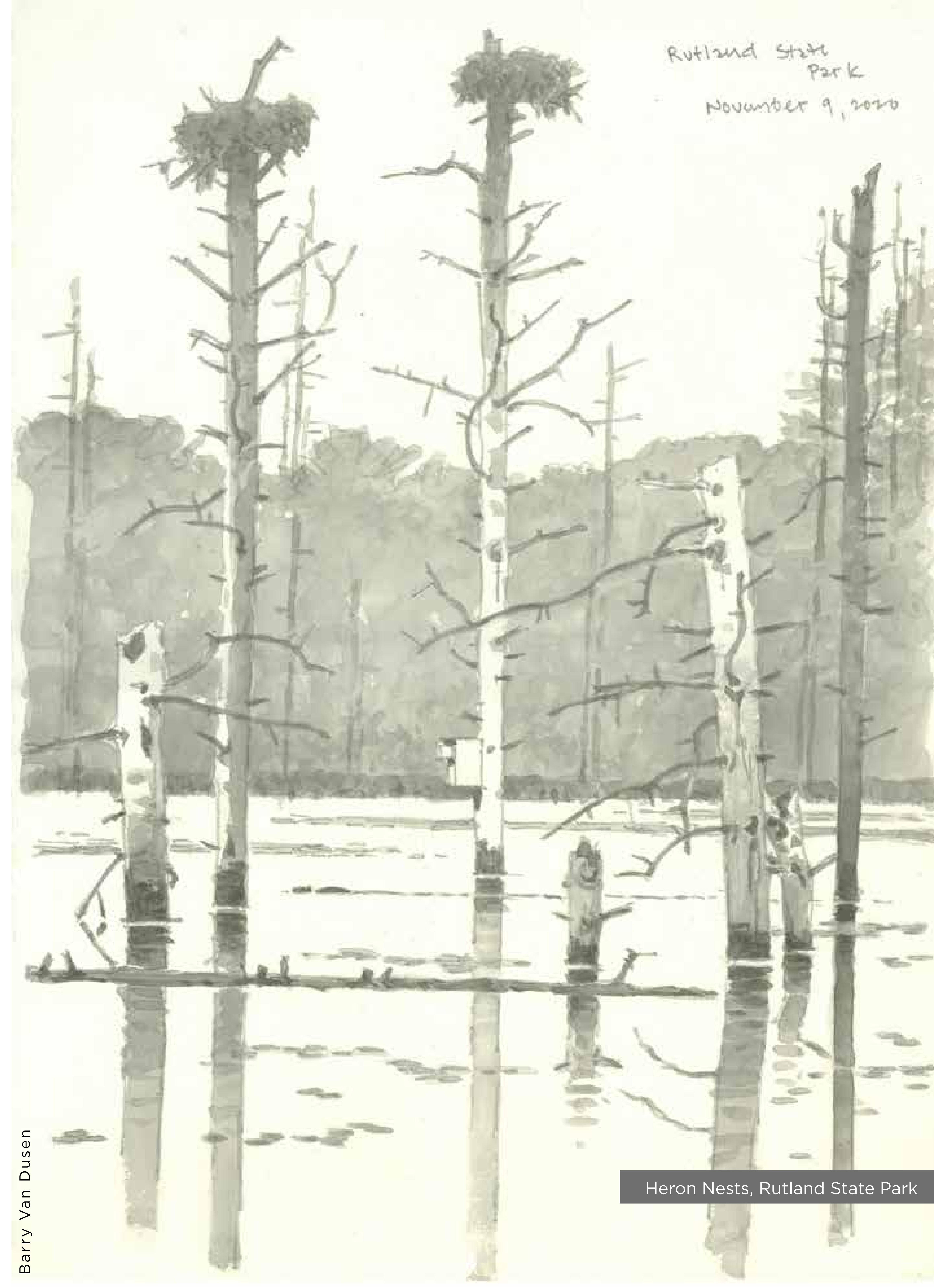


The paintings of Barry Van Dusen have been described as a unique blend of impressionism and realism. Always built upon a foundation of strong draftsmanship, his works are carefully planned but freely executed in a direct and painterly manner. Combining a lifelong interest in nature with a formal art education, Barry has developed a personal watercolor style that acknowledges the importance of science and biology while maintaining the primacy of artistic expression.

barryvandusen.com

Barry began his career as a designer and illustrator. His illustrations have appeared in books published by HarperCollins, Princeton University Press, Cornell University (Comstock) and the American Birding Association. Barry is a member of London's Society of Wildlife Artists,

and in 2014, he was named Master Artist at the international BIRDS IN ART exhibition (Wausau, Wisconsin) - an award which recognizes artists who have shown "outstanding achievement in using bird imagery in their artwork". Previous recipients of the award include Roger



Barry Van Dusen

Heron Nests, Rutland State Park





Wood Duck at Drake

Tory Peterson and Robert Bateman. Barry has illustrated many publications for the Massachusetts Audubon Society and his book FINDING SANCTUARY was published by Mass Audubon in 2020.

At the invitation of the Artists for Nature Foundation, Barry has traveled to Spain, England, Ireland, India, Peru and Israel, working alongside other wildlife artists to raise money for conservation of threatened habitats. In 2007, Barry was chosen to create the UK Habitat Conservation Stamp (the British counterpart to the US Federal Duck Stamp), and was the first American to be so honored

In Barry's own words:

As a young adult, I learned all I could about birds and studied bird identification, birdsong, taxonomy and bird behavior - and I spent many hours outdoors observing wild birds. After studying art at university, I worked as a commercial graphic designer and illustrator for a number of years, but birds were only temporarily put on the back burner. Over time, I brought my interest in birds in line with my art career by illustrating bird books and nature guides. Bird illustration (usually in gouache) is technically demanding, requiring a deep understanding of bird anatomy and structure. On these projects, I teamed up with professional ornithologists to assure that my bird illustrations were scientifically accurate.

My involvement with birds went through several stages as my career evolved, but I can pinpoint a major turning point in the

late 1980s, when I discovered the work of European wildlife artists. I became intrigued with the European approach stressing direct observation and field sketching, and started a routine of regular outdoor drawing in a field sketchbook. It took considerable practice before I was able to record useful drawings of birds, but the effort was worth it - the sketchbooks transformed and deepened my connection to these creatures. They trained my eye for subtleties of shape, proportion and plumage, and helped me learn the qualities that defined the unique character of the various species. In my experience, nothing makes you pay more attention to a subject than drawing it from life!

Drawing outdoors eventually led to painting outdoors, requiring that I assemble a field kit suited to my needs and preferences. Because of the optics I need for observing birds, my field kit can be cumbersome, making it even more important to carry only what I need for painting.

Fieldwork demands that I work rapidly and loosely, since wild birds are almost always on the move, and this practice has carried over into my studio painting. Watercolor is a perfect medium for painting birds; watercolor's spontaneity suits the vibrant, ephemeral quality of these elusive animals. In all of my bird paintings, I aim for a light touch, to retain that vital sense of life and movement. With my background in bird illustration, I need to fight a tendency to over-render, and I actively guard against this. Too many times, I've seen the life drain out of a bird painting with overworking.



Barry Van Dusen





Many of my paintings can be described as straight-forward bird portraits. Back in the studio, I pour over my field studies to find gestures and poses that can spark a painting. It's all about capturing the distinctive personality of a particular species by finding just the right lines, shapes and proportions. In the studio, I can work larger, and spend more time on the design and concept of a painting. In a recent series of larger watercolors, I weave the birds into a strong background pattern, making connections of tone, color and shape between the birds and the background. I'm aiming for an active composition that will challenge and intrigue the viewer. Artist-in-Residence programs have become very popular in recent years, and offer people like me a variety of opportunities for work and travel. In the past decade, I've taken part in four residency programs around New England, and have found them to be productive and fun. From my point of view, the best thing about these programs is the chance to work outdoors on a regular basis.

In 2017, I launched my most ambitious residency project, aiming to visit and work at all 61 Massachusetts Audubon wildlife sanctuaries, nature centers and museums across Massachusetts. Initially, I insisted on a two year working period but in the end the residency work spanned more than four and a half years! In all, I painted more than 200 watercolors for the project and filled four sketchbooks with hundreds of drawings, notes and studies. In 2019, Mass Audubon decided to publish the results of my residency, and FINDING SANCTUARY, a full-color, 192 page book was printed in 2020.

Barry Van Dusen







Hardwick, MA
August 1, 2021
(2) adults and
(2) well-grown
young



Birds are not the only subjects I explore with my watercolors. As an artist, I continually seek out subjects that engage my imagination, and re-ignite my passion for nature. I enjoy working with landscapes, flowers and plants, as well as fish, mammals and other animals. For me, however, inspiration most often comes in the form of birds. Their beauty and variety are a constant source of inspiration and I know they will always be my favorite subject!



Romance in the Hood







YOUR GALLERY

Hermis Haridas
Amur Leopard (*Panthera pardus orientalis*)
Tajikistan



YOUR GALLERY



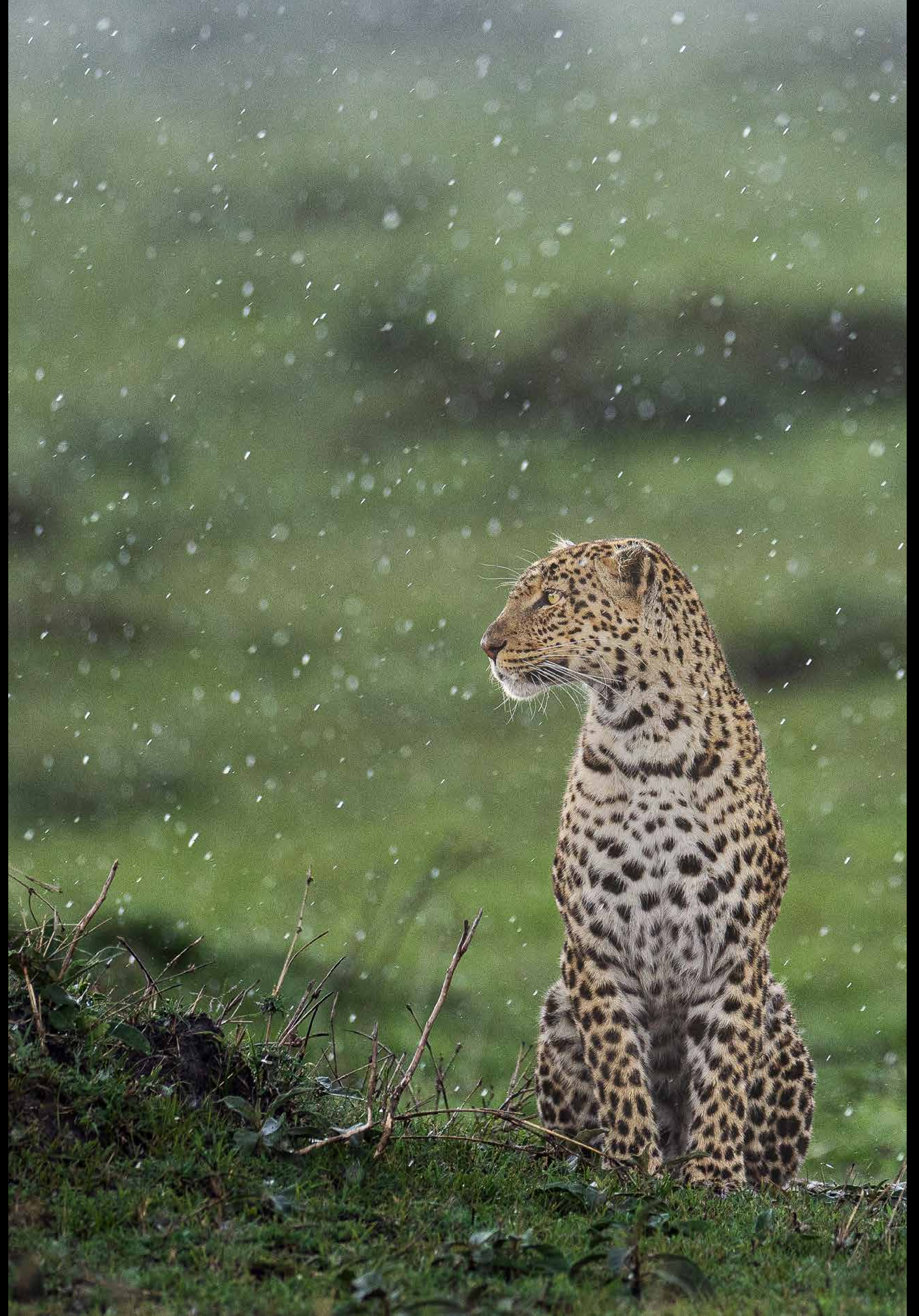
Borja de la Rocha
Baboon (*Papio*)
Kenya



YOUR GALLERY



Thomas Bretschneider
Cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*)
Kenya



YOUR GALLERY



Borja de la Rocha
Leopard (*Panthera pardus*)
Kenya



YOUR GALLERY



Robert van Poederoyen
Leopard (*Panthera pardus*)
Kenya



YOUR GALLERY



Thomas Bretschneider
Lion (*Panthera leo*)
Kenya



YOUR GALLERY



Aniket Deshpande
Black-chinned hummingbird (*Archilochus alexandri*)
Austin, Texas



YOUR GALLERY



Aniket Deshpande
Black-chinned hummingbird (*Archilochus alexandri*)
Austin, Texas



YOUR GALLERY

Robert van Poederooyen
Topi (*Damaliscus lunatus jimela*)
Kenya





YOUR GALLERY



Kambiz Cameo Pourghanad
Gannet (*Morus*)
Iceland



YOUR GALLERY



Borja de la Rocha
Canarian Blackbird (*Turdus merula cabrerarum*)
Macronesia



YOUR GALLERY



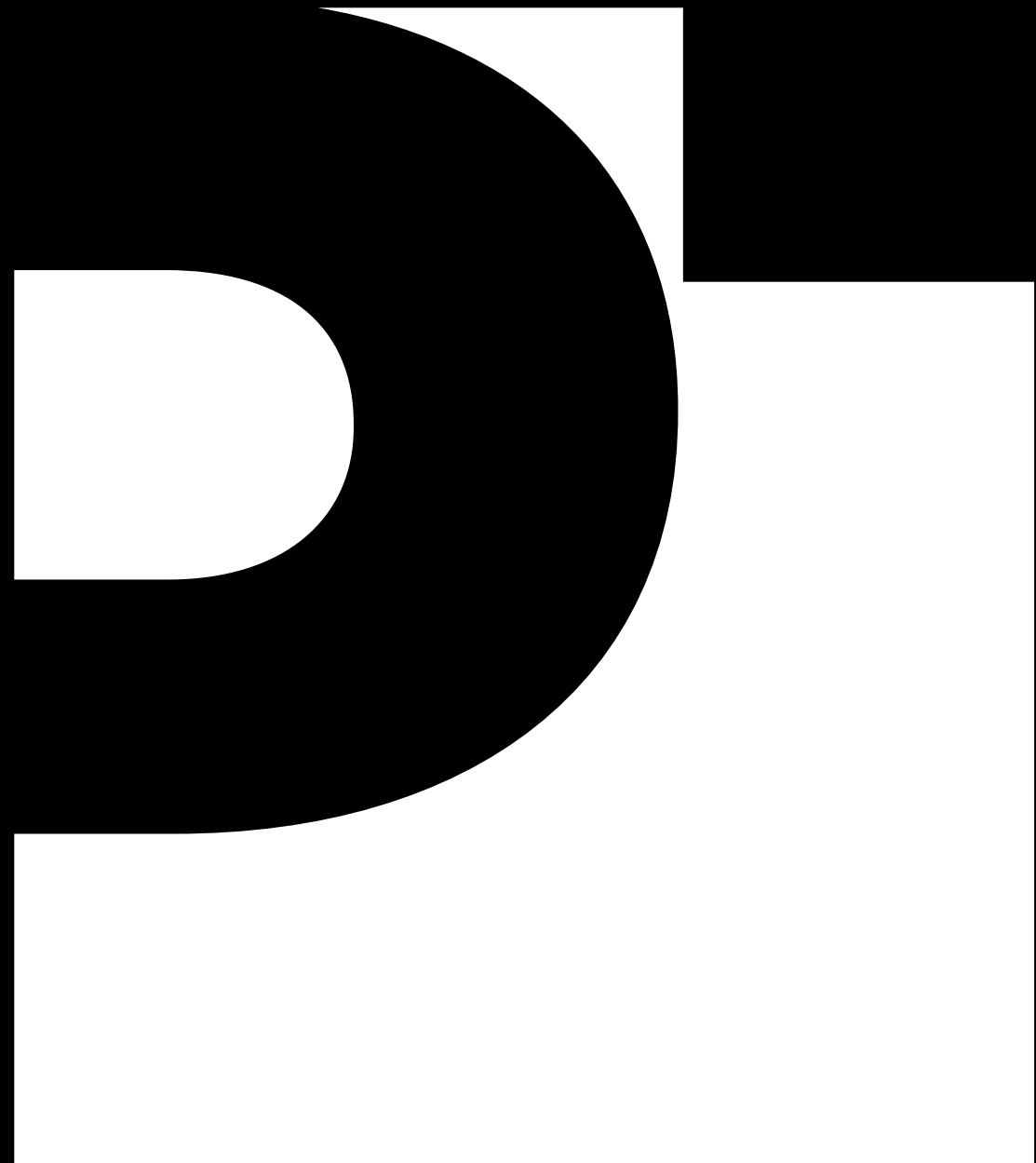
Thomas Bretschneider
Leopard (*Panthera pardus*)
Kenya



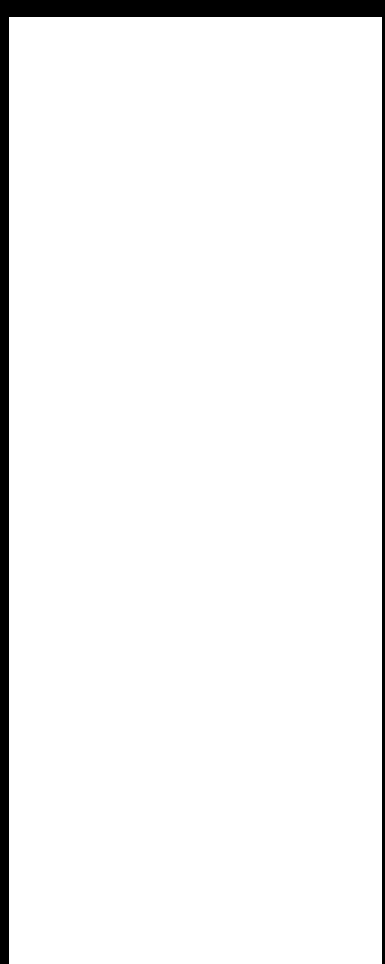
YOUR GALLERY



Hermis Haridas
Serval (*Leptailurus serval*)
Kenya



EXPLORERS



UPCOMING
FEATURES



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INTO THE WILD

with Buddhilini De Soyza



© Brad Allen

EIDER DUCKS IN NORTH ATLANTIC

By Brad Allen



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TAMMIE NORRIE

By Kambiz Cameo Pourghanad