EXPLORERS

SEP / OCT 2025

INTO THE WILD
WITH MOHAMMAD MURAD

WHISPERS OF THE MANGROVES: A GLIMPSE OF THE RIVER OTTERS
BY DR. NOUSHAD ALI

© Mohammad Murad

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Cover Story
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Publisher: Paws Trails Explorers **Editors:** Cynthia Bandurek, Ragul Patteri, & Bruno Ferreto Fiorillo
Content Director: Nisha Purushothaman, **Director Photography:** Hermis Haridas, **Design Desk** : Nithya Purushothaman

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

EDITORS DEN

Welcome to the 48th edition of **PT Explorers.**

Our *Cover Story* features internationally acclaimed photographer **Mohammad Murad** from Kuwait. He narrates his discovery of the wildlife of his native land and shares his journey of experimenting with and refining his techniques in wildlife photography.

In our *Conservation* article, **Dr. Noushad Ali** talks about an encounter with river otters in the scenic **Kadalundi River** in Kerala and delves into mangrove and otter conservation.

In *Species*, **Dr. Jishnu R** writes about the **Myristica Swamp Tree Frog**, a new species reported from the foothills of the Western Ghats.

Dunya Rajasekara from Sri Lanka talks about her journey in wildlife photography in the *Her Views* section.

Cub's Corner features **Grade 9 student Arko Saha** from India and showcases his beautiful images.

In *Travelogue*, **Anand Kumar** chronicles a trip to the Mara at the fabulous **Mara Trails Camp**. The wonderful sights and experiences of the Mara never cease to inspire.

Through the Lens features a story by **Abhijith Perambra** on a recent realization that **Golden Jackals** lived in his area.

Mike Hendley from Ottawa and his passion for wild arts is chronicled in the *Wild Arts* section.

Enjoy the exceptional images in the *Your Gallery* section.

Our thanks to all the wonderful contributors for helping us put this edition together. We remain dedicated to bringing your stories and images to the public to inspire and aid in conservation efforts worldwide.



© Nisha Purushothaman

FOUNDERS' NOTE

Dear Paws Trails Explorers Community,

Welcome to the 48th edition of PT Explorers!

This is our free magazine that comes out every two months, created from a deep love for wildlife, photography, and conservation.

Why do we keep going back to the wild?

Maybe it's the thrill of locking eyes with a leopard, the flap of wings above us, or the calm silence of a forest at sunrise. At PT Explorers, we believe it's all that and more. Most of all, it's about the stories. Stories told through photos, notes, sketches, and long walks into the unknown.

In this issue, we share ten such stories each unique, bold, and filled with love for nature. You'll find an open chat with a master wildlife photographer, a thought-provoking conservation piece, a spotlight on a rare species, and an inspiring interview with a woman changing the face of wildlife photography. Our "Cub's Corner" highlights a talented under-16 prodigy, and a real incident from the wild reminds us of nature's unpredictability. Plus, we bring you a travel story for the wanderers, a heartfelt tribute to wildlife art, and a gallery of images that speak louder than words.

This magazine is free because voices that protect nature should never be hidden behind a paywall.

Thank you for joining us on this journey.

For the latest & past issues, visit: www.pawstrailsmagazine.com

Hermis Haridas & Nisha Purushothaman
Founders - PT Explorers

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COVER STORY

Into The WILD
with Mohammad Murad



Mohammad Murad is a Canon EMEA Ambassador and internationally acclaimed wildlife photographer from Kuwait, celebrated for his evocative use of slow shutter speed and intentional motion. A former communications engineer, he found his true calling in the wild in 2015 trading circuits for silence, and calculation for instinct. His images are not just photographs, but emotional translations of the natural world, often blurring the line between realism and abstraction. In 2025, his haunting image of a frost-covered Pallas's cat was named a finalist in the BigPicture: Natural World Photography Competition. As the first Arab speaker at the prestigious GDT Nature Photography Festival, Mohammad continues to use his lens to stir empathy, inspire connection, and give voice to the untamed.

mohammadmurad.com
instagram.com/moe_murad
facebook.com/moe.muradphotography



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How did your journey into wildlife photography start, and what drew you to this genre?

Nobody knew me before 2015. I was just a regular guy, I took my kids to school, went to work, and lived an ordinary life. But everything changed when I picked up a camera and started posting simple shots of birds and garden life on Instagram. That small step opened a new door for me, one I never imagined I'd walk through.

I grew up in Kuwait, a country often dismissed as dry and lifeless. But once I began exploring it through the lens, I discovered a world I never knew existed. I had no idea we had such rich biodiversity. I didn't know we had owls nesting here, Little Owls and Pharaoh Eagle Owls. I didn't know we had migratory raptors like eagles, vultures, and buzzards passing through in the hundreds. I had no clue that Sand Cats still roamed our deserts, or that Lesser Crested Terns and White-cheeked Terns nested on Kubbar Island.

Joining the Bird Monitoring and Protection Team at the Kuwait Environment Protection Society was a turning point. They took me to places I'd never seen before, taught me how to read the land, anticipate behavior, and truly observe. I'd finish work and head straight to the desert, eat dinner out there, and return late at night. It became my second life and eventually, my first.

One early memory stays with me: the first time I saw two Griffon vultures in the Kuwaiti desert. They were massive.

© Mohammad Murad

Mohammad Khorshed and I got out of the car barefoot, afraid the sound of our shoes on the gravel would scare them off. We crawled on our stomachs like soldiers until we were close enough to photograph them. That was the moment I realized I was completely drawn in not just by the image, but by the experience.

Wildlife photography hooked me because it is raw, unscripted, and deeply emotional. Nothing is posed. Every moment is real and every image is earned. That's what keeps me going.

What does wildlife photography mean to you personally?

Wildlife photography is not just something I do, it's who I am now. It's a dialogue with nature, a way to connect with something much bigger than myself. I often say it's like music: when a violinist plays a melody, he's expressing something internal, something raw and whether people understand it or not doesn't matter. That's how I feel when I create images, especially with intentional camera movement or slow shutter. It's not about the perfect shot. It's about honesty, emotion, and offering a piece of myself to the world quietly, but fully.

And the most meaningful part? When my daughters once came home from school saying, "*We read about you in the newspaper*", and proudly showed my work to their friends. That meant more than any award I've ever received.

Many of your images carry a powerful sense of mood and atmosphere. How do you achieve that in the field?

Mood in photography is like breath in music it gives life to stillness. I often use slow shutter techniques and intentional camera movement (ICM) to add motion and emotion to my frames. I want the viewer to feel that the animal is doing something not just standing there. I'm not afraid to blur the scene, to create mystery, to transform the image into something expressive.

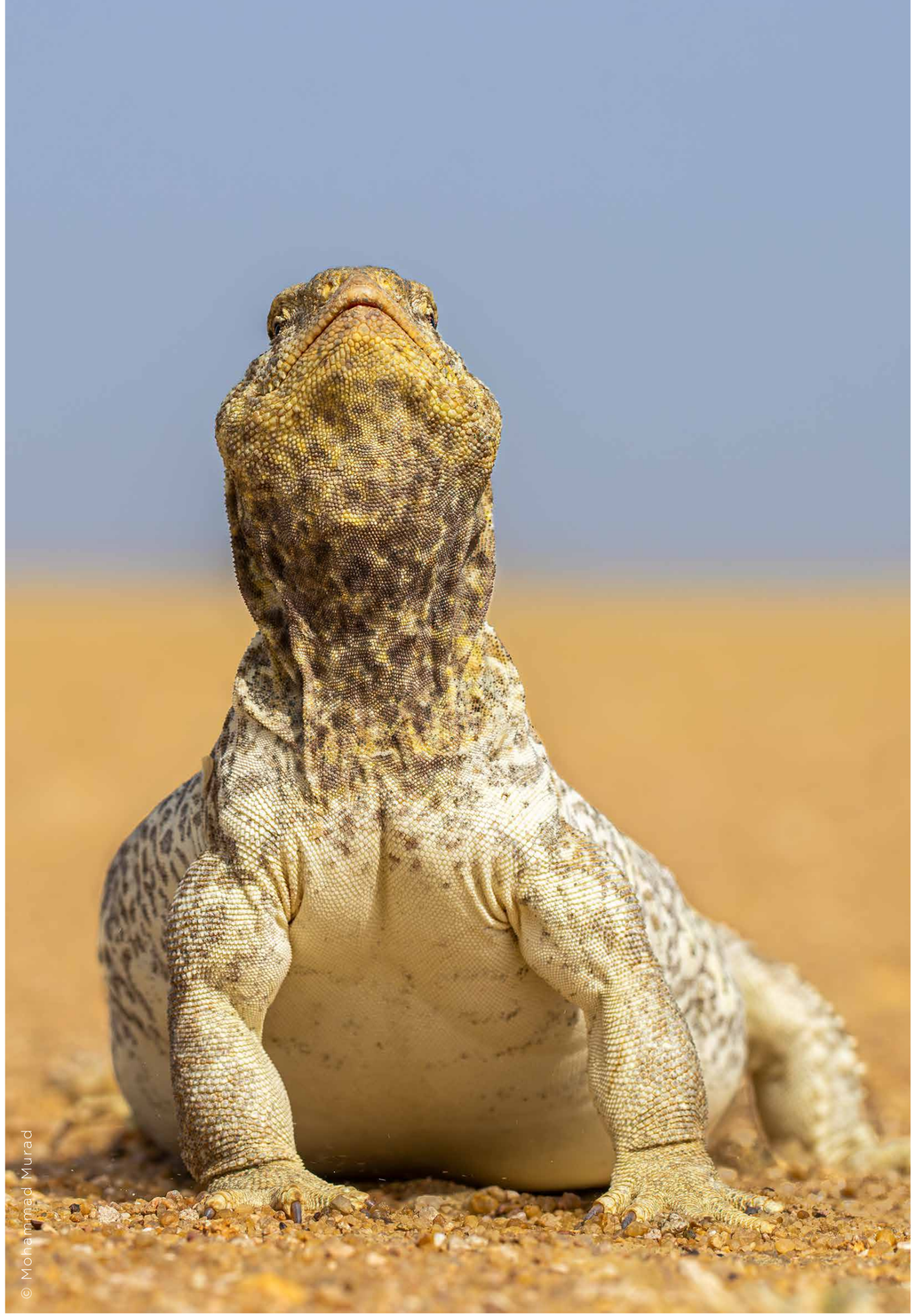
To me, this style is like drawing with light and energy. It's abstract, it has no rules and that's exactly what makes it so intimate. Every image becomes a personal sketch of how I felt in that moment.

Can you walk us through one of your most memorable shoots and what made it unforgettable?

I've had many unforgettable moments, but my expedition to Iceland stands apart. It took six months to plan. I prepared meticulously, buying all my gear from outside Kuwait to endure the snow. But when I landed, the airline lost my luggage. I had no proper winter clothing.

The other photographers kindly lent me what they could, but I was still freezing, my toes went numb, I couldn't crawl on the ground for long, and I had to stay close to the hut. But somehow, that limitation gave me a different perspective. I took shots that no one else did from closer range, more minimal, more emotional.

What made it truly unforgettable wasn't just the images it was the warmth I received from the other photographers, and the humbling beauty of the landscape. Iceland felt like a dream. Even in discomfort, I was overawed.



© Mohammad Murad



© Mohammad Murad

Do you plan your shots in advance or let the moment guide you?

I do my homework, I research animal behavior, light conditions, the terrain. But once I am in the field, I surrender to the moment. Animals don't follow scripts, and neither should we. Some of my best images happened when I let go of expectations and simply listened to the wind, the light, the rhythm of the wild. I trust my instinct more than any plan.

How do you balance the artistic and ethical aspects of wildlife photography?

Ethics come before art. Always.

No image is worth distressing an animal. I never bait, lure, or provoke, no matter how tempting the opportunity may seem. Sometimes the scene pulls you in, your heart races, your instincts beg you to press the shutter. But that's exactly when you need to pause, breathe, and put the animal first.

We must remember we are guests in their world. I've learned to read subtle shifts in behavior, posture, movement, even silence. If I sense discomfort, I step back. A photograph taken without respect will always carry that absence of trust. And other photographers will see it, you can feel stress in a frame, even when nothing is moving.

For me, true beauty lies in honesty. The most powerful images come when the animal is at ease, when the moment unfolds naturally, and the photographer is simply allowed to witness.

As John Muir once wrote, "*In every walk with nature one receives far more than he*

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seeks." That's the spirit I try to carry not to take from nature, but to receive what it offers, with humility and care.

What challenges have you faced while photographing in extreme environments?

Kuwait is no easy place for wildlife photography; temperatures can reach 56°C. It's like standing in an oven. Dust storms are frequent and they can destroy your camera sensor if you're not careful.

In contrast, in Mongolia and Iceland, I've faced temperatures as low as -35°C. I've had frostbite in my fingers, frozen camera batteries, lost luggage, and days of complete physical exhaustion. But through it all, I've learned that discomfort is part of the process. You adapt. You adjust. And in the struggle, you find something pure.

How do you prepare for a wildlife expedition mentally, physically, and technically?

Mentally, I prepare by letting go of expectations. Wildlife photography teaches you to be present to observe more than you act. You can't control nature, so I focus instead on building patience and staying open to whatever the wild chooses to offer.

Physically, I train for endurance. The body has to carry heavy gear, hike long distances, crawl, and wait for hours often in extreme conditions. Before my Mongolia expedition, I trained for three months just to be ready to hike the mountains. And still, it was hard. The cold, the altitude, and the wind were unlike anything I'd faced before. It reminded me

© Mohammad Murad

that no amount of training truly prepares you, only the wild can do that.

Technically, I make sure every piece of gear is tested, cleaned, and ready. I pack backups, extra batteries, and think through worst-case scenarios. I also set up my camera customizations in advance. I assign specific functions to buttons so I can adapt quickly, even with gloves on. I want to be able to change settings in a blink, without taking my eye off the moment.

Still, no matter how prepared I am, nature always finds a way to surprise me and that unpredictability is part of the magic.

What's the longest you've waited for a shot, and was it worth it?

One of my most meaningful experiences was spending nearly three months with a family of Arabian red foxes that had chosen to raise their kits near Kuwait City. something incredibly rare, as these foxes usually breed deep in the desert.

I visited their den four to five days a week, sitting for hours after sunset. At first, I kept a distance of about 20 meters, but over time, they grew used to me. Eventually, two of the kits were so comfortable they began licking my camera and feet, a level of trust that moved me deeply.

The final image - a young fox framed by the colorful glow of city lights came after weeks of waiting. I used two small continuous lights and patiently waited for the moment they'd return to dig up food the mother had hidden. That photo wasn't just a result of technical planning it was built on patience, presence, and quiet respect.

And yes, it was worth every single second.

What fascinates you about owls, and how do you photograph them so intimately?

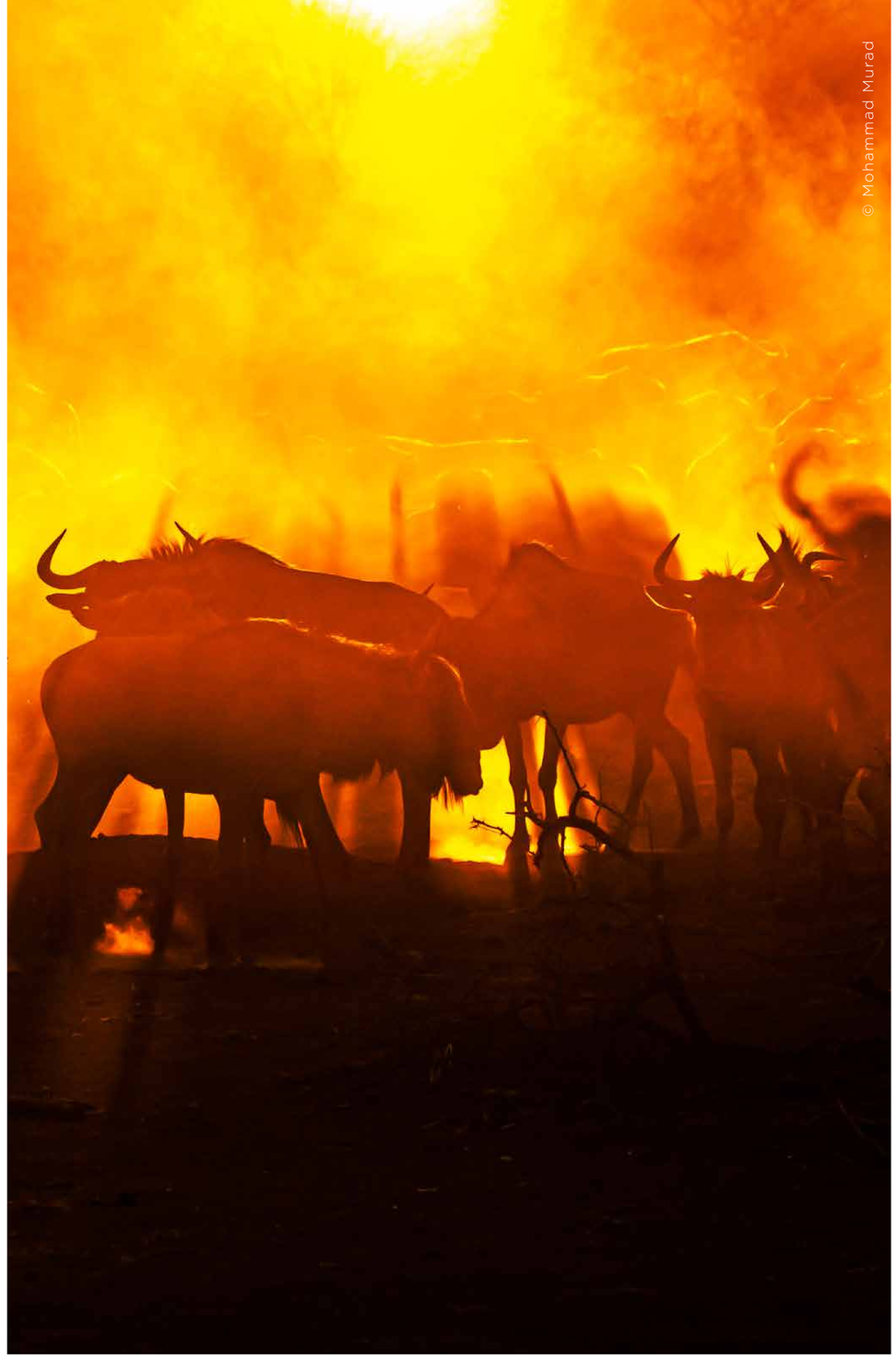
Owls are silent spirits elusive, graceful, and deeply mysterious. In Kuwait, we have four species, and I've spent years observing them. They don't reveal themselves easily, but once they accept your presence, they offer moments of rare intimacy.

The Pharaoh Eagle Owl, for example, roosts in rocky crevices or caves by day and becomes active after sunset. With extraordinary night vision and a unique third eyelid, the nictitating membrane, they're perfectly adapted for nocturnal hunting. These details fascinate me, but it's their presence that moves me most.

Photographing owls requires trust. You learn their rhythms, stay quiet, return often. Over time, they stop seeing you as a threat and start allowing you into their world. That quiet bond is what I aim to capture. Every image is a conversation without words.

What role has social media, especially Instagram, played in your journey?

Instagram was the spark. It's where I first began sharing my work in 2014, and the encouragement I received gave me the confidence to pursue wildlife photography more seriously. Through


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the platform, I connected with a global audience and became part of a larger conversation about nature, storytelling, and conservation.

It was also where I discovered the work of incredibly talented photographers, their images inspired me to push my own limits. I followed them, studied their work, learned about the places they photographed, and the competitions they entered.

But no matter how powerful social media is, I always remind myself: the image must come first. Likes come and go, but a meaningful photograph will always find its place.

What gear do you currently use, and why?

I shoot with two Canon EOS R3 bodies, paired with lenses like the Canon RF 400mm f/2.8, the RF 100–500mm f/4.5–7.1L IS USM, and wide-angle lenses for creative and ground-level perspectives. I also use ND filters to control shutter speed in daylight especially for my motion-based work.

My favorite combo what I call the “beast combination” is the R3 with the RF 100–500mm. It’s lightweight, versatile, and fast. I don’t need a tripod, and I’m ready for any situation, whether I’m crawling in sand or reacting to sudden animal movement.

For me, gear must be reliable, responsive, and able to withstand extreme conditions. But ultimately, gear is just a tool. Vision comes first.

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How have international awards impacted your work?

I have always believed that a true Awards are affirmations, they tell you that your vision, your way of seeing the world, matters. They've brought my work into the spotlight, giving me exposure I never actively sought but one that came as part of the journey. Suddenly, people and organizations I'd once admired were reaching out to me.

Thanks to the recognition from major competitions, I was invited to speak at international photography festivals like GDT in Germany and Xposure in Sharjah. I also had the honor of becoming a Canon Ambassador for Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa something I never imagined when I first picked up a camera.

These awards opened doors, brought credibility, and helped me reach beyond borders. But they didn't change why I photograph. I still shoot for the love of nature, for the story, for the feeling. And the greatest reward? It's when my children look at my work and say, "*That's my dad.*" That moment outweighs any medal.

I was just a regular man, unknown outside my circle of family and friends. Through hard work and devotion, I now stand on the stages of the most prestigious competitions in the world. That transformation means more to me than any trophy ever could.

How can wildlife photography contribute to conservation and awareness?

A powerful image can touch the heart before the mind has time to speak. It stirs





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empathy and empathy leads to action. When people feel connected to a species, they begin to care. And when they care, they protect.

Wildlife photography makes the unseen visible and often unforgettable. It has the power to turn curiosity into concern, and concern into change.

Personally, I use my work to support conservation efforts whenever I can. For example, when the United Nations approached me for images of the Pharaoh Eagle Owl for an awareness campaign, I provided them for free. For me, that's not a transaction it's a responsibility. If an image can play even a small role in protecting a species or preserving its habitat, then it has served its highest purpose.

What's your workflow like after a trip?

The first thing I do is back everything up always in two separate storage locations. Once that's done, I take some time to rest and reflect before jumping into the editing process.

When I'm ready, I go through every single image one by one, rating them with stars. Some photos are selected for daily Instagram posts, others I set aside the, ones I like but need to revisit with fresh eyes. And of course, there are images I set apart specifically for competitions.

I do all my post-processing in Lightroom, applying only minimal adjustments. I focus on enhancing the light, color, and mood without changing the essence of the moment.

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For me, post-processing isn't about creating perfection it's about preserving the soul of the scene, exactly as I felt it in the wild.

Have you noticed changes in how wildlife responds to human presence?

Yes. Some species are becoming bolder like foxes near urban areas. Others are disappearing into deeper isolation. Wildlife is adapting, but it's not always a good sign. Their behavior reflects the pressure we're placing on them. We must be aware, and act with responsibility and humility.

What advice would you give to aspiring wildlife photographers?

Start with what you have. Borrow gear, rent it, learn with what's available. Don't wait for perfection. Just start.

And most importantly don't imitate. Find your own voice. Talk to the people who inspire you. Be humble. Work hard. And don't expect instant results.

Recognition takes time. Just love the process, and it will love you back.

What species or place is still on your bucket list, and why?

There's a long list of species I'd love to photograph I think every wildlife photographer dreams of capturing as many animals as possible in their lifetime.

For me, one of my personal goals is to photograph all the fox species in the world. I've spent years with Arabian red foxes, and now I find myself drawn to



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their cousins in colder, more remote landscapes places fully blanketed in snow, where silence and solitude shape everything.

Lately, I've been gravitating toward the far north, places of profound isolation, untouched by human presence. It's not just a photographic goal; it's a spiritual one. To witness that kind of purity and to earn a moment within it would be an honor.

What's next for you?

I'm currently working on a visual series titled *The Art of Motion*, a project where I combine wildlife behavior with abstract storytelling, using slow shutter and intentional movement to explore emotion through motion.

I'm also developing Arabic-language educational content for aspiring photographers. There's a real need for accessible, high-quality resources in our language and I want to help bridge that gap and share this passion with a wider audience across the region.

And as always, I'm chasing the next moment, one that can't be planned, only felt.

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CONSERVATION

Whispers of the Mangroves: A Glimpse of the River Otters

By **Dr. Noushad Ali**

©Dr. Noushad Ali



Dr. Noushad Ali is a nature enthusiast, wildlife photographer, and conservation storyteller based between the UAE and Kerala. With a passion for exploring lesser-known habitats and species, he uses both his lens and words to raise awareness about biodiversity and the urgent need to protect fragile ecosystems. His work reflects a deep connection to the natural world and a strong commitment to responsible wildlife tourism.

instagram.com/drnoushad/
facebook.com/noushad.ali.336/



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It was a quiet morning on the Kadalundi River. As the boat glided gently through the tangled emerald corridors of the mangroves, I found myself immersed in the rhythmic calls of kingfishers and the occasional flutter of herons. These brackish backwaters are natural sanctuaries, an intricate web of life that shelters countless species, from crustaceans and birds to reptiles and mammals.

But nothing quite prepared me for what I was about to witness that day.

Amid the gnarled roots and mudflats, three slender shadows moved along the riverbank. At first, I mistook them for monitor lizards, but a flick of a whiskered snout and the sleek, smooth movement across the water revealed their identity, - river otters. It was a rare and intimate moment, the kind that makes you forget to reach for your camera.

The trio rested briefly, on river banks. They seemed alert yet at ease, occasionally glancing toward the water's edge. Moments later, the calm was broken by a splash one of them had slipped into the water with purposeful grace. With swift, darting movements, it hunted beneath the surface. Within seconds, it emerged with a wriggling eel in its jaws.

But this was no solitary feast. The catch became a shared prize. The otter, although reluctant at first, eventually yielded portions of the eel to its companions. There was a certain unspoken camaraderie, a natural code of sharing that left me in awe. It was a fleeting moment but etched forever in memory.



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This encounter is more than just a personal thrill. It is a poignant reminder of the hidden worlds thriving within our fragile ecosystems. Mangroves, like those in Kadalundi, act as cradles of biodiversity. Their tangled roots serve as nurseries for fish, shields against coastal erosion, and buffers against climate change. Yet, these vital habitats are under constant threat from unchecked development, pollution, and habitat fragmentation. Mangroves are vital coastal ecosystems that offer immense ecological benefits. They support rich biodiversity by providing shelter and breeding grounds for numerous species, including birds, fish, reptiles, and mammals like otters. As highly efficient carbon sinks, mangroves capture and store large amounts of atmospheric carbon, helping combat climate change. Their dense root systems protect coastlines by reducing wave impact, preventing erosion, and buffering storm surges. Additionally, mangrove habitats serve as critical nurseries for many commercially important fish and crustaceans, sustaining local fisheries and livelihoods. Conserving mangroves is essential for maintaining coastal resilience and ecological balance.

River otters, shy and elusive by nature, are excellent indicators of wetland health. Their presence signals a thriving aquatic ecosystem. But like the mangroves they inhabit, they are increasingly vulnerable to human disturbance, plastic pollution, and diminishing fish stocks. River otters are excellent bioindicators of freshwater and coastal ecosystem health. Their presence signifies clean water, abundant prey, and intact habitat, as they are highly



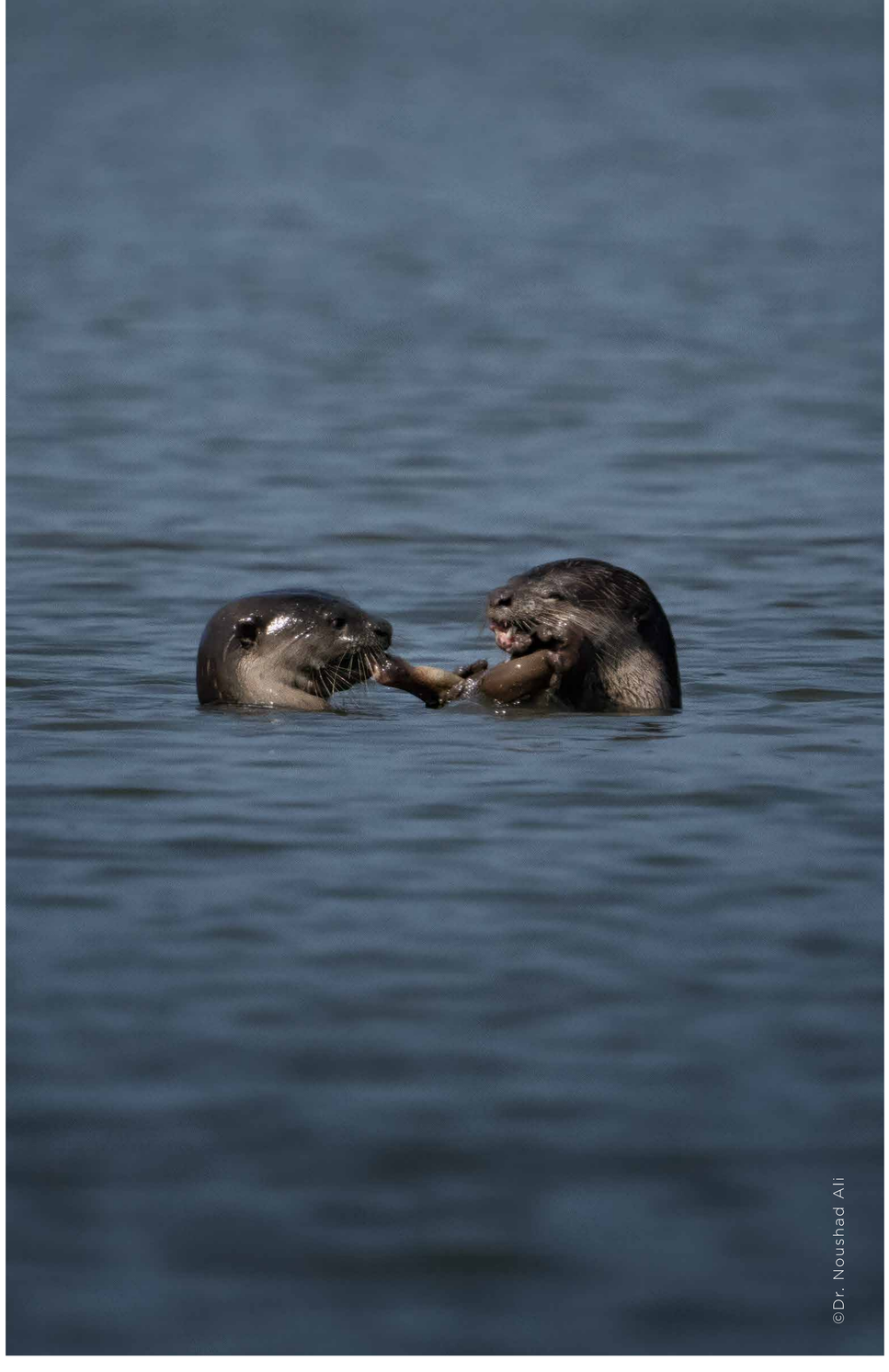
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sensitive to pollution, habitat degradation, and human disturbances. Since otters sit near the top of the aquatic food chain, a stable otter population reflects a well-functioning, balanced ecosystem. Declines in otter numbers often signal underlying environmental issues such as water contamination, reduced fish stocks, or ecosystem imbalance. Monitoring otter populations helps conservationists assess the overall health of wetland and riverine habitats.

The Smooth-coated Otter (*Lutrogale perspicillata)* is the largest otter species in Asia, distinguished by its velvety fur, broad muzzle, and partially webbed paws. Unlike their solitary cousins, Smooth-coated Otters are highly social creatures, often seen in groups of three to ten individuals, known as rafts.

They are expert swimmers, capable of remaining submerged for over eight minutes while hunting. Their diet primarily consists of fish, but they also eat crabs, amphibians, and occasionally small birds or reptiles. They are known for their intelligence and coordination, especially during group hunts, a trait I witnessed firsthand.

Smooth-coated Otters are primarily found across the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia, frequenting wetlands, rivers, estuaries, and mangrove forests. However, despite their adaptability, their populations are declining across much of their range. As top predators in aquatic food chains, otters depend on stable environments free from pollution and excessive disturbance. A thriving otter population suggests a balanced and functioning ecosystem, while their absence may signal water contamination, habitat loss, or ecological degradation.

In India, these otters are listed as ‘Vulnerable’ on the IUCN Red List due to habitat loss, pollution, poaching, and depletion of fish stocks. They are also under threat from human-wildlife conflict, particularly in areas where they compete with fishermen or raid aquaculture farms.

Both mangroves and river otters face growing threats from human activity. Coastal development and land reclamation lead to habitat destruction and fragmentation. Pollution from agricultural runoff, sewage, and industrial waste degrades water quality, directly affecting otters and mangrove health. Mangroves are also cleared for aquaculture and infrastructure projects. Otters, meanwhile, often come into conflict with fisheries, where they are viewed as competitors for fish, sometimes leading to trapping or persecution. Protecting these ecosystems requires integrated conservation efforts and community awareness.

In Kerala and across South Asia, several initiatives focus on conserving mangroves and river otters through community participation and habitat restoration. In Kerala, the Kadalundi-Vallikkunnu Community Reserve is a model where local stakeholders actively protect mangrove ecosystems, promoting eco-tourism and awareness. The Mangrove Cell in Maharashtra and



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the Mangrove Foundation support similar community-driven conservation efforts, which can serve as replicable models for Kerala.

For otters, the Otter Conservation Programme promoted by Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and studies conducted by researchers in the Western Ghats and Kerala backwaters have increased awareness of smooth-coated otters and their ecological role. In areas like Thattekad and Kottayam, citizen science, nature education, and local surveys are helping document otter presence and push for better habitat protection. Such integrated approaches highlight the importance of involving local communities in safeguarding both mangroves and otters.

Protecting mangroves and river otters requires collective effort. Readers and nature lovers can contribute by spreading awareness, supporting responsible ecotourism, and avoiding products or practices that harm coastal ecosystems. Visiting eco-friendly destinations, like mangrove reserves, encourages conservation through tourism. Local communities can participate in habitat clean-ups, report wildlife sightings, and engage in sustainable fishing practices that reduce conflict with otters. Policymakers can strengthen protection laws, fund conservation research, and support community-led initiatives. By working together through education, engagement, and action we can ensure these vital ecosystems and their charismatic inhabitants thrive for generations to come.

To witness them is a gift but also a call to action.

As a nature enthusiast and wildlife photographer, I believe stories like these can foster deeper respect and urgency for conservation. Every sighting, every photo, is a chapter in a much larger narrative - one of survival, coexistence, and stewardship.

Let us protect what remains, and celebrate what still thrives.



©Dr. Noushad Ali

©Dr. Noushad Ali

SPECIES

Myristica Swamp Tree Frog and the Secret Life of India’s Rarest Frog

By Dr Jishnu R



Dr Jishnu R



Dr. Jishnu R is a wildlife filmmaker and photographer, and the founder of the Kollam Birding Battalion. Currently pursuing his MD at the University College of Medical Sciences, Delhi, he has received numerous national and international accolades, including the Kerala State Award for wildlife film. His work combines a passion for storytelling with a dedication to conservation.

instagram.com/jishnuraveendran/
youtube.com/@drjishnu



Dr Jishnu R



© Dr Jishnu R



Dr Jishnu R

On the foothills of the Western Ghats, in the year 2012-2013, scientists described a curious little frog that had remained hidden from the world from ARIPPA – a small patch of Myristica forest patch in the kulathupuzha range of Kollam district in Kerala.

Myristica Swamp Tree Frog has carved out a life in the rarest and ancient forest ecosystems in India , the **Myristica swamp forests** remain moist throughout the year and are filled with nutmeg-family trees with thick roots.

What makes thise swamp special is its waterlogged soil with constant flooding, along with thick layers of fallen leaves and pools of dark, still water. The tall Myristica trees rise above, their roots forming buttresses and tangled masses.

These conditions are perfect for *Mercurana* species, that prefer a cool, damp, and quiet world. these frogs are swamp specialists through and through.

Myristica Swamp Tree Frog is a tree frog that belongs to the family **Rhacophoridae** and the **only species** in its genus, *Mercurana*.

The frog is small, adult males measure about 3.5 to 4 cm in snout-vent length, while females can grow up to 6.5 cm. They have large toe pads and long limbs, perfect for climbing in the slippery swamp vegetation. Their toes are about 75% webbed, which helps them navigate both trees and water. The tips of its fingers and toes have **well-developed round pads**, useful for gripping onto leaves and branches. Its skin has small, raised bumps

Dr Jishnu R

called **tubercles**, especially noticeable on the limbs.

Tiny Performer with a Famous Name

The scientific name *Mercurana myristicapalustris* carries a meaningful tribute and a message about the frog's unique home. The **genus name**, *Mercurana*, blends "Mercury" in honour of **Freddie Mercury,** the legendary lead singer of the rock band Queen with "Rana," a Latin word commonly used in the names of frogs.

The **species name,** *myristicapalustris*, comes from "Myristica," the nutmeg tree family that dominates the frog's swampy habitat, and "*palustris*," a Latin word meaning "swampy." Together, the name highlights the frog's close connection to the rare and fragile **Myristica swamp forests** of the Western Ghats one of the most threatened ecosystems in India.

Swamp Drama Every Monsoon

When the **pre-monsoon rains** begin usually in April and May *M. myristicapalustris* begins its breeding season. Males become vocal, climbing onto low branches and calling to attract females. Their calls are rhythmic and soft, suited to the thick vegetation and damp air. Sometimes, males even fight over the best calling spots.

Once a female chooses a mate, something remarkable happens. The pair climbs down to the forest floor, where the female **digs a shallow pi**t in the wet, muddy leaf litter. There, she lays a clutch of **eggs**, unpigmented and jelly-like, and



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covers them with mud. The male guards the site briefly before disappearing back into the trees.

About a week later, the first heavy rains of the monsoon arrive. These rains flood the swamp, washing the **tadpoles** out of their underground nest and into nearby pools. Here, they swim freely, feeding and growing until they transform into froglets and climb into the trees.

This breeding method laying eggs in the mud before the rains, then letting nature do the rest is perfectly suited to the unpredictable swamp environment. It is a delicate life timed to the rhythm of the monsoon.

Quiet Life in the Trees

Outside the breeding season, *M. myristicapalustris* lives a mostly quiet, **arboreal life,** meaning it spends its time in trees and shrubs. It hunts at night, feeding on small insects like ants, beetles, and flies. It uses a sit-and-wait strategy, staying still and striking quickly when prey comes near.

Because this frog is small, shy, and lives in such hard-to-reach places, it is **very rarely seen.**

Frog in Danger

Even though scientists only discovered *M. myristicapalustris* in 2013, this little frog is already facing a serious threat its home is disappearing. The **Myristica swamps,** where it lives, are being lost fast. In many areas, these swamps a**ren't protected by law,** so they are quietly cleared away



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for **farming and plantations,** including **rubber, palm oil, and teak trees**. These changes destroy the wet, shady, and peaceful environment that this unique frog needs to survive.

Climate change is another big threat to *M. myristicapalustris.* This frog depends on the **pre-monsoon rains** to start breeding. But now, with **changing rainfall patterns,** things are getting unpredictable. If the rains come **too late** or don't last long enough, the frog's eggs could **dry out before they hatch**.

On the other hand, if the rains come **too early or too heavy,** the **tadpoles might get washed away** by fast-moving water before they are fully developed. These changes can be disastrous for a species that already lives in such a limited and fragile environment.

Why This Frog Matters

You might wonder: why care so much about one small frog? Because *M. myristicapalustris* is more than just a frog it is a powerful symbol of a rare and fragile ecosystem. It acts like a messenger, telling us about the health of our environment. Frogs like *M. myristicapalustris* are **natural indicators** when they begin to disappear, it is often a sign that something is going wrong with the land, the water, or the climate. Protecting this species means we are also protecting the **ancient Myristica swamps,** which are home to many other rare and unique species from birds and butterflies to plants that grow nowhere else on the planet.

One of a Kind

Hidden deep in the swampy forests of the Western Ghats, *M. myristicapalustris* lives a life few people ever see. It is small and quiet, singing only when the warm rains arrive. Named after a music icon and found in a forest that feels like another world, this frog is truly special. It reminds us that even the tiniest creatures can have stories worth telling. If this frog disappears, we don't just lose a species we lose a part of the forest's soul.

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Her Views & Visuals

By Dunya Rajasekara

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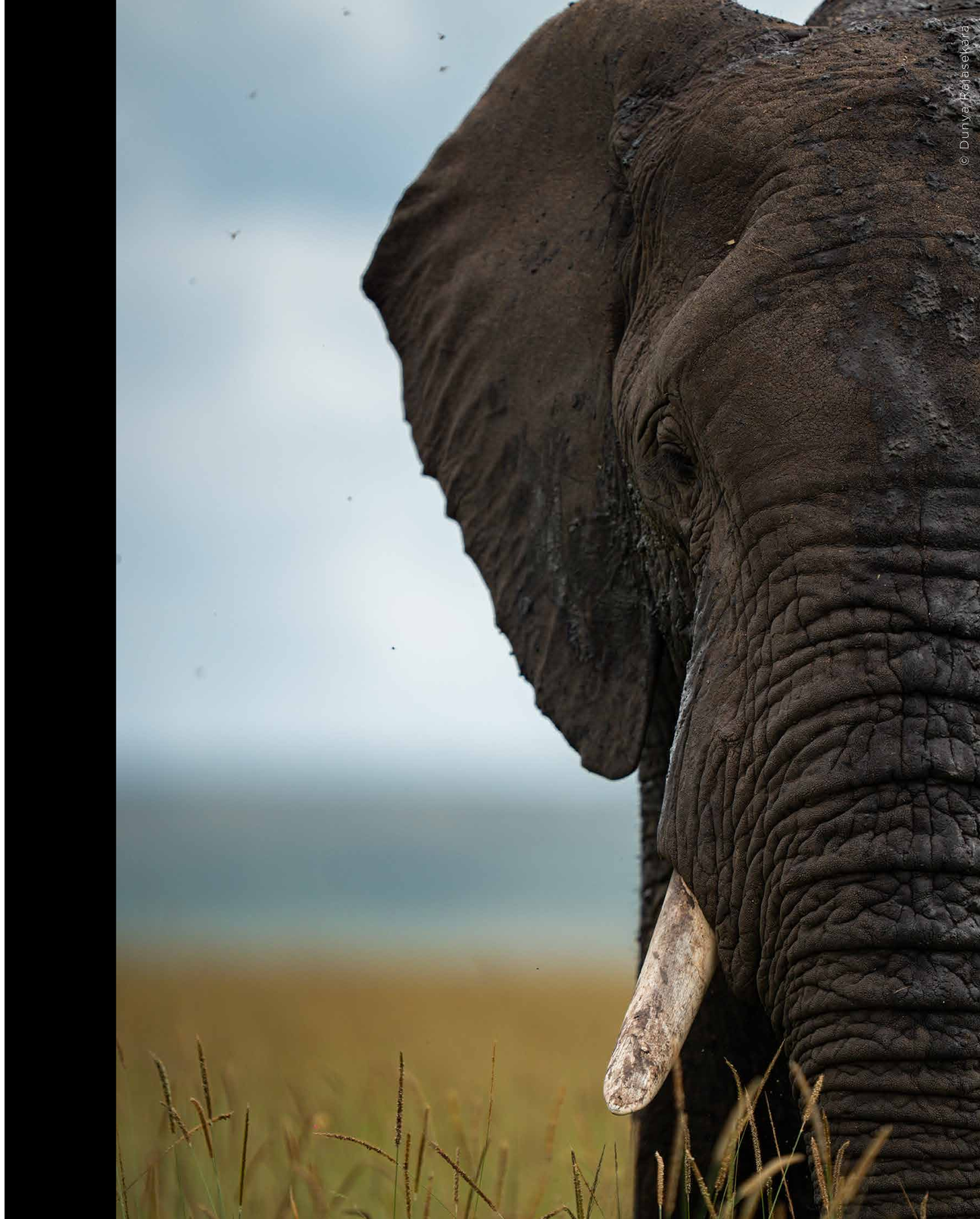


Born and raised in Sri Lanka, she spent 12 years as a cabin crew member with Sri Lankan Airlines, traveling the world and gaining unforgettable experiences. In 2023, she chose to follow her passions full-time. Today, she works as a model, content creator, and stylist, while also dedicating herself to wildlife photography and guiding tours.

While travel has always been a part of her life, the wild holds her heart. Observing animals in their natural element and spending hours in the jungle feels more like home than any city ever could. For her, the wild is not just a passion it is where she truly belongs.

instagram.com/click_a_wild_

Her Views and Visuals




© Dunya Rajasekara

How did your interest in wildlife arise?

Growing up, I spent hours watching NatGeo, Discovery, and Animal Planet channels with my grandfather. I was fascinated and always thought, how cool would it be to be part of the team capturing all this? I have also always loved animals, so it felt natural.

Being raised on an island so rich in wildlife also shaped me - from leopards and elephants to the incredible birdlife, nature was never too far away. After Covid, just as the lockdowns ended, I started visiting Sri Lanka's national parks with my friends. I borrowed a camera and began clicking away, and I got completely hooked. From then on, I couldn't stop going back to the wild, trying to capture these elusive, majestic animals. That was how it all started.

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

My journey as a photographer has been one of passion, learning, and growth. Wildlife photography has taught me patience, discipline, and deep respect for nature. Spending hours waiting for a single moment has changed me - it has made me calmer, more grounded, and more connected to the world around me.

To every girl who dreams of holding a camera in the wild: this path is not just about capturing beautiful images. It is about learning to see it differently, to value every sound, every movement, and every life form in the forest.



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Through this work, we become storytellers for nature, giving a voice to the animals and landscapes that cannot speak for themselves.

Photography has the power to inspire change. By following this passion, you are not only discovering strength within yourself, but also helping protect the wild places and creatures that make our planet so extraordinary.

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

Conservation is everything. As photographers, we can:

• Raise Awareness by documenting vulnerable species and habitats, showing the impact of human activity.
• Create Connections by capturing the emotions and personalities of animals so people truly care.
• Tell Stories by Adding context through captions and narratives, highlighting both problems and solutions.

At the end of the day, our images can inspire people to protect what they might never witness their subjects in person.

Can you give our readers the best wildlife photography tips?

Wildlife photography is tough - miss the moment, and it is gone forever. A few tips I live by:
• Know Your Subject: patience is everything. Watch an animal's behavior closely — with practice, you will start predicting its movements and capturing


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those rare, magical moments.
• Composition Matters: shoot at eye level for intimacy and include the environment to tell a bigger story.
• Manual Mode: always shoot manual. It gives you control over lighting and allows your creativity to shine.
• Enjoy the Moment: don't forget to lift your eyes from the camera or viewing window. Savor the experience with your own eyes, feel the jungle around you, and let the magic of the moment sink in. Sometimes, the memory itself is the most beautiful shot youwill ever take.

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

For me, the future of my journey in wildlife photography is rooted in conservation and storytelling. My dream is to be part of film crews with platforms like NatGeo or BBC, where powerful stories about the wild can reach millions and inspire real change.

One day, I hope to create my own documentary - not just to showcase the beauty of wildlife, but to highlight the urgent need to protect it. I want my work to do more than capture breathtaking images; I want it to remind people of their connection to nature. In today's fast-moving world, we often forget that we are part of the same ecosystem as the leopard in Yala or the elephants crossing our plains. Through photography and film, I hope to encourage people to spend more time in nature, to value it, and to take action to conserve it for generations to come.

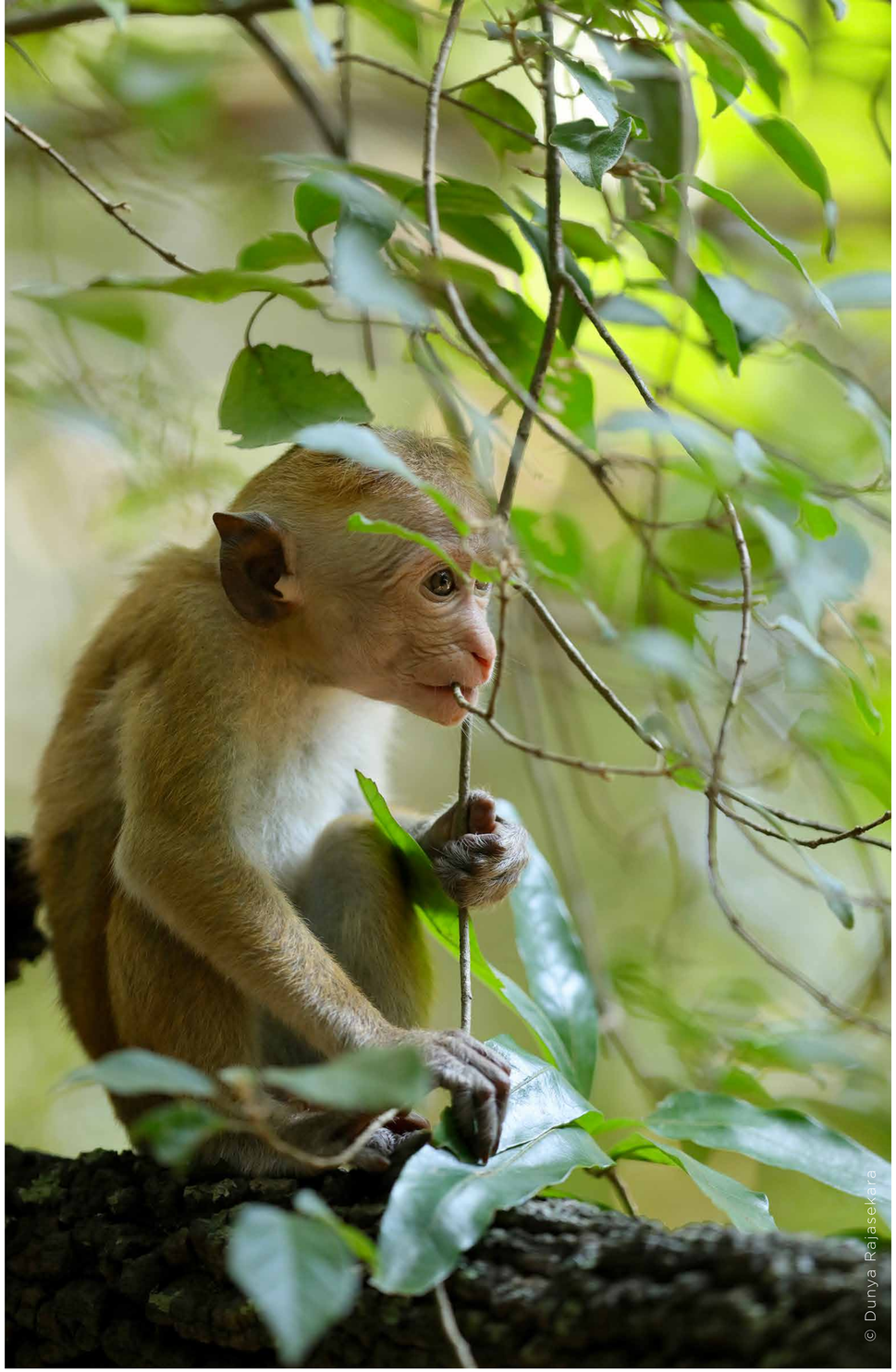
Tell us about your gear.

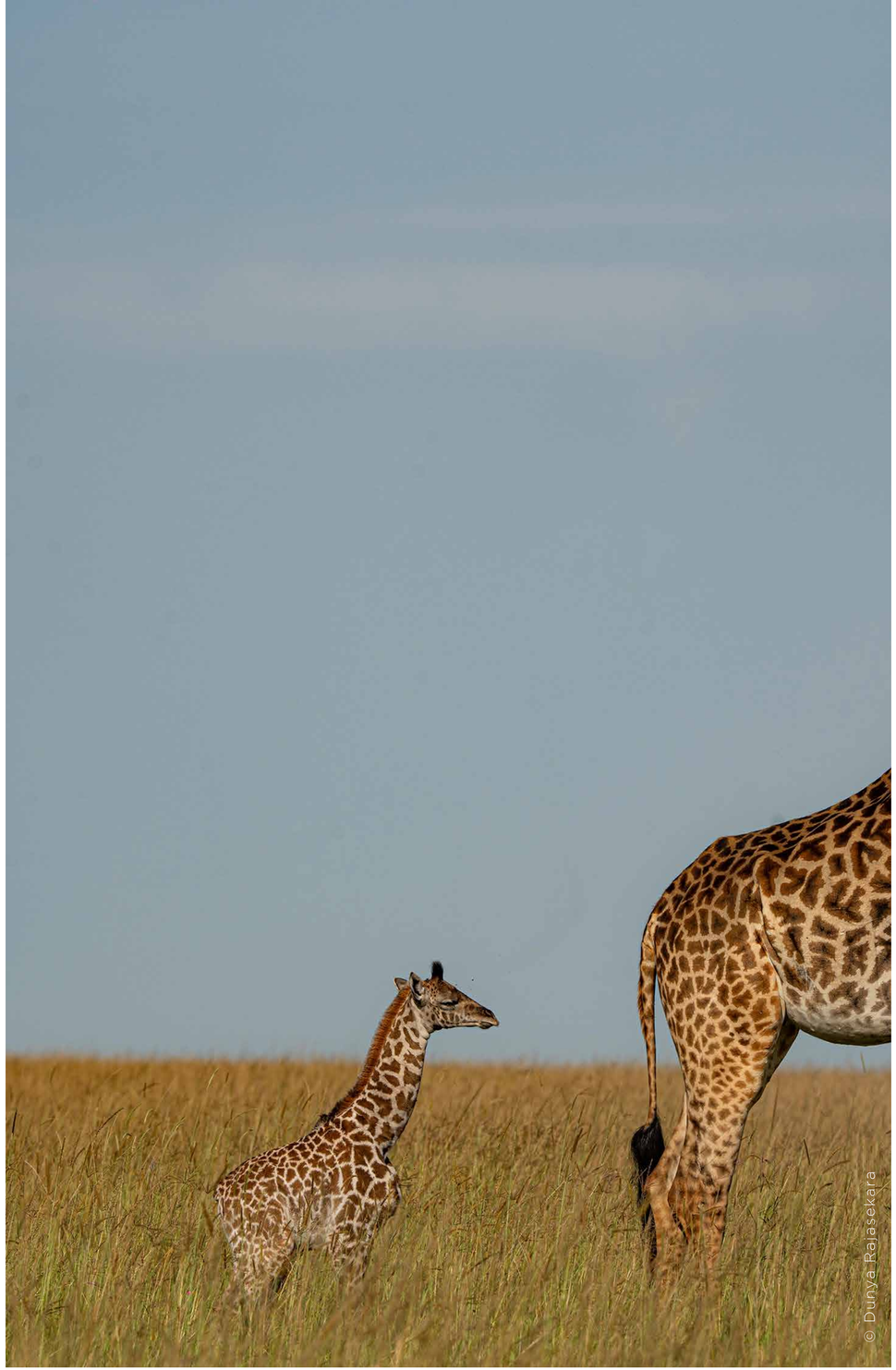
I started with a Canon 5D Mark IV and a 100 - 400mm lens, a great setup to begin with. It is reliable, user-friendly, and light enough to carry on long days in the field. Recently, on my last trip to the Masai Mara, I tried the Sony A7 IV with a 400mm f/2.8 lens, and I absolutely loved it. The performance in low light was incredible, which makes such a difference when shooting wildlife at dawn or dusk.


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Passion for Nature

By Arko Saha

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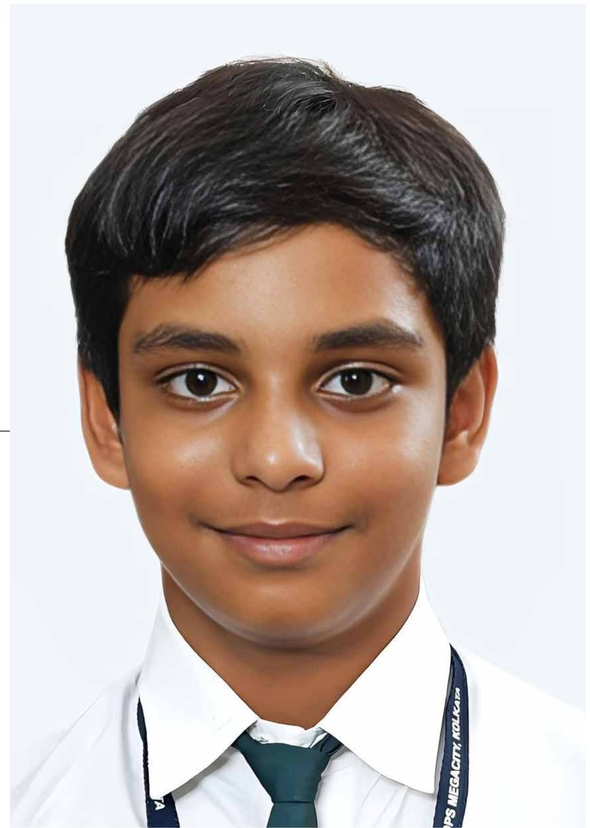
CUB'S CORNER

CUB'S CORNER



Arko Saha is a Grade 9 student at DPS Megacity, Kolkata, with a deep passion for nature photography. Fascinated by birds and insects, he began capturing the natural world at just 3.5 years old with a camera gifted by his parents. Inspired by backyard wildlife and mentored by his father, Arko now documents the beauty of nature through a keen and curious lens.

instagram.com/arko.saha.wildlife



I am a grade nine student at Delhi Public School Megacity (DPS), Kolkata. Photography is my passion, something I truly feel from the heart. My favourite subjects are the many wonders of Mother Nature, especially birds and insects. Since childhood, I have been drawn to the beauty of the natural world. Over time, I have come to appreciate it even more, both through my own eyes and the viewfinder of my camera. I believe birds and insects are among nature's most fascinating creations, and it brings me immense joy to document them through my lens.



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My photographic journey began before I was four, when my parents gifted me my first digital camera, a Canon PowerShot. That little camera sparked a deep love for capturing the world around me. Later, when I received my first DSLR, I began transitioning from a curious enthusiast to a more serious photographer. Through all of this, my biggest support system has been my parents. They are my best friends, my strongest critics, and my constant source of encouragement, making it possible for me to pursue my passion.

My father has always been my first and most important mentor. We used to have a backyard teeming with life, jumping spiders, frogs, colourful caterpillars, and all sorts of unique insects. I remember watching him photograph these tiny creatures up close and then showing me the images. That was my first real introduction to the vibrant life around me. Over time, I started learning the names of various insect species, and later, birds too. I was mesmerized by the jewel-like shimmer of Chrysilla spiders in the sunlight. I watched migratory birds visit our backyard during certain seasons. I saw striking flycatchers perched deep within the branches of our mango trees and even once spotted a huge honey buzzard being mobbed by a group of crows!

One of the happiest moments of my life was four years ago, when my parents gifted me a DSLR camera along with a 55–250mm lens. That gift marked the true beginning of my photography journey. I started photographing garden birds like sunbirds and flowerpeckers, who feasted in our garden almost every day.

But perhaps the most unforgettable moment of all was my first real photography trip. My family took me to a small lake near a village in the Burdwan district of West Bengal. It was wintertime, and the lake was alive with hundreds of waterbirds and raptors, ospreys, ducks, pratincoles, herons, and jacanas everywhere I looked. I was awestruck by the sheer diversity. Flocks of birds filled the sky, and I could hardly keep up with what I was seeing. That experience, my first encounter with nature in its wild unfiltered form is now etched in my heart forever.



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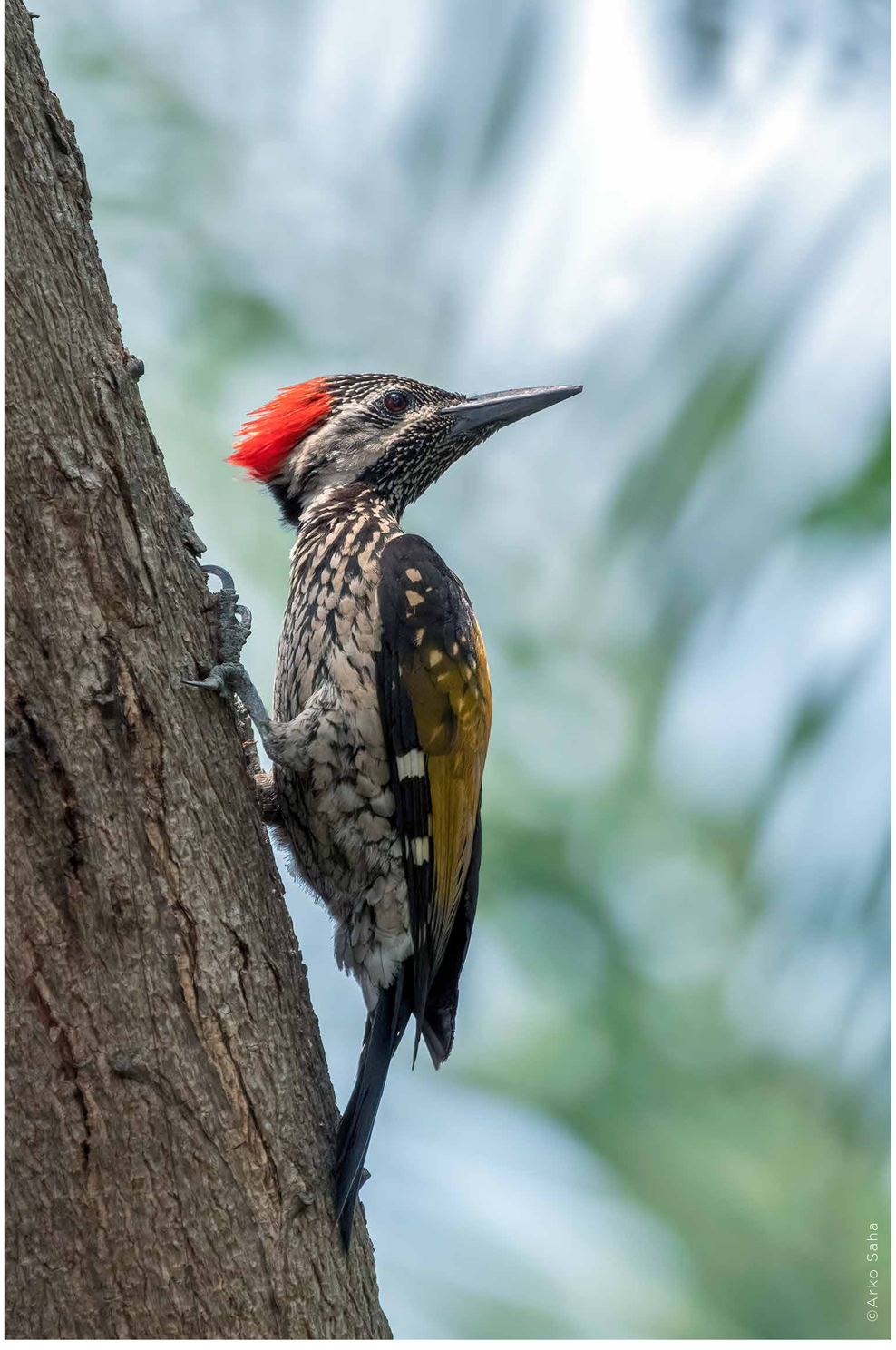


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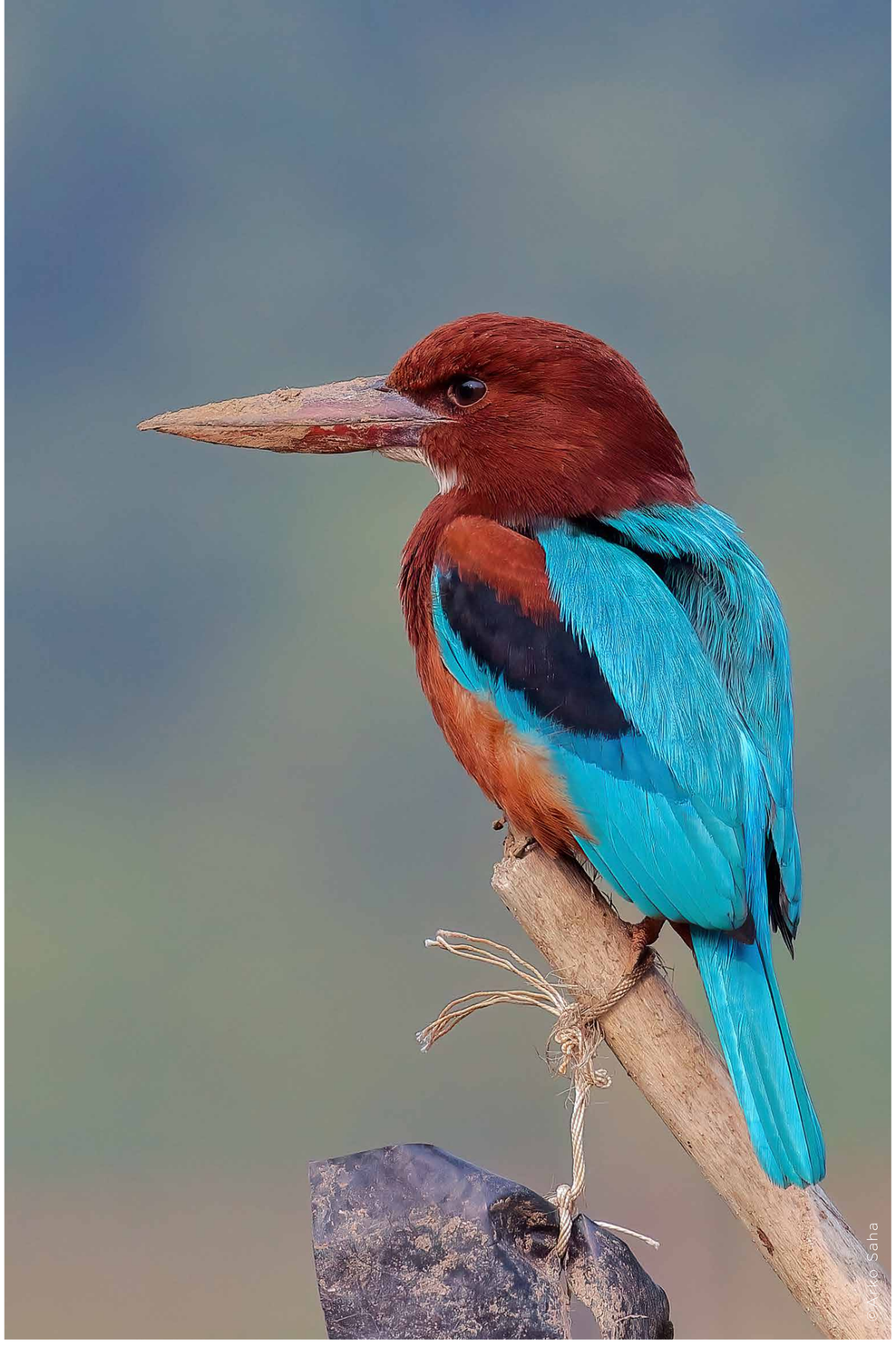


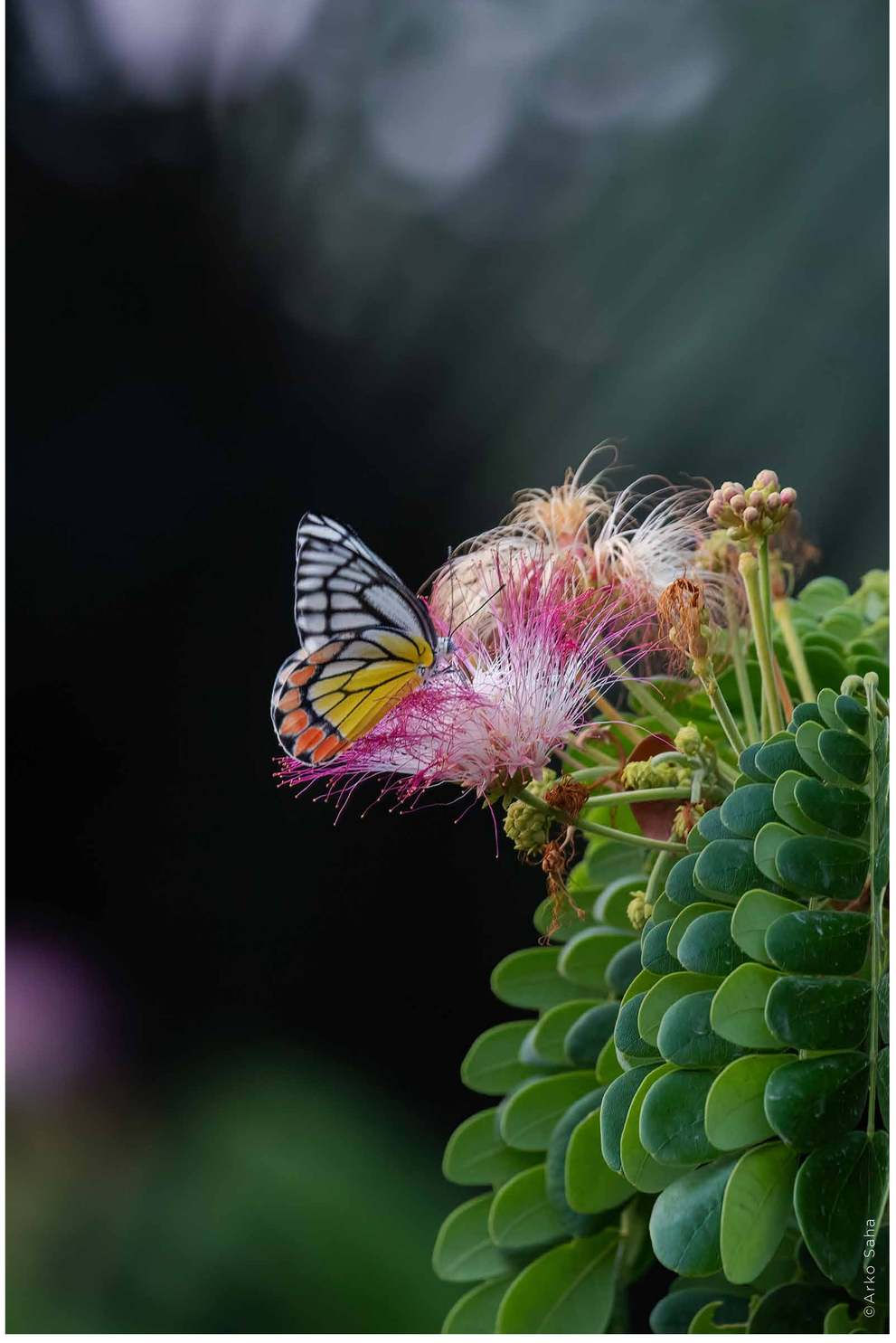
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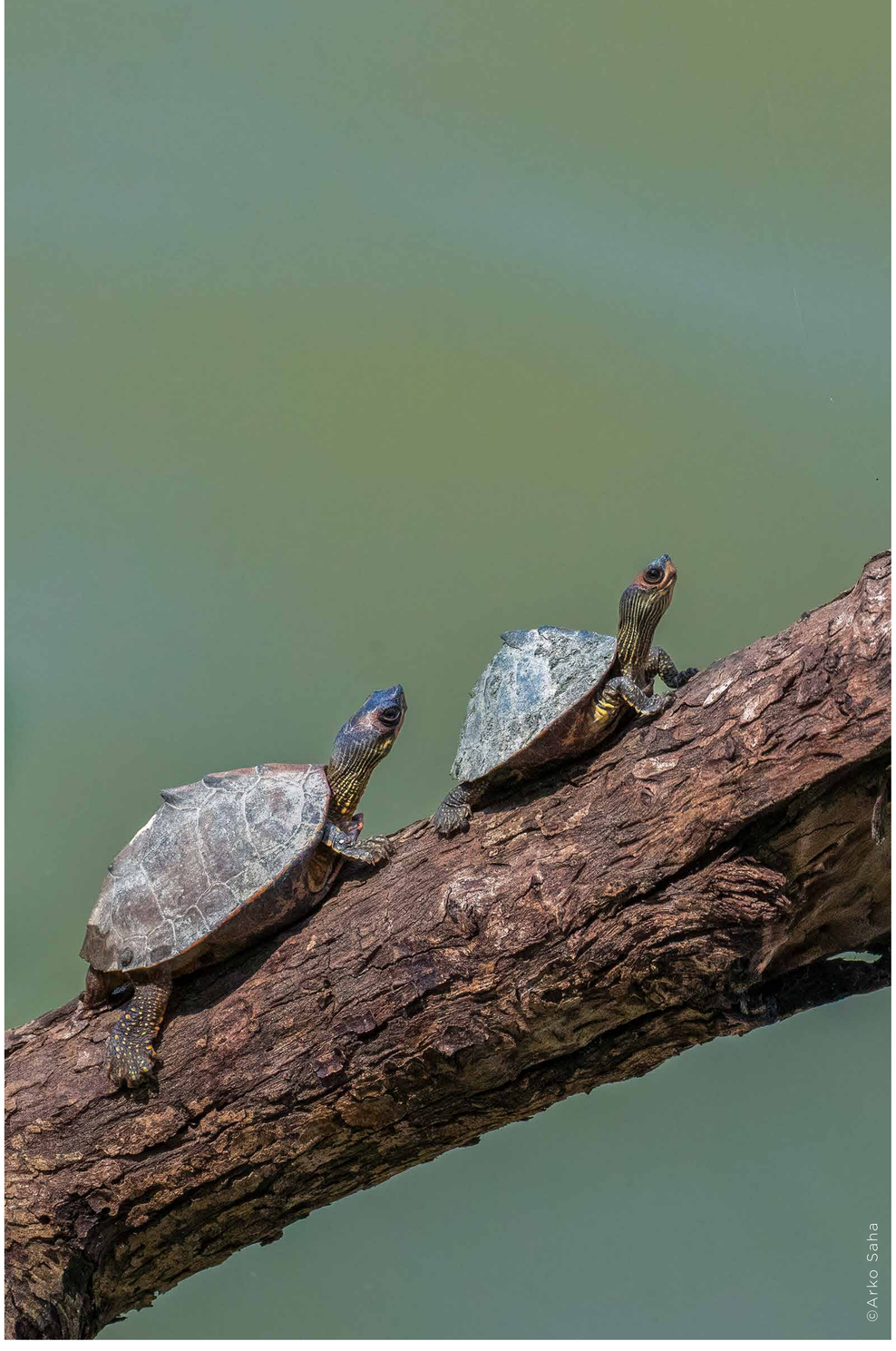

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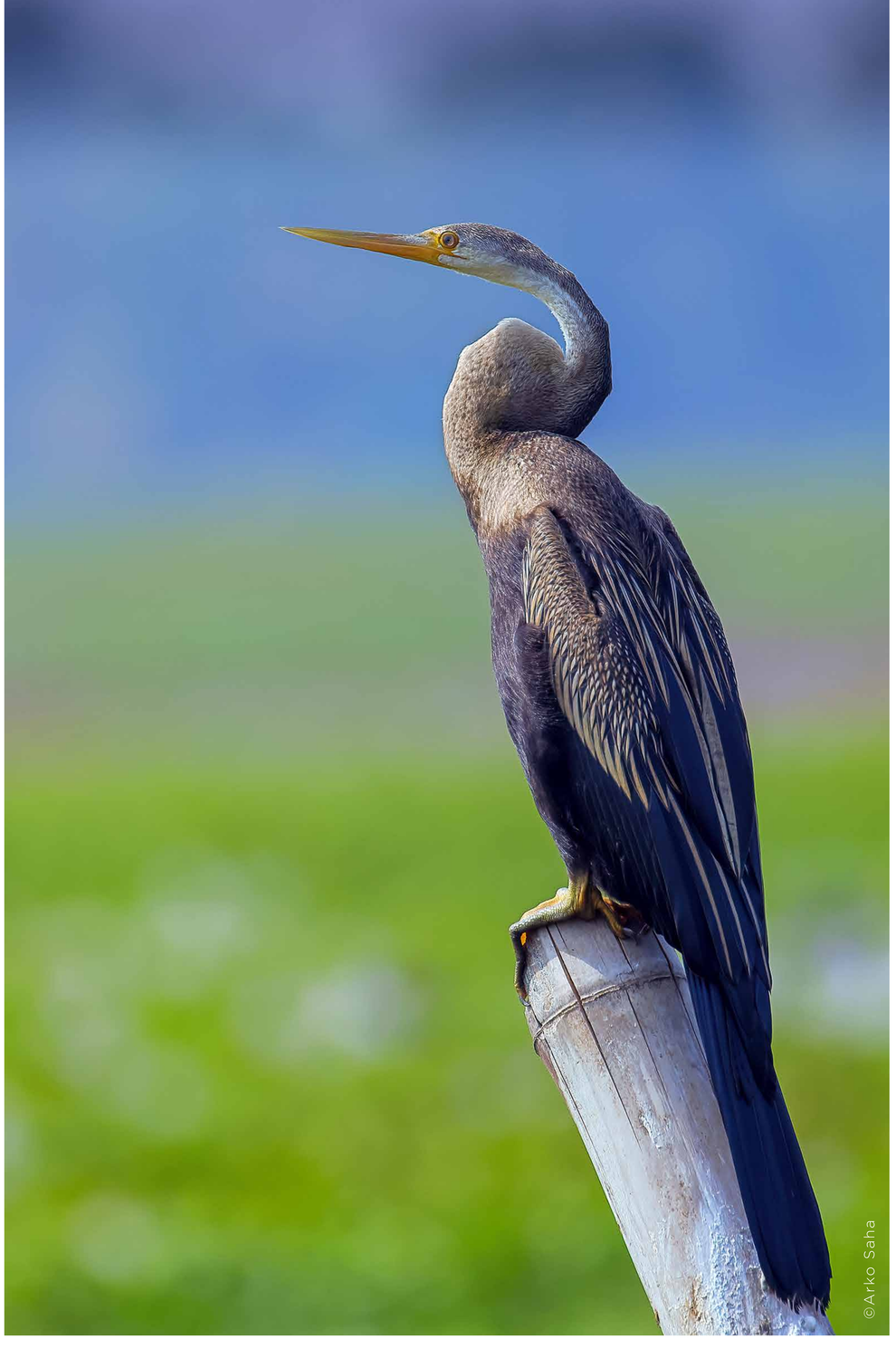

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TRAVELOGUE

Chasing Light & Life

By Anand Kumar

© Anand Kumar



Anand, a seasoned banker and accountant by profession, who initially turned to photography as a means of stress relief a creative outlet beyond balance sheets , deadlines, audits and regulatory demands. What began as a hobby soon evolved into a passion, drawing him deep into the captivating world of wildlife photography. His journey led him to the heart of Masai Mara, where he found not just subjects for his lens, but a profound connection to nature and its raw, untamed beauty. Today, Anand is no longer just the man who once balanced books and analyised financials. He is someone who now balances light, shadow, and stories.

instagram.com/
anandkumarsphotography

As an amateur photographer, I have often found myself chasing light, beauty, and fleeting moments through the viewfinder of my camera. While cityscapes and controlled environments helped me understand composition and exposure, I knew that true growth lay beyond the predictable. My journey to Kenya's Masai Mara National Reserve stemmed from a desire to confront the wild, embrace the unpredictable, and refine my craft amidst some of the planet's most majestic landscapes and wildlife.



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Masai Mara is a name that resonates with photographers and wildlife enthusiasts around the world. Renowned for its sweeping grasslands, dramatic wildlife encounters, and golden horizons, it promised to be as challenging as it was rewarding. What I found there exceeded all expectations. It became a masterclass in patience, adaptability, and humility. This is the story of my experience.

My first glimpse of the Masai Mara from the air was unforgettable. Below, the land stretched endlessly an intricate patchwork of golden grasslands, serpentine rivers, and the scattered shadows of wildlife moving freely across the plains. As our small bush plane touched down on a rudimentary dirt airstrip, I realized this was no ordinary destination. This was nature vast and unfiltered.

From the moment I met my local team at Mara Trails, it became clear that the success of my journey would rely as much on their deep knowledge of the land and its wildlife as on my technical skills. With years of guiding experience, they became my interpreters, translating the wilderness into a language I could understand through my lens.

Each day began long before sunrise. By 4:45 a.m., I was preparing my gear; by 5:00 a.m., we were bouncing across dew-drenched plains in our open Land Cruiser. The African sky gradually shifted from ink-black to soft purples and oranges, transforming the landscape with it.

Sunrises in the Masai Mara weren't just visually stunning, they were



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transformative. The soft, directional light bathed the world in a golden glow, making even familiar animals seem mythical. For a photographer, it was a playground of light and shadow, silhouette and detail.

Yet capturing these moments was far from simple. Exposure settings required constant adjustment as the sky brightened minute by minute. Shooting into the sun yielded dramatic silhouettes, giraffes striding across ridgelines, elephants emerging from morning mist while turning away revealed rich textures in fur and feather. The true challenge was not just seeing the light but anticipating its dialogue with the land.

If sunrise was soft and poetic, sunset was theatrical. The light deepened, shadows lengthened, and the sky erupted in a riot of crimson, gold, and violet. Against this breathtaking backdrop, animals paused sometimes alert, sometimes at rest, creating silhouettes of unparalleled beauty.

Photographically, dusk posed its own challenges. Light disappeared rapidly, requiring quick adjustments to ISO, aperture, and shutter speed. Dust suspended in the golden glow added atmosphere but also demanded caution to avoid lens flare and sensor contamination. Through trial and error, I discovered that my best images came not from chasing perfection, but from embracing the environment's imperfections.

Unlike studio photography, where every element is controlled, wildlife photography is a lesson in surrender. The animals owe you nothing; they won't repeat a moment for a missed shot. I spent hours tracking elusive leopards, only for them to vanish into the undergrowth seconds before I was ready.

Harsh midday light flattened contrasts, while sudden weather shifts could turn a brilliant scene dull in moments. Despite precautions, dust found its way into every crevice of my gear. Through it all, I learned that adaptability, quick thinking, and humility are as vital as any lens or camera body.

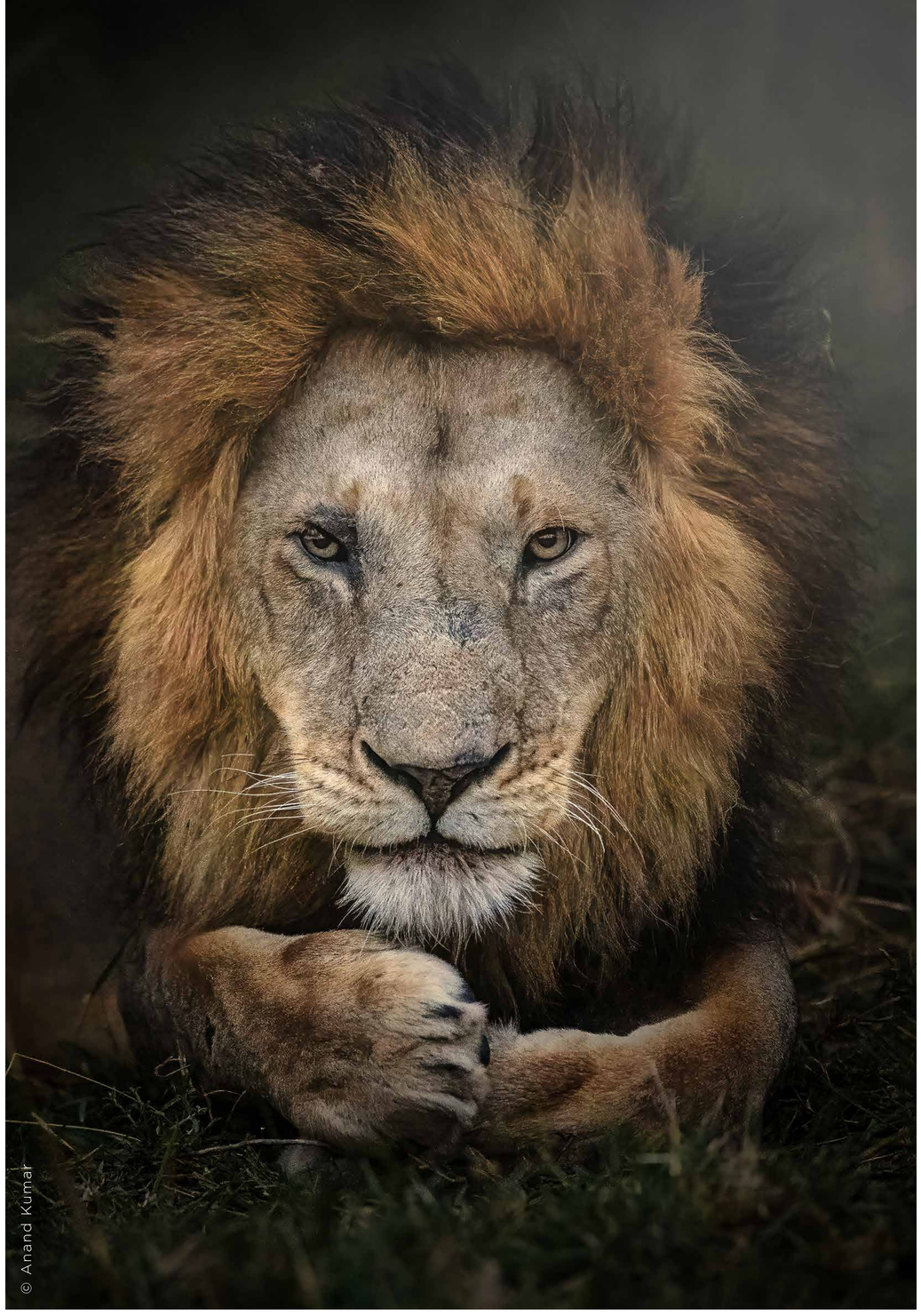
Capturing fast-moving animals required high shutter speeds—often at the cost of aperture and ISO balance. Predators mid-hunt demanded instinctive adjustments and precise focus. Composition had to happen in an instant: framing subjects against dramatic skies, using rivers or herds as leading lines, and balancing negative space to tell a compelling story within a single frame.

We had the privilege of witnessing and capturing few extraordinary moments in the wild.

- Faulu the leopard: We photographed this magnificent animal showcasing her elegance and agility in her natural habitat.

- The Topiu & Marsh Pride: Observing the male lions was both humbling and awe-inspiring, revealing the social dynamics and power of these iconic predators.

- Rhinos: Their quiet strength was a stark reminder of the urgency of conservation.



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• Cheetah siblings: Playful and full of character, their interactions displayed the close bonds between them.

• Newborn elephants: Their innocence and curiosity brought a profound sense of wonder.

These encounters not only deepened our appreciation for the animals but also underscored the need to protect their habitats for future generations.

No visit to the Masai Mara would be complete without engaging with the Masai people proud, resilient, and deeply rooted in their land.

Welcomed into a village, I witnessed traditions that have endured for centuries. Men performing the iconic jumping dance, women creating intricate beadwork, and elders sharing stories beneath acacia trees. Their hospitality was sincere; their dignity unmistakable.

Photographing the Masai required sensitivity and respect. I sought consent before every portrait, engaged in genuine conversations before raising my camera, and aimed to capture not just their image, but their spirit. These photographs remain among my most cherished—expressions of humanity, resilience, and continuity.

One elder's words stayed with me: "The animals, the grass, the sky we are all part of this place. We do not own it; we belong to it."

It was a sentiment that echoed the quiet teachings of the land itself.

If the Masai Mara instills one virtue above all, it is patience. Hours spent in stillness, waiting for the perfect moment, taught me that great photography is not taken it is received. The best images come when we release expectations and synchrony with nature's rhythm.

For every successful shot, there were dozens of failures: overexposed skies, missed focus, flawed compositions. Each mistake was a lesson; each lesson, a step forward. I began to see failure not as a setback, but as an integral part of the creative process.

No image can fully capture the weight of a lion's gaze or the vibration of hooves across the plains. Yet photographs serve as bridges connecting experience to memory, and distant worlds to those who may never set foot there. They inspire, educate, and remind us of the beauty and fragility of the world we share.

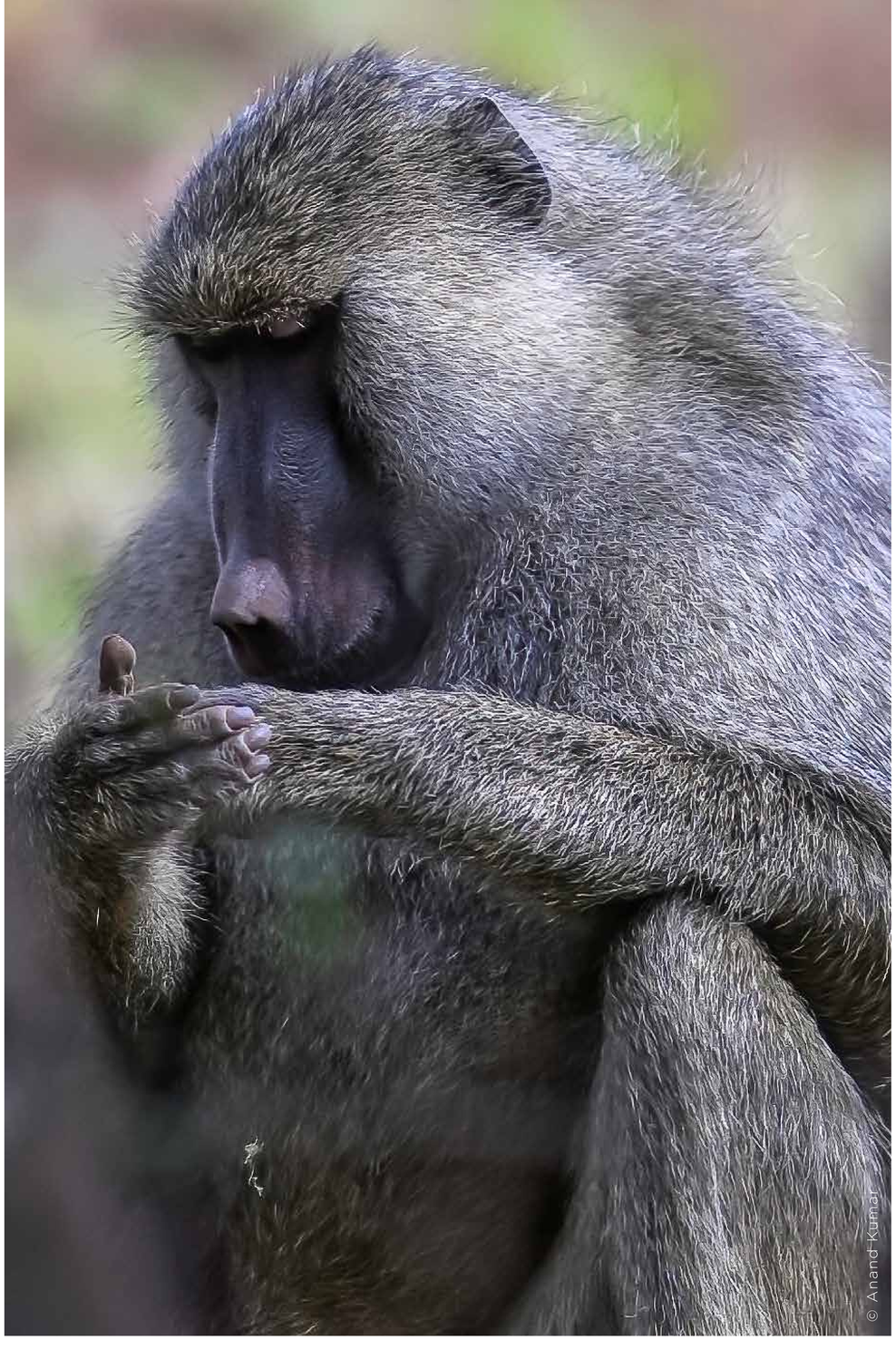
Returning home, I carried more than a collection of images. I carried stories of patience and perseverance, connection and humility. My time in the Masai Mara has not only refined my skills but also transformed my understanding of my role within the natural world.

I remain, by title, an amateur. Yet my journey is reshaping my perspective. Photography is not just about capturing moments, it is about honoring them.

I hope to return to the Mara each year not only with improved technique, but with a deepened sense of gratitude and responsibility to share its stories with integrity and care.




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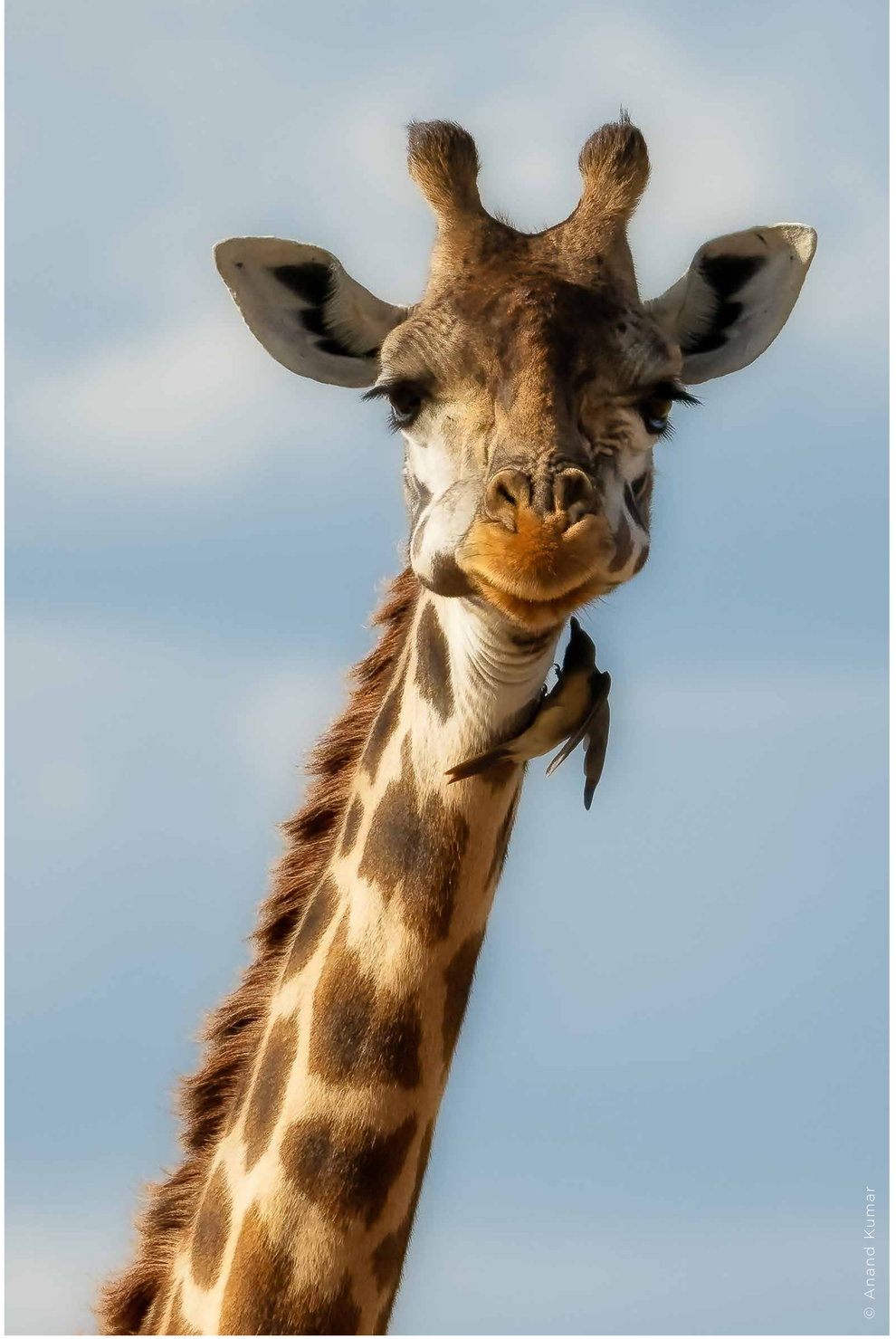


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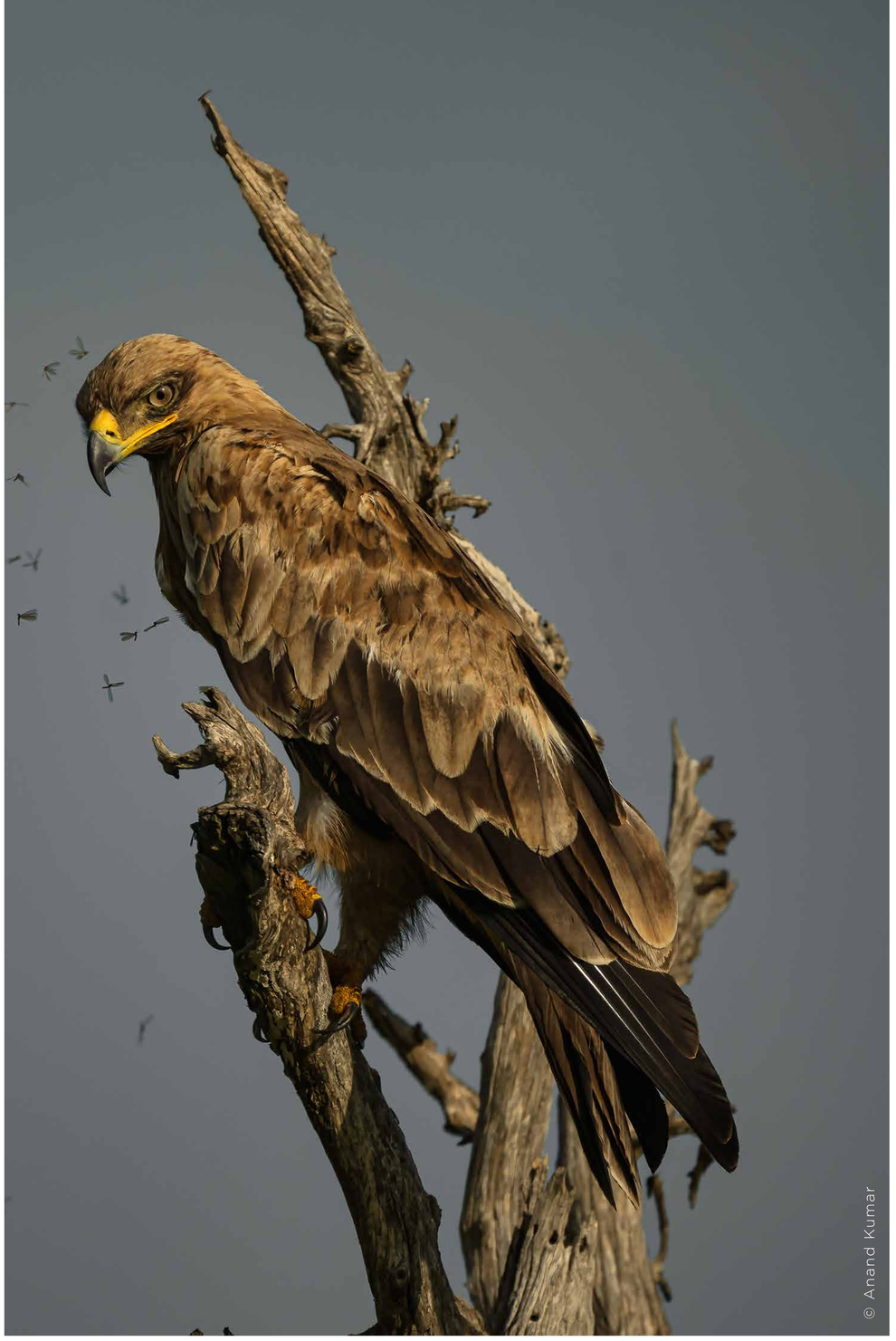

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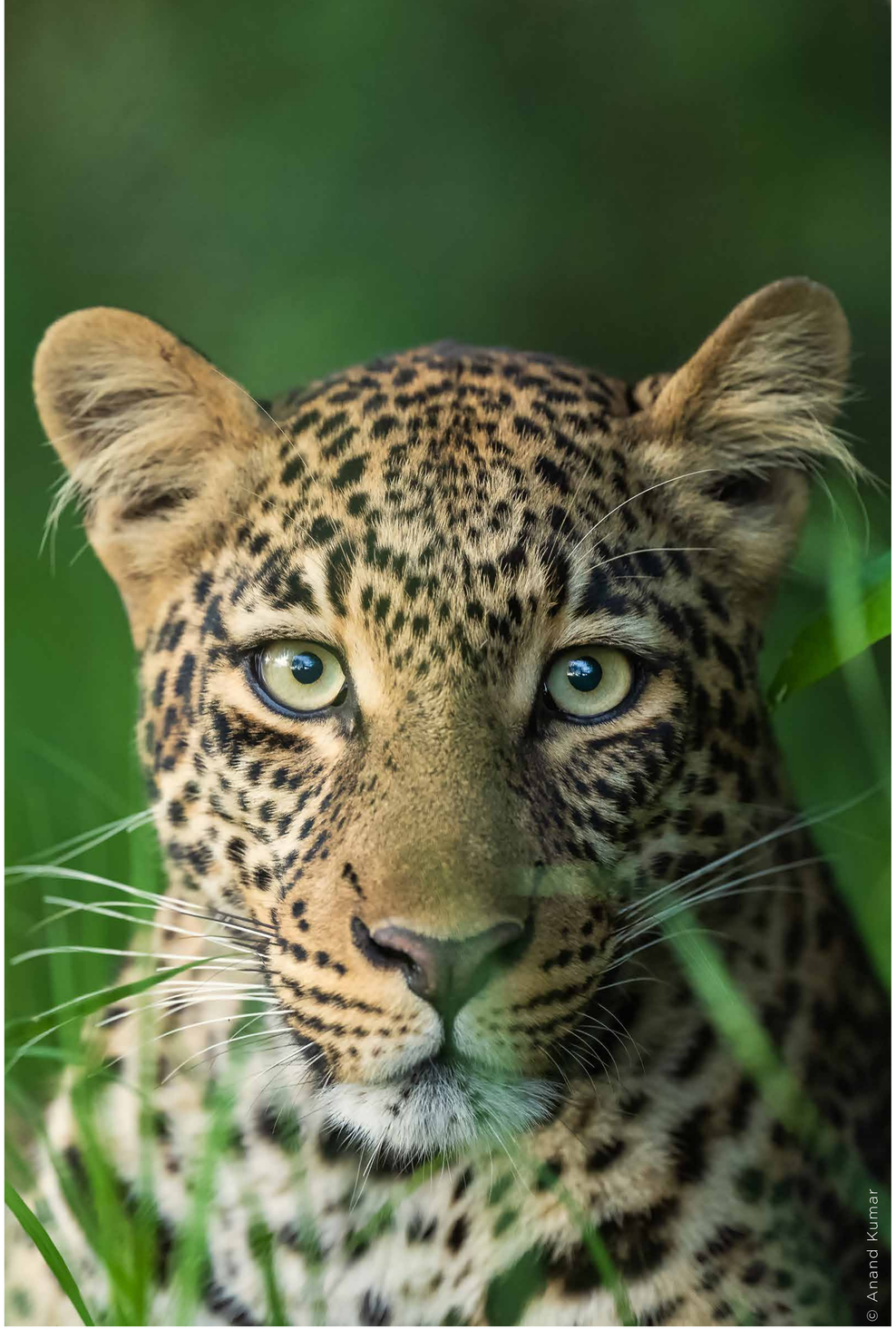

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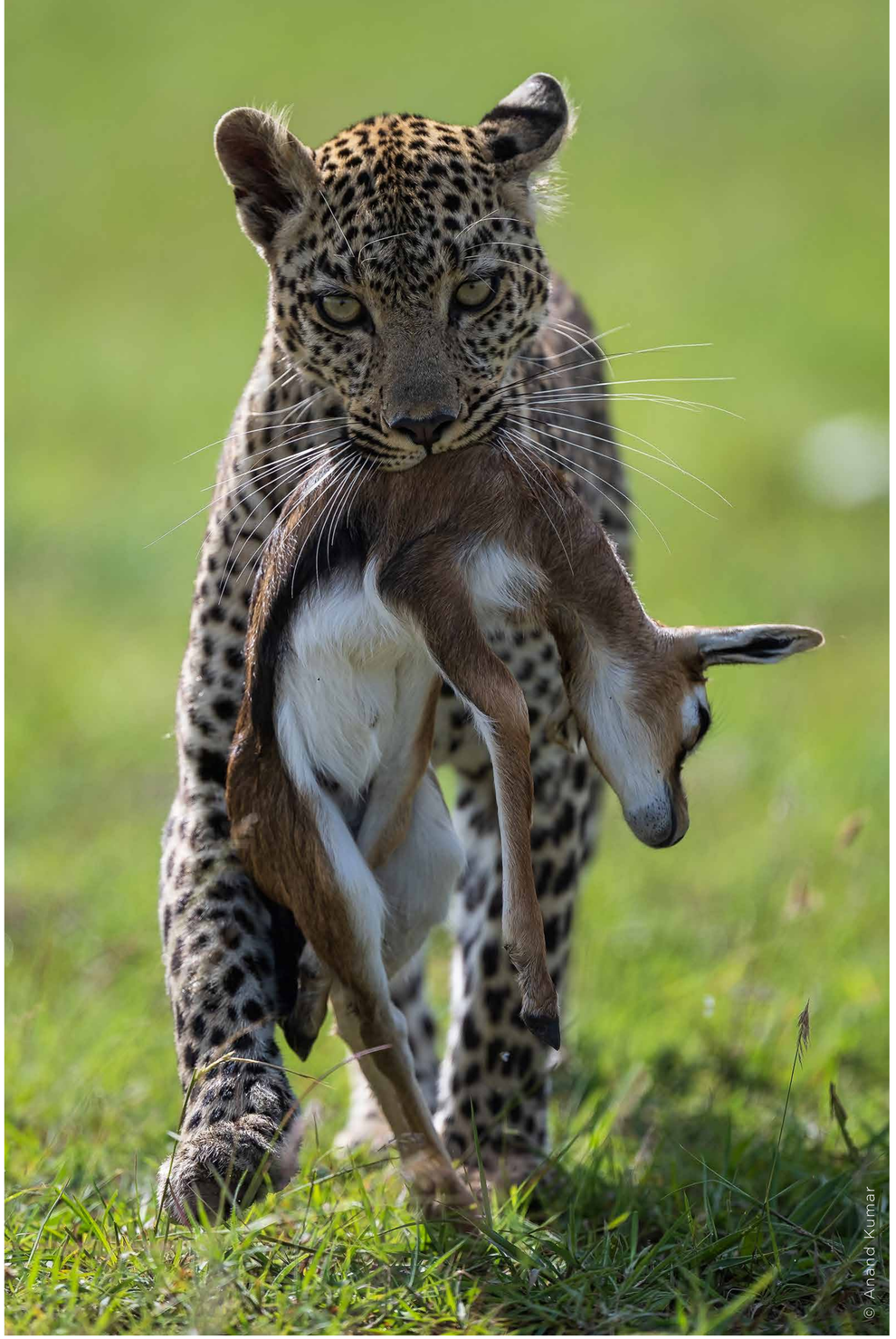

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Echoes from the Wild

By Abhijith Perambra



© Abhijith Perambra



Abhijith Perambra is a passionate wildlife photographer from Kerala with over a decade of experience capturing natural landscapes and wildlife. Specializing in wildlife documentaries, he won the Wildlife Documentary Competition by the Kerala Forest Department (2024) and secured second place in the CWRDM Wetland Day Documentary Competition (2025). He has received multiple photography awards, actively participates in conservation efforts, and conducts workshops and exhibitions to inspire others to connect with nature through photography.

instagram.com/abhijith_perambra
youtube.com/@
earthechoes-abhijith_perambra

I began learning about golden jackals in the area around my house. As a child, I would often hear their howl in the evenings, and I always assumed they were made by foxes. It was only recently that I confirmed those sounds indeed belonged to golden jackals.



© Abhijith Perambra


© Abhijith Perambra



All the creatures around us live in mutual dependence, yet we often fail to recognize the role of golden jackals in this balance their interdependence with other species and the valuable services they provide to nature.

I started observing them in the quarry habitat near my home. They are usually seen in the early mornings and evenings, often in small groups. Like most wild animals, foxes tend to avoid human presence. So, observing and photographing them requires a lot of patience and caution. I had to wait for long periods before I could capture good images but the wait was well worth it. As I continued watching them, I realized how unique their lifestyle is compared to many other animals.

The jackal, a wild animal of the *Canis* genus, is also often misunderstood. Many people wrongly assume that jackals attack humans, but they are, in fact, harmless and misunderstood creatures. Jackals play a crucial role in agriculture by controlling pests such as rats and wild pigs, which damage crops. This makes them valuable allies to farmers.

Being nocturnal, jackals hunt at night and rest in the bushes during the day. They are omnivores, feeding on a variety of fruits and vegetables depending on the season. For instance, during summer, they enjoy eating mangoes and jackfruits. One reason people dislike jackals is that they sometimes prey on domesticated poultry, such as chickens. Apart from that, jackals rarely pose any threat to humans.

These animals live in groups and give birth in a den after mating. Interestingly, foxes often choose to give birth in a den originally made by porcupines, as these shelters offer better protection for the young. golden jackal pups, much like puppies, stay with their mothers until they are capable of hunting on their own.

Although there are often conflicts when domestic dogs and golden jackals encounter each other, they sometimes do mate. The offspring from such matings known as naayikurukkan are hybrid animals that are increasingly common in some regions. These hybrids usually have distinct coat colours and characteristics. However, their presence poses a threat to the purity and survival of the native golden jackal species.

While not currently endangered, golden jackals face threats from habitat loss and persecution due to their reputation as poultry thieves. Conservation efforts focus on mitigating human jackal conflicts and protecting their natural habitats.
The golden jackal remains an integral part of India’s rich biodiversity. As we strive for coexistence, understanding and respect, this clever canid is key to its survival.

As generalist survivor, the species is considered indicator for the health of an ecosystem. Its presence suggests a well-balanced environment with sufficient resources. Incorporating these facts into a propper documentation will provide readers with a deeper understanding of the golden jackal’s ecological and cultural importance in India.


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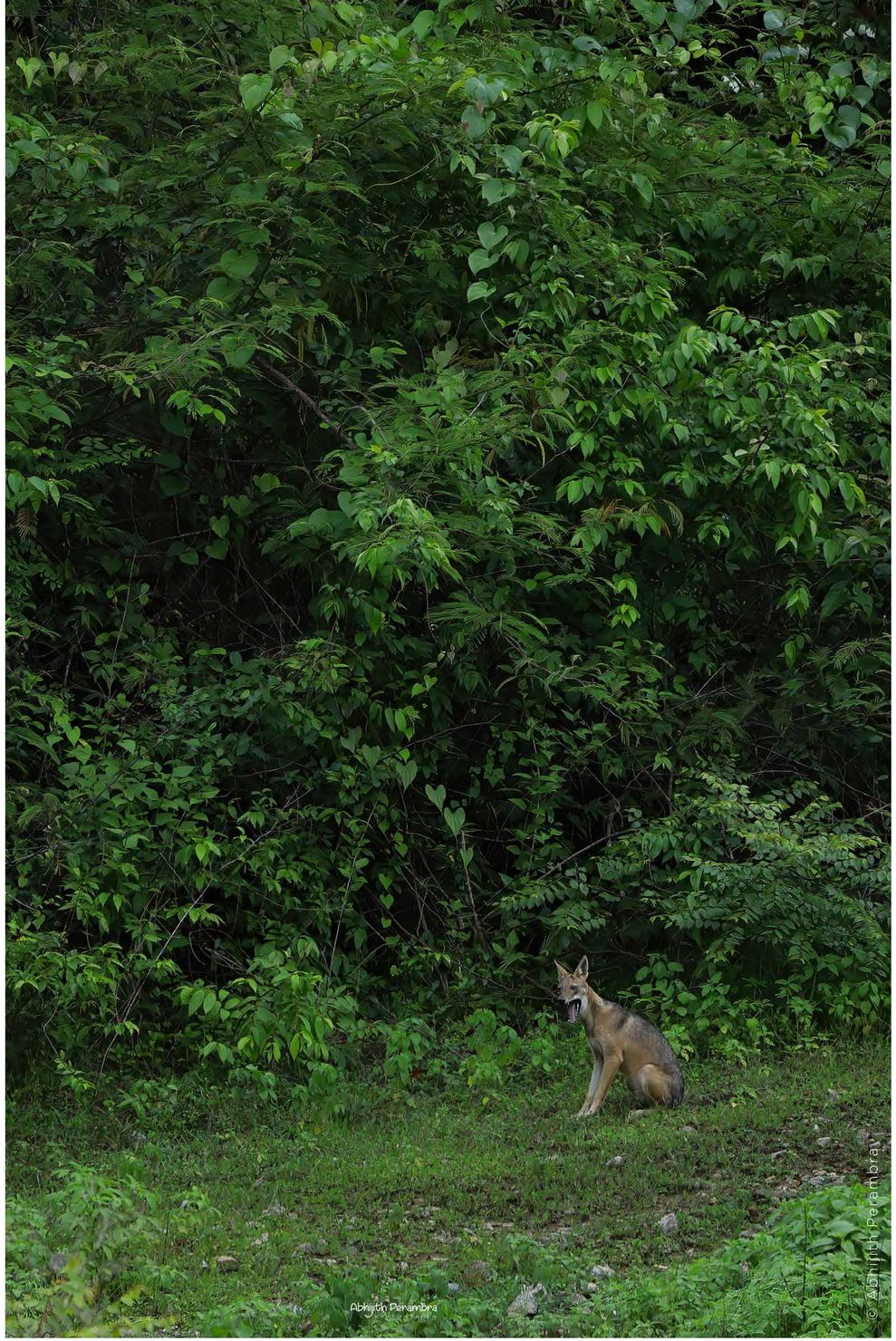
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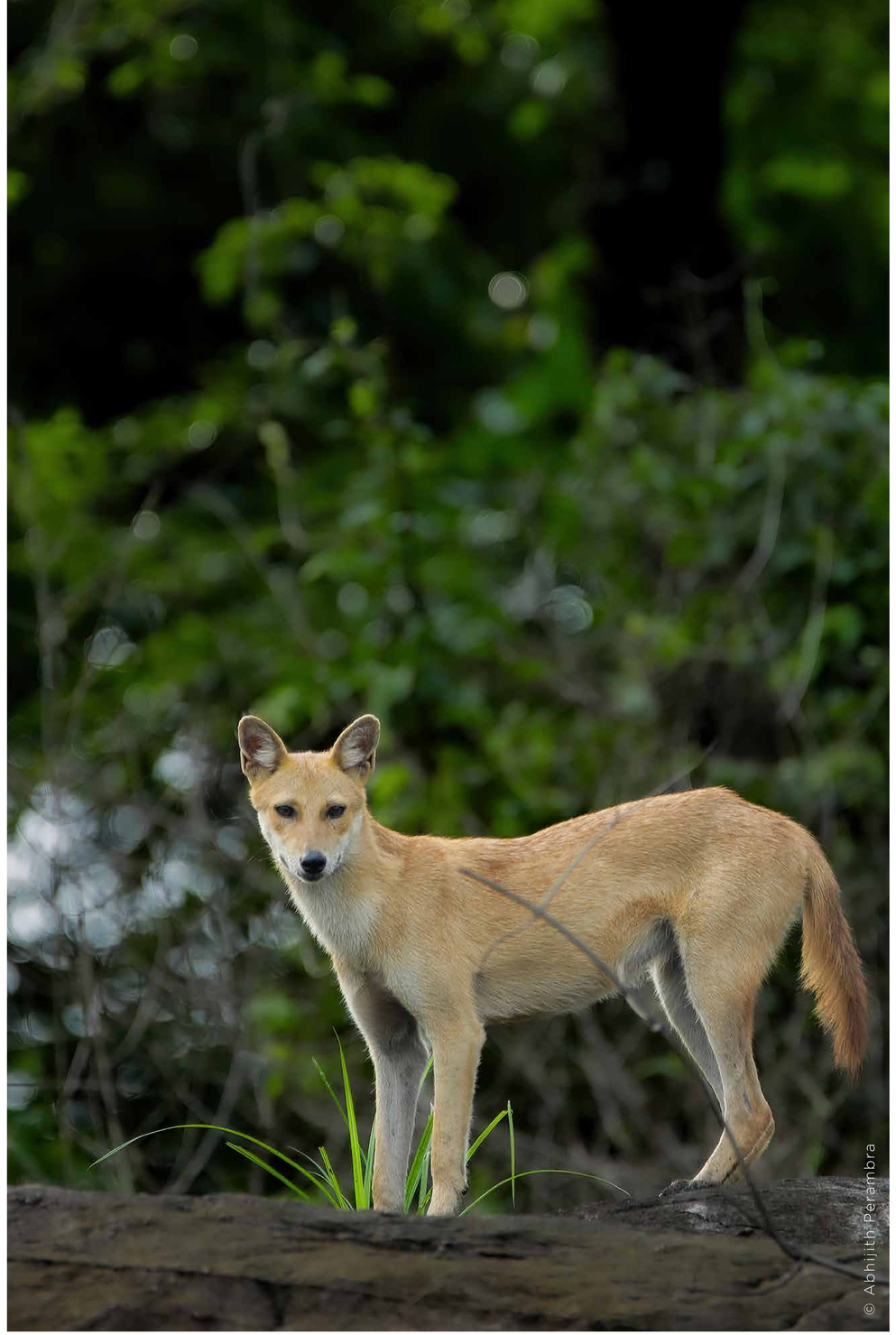

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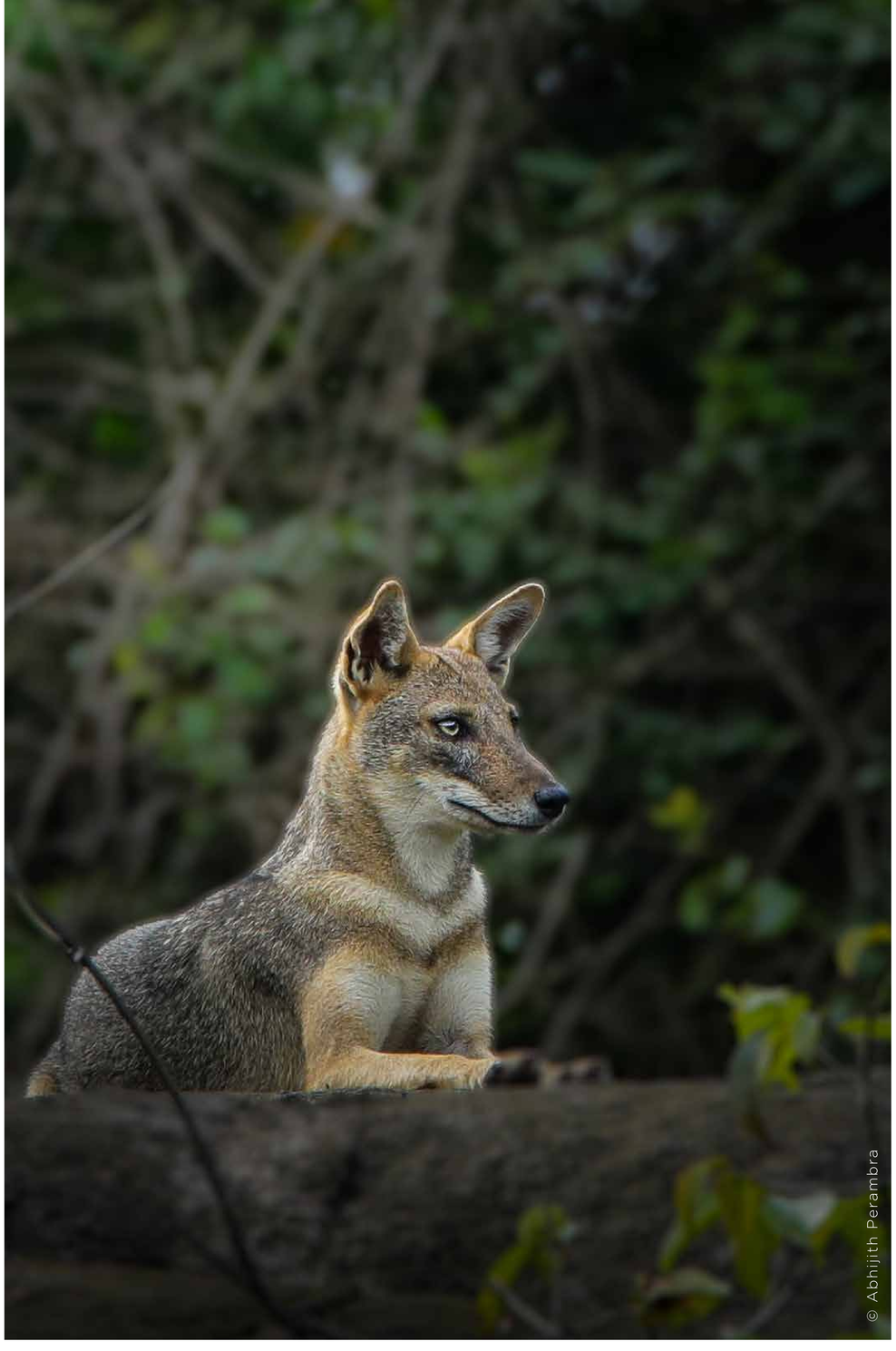

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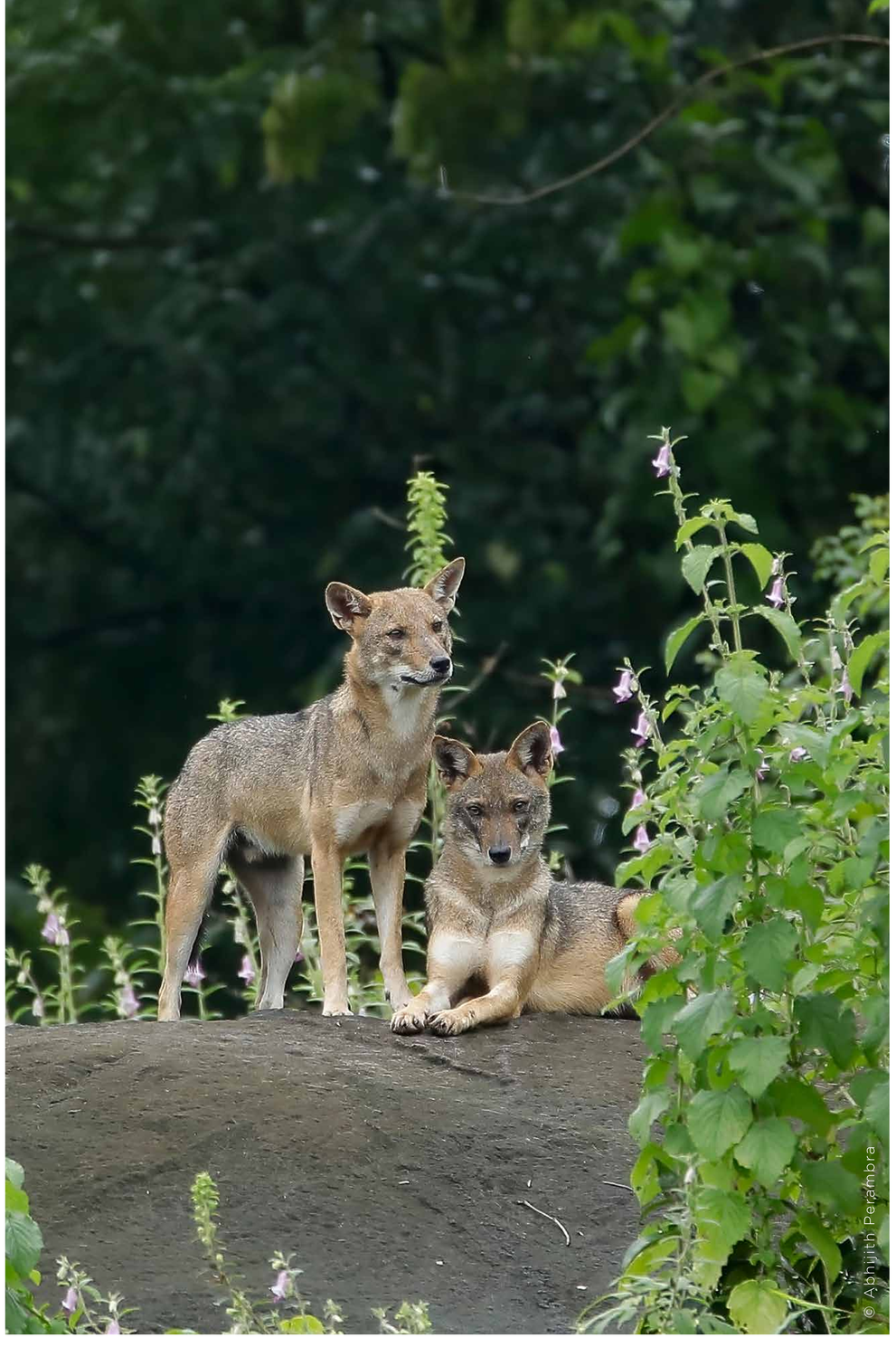

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Practice in Public, Driven by Passion

By Mike Hendley

© Mike Hendley



Mike is a Canadian artist based in Ottawa, working in graphite, watercolor, oil, and digital. His work explores wildlife and the natural world, shaped by daily sketchbook practice, field photography, and time spent observing outdoors. He teaches drawing and painting through workshops and shares his work at mikehendley.com, on Instagram @ mike_hendley and through his podcast “Drawing Inspiration” found anywhere you listen to podcasts.

mikehendley.com/
facebook.com/ArtistMikeHendley
instagram.com/mike_hendley



My art practice started long before I thought to call myself an artist. Drawing showed up early and often, in the margins of school notebooks and sketches on scraps of paper. It stayed with me through every career pivot and quiet moment. Today, I'm based in Ottawa, Canada, working in pencil, watercolor, acrylic, oil, and digital. Most days begin or end with drawing inspiration from nature, wildlife, and the space where technology and the outdoors intersect.

I grew up on a hobby farm in Ontario, and my earliest inspiration came from cartoons like "Tom and Jerry" and comic books. I copied animals from those comic books, invented creatures from my imagination, and used whatever materials I could find. There were no classes or mentors, just a pencil, a desk, and time. Though I didn't pursue formal art education, that early habit of observation and making never left.

When school and work took over, art slipped into the background. I was a computer hobbyist and hacker in the 80s, then a web designer in the early days of the internet. Over time, I took on a leadership role in health research technology. Even while managing teams, shaping strategy, and building software, I kept sketching quietly on the side. First, as a stay-at-home dad with my oldest daughter, and later with more intention. That consistency became a thread that grounded me.



© Mike Hendley



My day job is technical and structured. It taught me how to manage time, think in systems, and lead without losing curiosity. I used to think my work in tech and my art were separate, but I've learned they inform each other. Problem-solving in software helps me push through failed paintings. Leading teams gave me the tools to teach. My day job is also a kind of quiet sponsor, providing the financial stability that allows me to take creative risks and invest in my art practice without pressure to monetize every piece.

My tools now include graphite, acrylic, watercolor, oil, and digital. Graphite gives me control and precision for animals and textures with a small kit and the challenge of suggesting colour where there is none. Watercolor took me several attempts to embrace, and I have now developed my style of realism using a simple kit and just a waterbrush. Oil lets me slow down and build deeper realism. I've come to love oil paint, and it is becoming my primary focus. Each medium offers a way to explore what I see.

Sketchbooks have become a central part of my practice. They are where I work out ideas, explore composition, and test materials. I often carry two or three--one for graphite, one for watercolor, and another that holds quick studies or notes. Working in sketchbooks has helped me move past the pressure to make finished pieces every time. It gives me space to experiment

and think through problems visually. Most of my finished work starts as a loose drawing or colour test in a sketchbook.

Photography plays a big part in my work. I use a Sony a6700 with a long telephoto lens that I keep with me on my drives to run errands. I also rely on my iPhone for quick studies of insects or textures. These photos aren't just documentation; they're part of the drawing process. They help me study gesture, form, and composition before picking up a pencil or brush. I organize them into reference folders, tagging them by species, pose, or setting so that I can pull from them later.

My location in Ontario means I don't always have access to the animals I want to draw. In those cases, I work with photographers I've connected with through my podcast or social media who share their reference images or make them available for a small fee. I always credit their work and focus on representing the subject with care. I see it as a kind of collaboration--respecting the time and effort it takes to get close to these animals, often under challenging conditions.

I try to sketch daily, though I don't always succeed. When I do, it might be for a few minutes or sometimes for hours. I often work in coffee shops in the early morning before heading into the office. These sessions keep me grounded. Pentel mechanical pencils, Golden QoR watercolors, and Etchr sketchbooks are always in my bag. I've built a drawing kit over time that has everything I need in one package. Practicing in public has become part of my process, both as a way to stay accountable and as an invitation for conversation. It's a routine that makes space for creativity, even on the busiest days.

Much of my work centers on wildlife. Birds, frogs, insects, and mammals appear again and again along with the odd human subject. I spend time observing the animals in the wild, watching kestrels scan a field, frogs frolick in our pond, studying how a heron preens, or how a caterpillar eats. I draw to understand, not just to represent. I want to show the small details--the curve of a wing, the texture of fur, the quiet posture of rest.

That practice takes discipline. It means sitting still. Noticing. Accepting that your presence changes an animal's behavior. Drawing animals in a way that reflects that understanding. That discipline shapes everything I do. It affects how I use line, where I put detail, and how much I choose to leave out. It's about restraint as much as rendering.

In 2019, I launched a podcast called _Drawing Inspiration_. Over 109 episodes, I interviewed more than 80 artists across mediums and experience levels. Those conversations expanded



© Mike Hendley

my understanding of what it means to live a creative life. They also connected me with a global community of makers who think deeply about their work. The podcast became a kind of education--learning through conversation, reflecting through editing, and growing through feedback. Even now, these episodes are downloaded every day.

Now, I teach more regularly through live demos, in-person workshops, and online sessions. I've partnered with companies to help others discover the tools and processes that work for them. But everything still comes back to the sketchbook. Teaching allows me to clarify my thinking. It pushes me to name what I do and why I do it, and it reminds me to stay open to new approaches.

In 2025, I set a theme for my creative life: _The Year of Connection_. As part of that, I've been working on a series of in-person workshops. Every class will be a chance to clarify my thinking and process. Teaching pushes me to explain my approach, make decisions with intention, and learn from the feedback and questions of others. It has become a steady part of how I grow as an artist. Sharing my work and process publicly through social media, newsletters, and now YouTube has extended that learning loop.

I'm preparing to transition into full-time art as I approach retirement from my technical role. I'm building a



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sustainable practice around originals, prints, workshops, and commissions. I'm not chasing trends. I'm focused on steady, meaningful work that reflects what I care about most. That includes work that takes time, such as large oil paintings that evolve slowly over weeks or months, or sketchbook pages that build toward something larger.

I continue to work on larger oil pieces and build out some quiet projects. I plan to apply for residencies and exhibitions, and I'm considering reviving the podcast with shorter 6--8 episode seasons, possibly supported by companies interested in helping promote and share artist stories. I've also started expanding onto YouTube to share more of my process. Video gives me a way to show the pacing of a drawing or painting session--how slow, quiet, and iterative it can be.

While the natural world is my primary subject, my years in tech influence my perspective. Structure, flow, and pattern show up in bark, feathers, and movement. I often find parallels between a well-balanced painting and a well-written piece of code. I also use digital tools to manage my art practice, from building compositions in Photoshop to editing video and maintaining my website. That overlap is where my creativity lives. It's not about switching hats. It's about seeing the connections between systems and sketches, precision and process.

Conversations with other artists, through the podcast or online, have shaped much of my thinking. They've introduced me to new tools and approaches and reminded me how much community matters. That network continues to influence my direction. Some have become collaborators, others mentors. Many are people I've never met in person, but whose work and thinking I carry with me.

Art didn't begin for me in a single moment. It has always been there. What changed was how much space I chose to give it. The more time I spend with nature, the more I sketch. The more I sketch, the more I learn. And the more I learn, the more I want to share through my work.



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9.15.2022

BLUE-SPOTTED SALAMANDER



THIS IS THE SECOND I SPOTTED THIS SEASON. FOUND IT IN THE SAME LOCATION UNDER WOOD NEAR THE ROLY POLY

© Mike Hendley



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PT EXPLORERS

YOUR GALLERY

WHERE EVERY FRAME TELLS A WILD STORY

EDITION 48

WITNESS.
INSPIRE.
CONSERVE.



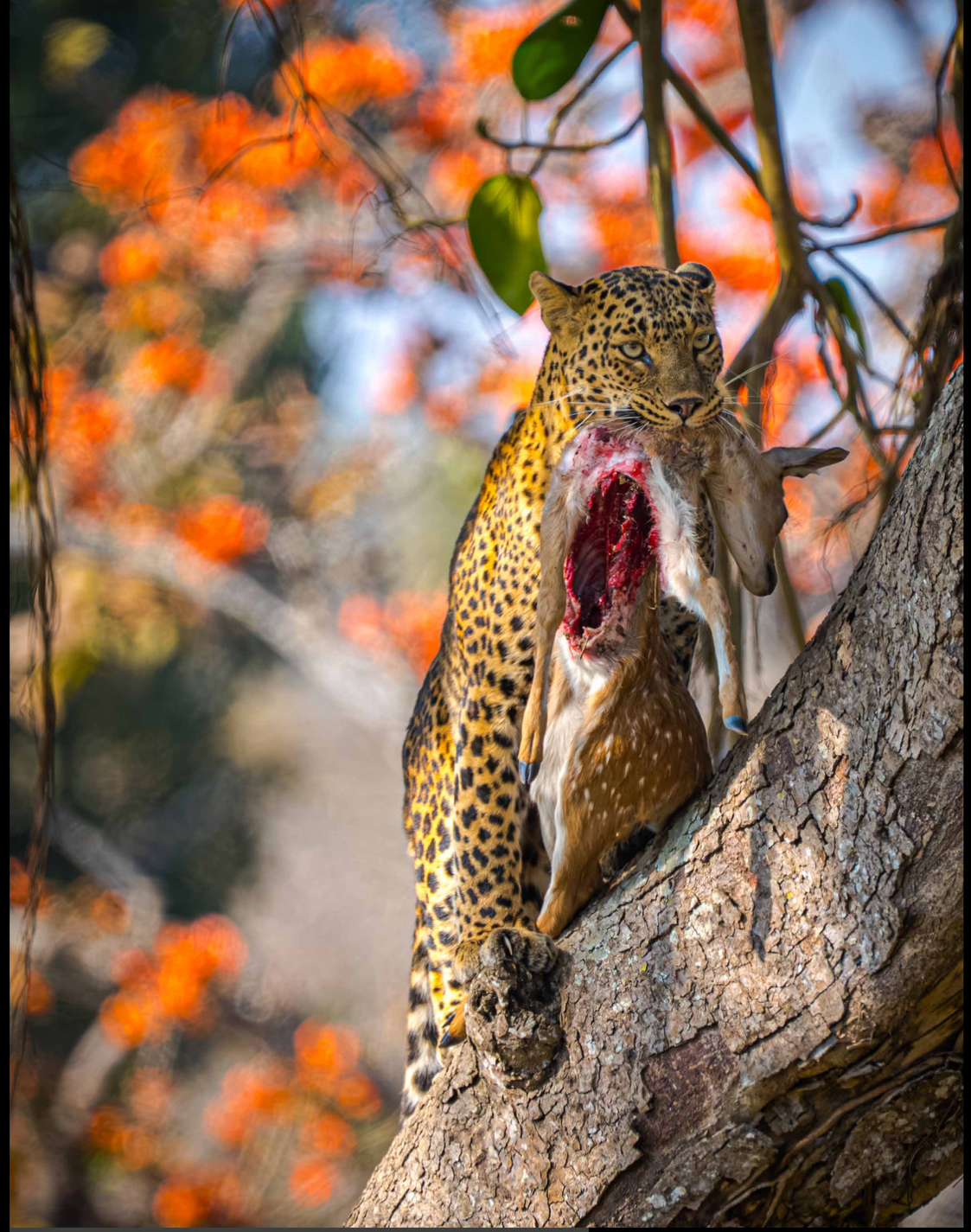
YOUR GALLERY

EXPLORERS

Prajith

Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*)

Al Qudra, Dubai, UAE



YOUR GALLERY

Rahul Meledath
Leopard (*Panthera pardus*)
Bandipur Tiger Reserve, India



YOUR GALLERY

Munna Mandalapu
Leopard (*Panthera pardus*)
Pench National Park, India



YOUR GALLERY

EXPLORERS

Nishim Hameed

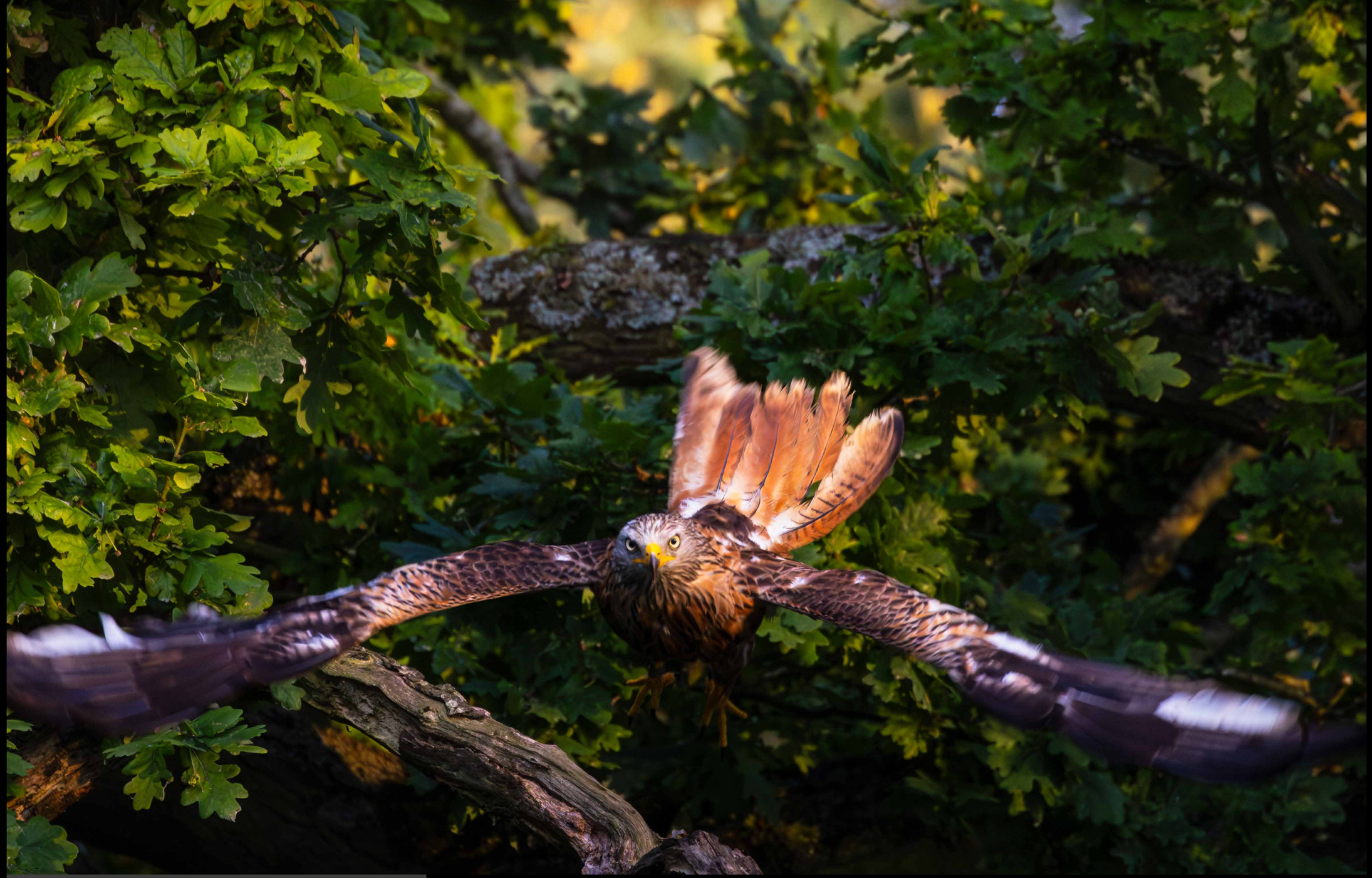
Leopard (*Panthera pardus*)

Masai Mara, Kenya



YOUR GALLERY

Dr KM Anand
Ghost Crab (*Ocypodinae*)
Vypin, Kerala, India



YOUR GALLERY

Immanuel Abraham Mathew
Red Kite (*Milvus milvus*)
Oakham, England



YOUR GALLERY

Mohamed Khair
Giraffe (*Giraffa*)
Masai Mara, Kenya



YOUR GALLERY

Sreeraj Babu
Tussock Moth (*Lymantriinae*)
Thrissur. Kerala, India



YOUR GALLERY

Rahul Meledath
Arabian Sand Gazelle (*Gazella marica*)
Al Dhafra region, Abu Dhabi



YOUR GALLERY

PT EXPLORERS

Aminlal Basheer

Anamala Pit Viper (*Craspedocephalus anamallensis*)

Thattekkad, Kerala, India



YOUR GALLERY

Deepa Girish
Leopard (*Panthera pardus*)
Masai Mara, Kenya



YOUR GALLERY

Sajin Mohan
Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*)
Al Qudra Lakes , Dubai

EXPLORERS

UPCOMING FEATURES



HER VIEWS & VISUALS

By Dunya Rajasekara



CUB'S CORNER

By Arko Saha



BALD BEAUTY

By Nisha Purushothaman