

INTO THE WILD

WITH ALISON BUTTIGIEG

THE HARD LIFE TOGETHER,
REFLECTIONS FOR AN
URGENT CHANGE

By Adriana Claudia Sanz

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© Tamara Rojas Sibaja



©Vidyun R Hebbar

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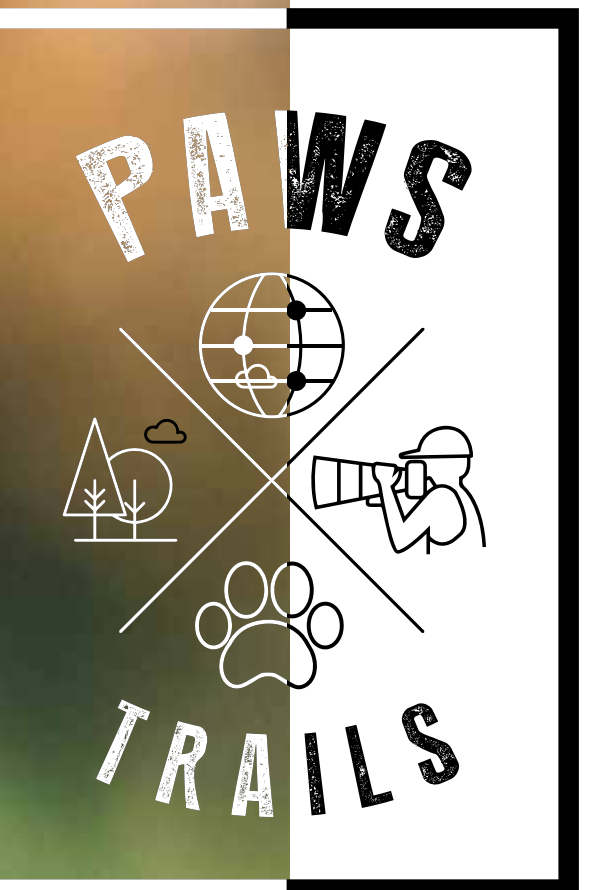
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Alison Buttigieg



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



EDITORS DEN

We proudly present, for the 40th time, an incredible edition featuring captivating stories and stunning images from around the world.

Our cover story spotlights Alison Buttigieg, who shares her passion for photography and her encounters with big cats. Keep an eye out for exclusive insights into her renowned cheetah kill image.

Adriana Claudia Sanz discusses the biology and conservation challenges faced by elephant seals in Patagonia, Argentina. The impactful images serve as a compelling reminder of the need for harmonious coexistence in the region.

In our Species Section, Hermis Haridas trains his lens on the Little Owl in Dubai's Arabian deserts.

Meet Vidyun, a 12-year-old sensation, in our Cub's Corner, where he showcases his love for macro and nature photography in the urban jungle.

Naomi Méndez shares her photography journey and her deep affection for Costa Rica's amphibians and reptiles in our Her View section.

Join Serfin Robert Horst on a captivating journey to Argentina's Córdoba Province through his photographic experiences.

In Travelogue, Arthur Diesel Abegg narrates his adventure through the heartlands of Argentina, focusing on reptile sightings.

Tamara Rojas Sibaja discusses wild art, illustration, and her endeavors to popularize and monetize this genre through her venture, Bêkuö Bosque & Ilustración.

PT Explorers are actively seeking new wildlife photographers to feature in our articles and gallery. Don't hesitate to reach out to us!



PHOTOGRAPHY DIRECTOR'S CHOICE

Thomas Bretschneider
Coral Reefs
Egypt



FOUNDERS' NOTE

Natural Legacy Preservation

Welcome to PT Explorers Magazine's 40th issue. As we celebrate the remarkable diversity of life on Earth and the determined efforts to safeguard it, we invite you to wonder, learn, and ponder.

Natural Wonders

The natural environment shows life's limitless ingenuity. From lush rainforests to freezing tundra's, from the depths of the oceans to the heights of our mountains, life surrounds us and amazes and humbles us. Our amazing photographers capture the beauty and complexity of Earth's creatures and landscapes.

Conservation in Action

This edition honors the unsung individuals who diligently protect our natural heritage. We tell the tales of people and organizations making a difference despite obstacles. Their determination shows that environmental conservation may lead to positive transformation.

Our Shared Duty

This magazine's readers value nature. We want you to consider your involvement in conservation's big story. Supporting conservation organizations, promoting awareness, or making sustainable lifestyle choices can help our planet.

Let us be inspired by nature's tenacity and beauty in these difficult times. We must also realize that our choices now affect our planet's future. We can preserve Earth's treasures for future generations by working together.

Thank you for celebrating wildlife and conservation with us. Let's encourage you to cherish, protect, and advocate for our amazing world.

Hermis Haridas & Nisha Purushothaman

Founders - PT Explorers



COVER STORY

Into The WILD

with ALISON BUTTIGIEG

Alison Buttigieg, an award-winning wildlife photographer, hails from Malta but has called Finland her home for more than 15 years.

Balancing her fervent pursuit of wildlife photography with a full-time role as an IT Project Manager, Alison's lens has taken her to remote corners of the globe. Her niche expertise lies in capturing the captivating lives of Africa's magnificent big cats.

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A hearty welcome to PT Explorers, Alison. We are super excited to have you here. Would you please introduce yourself to our readers?

I'm originally from Malta but have lived in Helsinki, Finland for over 15 years. I'm a tech program manager with a wild side - when I'm not navigating the complex and fast-paced world of technology, I love being out in the wilderness, camera in hand, waiting for the perfect shot of a stealthy wild cat. I enjoy the thrill and adventure of visiting remote wild places to capture photos of animals in their natural environment. I mostly focus on wild cats as they captivate me, and I have to prioritize my limited time in the field.

What made you become passionate about Wildlife Photography?

I grew up on a small island in the Mediterranean, where there was very little opportunity to see any wildlife. I used to love watching documentaries of faraway wild places, and I daydreamed of one day going on my own adventures to see all those places and the creatures that live there myself! Eventually when I grew up I met a very well-traveled gentleman who spent hours inspiring me with engaging stories of his travels and showing me his wonderful photographs. It suddenly dawned on me that I could make my childhood dreams a reality. So I bought myself a little bridge camera and started to travel to places I saw in the documentaries whenever I could. In the beginning I only took photos to capture and share memories with friends and family, but very soon I started to get very interested in photography and strived to learn more and improve. As social



media emerged as a potent storytelling platform, I realized that images of wild animals could ignite meaningful dialogues about conservation, so I dedicated myself even more to this craft.

As a Wildlife Photographer, how do you capture emotion and show the importance of conservation issues?

Capturing emotion in a wildlife photograph is a combination of patience, technical skills and also luck. After locating an animal and assessing the overall setting and light, I position myself and patiently wait for those moments with engaging facial expressions, body postures or interactions. It is critical that the focus is on the eyes, and I am working out ways to draw the viewer's eye to the subject in my compositions. I tend to use a lot of eye contact in my images to establish an emotional connection with the viewer. I also try to capture expressions and poses that are engaging. Through capturing the beauty and distinctive physical and behavioral traits of my subjects, I aim to emphasize what we stand to lose, and highlight that these magnificent sentient beings are the ones ultimately bearing the devastating consequences of our human activities and our failure to adequately protect them.

Do you have a favorite animal to photograph? Why?

I fell in love with Cheetahs from the moment I first set eyes on them as they are so elegant and graceful. Watching them run at full speed to catch prey is one of the most amazing things I

have witnessed in nature. I also have a soft spot for them because they are somewhat of an underdog - being the fastest land mammal on earth comes at the cost of strength, so most other predators are a threat to them and chase them off their kills and kill their cubs. They also have very interesting behavior. Mother cheetahs are very doting to their youngsters and fiercely brave when they need to defend them. Unrelated male cheetahs sometimes form coalitions, which increases their odds of survival and allows them to hunt and catch prey that would not be possible for a lone male. I also once witnessed a fully grown young male cheetah who had just been abandoned by its mother to fend for himself insinuate his way into another cheetah family with younger cubs. He lurked around the family with submissive posture until he was accepted and spent months living with them. I was there the moment they first met and it was fascinating!

Could you tell us about the tale behind your well-known cheetah kill photograph?

We were on a game drive in one of the conservancies in the Maasai Mara in Kenya way back in 2013, when we came across a cheetah family, a mother called Narasha and her two full grown offspring. They were trotting with purpose towards an impala. To our surprise the impala made no attempt to escape and the cheetahs literally walked up to it and the mother grabbed it by the neck, encouraging the younger ones to kill it as a teaching opportunity. On closer inspection of the images one can see a



© Alison Buttigieg





© Alison Buttigieg

few other bite marks on the neck, and after talking to an expert we concluded that most probably the impala had been already attacked before we arrived on the scene and escaped, and was probably in shock. The shock made it freeze in place, dulling the instinct to fight back or run away. This resulted in a unique photo, because the impala has such a dignified posture and seems to be looking directly at the camera. The photo eventually went viral with a false story attached to it, implying the impala sacrificed itself to save her fawns but this is totally untrue, and no animal would behave like that in the wild.

With your photographs, what are you hoping to communicate?

I always try to showcase the beauty and personality of the wonderful creatures I photograph to convey the message that animals are sentient. They form complex social bonds, navigate through the myriad challenges of survival, and raise their young against all odds with tender care that's beautifully universal. They have as much a right as us humans to live and share the planet with us.

What's the most elusive animal you've had to photographed and how did you meet that challenge?

For a very long time I wanted to photograph the Iberian Lynx, because they look so cool! However, up until recently they were teetering on the brink of extinction and very difficult to photograph, also due to their shy and elusive nature. In 2001 there were less than 100 individuals in the wild, and after intense conservation efforts in Spain and Portugal, in 2023 this number had risen to more than 1600. Ecotourism started to be used as one of the many incentives to protect the species and after some research I chose a location where I calculated I would have the best chance of photographing one. In the summer of 2023, I traveled to Central Spain to a manchego cheese farm where the Iberian Lynx was reintroduced some years ago in collaboration with local agencies and the WWF. There is now a healthy population of wild

Iberian Lynx. I spent 10 hours a day for 5 days in tiny hides waiting patiently in complete silence in the hope of seeing this iconic cat. One morning the stillness was broken by magpie alarm calls. From my research I knew that in this area, only one creature gets them this agitated. Adrenaline surging, I gripped my camera tighter and a few moments later I saw a shadow appear on the ground, then an Iberian Lynx emerged from behind the hide. My heart almost jumped out of my chest as another one trotted out from the same spot. They were a mother and her year-old offspring. I still cannot believe I got to see these elusive creatures that we came so close to losing forever.

Of all your wildlife photography experiences, what are some of your truly memorable moments?

The most memorable experience I had was undoubtedly in the south of Chile in Patagonia, in a park called Torres Del Paine and an adjacent estancia called Laguna Amarga. This area offers amazing opportunities to photograph pumas in some picturesque mountainous landscape. Wildlife photographers can follow and photograph pumas on foot - the pumas here have been protected for years, and the photography takes place extremely ethically so as not to put pressure on them.

As a result the pumas don't see humans as a threat, they see people as just another part of the landscape and completely ignore them. To hike in this remote terrain with its notoriously wild and unpredictable weather and be able to observe these pumas go around their daily business completely unfazed by our

presence is a memorable and exhilarating experience.

Where's your go-to photography location that you always go back to for photographing wildlife encounters?

I keep going back to East Africa, specifically the Mara-Serengeti area. As a wild cat lover with limited available time in the field this is the perfect destination as all the big cats are relatively easy to see, habituated to vehicles, and one also stands a good chance of seeing the smaller cat species: Serval, Caracal and Wild Cat. The landscape is also quintessential African and good for photography as it's very open.

Is there an animal that you are yet to photograph but would like to?

I have a long list of those, and my dream is to be able to photograph all of the wild cat species. Currently the Pallas's Cat is at the top of my list. I find their appearance very endearing, and I am intrigued by their unique behavior. I'm hoping to manage to photograph this awesome cat within the next few years.

What would you say to young girls who want to get into wildlife photography?

You can do anything you set your mind to do! Join forums, groups, or clubs that focus on wildlife photography. Engage with a community that shares your interest and where you can learn from others. Your photographs can be a voice for the voiceless. Use your platform and images to raise awareness about wildlife conservation and inspire others to care about the natural world.



© Alison Buttigieg



Can you give our readers your best wildlife photography tips?

The choice of location and the time of the year is crucial to be able to get the photos you want, I usually dedicate a lot of research to this. I want to ensure the odds of getting the photos I want are good. I also place a lot of importance in teaming up with knowledgeable guides who can help me find my target species and get me to the perfect position based on their knowledge of the area and animal behaviour. On a more technical level my best tip would be to not be afraid to shoot with high ISO. In many other photography disciplines this is discouraged, but wildlife photography is different as many interesting photographic opportunities present themselves at dawn and dusk. Nowadays there are some really good denoising software options to use, and they work really well to clean up the images.

In your belief, what poses the largest threat to wildlife conservation? As a photographer what can be done about it?

The threats to wildlife conservation is a multifaceted issue: there's habitat loss and fragmentation, poaching, climate change, pollution and human-wildlife conflict. But in essence it's about human behaviors and systems driven by socio-economic factors, and at its root cause is the increasing disconnection between humans and nature. As a photographer I strive to rekindle the connection between people and wildlife and also raise awareness about various conservation topics. Whenever wildlife photographers

visit national or private parks we are contributing economically and sending a message that animals are worth more alive. While this seems transactional, profit is the main reason many parks still exist, and many parks are always under pressure as entities want to re-purpose them for other endeavors such as farming, mining, building roads etc. We must also recognise that being in the wilderness is a privilege as there aren't many such areas left, especially with healthy animal populations. So wildlife photographers must always keep the welfare of the animals as their top priority and only engage in ethical activities without harassing the animals.

Some words of inspiration/ advice for young aspirants in this field?

In a world of social media where everyone's feed is highly curated, it might seem that wildlife photography is effortless and this might set some warped expectations. Many wildlife photographers who are at the start of their journey might feel discouraged that they are not getting the same results as they see online, or missing many shots. The reality is that behind many wildlife photos there are many hours of work (sometimes months and years) and often there's absolutely no result to show for it. There are also many failures compared to successes, especially in the beginning of a wildlife photographer's journey. But with each missed shot, there is a valuable lesson to be learned, and persistence is the most useful skill needed. The good news is that anyone can learn to be persistent! The most important thing of all is that you enjoy the experience in nature and the moments shared with the earth's beautiful creatures.



© Alison Buttigieg





CONSERVATION

The Hard Life Together, Reflections for An Urgent Change

By Adriana Claudia Sanz





Adriana is an Argentinian environmental magister and wildlife photographer. For more than 20 years, she has been dedicated to the care and protection of the natural environment.

She loves nature and photography. In her photos, she seeks to sensitize the viewer by calling to reflect on the environmental deterioration that grows day by day. In her photos, she combines art and nature, creating images that communicate her feelings while taking the photo.

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instagram.com/adrisanzphoto/**



© Adriana Claudia Sanz





The coasts of the province of Chubut, Patagonia, Argentina, are the only place in the world where continental breeding settlements of Elephant Seals (*Mirounga leonina*) exist.

Southern elephant seals are the largest pinnipeds. They show marked sexual dimorphism, with males having a noticeable trunk or proboscis, a distinguishing feature that gives them their name. Males also weigh up to 5 times more than females, reaching a weight of up to four tons. Their coat varies according to their age, being black at birth and silver-grey after their first moult at about two months of age. They spend most of their existence in the water, spending brief periods on land to breed and complete their annual moult. These times are the most vulnerable and occur from late winter to early summer.

At the end of winter, the males come ashore to form their harems, remaining fasting for the entire breeding season, which lasts about three months, during which time they lose more than 12 kg of weight per day. The harems are led by a dominant male who must fight daily with the others to maintain his dominance. On the periphery of the colony, there are other elephant seals that try to mate with the females, taking advantage of any carelessness of the dominant male, and often succeed. The females arrive a little later, between September and October, to give birth to a single calf, which was conceived in the previous season. The calves that are born in the shelter of their jealous mothers are suckled on demand for almost a month, after which they begin to become independent. It takes

another two months before the little elephant seals learn to swim and begin to forage in the ocean waters.

Their mothers become pregnant again while nursing. After weaning the young, they stay on shore for a while longer to moult. At this time, the new embryo is implanted, thus beginning the gestation of a new specimen that will culminate eleven months later. Once moulting is complete, they return to the sea to begin a new life cycle.

One of the most wonderful places to see and enjoy them is “Isla Escondida”, a continental beach located approximately 50 km south of the city of Rawson, the capital of the province of Chubut, which is also visited by tourists and local fishermen. Its name is due to the fact that it has a small island in front of it, which is hidden when the tide is high and covers it. This site is very accessible to everyone, it does not have any facilities or services for tourists, remaining almost in a wild state. Nor does it have any protected natural area status.

Living with visitors is often complex for elephant seals. Weekends are the most complicated days, as some families go with their pets, which have free reign and free access to the colonies, annoying adults and pups alike. Added to this is the waste that they leave abandoned everywhere when they return to their homes and the excessive and unlimited traffic with ATVs, vehicles that access absolutely all sectors of the beach, circulating rapidly just a few meters from the pups and sometimes inside the colonies. But the saddest thing happened,



© Adriana Claudia Sanz





in my case, one night, when fishermen were pulling their boats out of the water, crushing two hatchlings with their nautical trailer.

In addition to the aforementioned impact produced by visitors, there is also the addition of tons of plastic waste from the fishing industry's boats. Boxes used to stow the catch, containers where the bisulfite that inhibits the shrimp's melanosis processes is transported, nets, ropes, gloves, and other elements used in the process of catching the resource, fall into the sea and are dragged to the coast and deposited on the beaches.

This scenario has brought together several environmental organizations, which, coordinated by the "Forum for the Conservation of the Patagonian Sea and Areas of Influence" and with the financial support of the European Economic Community, are developing the project "Strengthening the Resilience of Argentina's marine protected areas", where one of the four axes to be carried out is the reduction of fishing plastics accumulated on the beaches of Chubut.

The objective of this line of action is not only to address the cleaning and recovery of the coasts but also to carry out in-depth work aimed at improving the production processes carried out on fishing vessels, in order to avoid the loss or dumping of plastic material into the sea. These actions can only be carried out with the support of workers, employers, and public administrators of the resource and the environment.

In addition, several NGOs are also working together with provincial institutions to resolve the coexistence of tourists and fishermen in the area where the colonies are located, aiming at the creation of a new coastal protected area



that functions seasonally and has periods of inaccessibility during the reproductive season.

The ecosystem value of these colonies along the coast of Chubut is enormous and their care should be a priority for everyone. That is why this article shows images that tell the day-to-day life of the elephant seals during the months they stay on land and the state of the beaches where they moult and reproduce, trying to raise awareness in the whole community so that they become aware of the tremendous ecological impact that every action we take has on them. As a nature photographer, I have the responsibility to show the beauty and fragility of ecosystems and their populations, and the importance of empathy and protection of all forms of life, calling to reflect on our behavior.

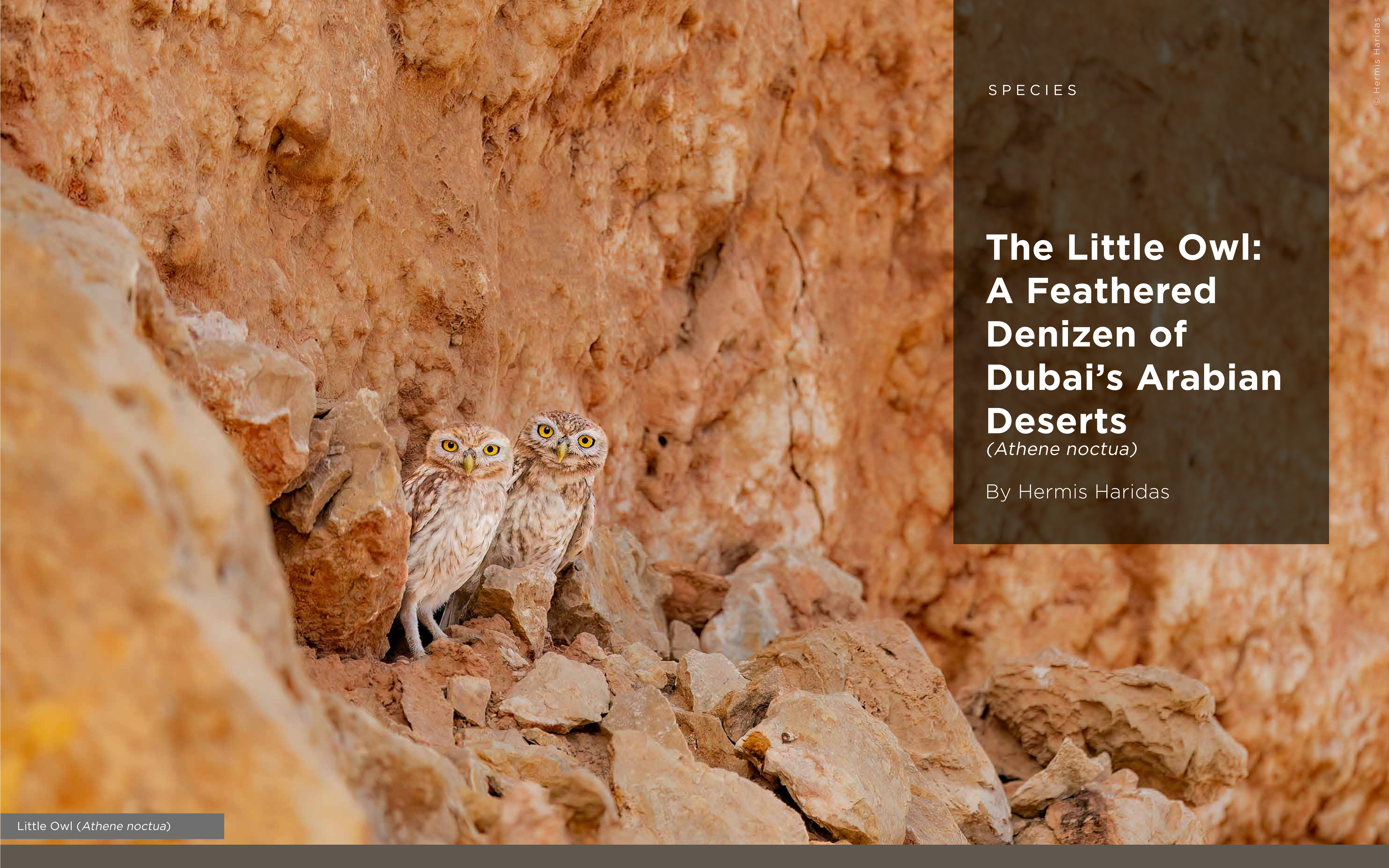
A friendly coexistence with the rest of the species that surround us, based on respect and love, is possible and necessary. As a society, we must make an urgent paradigm shift that recognizes that all living beings have the right to live in a healthy environment, the same one we conceive for ourselves. Destroying nature destroys us as a society. Change is possible and depends on the commitment of each one of us.

The images are devastating, but we believe that they show a reality that we can all reverse in the short term by joining forces, assuming responsibilities, and understanding that the world is one and that the only way to continue living in it is by developing our recreational and productive activities in harmony with the rest of the living beings.



© Adriana Claudia Sanz





SPECIES

The Little Owl: A Feathered Denizen of Dubai's Arabian Deserts

(Athene noctua)

By Hermis Haridas



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

His work with Paws Trails and Mara Trails Camp demonstrates his commitment to preserving nature and supporting communities in need. With an unwavering passion for the wild, he has spent countless hours in the wilderness, patiently waiting for the perfect shot and documenting the untamed wonders of nature. Through his enthralling images, Hermis not only spreads knowledge and creates awareness about the need of protecting animals, but he also encourages others to explore the world in order to appreciate and preserve the planet's unique biodiversity.

[instagram.com/hermis.haridas/](https://www.instagram.com/hermis.haridas/)

Introduction

The Middle East is a region of enchanting diversity, where ancient traditions meet modernity, and its arid landscapes hold secrets of unique biodiversity. Among the many fascinating species that call this region



Little Owl (*Athene noctua*)



Little Owl (*Athene noctua*)



Little Owl (*Athene noctua*)

home, the Little Owl (*Athene noctua*) stands out as a symbol of resilience and adaptation. This small, captivating bird has made its habitat in the harsh Arabian deserts, particularly around Dubai, and has intrigued ornithologists and nature enthusiasts alike with its charming presence and remarkable survival in an unforgiving environment. In this comprehensive document, we will delve into the life and habitat of the Little Owl in Dubai's Arabian deserts, exploring its behavior, ecological significance, conservation status, and the cultural aspects associated with this charismatic species.

I. Taxonomy and Description

The Little Owl belongs to the family Strigidae, a group of owls commonly referred to as “typical owls.” It is scientifically classified as *Athene noctua*. This species is characterized by its small size, standing at around 21-23 centimeters (8-9 inches) in height, with a wingspan of approximately 53-58 centimeters (21-23 inches). Little Owls have distinctive features, including a round head, flattened facial disc, and large, piercing yellow eyes. Their plumage varies in coloration but often consists of a mix of mottled gray and brown feathers, which serve as effective camouflage in their desert habitat.

II. Habitat and Distribution

The Little Owl's habitat extends across a vast range, spanning parts of Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. In the Middle East, it can be found in various countries, including Saudi Arabia, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates, with Dubai serving as a significant location for its



Little Owl (*Athene noctua*)



presence in the region.

Dubai's Arabian deserts offer a unique and challenging environment for the Little Owl. These deserts are characterized by vast stretches of arid dunes, sparse vegetation, and extreme temperature fluctuations. Despite these harsh conditions, the Little Owl has adapted to survive in this unforgiving landscape.

III. Behavior and Adaptations

A. Nocturnal Lifestyle: The Little Owl is primarily nocturnal, which means it is most active during the night. This behavior allows it to avoid the scorching daytime temperatures of the desert and hunt when prey is more abundant.

B. Diet: These owls are opportunistic predators, feeding on a variety of small creatures. Their diet may include insects, small mammals, birds, and even reptiles. Their ability to adapt their diet to the availability of prey in the desert is a testament to their resilience.

C. Nesting and Roosting: Little Owls are cavity nesters, often utilizing natural hollows in rocks or abandoned burrows for nesting sites. They are known to be territorial birds, fiercely defending their nesting locations. In the desert, they often choose well-hidden locations that provide protection from the harsh climate.

D. Camouflage: The Little Owl's plumage, with its mottled gray and brown colors, helps it blend seamlessly into its surroundings. This camouflage serves as a crucial defense against predators, such as larger birds of prey, during the daytime.



Little Owl (*Athene noctua*)

© Hermis Haridas





Little Owl (*Athene noctua*)

Little Owl (*Athene noctua*)



IV. Ecological Significance

The Little Owl plays a vital role in the desert ecosystem, serving as both a predator and prey species. By hunting small mammals and insects, they help control population numbers of potential pests. Additionally, they provide a food source for larger predators, contributing to the overall balance of the ecosystem.

Furthermore, their presence in the desert serves as an indicator of the habitat's health. Any changes in the population of Little Owls can indicate shifts in the local ecosystem and may signal potential environmental concerns.

V. Conservation Status

As a species, the Little Owl is classified as of “Least Concern” by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). However, it's essential to note that local populations may face different challenges, particularly in urbanized areas like Dubai, where habitat destruction and urban expansion threaten their natural habitats.

Conservation efforts in Dubai are crucial to ensure the continued survival of the Little Owl. These efforts may include protecting natural habitats, establishing artificial nesting sites, and raising awareness among the public about the importance of preserving this unique bird species.

VI. Cultural Significance

The Little Owl holds a special place in the hearts of the people in the Middle East, and it is often associated with folklore and traditions. Its presence in the region's deserts has inspired a rich tapestry of



stories and beliefs.

In some cultures, the Little Owl is seen as a symbol of wisdom and protection, a harbinger of good fortune and a guardian of the night. It is also mentioned in ancient literature and poetry, celebrating its unique character and resilience in a harsh environment.

Conclusion

The Little Owl's presence in Dubai's Arabian deserts is a testament to the adaptability and tenacity of nature. In the midst of harsh conditions and arid landscapes, this captivating bird has carved out a niche for itself, thriving despite the challenges it faces.

As we explore the life, habitat, behavior, ecological significance, conservation status, and cultural aspects associated with the Little Owl in the Arabian deserts of Dubai, we gain a deeper appreciation for the delicate balance of life in this unique ecosystem. This bird's ability to adapt and persevere in such challenging surroundings underscores the importance of preserving the fragile deserts of the Middle East and the remarkable species that call them home. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that the Little Owl continues to thrive in this captivating region for generations to come.

© Hermis Haridas



Little Owl (*Athene noctua*)





CUB'S CORNER

NATURE THROUGH MY EYES

Vidyun R Hebbar



©Vidyun R Hebbar

CUB'S CORNER

CUB'S CORNER



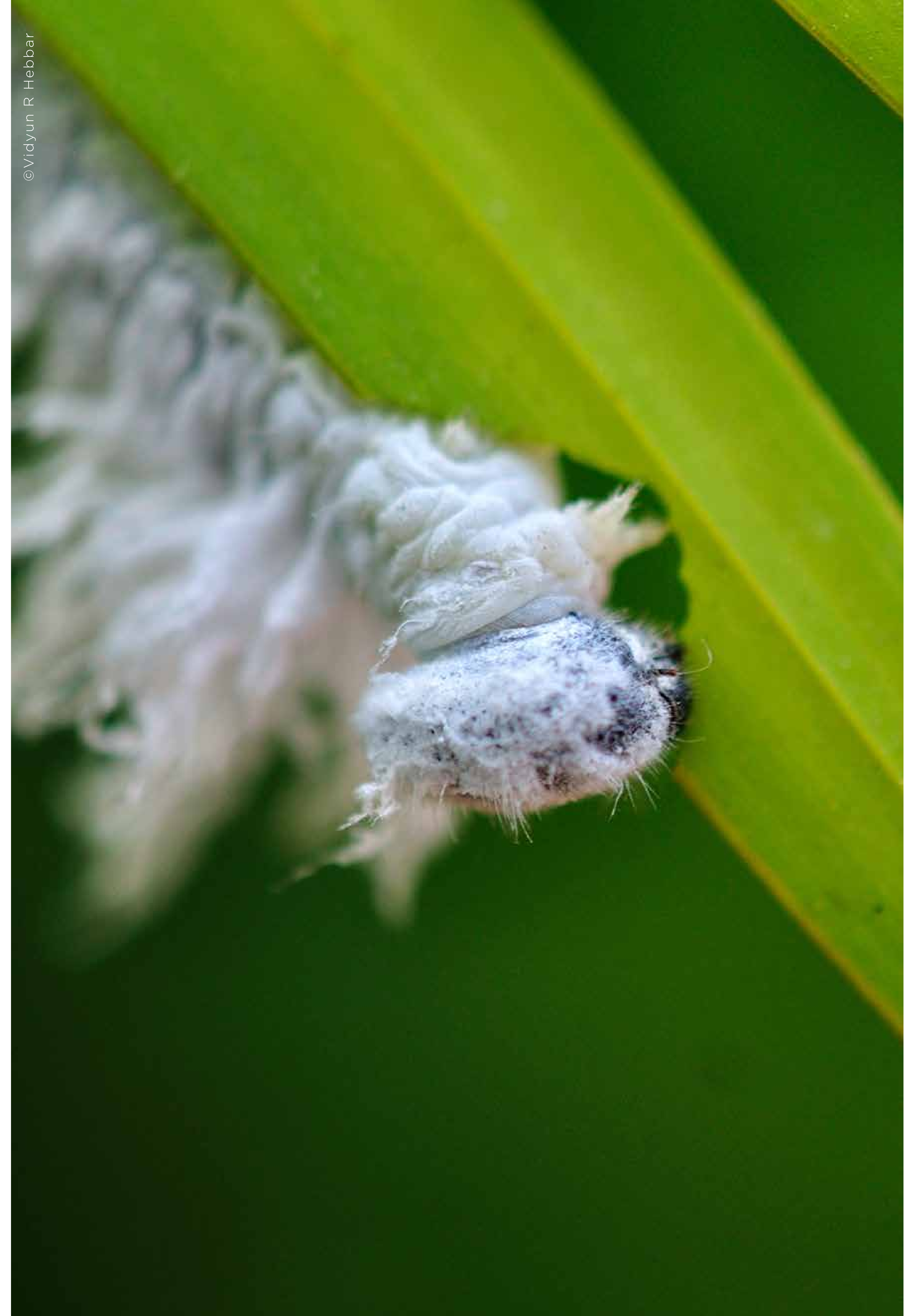
Vidyun R Hebbar is India's first "Young Wildlife Photographer of The Year" award winner. He is a 12-year-old boy from Bangalore who is passionate about macro and street photography. In addition to his photography interests, he also enjoys reading, collecting stones, and 3D penning.

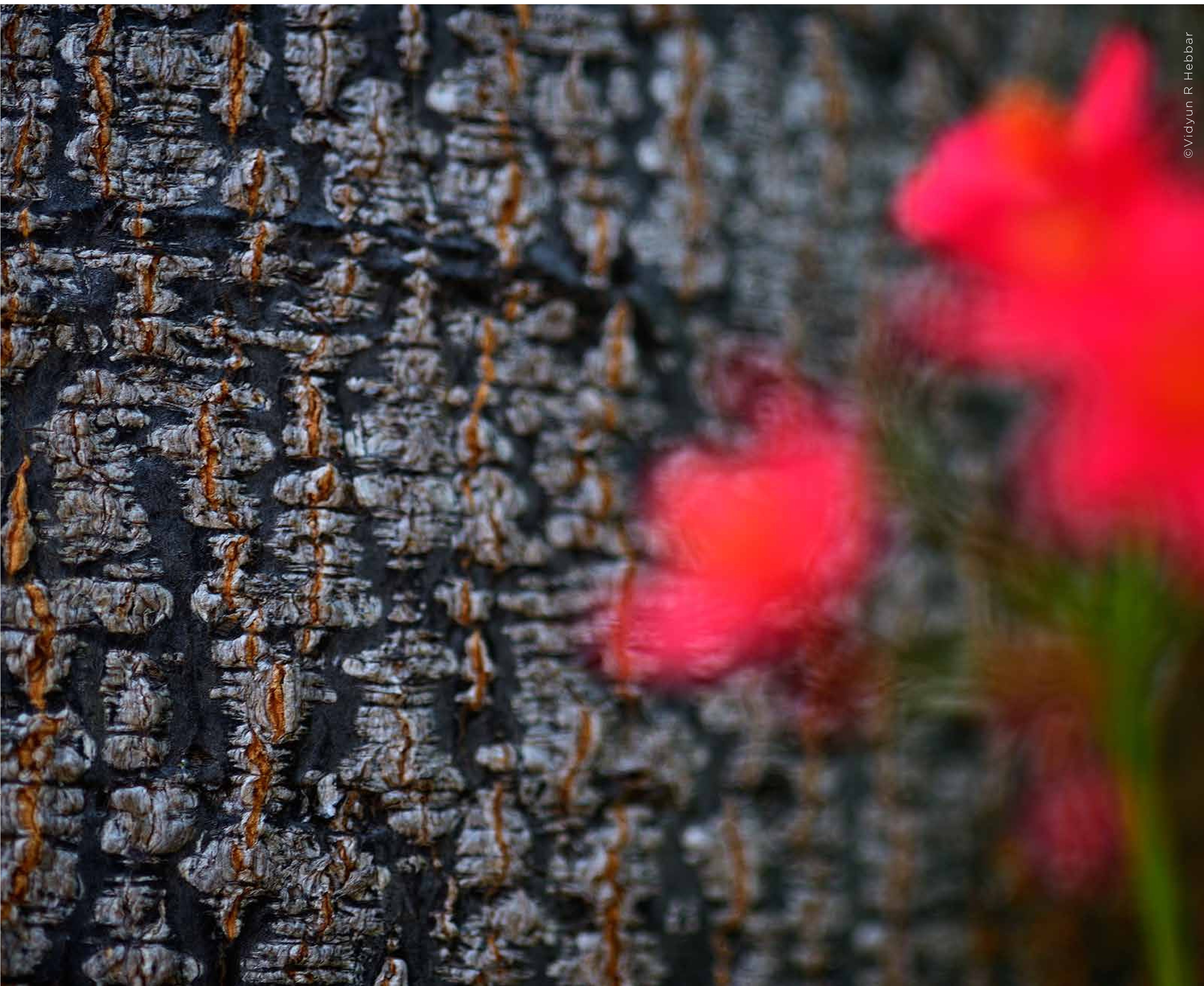
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I took my first photo when I was only three years old. My first photo was of him! I started clicking photos when my father gifted me his camera, which is a Nikon D5000 with an 85 mm macro lens. My father is also a macro photographer, and the category winner of amphibians and reptiles in WPY 2014. Like my father, I got Interested in the mesmerizing world of Insects and spiders. My father and I started to go to nearby parks to learn more about macro photography when I was six years old.

So our Photographic Safaris were not to jungles but to various gardens in our neighborhood. We also did photography in and around our native, Sringeri, Karnataka. In one of those interesting expeditions, I found a sunbathing lizard

©Vidyun R Hebbar





when we were about to return. Since I was tired, my father suggested that I sit inside our car and capture this magical shot. It has always been one of my favourite images.

I have learned many creative tricks and techniques from the mentors of the Creative Nature Photography forum. I regularly post my images and the experienced mentors comment on their views and suggestions. CNP is my greatest inspiration.

We went out one night to capture subjects lit by the humongous lights of the gopuram. Unfortunately that day, the lights were switched off. On the way back home, I noticed the raindrops on the windows looked very artistic when they were lit by a streetlight. This is how I captured two of my favourite images.

During the reign of Covid-19, we spotted a Wagtail just beside our apartment where there is an empty parking lot. During the break in my online classes, I used to go out to capture the wagtail playing with its reflection in the mirrors of trucks and cars. Once, we parked our car outside and camped inside just to capture the wagtail from inside the car. It even went atop the sunroof!

I used to see my father capture images with urban elements in the background. I also wanted to try something similar. I found a tent spider in a park that has upcycled art pieces installed. Along with my father, I tried capturing this spider with various moving vehicles in the background. Out of the hundreds of images I captured that day, only a handful of them were focused and had a good background. I loved this image because it has two very bold colours and also the intricate patterns of the web are in focus.

This image brought me the Young Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2021 and the Category Winner of 10 Years and under awards. I was not expecting this award, but I am very thrilled to have this title. Through this award, I got an opportunity to interact with great photographic personalities like Chris Packham, and Megan Mccubbin I aspire to continue and learn more about macro photography.

I am thankful to the mentors of CNP and my parents for their guidance that has helped me achieve this.





















Her Views & VISUALS

By Naomi Méndez



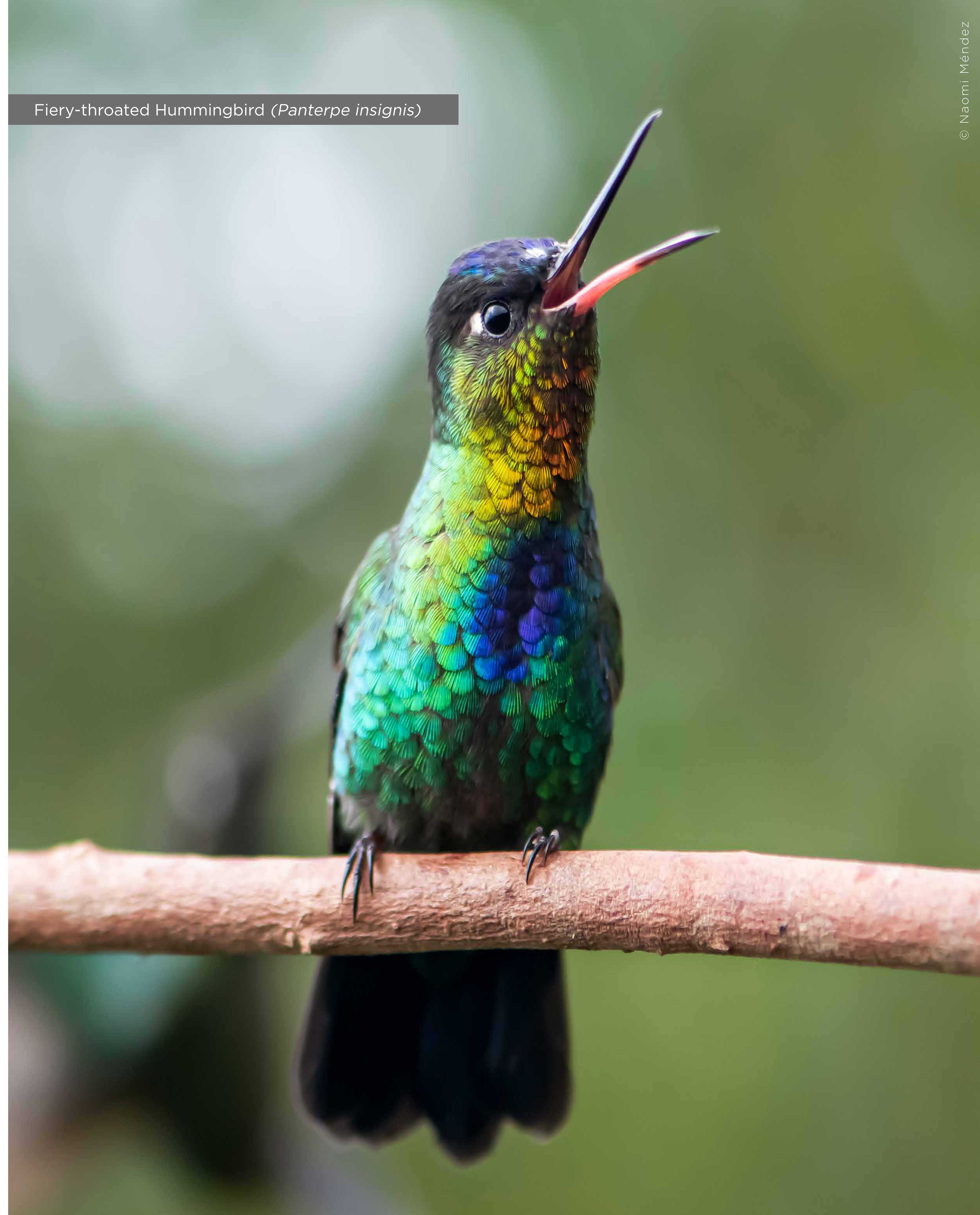
Fleischmann's Glass Frog (*Hyalinobatrachium fleischmanni*)



Naomi Méndez, is a Costa Rican naturalist photographer, who loves nature and she especially likes macro photography. She practices photography as a hobby, however, she aspires to get involved in environmental education and conservation projects.

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

Her Views and Visuals



Fiery-throated Hummingbird (*Panterpe insignis*)



Blue-sided Leaf Frog (*Agalychnis annae*)

How did your interest in wildlife arise?

Since I was a child, I felt attracted to nature, I loved watching documentaries about animals around the world and I dreamed of one day being able to have that approach to them.

I remember being very observant with the animals that I could see in my yard, any tiny colorful insect seemed fascinating to me, as well as the farm animals that were in my house, such as ducks, chickens and horses. In addition, I lived a large part of my childhood and adolescence in a rural town with beautiful mountains, so I was surrounded by nature.

I also remember that my dad bought me educational books about animals, both from Costa Rica and from other countries. I could spend hours looking at the photos and illustrations and learning everything about them.

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

Costa Rica is a country full of wildlife, so when I turned 19 I really started to get to know it. I visited beaches, mountains, volcanoes and everything that Costa Rica offers. The more contact with nature I had, more I wanted to always be there and capture all those beautiful details of our fauna, flora and fungi.

For me, being surrounded by nature is happiness and tranquility, since it makes me feel more in touch with mother earth; the sound of the wind and the birds around me is truly inspiring and even more so when I can capture all those moments with my camera.

The photos that I take are mainly of reptiles and amphibians. This is because in addition of being wonderful and interesting animals, I felt that I had to help take care of them. As we all know, snakes have been killed for a long time due to religious beliefs, myths or fear. However, people should know that like other animals, these reptiles have a very important role in nature and it is up to us to take care of them.

As for amphibians, they are one of the most threatened animals by climate change and human activities such as the alteration and loss of habitat in general, intensified agriculture, grazing and urbanization.

It is interesting, because when you start in the world of wildlife photography you learn more about animals. In my case, mainly snakes, I studied them in a self-taught way to get to know them better, be aware of their habits and even perfectly identify them by knowing the genus, species, the poisonous and non-poisonous. It became a hobby and the more I learned about them, the more I wanted to be closer to them and take pictures to show the great beauty they possess.

Where I currently live, together with my boyfriend, we saw the need to generate environmental education with the photos, since, despite being a much more urbanized area, encounters with wildlife are common, especially snakes and frogs, because we are very close to two important protected areas, which are part of the last remnants of forest in this part of the country.



Canopy Lizard (*Polychrus gutturosus*)



Fly Agaric (*Amanita muscaria*)

© Naomi Méndez



Tico Salamander (*Bolitoglossa tica*)

So, we have held different talks in our communities, mainly about snakes, since our objective is to prevent these reptiles from being killed, due to misinformation or fear. Additionally, spreading awareness about the species that inhabit these forests and teaching people to identify them.

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

The conservation of nature is something that all human beings should do, we depend on it and it is our responsibility to protect it.

Photography has become one of my greatest passions and part of my goals is for people to know and learn about nature, create awareness and so more and more people join in caring for Mother Earth. I think that photographers not only should focus on taking the best photo, but also, share an important message with it. I faithfully believe that a photo can create many sensations and reach many hearts; photography is one of the key tools for environmental education.

There is a very common phrase that says: “we do not take care of what we do not know”. Many people have no idea of everything that surrounds us and it is extremely important that through our photographs, we make known the importance of maintaining a natural balance.

As I mentioned before, photography is a means to generate environmental



Side-striped Palm-pit Viper (*Bothriechis lateralis*)

education and begin to change the negative visions that many people have about snakes and other animals. Learning to live with them is of the utmost importance.

Currently in Costa Rica it has become more common that people who own farms, want to reforest and regenerate the forest, because thanks to photographs and education they have realized that it is better to have the different species of animals alive and promote ecological tourism, where both photographers and nature lovers visit the place and thus create a positive impact on nature conservation.

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

When we venture into wildlife photography, we have to keep in mind that the weather conditions are not always going to be perfect for the photo. It may rain, it may be very cold or otherwise it may be very hot and those conditions difficult to take the photo we want. We always have to be prepared for adverse conditions that come our way.

Another important issue is to know the species of animals found in the area that we are going to visit. Studying about them before the trip is an excellent idea since it will help us to know about their habits and thus have a better chance of finding them.

Regarding the configuration, it will always depend if we are taking a day or night

© Naomi Méndez

Side-striped Palm-pit Viper (*Bothriechis lateralis*)





Eyelash Viper (*Bothriechis schlegelii*)



Eyelash Viper Oropel (*Bothriechis schlegelii*)



Blotched Palm-pit Viper (*Bothriechis supraciliaris*)

photo, and how much light we have available. However, in my opinion, the manual mode should always be used, since we have more control of all the values for our desired photo.

In macro photography, the use of external flash with diffusers is extremely important since it will help us with focus and better photo quality in every way.

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

One of my dreams is to photograph different animals around the world in their natural habitat, to get to know all the nature that planet earth has, and I would also like to be part of a great environmental education and conservation project.

In addition, of course to continue publicizing the natural wealth of Costa Rica through my photos.

Tell us something about the gears you use.

The equipment I use is a Nikon D5600 camera, mainly with a 105 macro lens. I also use external flashes with diffusers.



Ghost Glass Frog (*Sachatamia ilex*)



Rattlesnake (*Crotalus simus*)



Sylvia's Tree Frog (*Cruziohyla sylviae*)



Coronated Tree Frog (*Triprion spinosus*)

THROUGH THE LENS

A Journey Through Córdoba Province

By Serafín Robert Horst



Black Skimmer (*Rynchops niger*)

THROUGH THE LENS

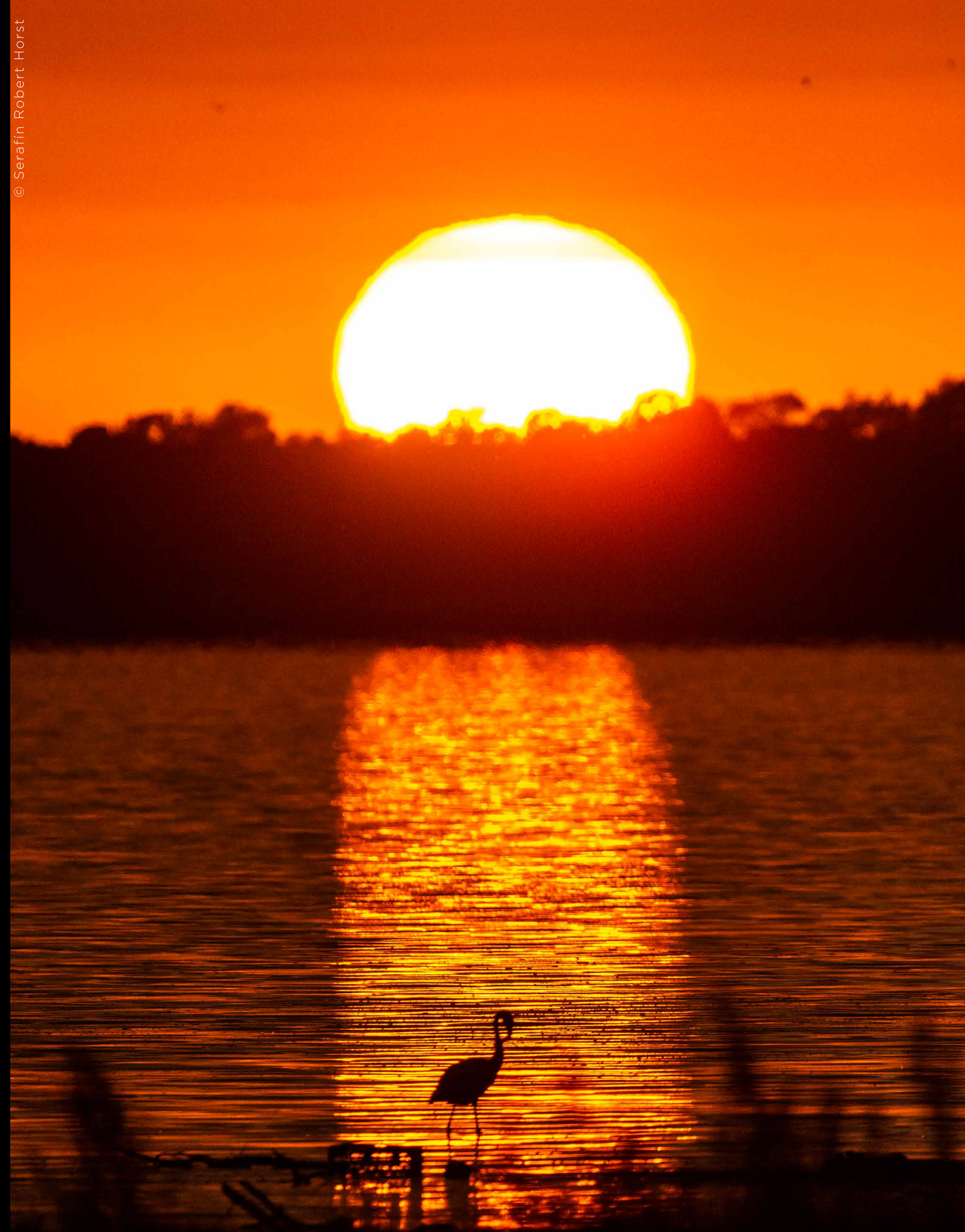


When Serafin Robert Horst was 11 years old, he discovered the wonderful world of birds and started to photograph them. For the last eight years, he has spent his free time studying and practicing wildlife photography in Argentina. His objective is, through photos, offer sensations and experiences to the viewer, to show the beauty of the natural world and pass on the desire to preserve it.

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Córdoba Province has something that makes it very special —the great variety of environments that you can find within just a few kilometres. At the same time, this allows us to observe many different species of birds and kinds of animals and enjoy amazing landscapes without needing to travel very many hours. What I'll do here, is offer you a journey through my province, Córdoba, by sharing experiences I've had doing wildlife photography.

I'm going to start at my favorite place —Pampa de Achala. This environment is located at 2000msnm (6,500 ft), west of the Capital City of Córdoba. The huge, humid ravines between high grasslands make it a magic place to enjoy peacefulness and fresh air. Also, the rock formations and the mountain streams are beautiful for composing images.



© Serafin Robert Horst

Chilean Flamingo (*Phoenicopeterus chilensis*)



Yellow-billed Teal (*Anas flavirostris*)



Chilean Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus chilensis*)

Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*)

Among the birds of this area, the most remarkable is the Andean Condor (*Vultur gryphus*). With 3 meters (almost 10 ft) of wingspread, it's an incredible experience to watch it soar in the wind. Birds like the Meadowlark (*Leistes loyca*) or the Chiguanco Thrush (*Turdus chiguanco*) are also easy to find. There are several endemic species in this area. One of them is the Olrog's Cinclodes (*Cinclodes olrogii*), a beautiful bird that feeds in the streams that run through the mountains. Another endemic species is the Achala Lizard (*Pristidactylus achalensis*). This amazing reptile can be seen all Summer and Spring, at midday, sunbathing on the rocks. The Red Fox (*Licalopex culpaeus smithersi*) is another characteristic species of the Achala Grasslands. And of course, I must mention the Puma (*Puma concolor*), the Ghost of the Mountains.

A beautiful place to visit in Pampa de Achala is the Quebrada del Condorito National Park. This park has a trail that guides us to a huge gorge and the Condoritos River that runs between the high walls of rock. A nice opción is to camp on the grounds and photograph the starry sky and the Milky Way at night.

The next stop on our journey, is Laguna Mar Chiquita or Mar de Ansenuza, northeast of the province. Recently named National Park, this is the biggest salty lagoon of Argentina, and year after year it's the resting place of thousands of migratory birds like James' and Andean Flamingos (*Phoenicoparrus jamesi* and *andinus*) and many other shorebirds —Phalarope (*Phalaropus tricolor*), Sandpipers (*Calidris*), etc. With more than 300 species of birds observed, I



Ferruginous Pygmy-Owl (*Glaucidium brasilianum*)



Crested Hornero (*Furnarius cristatus*)

would consider this one of the best places of the country for nature photography. Herons, Flamingos, Blackbirds, Sandpipers, Black Skimmers, Swans and all kinds of passerines are common to sight. The photographic possibilities are practically infinite. No doubt, one of the best possible sunsets is to watch the sun hide behind the sea between the dead trees and the pink Flamingos that feed on the shore only a few feet away.

One of the best experiences that I've had doing bird photography, was with the Black Skimmers (*Rynchops niger*). These amazing birds feed early in the morning and at sunset. They do so by skimming the surface of the water with their long bill, and when they find a fish, they close it quickly. To photograph them, I made a hidro-hide and got into the water with them. After a few hours, when they grew more confident, I was able to enjoy observing their behavior and took fantastic pictures from a distance of just a few feet, until the sun hid behind the horizon. Being in the water, I had the opportunity to photograph other birds like Flamingos, Herons and Black-Winged Stilts, from the unique point of view that the hidrohide offers.

Another very biodiverse environment that we can find at Mar de Ansenusa are the reed beds. These are the home of an incredible amount of birds —like Crakes, Blackbirds, Wren-like Rushbird, Many-colored Rush-tyrant and even the beautiful Scarlet-



© Serafin Robert Horst

Black-crested Finch (*Lophospingus pusillus*)



White Quebracho (*Aspidosperma quebracho-blanco*)



Vultur Gryphus (*Andean Condor*)

Long-tailed Meadowlark (*Leistes loyca*)

headed Blackbird. But shooting photos in the reed beds isn't easy, because they are usually very thick and hard to walk through because of the mud or water, and the birds tend to hide deep inside. Even so, it's fun to spend hours trying.

On the west side of Córdoba Province, there is a Reserve called Chancaní, that protects the beautiful "Monte Chaqueño". This environment refers to a dry climate forest characteristic of a large area of central South America. Here in Chancaní, we can find huge centenary species of trees that have been preserved from clearance. The Reserve is rough and wild, perfect if we want to totally disconnect from everyday life, and deeply connect with nature.

To reach the camping area, we must travel along a road that meanders between mountains, through the Taninga Tunnels. There, we can enjoy an incredible panoramic view of the sea of trees in the valley, with the Condors flying close to us. This road is special because it runs through several dark tunnels that go right through the mountain. Further on, it descends to the valley and plunges into the impressive forest and the Reserve. Walking among the gigantic Algarrobos and Quebrachos and contemplating their beauty surrounded by kilometres and kilometres of forest, is an uncomparable and delightful experience. On cold Winter mornings, the birds gather

together in mixed flocks made up of many different species —Ringed Warbling Finch, Cinnamon Warbling Finch (*Microspingus*), Black-crested Finch (*Lophospingus pusillus*), Red-crested Finch (*Coryphospingus cucullatus*), Golden-billed Saltator (*Saltator*), Black-legged Seriema (*Chunga burmeisteri*), Scimitar-billed Woodcreeper (*Drymornis*) and Woodpeckers (*Colaptes*, *Dryocopus*, etc). The Reserve also protects a great diversity of mammals like foxes, skunks, deers, wild cats, tuco-tucos, pumas and many species of snakes. At night, the sky is covered with stars and the sounds of the forest fill the silence. The mythical Chaco Owl (*Strix chacoensis*) hunts for roedents in the moonlight and the foxes watch us from the darkness.

Near the Reserve, Traslasierra National Park (Pinas) has been recently founded. Having a similar environment, it also protects a large area of natural wildlife for us to enjoy. Close by, we can visit a very small town called Chancaní. If necessary, we can buy supplies here for our stay at the camp.

In the afternoon, the sun slowly falls behind the trees, highlighting their silhouettes sharply against the orange sky, and we can start to feel the cool night air while making the fire before sleeping.

Córdoba is a wonderful province, full of unique places to enjoy and plunge into nature, and I feel fortunate to live here.







Southamerican Fox (*Lycalopex culpaeus*)



Subtropical Doradito (*Pseudocolopteryx acutipennis*)



Olrog's Cinclodes (*Cinclodes olrogi*)

TRAVELOGUE

Reptile Watching in Argentina

By Arthur Diesel Abegg

Photos by Alexandre Ferreira Righi
& Leandro Malta Borges



Figure 1 - Cabrera's Whiptail (*Contomastix celata*)

TRAVELOGUE



Arthur has always been fascinated by natural environments, and his earliest memories are always related to an animal. He is the author of books and scientific articles on amphibians and reptiles. He also has a master’s degree in Zoology from the University of São Paulo. Even when he is off duty, his hobbies are related to discovering different landscapes throughout South America and finding and observing reptiles in the wild.

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South America’s complex history, along with its diverse topography and climate, has given rise to an exceptionally diverse herpetofauna—as noted by the renowned North American herpetologist William Duellman. Argentina is the country that best summarizes this statement. From the tedious straight roads of the temperate grasslands near the Río de la Plata to the winding curves along the Andes Mountains, Argentine landscapes offer a

unique natural mosaic in the Southern Hemisphere. The species composition of reptiles, which are generally habitat specialists, naturally changes at the same pace. Could there be a better setting for three Brazilian herpetologists fascinated by observing and photographing wildlife?

Departing from Buenos Aires, our first stop was approximately 500 km to the southwest, in the village of Sierra de La



© Alexandre Ferreira Righi

Figure 2 - Sierra de la Ventana



Figure 3 - William S Marked Gecko (*Homonota williamsii*)



Figure 4 - Darwin's Tree Lguana (*Liolaemus darwini*)



© Leandro Malta Borges

Figure 5 - South American Marked Gecko (*Homonota horrida*)

Ventana. There, we were able to discover a geological formation, homonymous to the village, which emerges abruptly from the Pampean plains*, and whose origin dates back to the Precambrian period, around 2.2 billion years ago. Much older than the Andes themselves, therefore. In this location, our main goal was to find the rare and endangered Casuhatien Anole (*Pristidactylus casuhatiensis*), a beautiful greenish lizard endemic* to the Ventania mountain chain. Despite our efforts over three days, we did not find any trace of this species. However, we did not leave without being rewarded by beautiful images of the landscape (Figure 2) and other species of lizards, such as the Cabrera's Whiptail (*Contomastix celata*) and the William's Marked Gecko (*Homonota williamsi*) (Figures 1 and 3)

Heading southwest for about 500 km, we enter a region with a semi-arid climate, in the municipality of General Roca. Semi-arid regions have specific ecological features that vary between those of humid and desert climates. They often have low rainfall rates—but not as low as those of a desert climate. Due to our limited time, and to escape the high noon heat, we only carried out a few hours of searches for reptiles in this location, during the late afternoon and evening. At the end of the afternoon, among the shrubby vegetation—with thorns of all imaginable sizes—, some individuals of Darwin's Tree Iguana (*Liolaemus darwini*) were crawling (Figure 4). Fast and with complete visual affinity to the environment, getting good pictures of them was really challenging. At night, the swift *Liolaemus* lizards gave way to the slow and patient South American Marked



Figure 6 - Tarantula (*Grammostola* sp)



Figure 7 - Villa Pehuenia



Figure 8 - Thin Tree Iguana (*Liolaemus tenuis*)



Figure 9 - Chilean Tree Iguana (*Liolaemus chiliensis*)

Geckos (*Homonota horrida*); equally charming, they were much easier to photograph (Figure 5). Finally, the night was crowned with the observation of a predation event, something always difficult to see in the field. In this battle of venomous arthropods, the Tarantula (*Grammostola* sp.) defeated its rival, a Yellow Scorpion (*Brachistosternus* sp.) (Figure 6).

We continued our journey towards the west. Traveling for just over 300 km and climbing more than 1000 m in altitude, we arrive at the municipality of Aluminé, more specifically at Villa Pehuenia, located in the Cordillera de Los Andes. There, closer to Chile than most other Argentine cities, the environment was also completely different from what we had seen before: the Villa Pehuenia is situated in the middle of a transition between Montane grasslands and Temperate broadleaf and mixed forests, with the stunning presence of large lakes and snowy hills, with a very beautiful appearance (Figure 7). As if in an attempt to match the beauty of the environment, the lizard fauna that we observe in the place is dominated by a particularly admirable species. It was not necessary to walk for thousands of meters to start finding specimens of the Thin Tree Iguana (*Liolaemus tenuis*). This skinny lizard is only found in that region of Argentina. It presents an outstanding combination of smooth sparkling scales, alternating greenish and bluish tones, from the anterior to the posterior region of the body (Figure 8). With a less striking color—although also beautiful—and a robust body covered with keeled scales, the Chilean Tree Iguana (*Liolaemus*



© Leandro Malta Borges

Figure 10 - High Mountain Lizard (*Phymaturus verdugo*)

chiliensis) (Figure 9) also brought us great joy by revealing its presence amidst the dense undergrowth.

Our next destination would be the town of Bardas Blancas. We drove for about 350 km northeastward and entered the province of Mendoza. Before starting the search for reptiles, we crossed the Paso Pehuenche, a customs house located between the department of Malargüe, in Argentina, and the province of Talca, in Chile. After fulfilling our legal obligations and receiving very good service, we mentioned to the customs inspectors the reason for our being there—to find and photograph a High Mountain Lizard (*Phymaturus verdugo*). The High Mountain Lizards are notable lizards for their herbivorous diet and flattened body in the dorsal-ventral direction, with spiny scales on the tail. They are found on the eastern and western slopes of the Andes, always in rocky places, where they shelter between rock crevices. In other words, in order to obtain good images, we would have to be sneaky to the point of preventing the lizards from escaping into a crevice. The reason behind this is, because of their flattened body, High Mountain Lizards are able to access deep caves in the rocks, making their observation unfeasible. We stopped the car on the edge of a stony hill and started searching. We noticed a considerable amount of lizard feces, which gave us immediate liveliness. It didn't take long for us to find the first two individuals. Faster than us, however, they dispersed into nearby crevices, and we didn't get a single image. But, as luck usually smiles on those who insist, we were successful on the third one. We saw the lizard a few

meters away while basking in the sun (Figure 10). We approached slowly, without scaring it (unlike what we had done in previous encounters) and finally we were able to get great pictures of this beautiful reptile with a black head, greenish body, and yellow tail (Figure 11). With our mission accomplished, we returned through Paso Pehuenche. Surprisingly, the customs inspectors were waiting for us anxiously, curious to know if we had succeeded in finding that lizard. We tell them about the adventure, show some pictures taken and continue our journey.

After the first rewarding glimpses of the trip, we arrived at the Reserva Natural Villavicencio, located approximately 320 km northeast of Bardas Blancas. The reserve covers just over 60,000 hectares, among which three environments can be identified: Monte, Cardonal, and Puna, all composed mainly of grasslands and mountain scrub, with a very dry appearance. Despite the 21 species of reptiles found at the site, we were focused on finding the peculiar Patagonian Lancehead (*Bothrops ammodytoides*), the most southernly distributed snake species in the world. Although we were unable to find the target species, we came across an equally interesting snake. Amidst the multiple rocks and cacti of the place, a young individual of the Mousehole Snake (*Philodryas trilineata*) (Figure 12) was unsuspectingly crawling, possibly searching for small lizards. Interestingly, the Mousehole Snake also has an elongated, slightly upturned snout (although not as much as the Patagonian Lancehead), a unique feature within the

genus *Philodryas* and only shared with its sister species*, *Philodryas baroni*. At the end of the day, in the Reserva Natural Villavicencio, our fate really seemed tied to “big noses”.

At the last part of the journey, we begin the return towards Buenos Aires (more than 1000 km southeast of the Reserva Natural Villavicencio). On the long journey back, we obviously couldn't miss out on valuable opportunities to continue observing unique animals. Close to the municipality of San José, in a semi-arid and very hot formation, we found the most special gecko of the trip, the Underwood's Marked Gecko (*Homonota underwoodi*) (Figure 13). With psammophilous habits* light coloration and elliptical pupils, this species reminded us more of the lizard fauna of the Middle East than of its South American counterparts. Further on, in the imposing Sierras de Córdoba, we still had time for two memorable encounters. The first, a Painted Lancehead (*Bothrops aff. diporus*), the only venomous snake on the entire trip. With a vast repertoire of defensive



Figure 11 - High Mountain Lizard (*Phymaturus verdugo*)

© Leandro Malta Borges



Figure 12 - Mousehole Snake (*Philodryas trilineata*)



Figure 13 - Underwoods Marked Gecko (*Homonota underwoodi*)

behaviors and a lot of aggressiveness, photographing it was a spectacle in itself (Figure 14).

Finally, we had a comparable opportunity to Sierra de la Ventana (where the encounter with the Casuhatien Anole wasn't possible). Although we were not dealing with exactly the same species, observing the Argentine Anole (*Pristidactylus achalensis*), with its greenish color and turquoise flanks in the males, would also be very rewarding. Taking precious tips from one of the guides of the Quebrada del Condorito National Park, we headed to the spot where it would be more likely found. And so, it was. Quickly, both under and on the rocks, we could find several individuals, varying from young to adults, and of both sexes (Figure 15).

This way, with many photos in our luggage and surely an even greater number of unforgettable memories, we ended our journey in Argentina and returned to Brazil. Lucky for us, the extraordinarily rich herpetofauna of South America still holds many secrets, most of which are completely unknown to our eyes. Sounds like a great excuse for future trips, doesn't it?

Glossary:

- *Pampean: originating in the Pampas region, which are open formations in the southern portion of South America.
- *Endemic: restricted to a certain region.
- *Psammophile: that lives associated with sandy formations.
- *Sister-species: designation used to denote the groupings that include close-related species evolutionarily.

Figure 14 - Painted Lancehead (*Bothrops aff. diporus*)





Figure 15 - Argentine Anole (*Pristidactylus achalensis*)

WILD ART SHOWCASE



Exploring The Natural
World Through Illustration
By Tamara Rojas Sibaja

Tamara.

WILD ARTS SHOWCASE



Tamara Rojas Sibaja is a Costa Rican wildlife illustrator, art lover, entrepreneur, and the creator of the Bëkuö Bosque & Ilustración brand. She has been contributing to nature conservation in Costa Rica through her work and courses for eight years.

**[instagram.com/tamailustra_](https://www.instagram.com/tamailustra_/)/
[instagram.com/ bekuoaarte/](https://www.instagram.com/bekuoaarte/)
<https://bekuocr.com/es-cr>**

My name is Tamara Rojas Sibaja. I am a wildlife illustrator and an art lover. Curiosity and passion for art have been part of my life since I was very young. Growing up, I would watch my older sisters dance in the living room, and during the recess of a normal school day, I would run along the hallways and listen

to violins, transverse flutes, and clarinets; I would peek through the windows of classrooms to see ballerinas spinning and performing grand jetés. Then, I would head down a flight of stairs to the big art rooms, where I could smell the pigments and see the big canvases on the easels. This wonderful environment changed my



Chiroxiphia linearis
Costa Rica
Bëkuö
Bosque & Ilustración



life. I am a twin and the youngest of five siblings who, thanks to great economic efforts and scholarships, were fortunate enough to study at Conservatorio Castella, a public elementary school and high school that is a hotbed of artists in this country.

My parents loved art and believed that it was the best way in which a human being could develop. I embraced this idea and, when I started high school at the age of 13, I leaned toward painting. This wonderful craft gave me the freedom to discover myself in the best possible way. In the beginning, I was not the best. I never had an inborn gift; I was not born an artist. I made myself along the way after many hours of practice. I started drawing. Then, I learned oil painting. I fell in love with watercolor, and, eventually, I developed a technique for oil painting on paper, in which the focus at the time was to make portraits of children. Four years later, after graduating and finishing at the Castella, something inside kept telling me that I had to continue painting no matter what. I can say that the time at Castella was one of the happiest of my life.

I decided to study painting at the School of Fine Arts at Universidad de Costa Rica (University of Costa Rica). Thankfully, I was accepted and awarded a scholarship for my socioeconomic condition. My parents supported me, and I could not have been happier to start this journey with a great hope to make a living through my art. At the start of my major, when I was just seventeen years old, I faced numerous challenges and a heavy course load, which lead me to consider dropping out. Even so, I held on and, as

EN PELIGRO
DE DECIR ADIÓS



Tamara



Saimiri oerstedii
Costa Rica
Bëkuö
Bosque & Ilustración

Spizaetus melanoleucus
Costa Rica
Bëkuö
Bosque & Ilustración

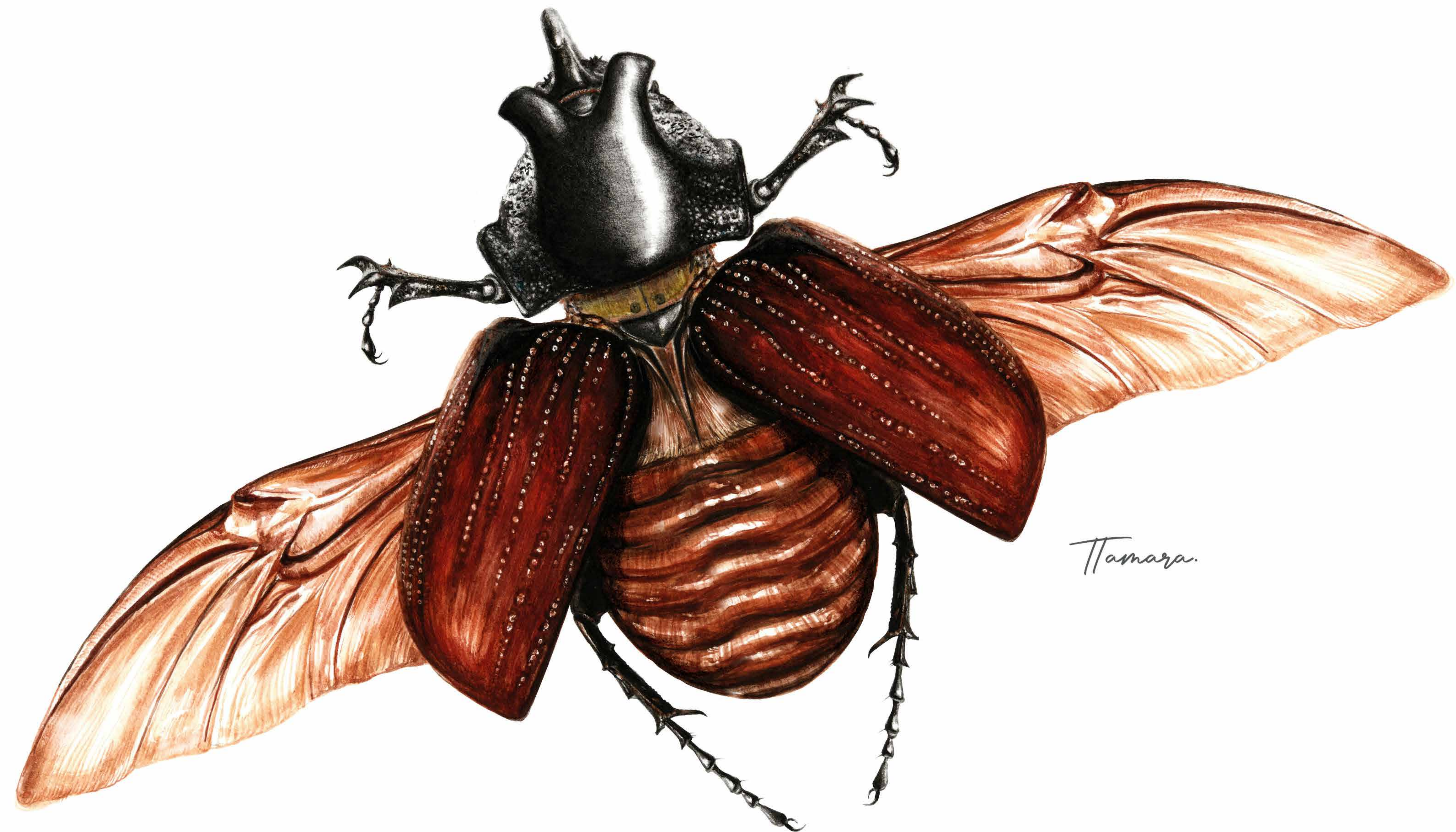


Tamara

a result, was able to get immersed in the learning of different techniques and styles during the first two years of the major. After that, I started my specialization, but it was not what I expected since that year the focus shifted from traditional to contemporary art, and we were not taught to paint that much. However, this resulted in a change of mindset that had a significant impact on my future, since we were encouraged to have our own criteria as artists. We were encouraged to create pieces of art from a sense of identity rather than just creating art for the sake of it.

In this journey I had many a crisis that helped me to know myself, but, in the end, there was one that changed everything: I decided to quit painting once I finished my major! In spite of having the best of grades, I felt that I had lost myself, so I found it necessary to take a break until I found the meaning again. Thus, all my materials to create were stored for two whole years while I started a new major in Graphic Design, for which I would obtain a *licenciatura* (a type of graduate degree). This degree helped me secure jobs that would allow me to keep my dream of making a living through art. One day, a year and a half later, I stumbled upon a binder full of projects from my first two years of my major, and something caught my attention: Regardless of whether they were carvings, watercolors, oil paintings, sculptures, or ceramics, birds were always present in my works. I felt some of the excitement that I had lost, and from that day onwards, I started to realize that birds were my theme.

Coelosis biloba
Costa Rica
Bëkuö
Bosque & Ilustración



Eumomota superciliosa
Costa Rica
Bëkuö
Bosque & Ilustración



I have loved nature throughout the years. I have always been very observant, and small details, such as those in insects, spider webs, seeds that fly in the air, fruits, and the behavior of birds, nests, and leaves, among other wonders, have captivated me. Moreover, my twin, Nefer, studied biology, which had already had an influence on me. Thus, I focused on going deeper into the subject and developing my own style with watercolor and colored pencils.

In this process, I focused on nourishing my creativity and on getting my inner artist excited. One day, while studying birds and nature, I discovered the existence of endemism in my country, that is, birds that are only found in Costa Rica. I think that day my purpose was born. I felt very strongly that making native and endemic species known through the stories in my watercolor paintings and nature was going to be my goal. I, then, began to invent live gardens with illustrations of endemic birds, which was a beautiful laboratory, for a year. My resources were limited, but the results were good.

In December 2015, my brand Bëkuö, which means star in the indigenous Bribri language, was born. I wanted it to be linked to our roots and to always be the star that I would follow. This creative enterprise would represent my art, and it would help me to contribute to conservation through illustrated products. To be coherent with my intentions, I decided that Bëkuö would donate some of its revenues/income to conservation projects. That is how, from the very first year, I started donating to a Costa

Rican foundation that educated and did research about birds of prey in the country.

In that moment the adventure that completely transformed me began. Starting up a business as an artist is taking a leap and learning to live with uncertainty. Thankfully, people seemed to like the idea behind Bëkuö and the illustrations of small gardens. However, I was clueless about how to administer a business, so I invested in business administration. Starting up my own company was not easy at all, but I was not doing so badly either. I started going to the woods to study birds, and that filled my soul. This fulfillment was reflected in my drawings, which started to get better.

However, after three and a half years, my physical health deteriorated because of the tremendous workload. This made me get insurance through our social security and hire help for the first time. Painfully, I also had to accept that the product that I was making was not profitable in practical terms. Although people loved it, I could not continue with it because it entailed too much manual labor, care for the plants, and I was not earning enough.

Then, I started to develop a collection of bottles, mugs, notepads, keychains, and magnets with my illustrations of wildlife. In addition, I started to know my target audience better in those three years, because I became one of them. I have fallen in love with rubber boots, binoculars, and field guides, and people seem to love the products too.



Lophornis helenae
Costa Rica
Bëkuö
Bosque & Ilustración



Neomorphus geoffroyi
Costa Rica
Bëkuö
Bosque & Ilustración



At this point, business started to take off. Tour companies requested many of my products. I also started to sell my goods to retail stores around the country. I even managed to take a course on naturalist illustration for a month in Mexico. By that time, I also started to donate to another conservation project called Proyecto Cabanisi (Cabanisi Project).

Sometime later the pandemic hit. For me, it was a much-needed break because an entrepreneur, in my case, must be an artist, accountant, administrator, salesperson, social network manager, customer service representative, photographer, and designer. In addition, I needed to be efficient both with time and other resources. Moreover, since Bëkuö depended on artistic production, this time allowed me to dedicate time to create and further my training at a Spanish academy that had always interested me. Six months into the pandemic, my savings started to run out, so I decided to start online bird illustration courses for beginners. I was surprised at the turnout. These courses were how I survived the pandemic.

When things started to go back to normal, I had to face the decision of whether to continue with Bëkuö or not since the products practically stopped selling. Honestly, I was very sad. It was very difficult to get back to my feet again, but my partner, an expert naturalist, gave me the strength, support, and inspiration to remember why Bëkuö was born in the first place. That love for the natural world and conservation gave me back my strength. I, then, renewed the brand. It went from being Bekuo Arte

& Diseño to Bëkuö Bosque & Ilustración. I changed the graphic line, selected the best products, and added other new ones such as socks, bandanas, and stickers. I started from scratch again, like a phoenix. By 2021, the business had already turned 6 years old, and things took off. Tourism had a strong comeback after the pandemic just as my sales. I hired my twin sister full-time and my father seasonally, but I was afraid the income would not be enough to cover all the expenses. Still, we made a great team; we improved many things, and the business grew in its seventh year. This allowed me a trip to Colombia and another one to Ecuador to get acquainted with wildlife that inspired both my artwork and Bëkuö.

In 2023, we have grown a lot. We had the highest season ever, which allowed us to undertake challenges such as managing personnel and two stores simultaneously. I am deeply thankful for my father and my sister's support during that year because they made me feel that I was capable. Currently, the company is more solid, and we were able to hire a professional administrator and an assistant. The intention is to have a bigger team to then start with the internationalization of the brand.

At present, Bëkuö is almost eight, and I have a very clear goal. I only illustrate species that need to be known and protected. In fact, I donate 3% of all of the revenues to the Cabanisi Project. I also create the marketing for the project and collaborate with fieldwork by monitoring nests. In addition, I have taught courses on how to paint the Pinzón Costarricense or Melozone cabanisi to make it known

Pharomachrus mocinno
Costa Rica
Bëkuö
Bosque & Ilustración



Philodice bryantae
Costa Rica
Bëkuö
Bosque & Ilustración



since it is an endangered species that is endemic to Costa Rica alone.

It is funny how people ask me to personalize illustrations. However, I have remained true to my initial intention: I want my art to have the purpose of educating and preserving. I recently included mammals as part of my artistic production, and this year I want to incorporate felines, frogs, and deepen on the depiction of the forest with botanical illustrations. Moreover, I plan on expanding the products offered by Bëkuö. I dream about Bëkuö growing and inspiring many to take care of and protect this wonderful natural world. I would also like to use its earnings to buy some hectares of forest to fulfill the dream of protecting nature.



Spizaetus melanoleucus

Costa Rica

Bëkuö

Bosque & Ilustración



Spizaetus ornatus

Costa Rica

Bëkuö

Bosque & Ilustración



YOUR GALLERY



Abubakr Younus

Black Fat-tailed Scorpion (*Androctonus bicolor*)

Dubai, UAE



YOUR GALLERY



Manu Rajan

Sushil's Bush Frog (*Raorchestes sushili*)

India



YOUR GALLERY



Rujlan Ahmad

Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*)

Dubai, UAE



YOUR GALLERY



Cynthia Bandurek
Rossenber's Gladiator (*Hypsiboas rosenbergi*)
Costa Rica



YOUR GALLERY



Sneha Kumari

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)
Bhigwan Bird Sanctuary, India



YOUR GALLERY



Peter Hudson

Spinner Dolphin (*Stenella longirostris*)

Queensland Coast, Australia



YOUR GALLERY

Amith Krish

Cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*) & Wildebeest (*Connochaetes taurinus*)

Masai Mara, Kenya





YOUR GALLERY



Abubakr Younus
Camel Spider (*Solifugae*)
Dubai, UAE



YOUR GALLERY



Sibin Nelson

Ponmudi Bush Frog (*Philautus ponmudi*)
Munnar, Kerala, India



YOUR GALLERY



Subhash Krishnan
Grey Crowned Crane (*Balearica regulorum*)
Dubai, UAE



YOUR GALLERY



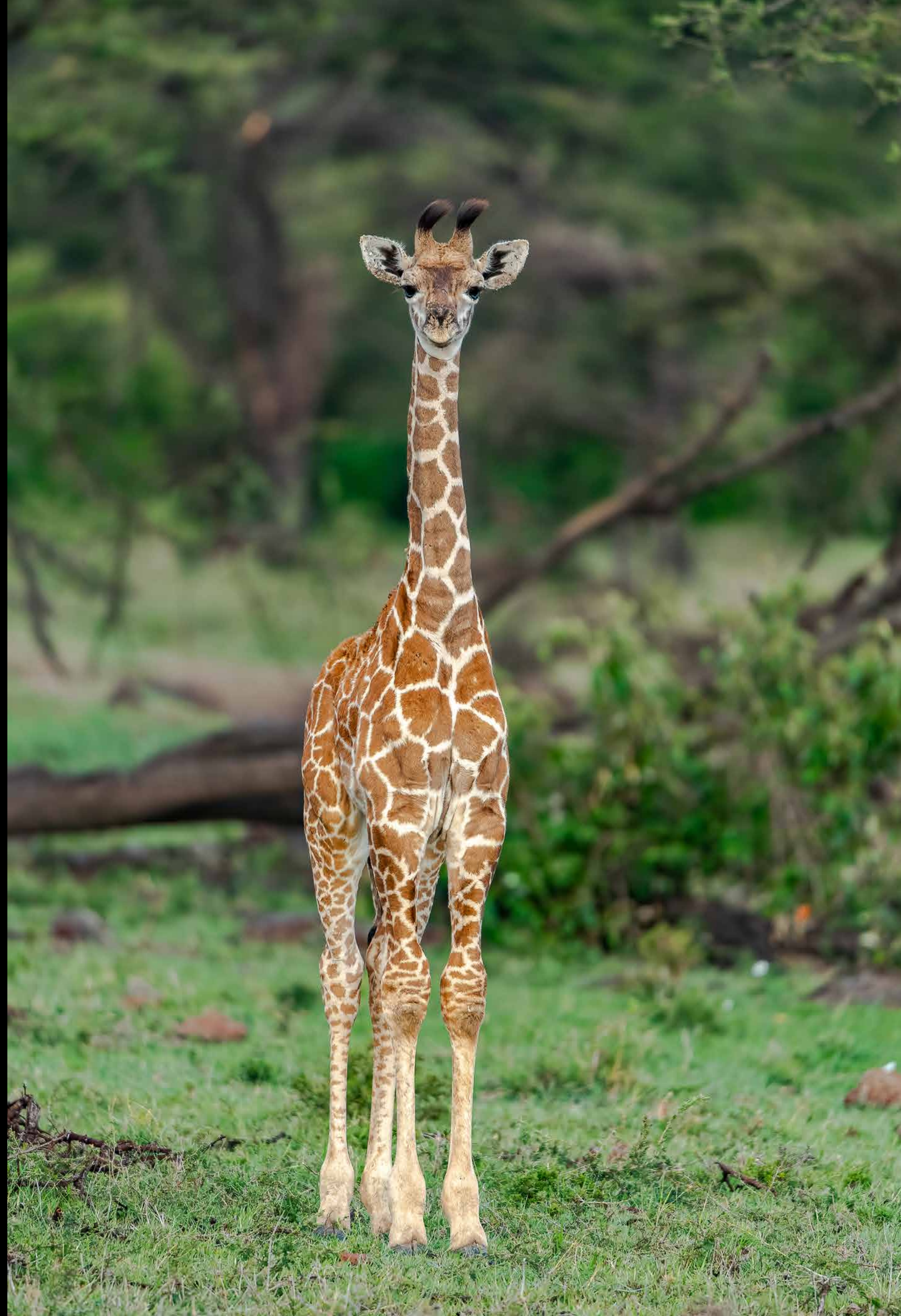
Jayaram Kulur
Masai Giraffe (*Giraffa tippelskirchi*)
Masai Mara, Kenya



YOUR GALLERY



Suresh Kumar Thangarajan
Egyptian Goose (*Alopochen aegyptiaca*)
Dubai, UAE



YOUR GALLERY



Amith Krish
Masai Giraffe (*Giraffa tippelskirchi*)
Masai Mara, Kenya



YOUR GALLERY



Abubakr Younus

Dorias Comb-fingered Gecko (*Stenodactylus doriae*)

Dubai, UAE



YOUR GALLERY



Cynthia Bandurek
Red Eyed tree Frog (*Agalychnis callidryas*)
Costa Rica



YOUR GALLERY



Manu Rajan
Robber Fly (*Asilidae*)
Dubai, UAE



ShutterSpeed24

YOUR GALLERY



Rujlan Ahmad
Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*)
Dubai, UAE



YOUR GALLERY



Sibin Nelson

Malabar Gliding Frog (*Rhacophorus malabaricus*)
Munnar, Kerala, India



YOUR GALLERY



Subhash Krishnan
Purple Swamphen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*)
Dubai, UAE



YOUR GALLERY



Faisal Fasaludeen

Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*)
Jhalana Reserve Forest, Jaipur, Rajasthan



YOUR GALLERY



Saurabh Misra

Tiger (*Panthera tigris*)

Ranthambore National Park, Rajasthan, India



YOUR GALLERY



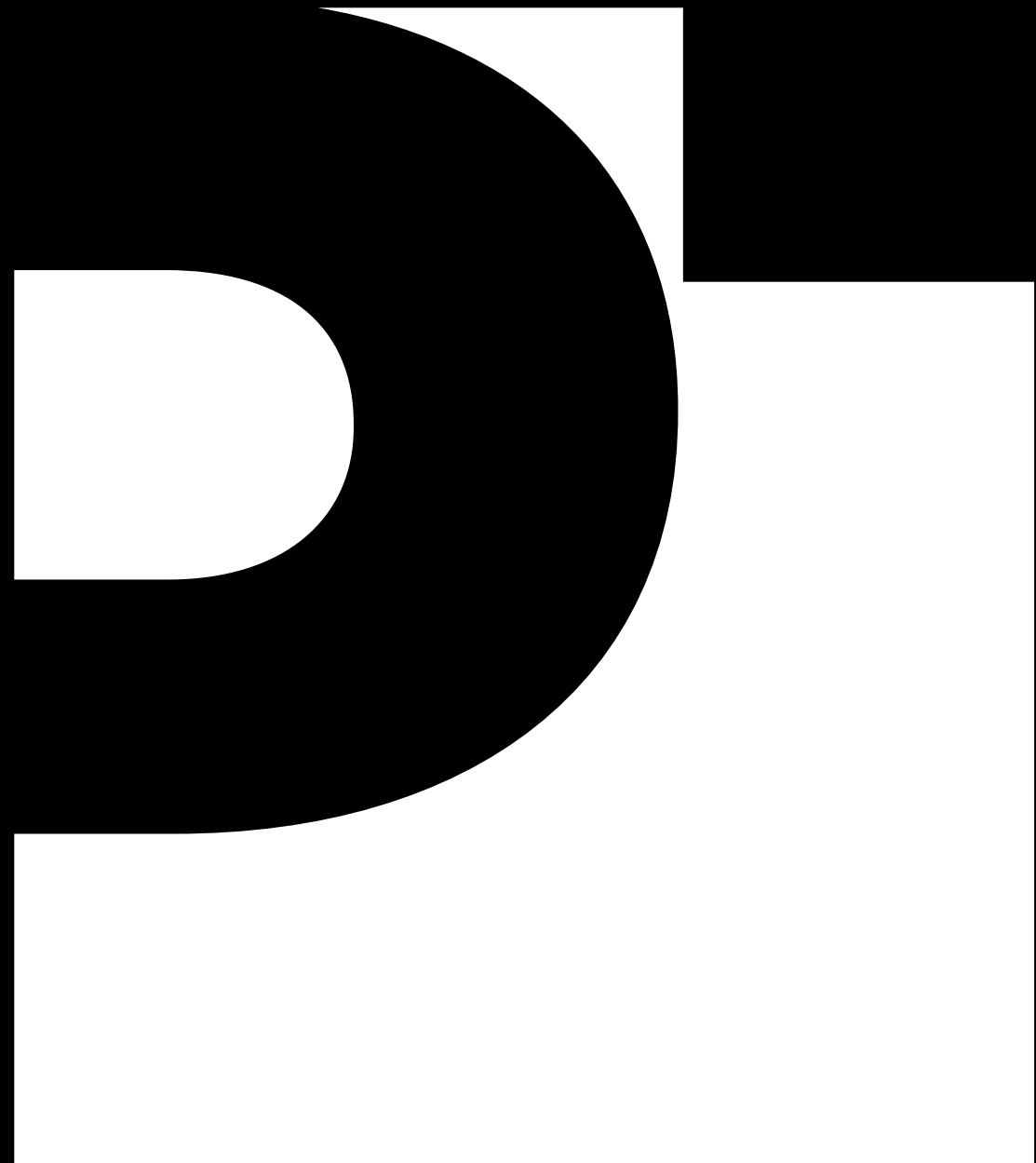
Ajith k Sukumar
House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)



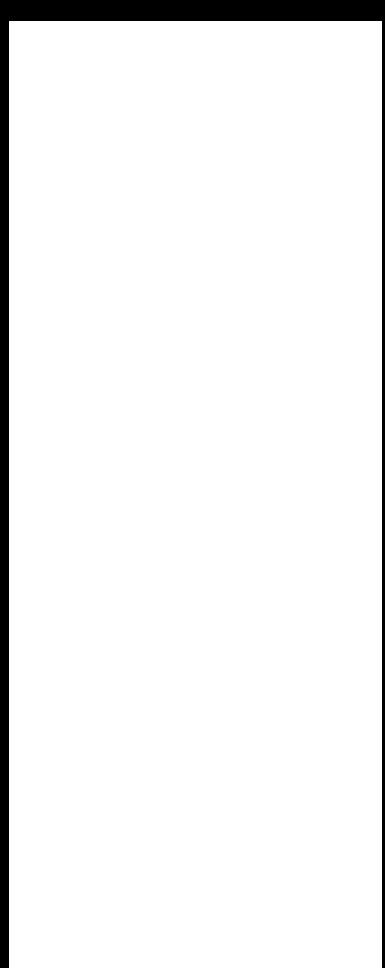
YOUR GALLERY



Thomas Bretschneider
Clownfish (*Amphiprioninae*)
Egypt



EXPLORERS



UPCOMING
FEATURES



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INTO THE WILD

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HER VIEWS & VISUALS

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CUB'S CORNER

By Govind Manu
