



# ANIMA MUNDI

*Adventures in Wildlife Photography*

Issue 21, Year 6 - January 2016

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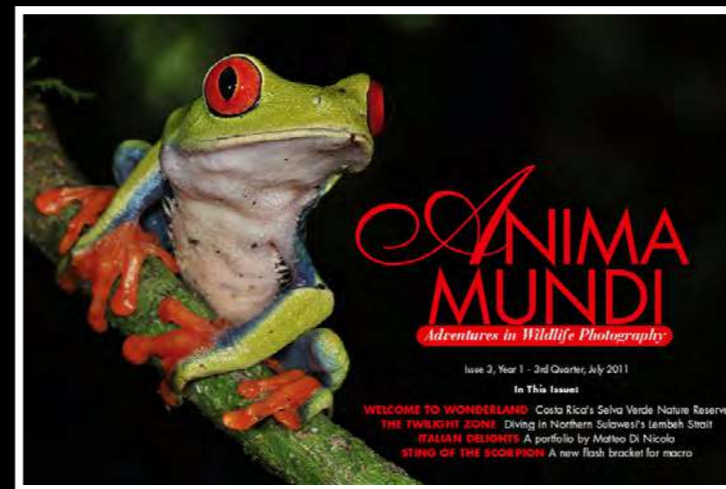
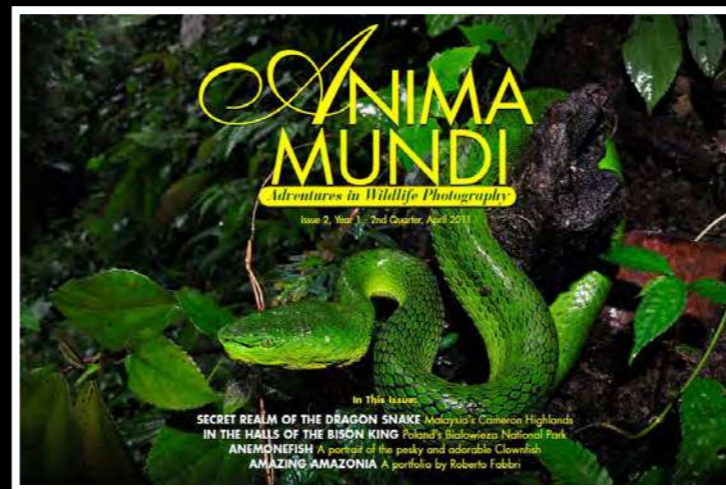
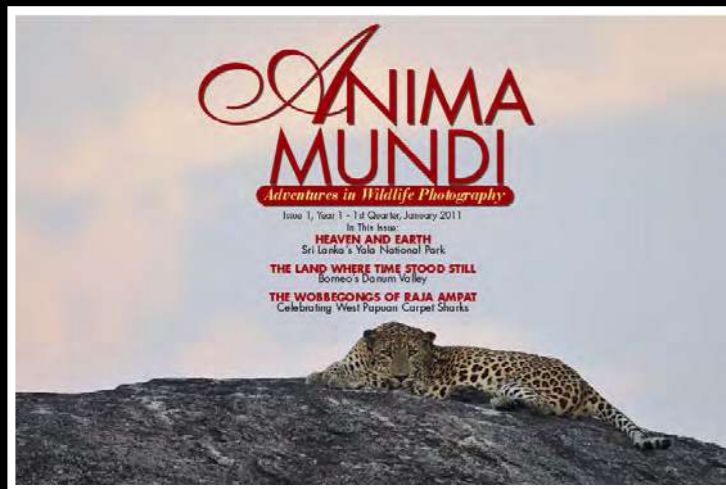


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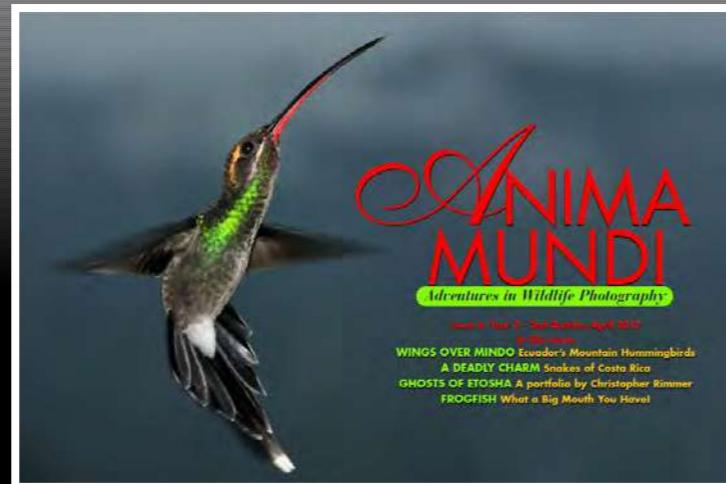


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Dear Andrea & Antonella,

*I have just finished reading your latest edition of Anima Mundi and I was inspired to write and say how much I am enjoying your publication and following your adventures. My wife and dive/photo partner Cherie and I were so inspired by your feature on Yala National Park that we booked a Safari with Eco Team and we had a fantastic time. It was exactly as portrayed in your article and we also followed your recommendations for visiting the cultural triangle in Sri Lanka. As we were leading one of our dive tours on a live aboard exploring the Maldives last June, a private side trip to Sri Lanka was clearly not to be passed up due to your information. So, I guess it's good news for you both that others are reading and responding to your work. So, we just wanted to give you some feedback, say hello and wish you all the best with your future adventures. Keep up the great work.*

Kevin & Cherie Deacon  
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# ANIMA MUNDI

*Adventures in Wildlife Photography*

## A look behind the scenes

Welcome to our new issue! We hope you'll find lots of interesting features in it as usual - but this time we also have an extra, a little essay about what goes on behind actual wildlife photography which might come as a surprise to some of our less experienced readers. But let's see first what we have in store for you here.

We start on page 4 with the truly fascinating images of a Metalmark moth we discovered in the forests of Assam, in North-eastern India - a tiny, relatively nondescript lepidopteran which however will leave you stunned thanks to its unbelievable capability to mimic a Jumping spider, its most dangerous enemy. This is one of those rare instances when even the most biased naturalist is left in awe by nature!

We follow up on page 9 with the second part of our extensively illustrated travel story on Sri Lanka's Wilpattu National Park. The quality and variety of the images which accompanied Part One - published on issue 20 - were apparently greatly appreciated by many of our readers worldwide, but we detected some naivete here and there in the comments and info requests, so we thought that a honest explanation of what it takes to get good close-up photos of Asian leopards in the wild was in order. Taking such images is neither particularly easy nor common, believe us - read on and find why!

Starting from page 55, we then move further north, from the leopards of Sri Lanka to the personal portfolio by young Indian photographer Bhavya Joshi - a truly enthusiastic naturalist with

a keen eye for details and a personal vision we loved as soon as we set eye on his work. And we are pretty sure you'll love it too.

We then travel east and to page 70 for a fascinating look at a very commendable initiative - The Bangladesh Python Project. Find out - thanks to the crisp images and detailed text by our new contributor Scott Trageser - how you can be part of it, joining a small dedicated group of volunteers willing to rough it out in the swamps and forests of Bangladesh to protect nature and educate villagers about conservation. We only wish we were able to publish such stories more often - it's pretty amazing seeing the great work these young researchers are doing.

Our issue's contents finally come to a spectacular close on page 85 with an in-depth trip report about herping (searching and photographing reptiles and amphibians, in the colorful aficionados' parlance) in Morocco by Italian amateur herpetologist Marco Sassoe. Marco's wonderful images and very engaging text offer a very refreshing image of this northern African country, showing that even stony deserts and arid sandy wastelands are full of wonderful surprises for those willing to search and see.

And now - enjoy your issue while we start working on the new one, to be published in April. In the meantime...

Have a good trip!  
Andrea & Antonella Ferrari  
[www.animamundimag.com](http://www.animamundimag.com)

■ The Sri Lankan leopard, primadonna of Wilpattu - read about it starting from page 9.

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- constructive criticism, useful  
suggestions and interesting  
contributions are welcome.  
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Publishers  
Andrea and Antonella Ferrari  
[nautilus@reefwonders.net](mailto:nautilus@reefwonders.net)

Editor-in-Chief  
Andrea Ferrari  
[editor@animamundimag.com](mailto:editor@animamundimag.com)

Original Layout Design  
Laura Genovese  
Anna Bortolini

Videographer  
Antonella Ferrari  
[anto@reefwonders.net](mailto:anto@reefwonders.net)

Video Editing  
Leon Joubert & Claudia  
Pellarini-Joubert  
[info@bittenbysnakes.com](mailto:info@bittenbysnakes.com)

Technical Support  
Komodo adv  
[mail@komodo-adv.com](mailto:mail@komodo-adv.com)

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■ Tail detail of a Bengalese  
Kukri Snake *Oligodon dorsalis*  
raised in defensive behavior -  
see our feature on the  
Bangladesh Python Project  
starting on page 70.



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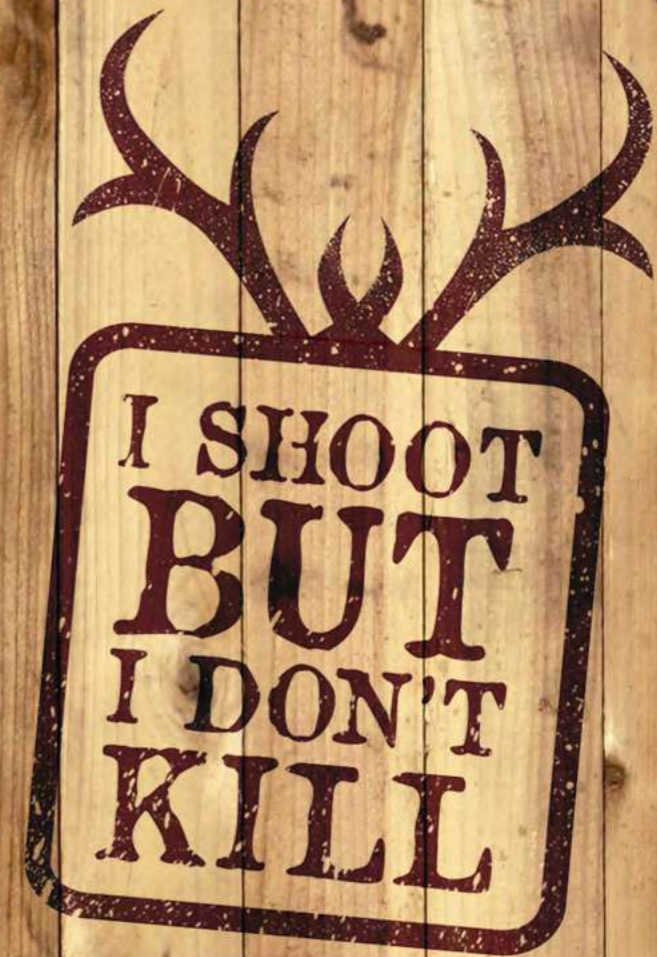


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**SCOOP!**



# The incredible **JUMPING SPIDER MIMIC MOTH**

A STUNNING ENCOUNTER  
IN THE FORESTS OF ASSAM  
WITH A TINY MOTH  
WHICH MIMICS TO PERFECTION  
ITS DEADLIEST PREDATOR



The eye- and leg-like patterns appearing on the raised wings of *Brenthia mimic* to stunning perfection the frontal appearance of its worst enemy - a Jumping spider.



The defensive strategy of *Brenthia* includes rotating on its own axis with fast, irregular moves - imitating to perfection the jerky movements of a roving Jumping spider. All the individuals we observed were 5-8mm wide.

TEXT BY ANDREA FERRARI  
PHOTOS BY ANDREA & ANTONELLA FERRARI

As we slowly advanced along the well-maintained forest trails of the Hollongapar Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary in Assam, North-eastern India, my attention was drawn to several queer-looking, tiny Jumping spiders which appeared to be rotating jerkily - as most of the members of this tribe do - on the exposed upper surface of many large leaves. Yet there was something strange about these spiders, an ever-so-slight difference which appeared to set them apart from the other innumerable *Salticidae* species which we were encountering with regularity in that same wonderful, virgin habitat. Bending among the thick bushes and vines to take a closer, better look, I found myself speechless with surprise - this was no Jumping spider, this

was a tiny day moth which - seen exactly from the front and at eye level, ie from the point of view of a roving Jumping spider in search of prey - looked exactly like a Salticid thanks to the leg-like and eye-like bright patterns drawn on its wings, which were kept raised and fully spread. To fully implement its incredible act of mimicry, the moth - which I found later to be an unidentified species of the so-called Metalmark moths belonging to the genus *Brenthia* - regularly turned on its axis, exposing its set of wings with a series of jerky, fast postures which imitated to perfection the toy-like movements of Jumping spiders. Closer examination showed also that the eye-like and leg-like pattern is repeated, with some subtle variation - on the

lower/back side of the raised wings of the moth, so that the optical illusion of a hunting Jumping spider is offered both from the front and from the back. As a typical prey of Salticids - incredibly fast predators which catch their prey with a well-aimed jump from a distance - our *Brenthia* had clearly evolved a most amazing defensive strategy: it looks like its worst enemy (which by the way happens to dislike the members of its own kind) to avoid becoming its prey. One word of advice - to fully appreciate the extraordinary effectiveness of its mimicry, look at the photos published in these pages as you squint, or from a little distance: in brief, look at them through a Jumping spider's eyes. And be prepared to be amazed at our *Brenthia's* incredible trick!



The Jumping spider mimicry is repeated - albeit with some subtle differences - on the lower/back side of the wings, offering an effective defense from attacks coming from the rear.

A comparison of two different *Brenthia* sp. specimens and two Salticidae sp. Jumping spiders observed in the same habitat and environment, the Hollongapar Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary in Assam, North-eastern India. The effectiveness of the unique defensive strategy of *Brenthia* is unquestionable.



■ The mimicry evolved by *Brenthia* sp. works best when faced from the front and at the same level - the point of view of a roving Jumping spider. A view from the top - at far right - shows quite clearly the raised, front-facing position of its four wings normally adopted by *Brenthia* sp. when resting in the open on top of a leaf.





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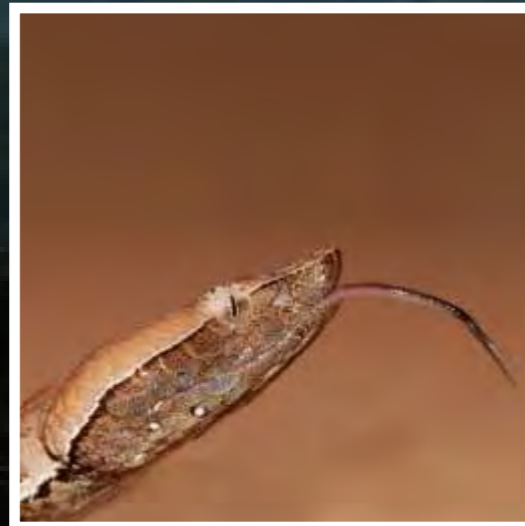
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# LAND OF LAKES AND LEOPARDS

PART TWO

In search of leopards, elephants and other  
spectacular wildlife in one of the world's  
most beautiful protected areas



A typical villu (lake) landscape of Wilpattu National Park, Sri Lanka.



TEXT BY ANDREA FERRARI  
PHOTOS BY ANDREA & ANTONELLA FERRARI

As an update - and an integration - to Part One of our feature on Sri Lanka's Wilpattu National Park (see *Anima Mundi - Adventures in Wildlife Photography* issue no. 20) we'd like now to elaborate a bit on the chances of capturing gratifying wildlife images there (and, indeed, in most National Parks in this part of the world). We have received several comments from our readers worldwide about the photos which illustrate the first half of this two-part article, all enthusiastic but occasionally somewhat naive, so we feel the facts should be set straight. Wilpattu is a National Park, but it is foremost and most importantly a wild area, basically undisturbed by man. There are no fences, no clearly marked boundaries, no human-habituated animals, no walking trails, no possibility to step off your vehicle, and there are very few, underequipped anti-poaching patrols which seem to be

working on a semi-volunteer basis. It is very important to understand this - National Parks in Sri Lanka, India and nearby areas have absolutely nothing to do with the zoo-like private reserves of - say - South Africa, where most predators are constantly monitored and actually "managed" by well-trained and properly equipped staff and are often even known by personal names or nicknames. In such places - which we do not like, even if we appreciate the fact that in most instances they succeed in successfully mixing financial enterprising with seriously managed conservation - great sightings and exceptionally good opportunities for spectacular wildlife photography are more or less guaranteed. And with good reason - given their very expensive rates, such private game reserves must deliver the goods to their paying clients from overseas - at any cost. Not so in Sri

■ Land or Bengal monitor  
*Varanus bengalensis*.

*continued on page 13* ➤

*Indian elephant* ■  
*Elephas maximus indicus*  
are often seen foraging  
in the shallow villus.



Lankan, in Indian and in other Asian National Parks or Nature Reserves. There, visitors are basically on their own - to actually find animals, not to mention getting good images of them - is a serious, demanding undertaking which requires great stamina (roads can be extremely rough, and the vehicles available tend to be less comfortable / luxurious than those being used in African parks, being much harder on one's back and bottom), patience (waits lasting several hours at specific spots such as waterholes are not uncommon), the willingness to get up early and stay out late (typical days in Wilpattu start at 5.00 in the morning and end at 19.00 in the evening, with barely the time to eat, shower and grab some sleep), a

cheerful disposition towards repeated disappointment and failure (which I must admit we often sorely lack) and above all the services of a professional guide such as our good friend Mevan Piyasena. This last factor is the most important of all the previous ones put together, as all the patience, optimism and resilience in the world won't help you if one is unable to read tracks and pugmarks or is unfamiliar with the terrain and the animals inhabiting it. Some of the flag species ranging throughout Wilpattu - leopards immediately spring to mind - tend to follow fairly predictable routines in their daily behavior, and with a lot of experience in the field one can somewhat predict - or reasonably try to - where and when they'll show up. A

*continued on page 15* ➤

*Indian peafowl  
or blue peafowl  
Pavo cristatus.*



■ Ceylon  
mugger  
crocodile or Sri  
Lankan marsh  
crocodile  
*Crocodylus*  
*palustris* sub.  
*kimbula*.





■ Sri Lankan leopard *Panthera pardus kotiya* on the sand shores of a villu - this is the archetypal Wilpattu sighting.




good driver is also of paramount importance, as in Wilpattu - as in most if not all Sri Lankan and Indian National Parks - off-road driving ("bundu bashing" as they call it in Africa) is severely forbidden, with all driving being restricted to dust or gravel roads. This means that the best positioning of the vehicle to meet the photographer's needs of the moment will greatly depend - within the limitations of local rules - on the driver's intuition and reflexes. This might come as quite obvious to most experienced, globetrotting wildlife photographers, but it does often prove disappointing and frustrating to those amateur wildlife photographers and occasional tourists (and there are plenty) visiting the Park for just a few hours and expecting to be shown leopards, elephants and other iconic species in the short time of their trip, as it often happens in some of Africa's most popular tourist destinations. Not so! Asia's wildlife is spectacular, fascinating and occasionally abundant, but it is usually very shy and often in conflict with its

*continued on page 20* ➤



■ Left, Bark gecko  
*Hemidactylus leschenaultii*;  
 top right,  
 Green forest lizard *Calotes calotes*;  
 bottom right,  
 Green forest lizard *Calotes calotes*, juvenile.



 Sri Lankan leopard  
Panthera pardus  
kotiya resting on the  
shores of a villu.



*Indian elephant* ■  
*Elephas maximus indicus.*





Left, Indian peafowl or blue peafowl *Pavo cristatus*, male; right, Indian pond heron or paddybird *Ardeola grayii*.



human neighbors, requiring a serious, highly motivated approach to reveal itself. This is the main reason for which we enjoy it so much and rate a good image of an Asian flag species - such as the leopards of Wilpattu - so much more gratifying, precious and well-earned than one of the same species taken in a managed private game reserve. Furthermore, climate change and political unrest can often make things difficult in several Asian countries, as our latest visit to Wilpattu a few weeks ago has shown us. Due to the lashing, unprecedented rains which took place during the monsoon, Wilpattu had been plagued by severe flooding, leaving a great many well-known trails underwater, with others mired in knee-deep mud or heavily rutted. But the greatest shock - and I must admit, disappointment - came from the marvelous *villus*, the shallow lakes which dot the Wilpattu landscape, usually ringed by those stunning white sand beaches on which languidly lazing leopards provide unforgettable photo opportunities. Briefly put - there were no beaches anywhere to be seen. Overflowing with rainwater - no such rains had fallen on Wilpattu for the past fifteen years - the *villus* had now crept right to the forest edge, the water quietly lapping at the trees' roots,

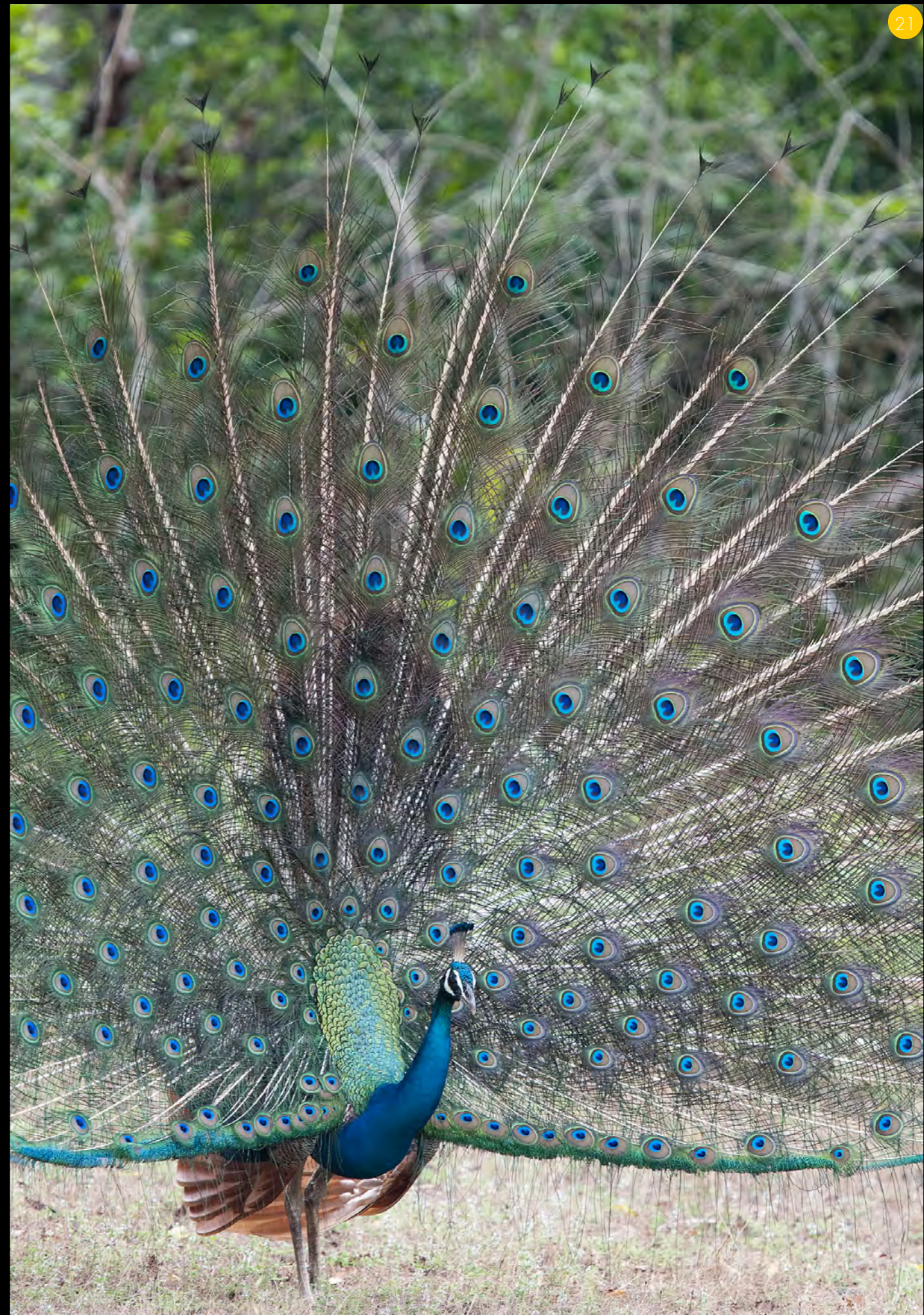
*continued on page 22* ➤



Purple heron ■  
Ardea purpurea.



■ Left, Crested serpent eagle *Spilornis cheela*; right Indian peafowl or blue peafowl *Pavo cristatus*, male (peacock) displaying.



depriving Wilpattu of its most instantly recognizable trademark. Wildlife behavioral patterns had changed accordingly, with leopards becoming mysteriously shy, elephants moving to distant, more remote locations, crocodiles becoming more or less invisible due to the higher water levels and waterbirds - usually seen in great numbers at the *villus'* shores - now conspicuously absent. This is not to say that our trip to Wilpattu was disappointing compared to the previous ones, not by any measure - but it certainly was different, and occasionally more frustrating. In fact, it was so enjoyable and successful that it will be the subject of a future article on *Anima Mundi*. However, all the above is to say that nature - raw, wild, untamed nature - is by definition unpredictable, and even the most carefully planned trip may give different results than expected, especially in the National Parks and Nature Reserves of this part of the world. Another factor which weighs heavily in - but which usually goes unmentioned for "personality cult" reasons - is luck. Plain, simple, blind luck plays probably - it's hard to admit it for those who carefully groom their professional image - the most important role in this kind of wildlife photography, where little is predictable and nothing is

*continued on page 26* >

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*.

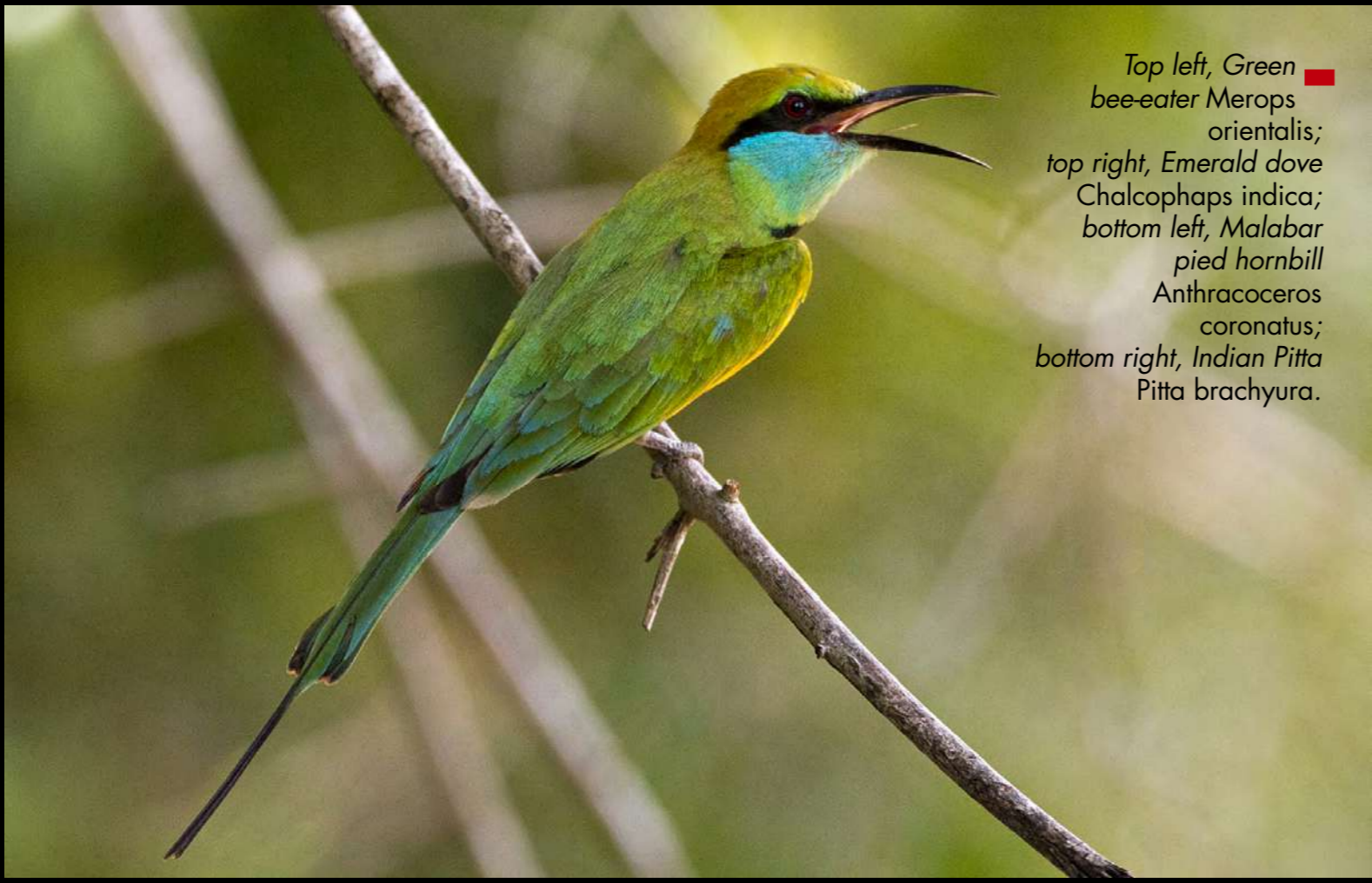




Sri Lankan leopard ■  
Panthera pardus kotiya.

*Unforgettable  
encounters  
on the villus'  
sandy shores*





Top left, Green  
bee-eater *Merops  
orientalis*;  
top right, Emerald dove  
*Chalcophaps indica*;  
bottom left, Malabar  
pied hornbill  
*Anthracoceros  
coronatus*;  
bottom right, Indian Pitta  
*Pitta brachyura*.






Sri Lankan leopard ■  
Panthera pardus kotiya.

Green imperial pigeon  
*Ducula aenea*.



managed or guaranteed. A sly, cautious leopard can slink in total silence a few feet behind one's vehicle, in which a photographer has been patiently, stubbornly waiting for hours under a scorching sun: it takes a measure of luck to be looking in the right direction at the right moment to spot it. You don't spot it, you miss the picture - we've seen it happen so many times, and it has happened to us too! Patience, stubbornness, resilience, fast reflexes, a good knowledge of animal behavior and a guide's field experience are uniquely important - but they are nothing without that magical pinch of luck. So take the images gracing our pages with a pinch of salt - bringing them home required a lot of hard work, and nothing can guarantee another visitor will be able to see what we have seen. For exactly the same reasons cited above, however, one might even be luckier than us, and witness a kill or a mating (as it happened to us during our last trip to Wilpattu, in fact). But don't take anything you see on these pages as granted, and plan your stay carefully - besides luck and willingness to work hard, time also is very important, and a wildlife photography trip to any Sri Lankan National Park (or an Indian one) usually requires a minimum of 2-3 weeks to fully offer the best chances to be really fruitful, with great sightings and unforgettable encounters.


Top left,  Brahminy kite  
Haliastur indus;  
top right, Common  
kingfisher  
Alcedo atthis  
with freshwater  
crab prey;  
bottom left, Sri  
Lankan junglefowl  
Gallus lafayettii;  
bottom right, a pair  
of White-bellied sea  
eagles Haliaeetus  
leucogaster.





Antonella standing by a Nagaraja or Cobra King guardstone in the ancient capital city of Anuradhapura, a holy Buddhist cult and pilgrimage site.



A typical villu (lake) landscape,  Wilpattu National Park, Sri Lanka.

■ Sri Lankan leopard  
*Panthera pardus kotiya*  
at rest in the fork of a tree.



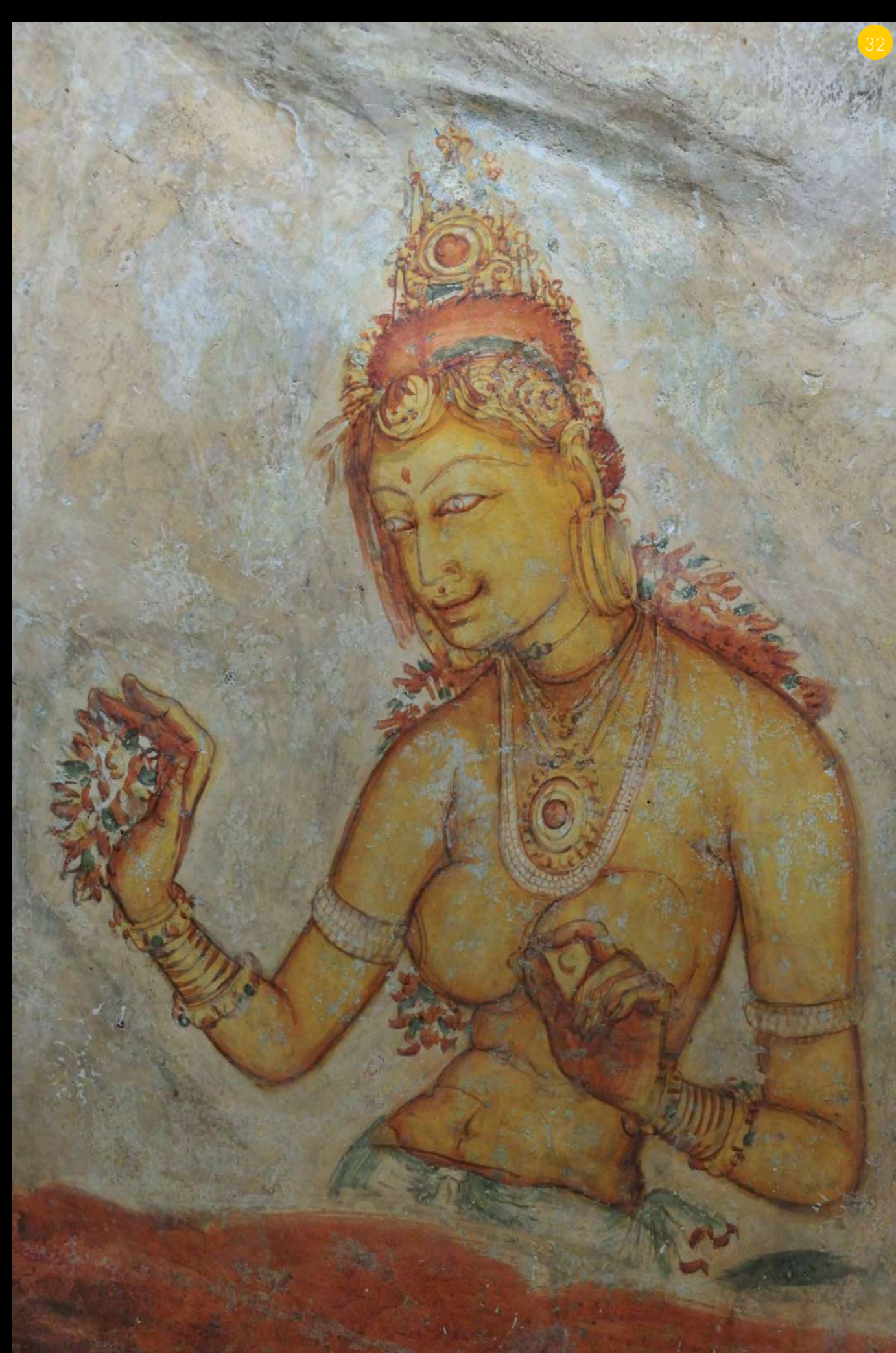




■ Ceylon mugger  
crocodile or Sri Lankan  
marsh crocodile  
*Crocodylus palustris*  
*sub. kimbula*.



Left, one of the seated Buddha statues in the Vatadage of the ancient capital city of Polonnaruva; right, one of the splendid heavenly damsels or Apsaras frescoes on the ancient rock fortress and pleasure palace of Sigiriya, a mountain monument which is part of Sri Lanka's Cultural Triangle and is under patronage of UNESCO as a World Heritage site.



■ Sri Lankan leopard  
*Panthera pardus kotiya*.





■ Left, Crested or Changeable Hawk Eagle *Nisaetus cirrhatus*, juvenile; right, Toque macaque *Macaca sinica*, a Sri Lankan endemic species which is relatively common in Wilpattu National Park.





Ceylon mugger ■  
crocodile or Sri Lankan  
marsh crocodile  
*Crocodylus palustris*  
sub. *kimbula*.



Left, Sri Lankan grizzled giant squirrel *Ratufa macroura*; right, Lesser adjutant stork *Leptoptilos javanicus*.



■ *Ceylon mugger crocodile*  
or *Sri Lankan marsh*  
*crocodile* *Crocodylus*  
*palustris sub. kimbula.*  
*This is a rather aggressive*  
*species which is*  
*responsible of several*  
*human fatalities every year.*





Left, the Kiri Vihare dagoba in the ancient capital city of Polonnaruwa; right, a beautifully carved Nagaraja or Cobra King guardstone in the Vatadage of the ancient capital city of Polonnaruwa.







The imposing Ruvanvelisaya stupa or dagoba in the ancient capital city of Anuradhapura, a holy Buddhist cult and pilgrimage site which is part of Sri Lanka's Cultural Triangle and is under patronage of UNESCO as a World Heritage site. Anuradhapura is easily reached from Wilpattu.



Villus are an unmistakable, ■ unique feature of Wilpattu's spectacular landscapes.



■ Indian or Black-naped hare *Lepus nigricollis*. This is the prey of choice for most large raptors, monitor lizards and even young leopards.

The Land or Bengal monitor *Varanus bengalensis*: hunting, basking, digging for eggs and being occasionally preyed on by leopards and large birds of prey.





■ Brown Fish Owl *Ketupa zeylonensis*, in a breeding or territorial display.



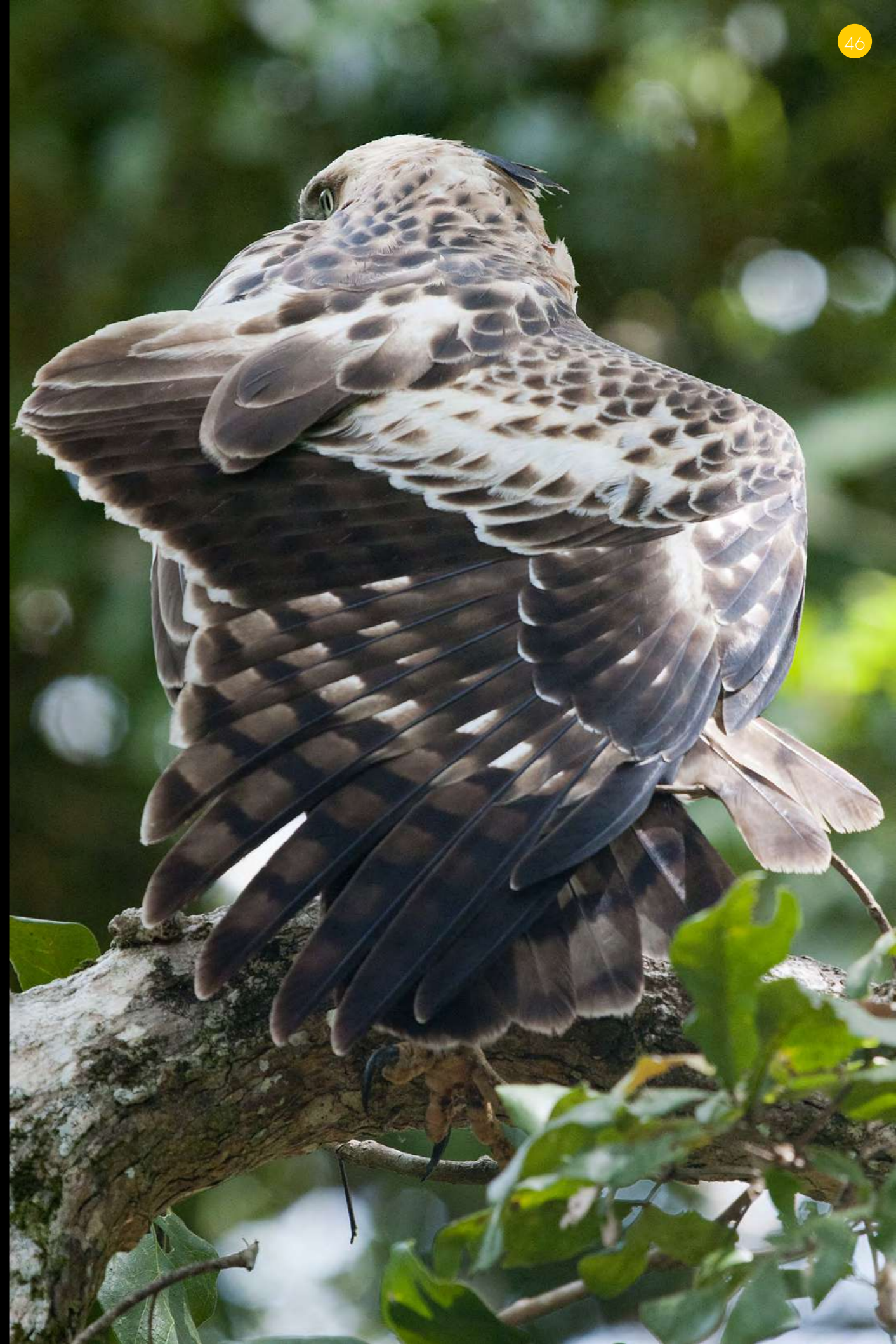
*A Sri Lankan leopard ■  
Panthera pardus kotiya  
scanning the shores of a villu  
for a possible prey  
from its tree hideout.*

Top left, Flapshell turtle *Lissemys punctata*;  
top right, Barking Deer or Muntjak *Muntiacus muntjak malabaricus*, female feeding on a mushroom;  
bottom left, Wild boar *Sus scrofa* with piglets;  
bottom right, Indian star tortoise *Geochelone elegans*.






■ Left, a stucco grotesque dwarf sculpture in the ancient capital city of Polonnaruwa; right, preening Crested or Changeable Hawk Eagle *Nisaetus cirrhatus*, juvenile.



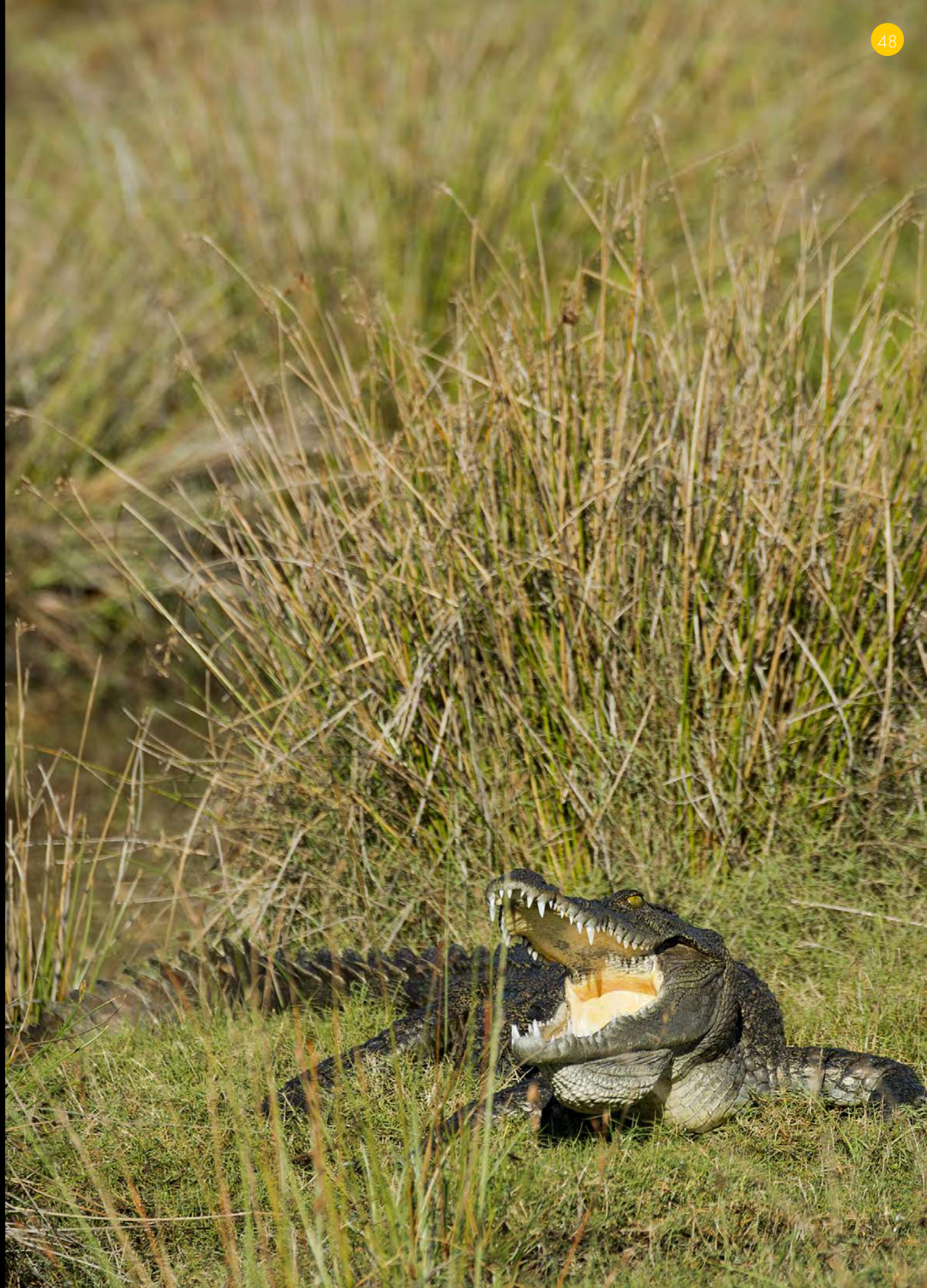


Sri Lankan leopard   
Panthera pardus kotiya.





■ Left, Great thick-knee *Esacus recurvirostris*; right, basking Ceylon mugger crocodile or Sri Lankan marsh crocodile *Crocodylus palustris sub. kimbula*.




■ Subadult Sri Lankan leopard  
*Panthera pardus kotiya*.





■ A carpet of flowers in a villu landscape - a typical sight in Wilpattu National Park, Sri Lanka.

Sri Lankan jackal   
Canis aureus naria  
bathed in the golden light  
of dawn.

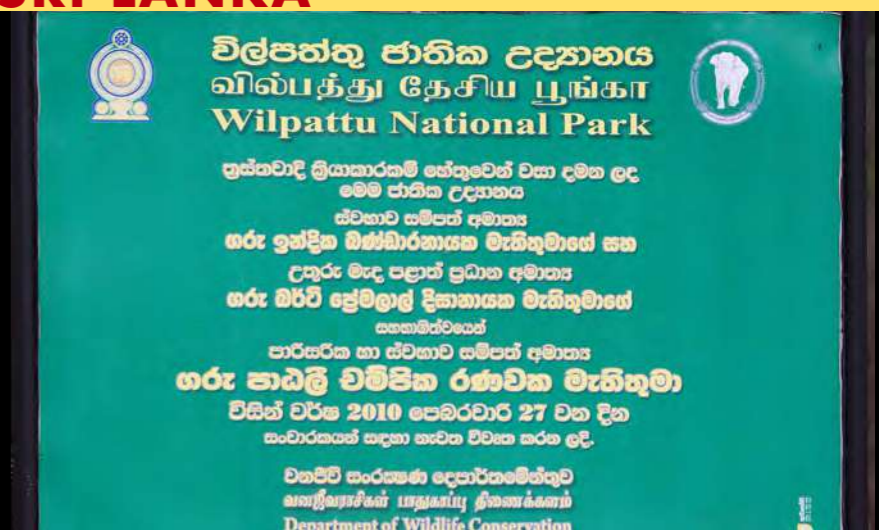


■ Sri Lankan leopard  
*Panthera pardus kotiya*.



# At-a-glance travel guide

COUNTRY OF DESTINATION: **SRI LANKA**



## USEFUL TIPS FOR YOUR EXPEDITION

Some simple, common sense, field-tested advice and information to make the best out of your trip and avoid hassles, worries and problems

**ROUTE:** Your international flight will land at Bandaranaike International Airport, in the Sri Lankan capital Colombo, where you will be met by your guide of choice. Travelling around this beautiful and relatively small tropical island for holiday and sightseeing alone is exceedingly easy and safe (in fact highly advisable), but when dealing with the bureaucracy of National Parks and the unpredictability of wildlife we always prefer to rely on a good, knowledgeable local guide. Whenever we visit Sri Lanka's National Parks we do so with our naturalist and wildlife photographer friend **Mevan Piyasena**, who has proven himself on several occasions a highly reliable, professional organizer.

**MEANS OF TRANSPORT:** Open, canvas-roofed 4-wheel drive jeeps are used for privately guided trips and are ideal for comfortable, flexible wildlife photography inside the National Park. Walking and night driving inside the protected areas is not allowed, but a few semi-protected rest stops are provided where one can get off the car and have a light picnic breakfast or lunch.

**CURRENCY:** Sri Lankan rupee - even if US dollars and Euros are commonly accepted at most tourist resorts, it is advisable to change a reasonable sum upon arrival to buy the inevitable (and excellent) organic spices and tea to bring home.

**ACCOMODATION:** Accomodation ranging from spartan to luxurious is readily available in the vicinity of the Park's gate (camping or spending the night inside Sri Lankan protected areas is sadly not allowed anymore). A very good and practical option is offered by simple, clean, private country bungalows - complete with personal cook and caretaker - being widely offered for rental.

**FOOD:** Sri Lankan food is spectacular, often very fiery, mostly based on all possible culinary declinations of coconut flesh and milk and with a predominance of savoury vegetarian and fish dishes, usually served in abundance. Do not miss the

## *A rich wildlife which has been long preserved by Buddhist culture*



mouth-watering curries and the buffalo milk curd topped with treacle (palm sugar syrup) dessert.

**LANGUAGE:** Sinhalese and Tamil, but excellent English is widely spoken everywhere.

**WORRIES:** Basically none at the moment - Sri Lanka is one of the safest, most relaxed countries we know. As anywhere else, avoid being around alone at night in Colombo, especially if carrying expensive jewellery and cameras.

**HEALTH:** Again, Sri Lanka appears to be a very safe tropical country health-wise. We are unfamiliar with any cases of dangerous tropical diseases there, and food appears to be safe anywhere. As usual, avoid drinking tap or well water and prefer tea or bottled water. Ticks, mosquitoes and the occasional venomous snake are a liability in the field.

**CLIMATE:** Tropical, but very variable depending on season and altitude. In the lowlands expect hot, relatively dry days and the occasional thunderstorm; at higher elevations - such as in the tea plantations of Nuwara Eliya - expect misty, cool mornings and cold nights. One side of the island is usually experiencing the rains of the monsoon at a time while the other is in the dry season - so simply switch sides accordingly to your preferences of the moment!

**BESIDES:** Situated at the southernmost tip of the Indian subcontinent, the island of Sri Lanka - the ancient Serendib and Taprobane - has always been at the crossroads of the busy sea lanes of the Indian Ocean, a rich, bountiful, teardrop-shaped land of ancient history and culture where a wealth of wildlife and a beautiful environment have historically been preserved by the strong influence of Buddhist culture. And because of the beneficial Buddhist influx, not

only wildlife is confident and abundant everywhere, but many stunningly beautiful archeological sites - still vibrant in the daily observance of cult by the locals - survive and are carefully preserved today in the island. Given their proximity to each other and ease of visiting, the ancient cities of Anuradhapura (the closest to Wilpattu) and Polonnaruwa and the mountain fortress of Sigiriya - all three exceedingly abundant in spectacular works of art, sculpture and architecture and forming the so called "Cultural Triangle"- are an absolute must for all discerning travellers. The ancient capital of Kandy and the hill station of Nuwara Eliya are also not to be missed. The flat, palm-fringed island coastline also offers excellent opportunities for relaxing at some of the world's most beautiful beaches. Sri Lanka has a wonderful hospitality tradition, and some of the most beautiful, well-furnished, romantic hotels we have ever visited are found here. ●





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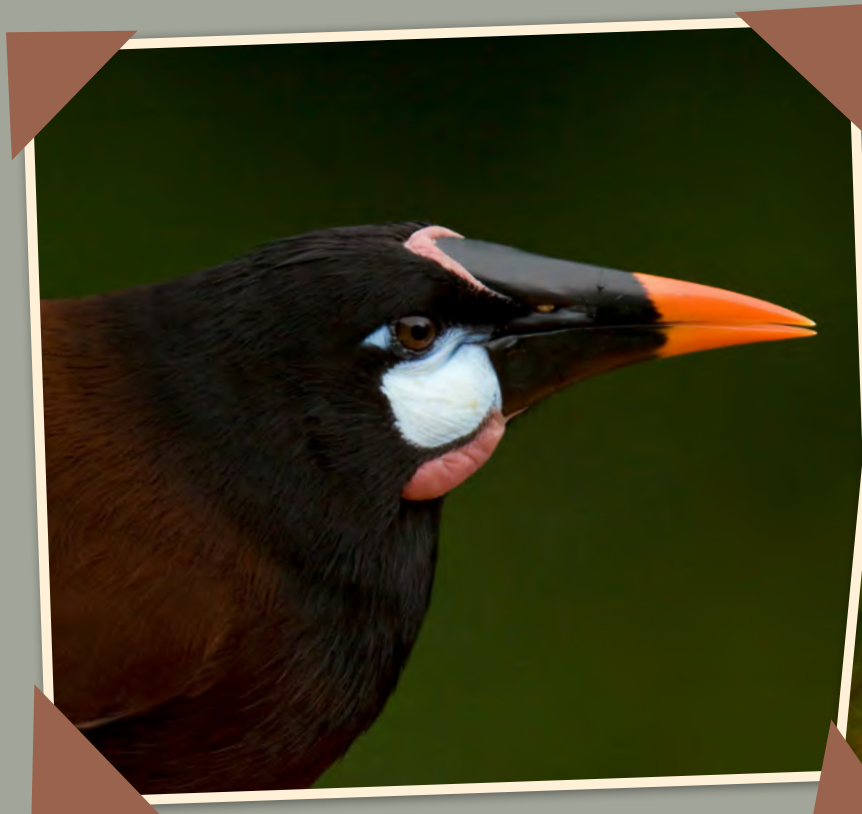
*Amphibians and reptiles are awesome...  
we show it!*



*An opportunity to escape from the routine  
and join us on an exciting adventure to  
experience tropical wildlife at its best!*

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Sarapiquí,  
Costa Rica



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As one of Costa Rica's legendary eco lodges, we are committed to a sustainable future – not only for Selva Verde, but for the people and wildlife that call the Sarapiquí home. We proudly carry and support Costa Rica's Certification for Sustainable Tourism. We actively work with conservation partners, including the Sarapiquí Conservation Learning Center, to promote conservation and environmental education throughout the local community. Learn more about our efforts when you visit Selva Verde!



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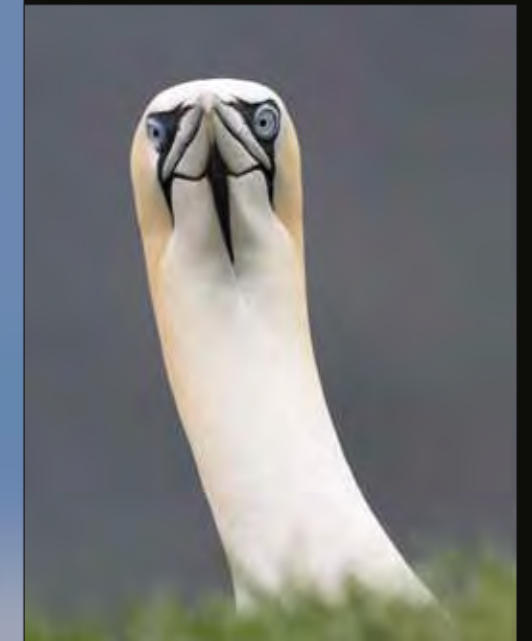
# NATURE'S PHOTO ADVENTURES

## Photographic Learning Travel Adventures

"Our goal at Nature's Photo Adventures is to lead instructional photographic workshops to the some of the world's most beautiful and unspoiled destinations while providing a rewarding and educational learning experience".

"We strive to exceed your expectations, taking you on an adventure and a once in a lifetime experience. Explore nature, share, learn and develop new levels of photographic skills and leave with fantastic photographs and wonderful memories and new found friends."

*David Hemmings - President, Nature's Photo Adventures*



"My experience was EXCEPTIONAL! The trip exceeded my expectations in all areas. I hoped to get in a position to see owls and couldn't possibly have been happier. It was abundantly clear that David invested significant time and effort prior to the arrival of the group in scouting the area around Quebec and Ontario. He knew exactly where to go to find every species of owl. His knowledge and efforts were very much appreciated by the entire group. My primary objective was just getting in a position to photograph owls and was not expecting much in the way of photographic instruction. I was very pleasantly surprised and was very happy with the instruction. Prior to the trip I had a love/hate relationship with auto focus as it applies to photographing birds in flight. I've struggled with this for years. While I have a lot more to

learn, and need to work at honing my skills, the trip with NPA helped me tremendously in being able to photograph birds in flight. Photographing birds in flight was my main objective. Prior to the trip I was nearly clueless in comparison to my skills after the trip. You can also see from my bird list that I found the trip productive from a birding perspective as well".  
*Kevin McCarthy, USA*

"I recommend NPA workshops! The level of services by workshop leaders was excellent. Quality of photographic instruction was exceptional and they

were always on hand to solve issues that arose, and I had more than my share of equipment issues. Quality of wildlife provided was good and I was amazed at how easily the subjects accepted new setups provided. Locations visited were right on for the species targeted. My most memorable moment was using the flash setups the first time and capturing an image of the Swordbill Hummingbird. I feel that my level of photography has improved with the custom functions that were set up on my camera for me and the resulting images that I obtained. Overall experience and

expectations were achieved and we were fortunate to have a very compatible group on our tour, which made it very enjoyable. This was my first workshop and I would recommend them to friends".  
*Rosemary Harris, Canada*

"Great trip, great experience and great workshop leader. Great opportunity for capturing images of magnificent and uncommon (in southern USA) birds. Organizers contribute to great group dynamics and superb attitude. Cool techniques".  
*Eric Grossman, USA*



[info@naturesphotoadventures.com](mailto:info@naturesphotoadventures.com)

<http://www.naturesphotoadventures.com>

**Canada:** Newfoundland - Puffins & Gannets • British Columbia - Spirit Bears • Alberta - Black Bears & Elk • Churchill - Breeding Arctic Birds and Polar Bears • Ontario & Quebec - Snowy Owls and Great Gray Owls  
**United States:** Alaska - Kodiak Bears & Bald Eagles • Florida - Raptors **Asia:** Borneo - Orangutans, Proboscis Monkey, Broadbills • India - Bengal Tigers and birds **Africa:** Botswana - Chobe River - Elephants and Hippos • Kenya & Tanzania South Africa - African Penguins and the Big 5 **Central & South America:** Peru - Machu Picchu and The Amazon • Costa Rica - Hummingbirds • Brazil - The Pantanal & Jaguars



# The Indian Eye for Details

A young and passionate photographer from India with a magic touch for light and details creates a panoply of spectacular images capturing the intimate essence of his own country's wildlife

## *Bhavya Joshi - A Wildlife Photographer in His Own Words*

My name is Bhavya Joshi, I am 24 years old, I am from Rajkot in Gujarat, India and I am an engineer by profession and a wildlife photographer by passion. At very young age I fell in love with nature, especially with bugs and reptiles which attract me much more due to their uniqueness from all other fauna. I call them common aliens around us.

I started my photography in 2008 with a simple digital camera, at that time I was capturing common wildlife images for fun. As time went by, forums, books, magazines, the internet and animal tv channels made me more curious about wildlife, and I started spending most of my time in photographing

animals, taking notes of their behavior, and now I have come to fully understand the importance of wildlife and its conservation.

My "addiction" forced me to buy a Dslr, and I started my serious photography in 2011. Today, I am doing wildlife photography with the support of my peoples, sharing with all knowledge about bugs and other animals, sharing awareness about wildlife.

My current equipment: Canon 550D, Canon 100mm F:2.8 Non L, Canon 18-55mm, extension tubes (third party), Tamron 70-300mm tele/macro, Sigma 50-500mm, Simpex flashes, ring flashes, tripod. ●

[http://www.flickr.com/photos/bhavya\\_joshi/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/bhavya_joshi/)



**Blue-banded  
bee in flight**  
*Amegilla cingulata*

Canon Eos 550D  
EF 100mm,  
F:5.6,  
ISO:400,  
1/3200s

**Greater  
Flamingos**

*Phoenicopterus  
roseus*

Canon Eos 550D  
150-500mm,  
F:10.0,  
ISO:400,  
1/800s





**Robberfly**  
*Asiliidae*

Canon Eos 550D  
EF 100mm,  
F:8.0,  
ISO:400,  
1/200s

**Bark gecko**  
*Hemidactylus sp.*

Canon Eos 550D  
EF 100mm,  
F:11.0,  
ISO:400,  
1/200s



**Wolf spider  
on sand**

*Lycosidae*

Desert

National Park,  
Rajasthan

Canon Eos 550D  
EF 100mm,  
F:8.0,  
ISO:200,  
1/200s







**Lesser  
Flamingos**

*Phoeniconaias  
minor*  
Jamnagar,  
Gujarat

Canon Eos 550D  
50-500mm,  
F:7.1,  
ISO:400,  
1/2000s



**Wild hare**  
*Lepus nigricollis*

Canon Eos 550D  
70-300mm,  
F:8.0,  
ISO:800,  
1/400s

**Vulture  
with Crow**

Canon Eos 550D  
50-500mm,  
F:8.0,  
ISO:800,  
1/2000s





**Yellow  
carpenter bee  
in flight**

*Xylocopa sp.*

Canon Eos 550D  
EF 100mm,  
F:8.0,  
ISO:100,  
1/200s



**Asiatic lion**

*Panthera leo*

Gir National Park,  
Gujarat

Canon Eos 550D  
50-500mm,  
F:7.1,  
ISO:800,  
1/500s

**Indian desert jird**

*Meriones hurrianae*

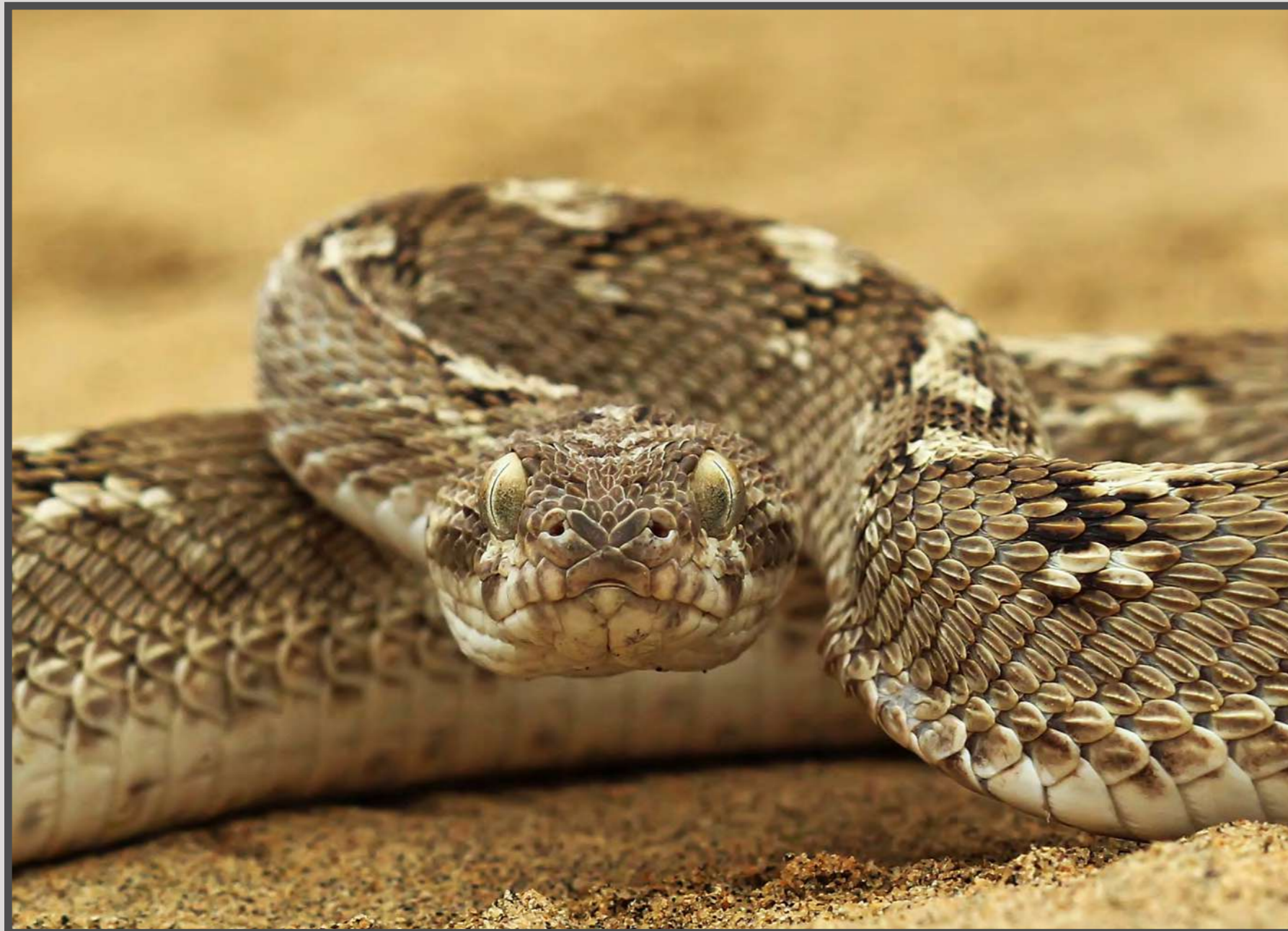
Canon Eos 550D

70-300mm,

F:8.0,

ISO:400,

1/500s



**Saw scale viper**

*Echis carinatus sochureki*

Canon Eos 550D

EF 100mm,

F:8.0,

ISO:400,

1/400s



**Hoverfly**  
*Simosyrphus*  
*grandicornis*

Canon Eos 550D  
EF 100mm,  
F:7.1,  
ISO:400,  
1/1000s

**Indian toad**

*Duttaphrynus melanostictus*  
Juveniles

Canon Eos 550D  
EF 100mm,  
F:14.0,  
ISO:400,  
1/200s



**Little  
cormorants**  
*Microcarbo niger*

Canon Eos 550D  
70-300mm,  
F:4.0,  
ISO:200,  
1/2000s



**Marsh crocodile**

*Crocodylus*

*palustris*

Gir National Park,

Gujarat, juvenile

Canon Eos 550D

EF 100mm,

F:10.0,

ISO:400,

1/200s





**Sweat bee**  
*Ceratina sp.*

Canon Eos 550D  
EF100mm,  
F:8,  
ISO:200,  
1/200s





**Saw scale viper**

*Echis carinatus  
sochureki*

Desert National  
Park, Rajasthan

Canon Eos 550D  
18-55mm,  
F:8.0,  
ISO:400,  
1/400s

MARCO COLOMBO

MATTEO DI NICOLA

# PALUDI e SQUAME

RETTILI e ANFIBI d'ITALIA



ARCHIVIO FOTOGRAFICO ITALIANO

## NEW HERP BOOK

### ***PALUDI E SQUAME: rettili e anfibi d'Italia***

Published by the Italian Photographic Archive, this book comes from a great love for Italian herps, from the wish of making them known to the public in all their beauty and fascination, and last but not least their need of protection. This is the first strictly photographic book about Italian frogs, toads, newts, salamanders, turtles, lizards and snakes in their natural environments, through shots obtained over many years by the authors. This work has been published with the sponsorship of Rile-Tenore-Olona Local Park (Lombardy) and the patronage of Societas Herpetologica Italica (SHI). The book is in Italian but don't be afraid, there are much more photographs than texts!

***Authors: M.Colombo & M. Di Nicola***

***Product details: 28x28 cm, hardcover, 112 pages***

***Publisher: Punto Marte***

***Price: 25 euro (shipping costs excluded)***

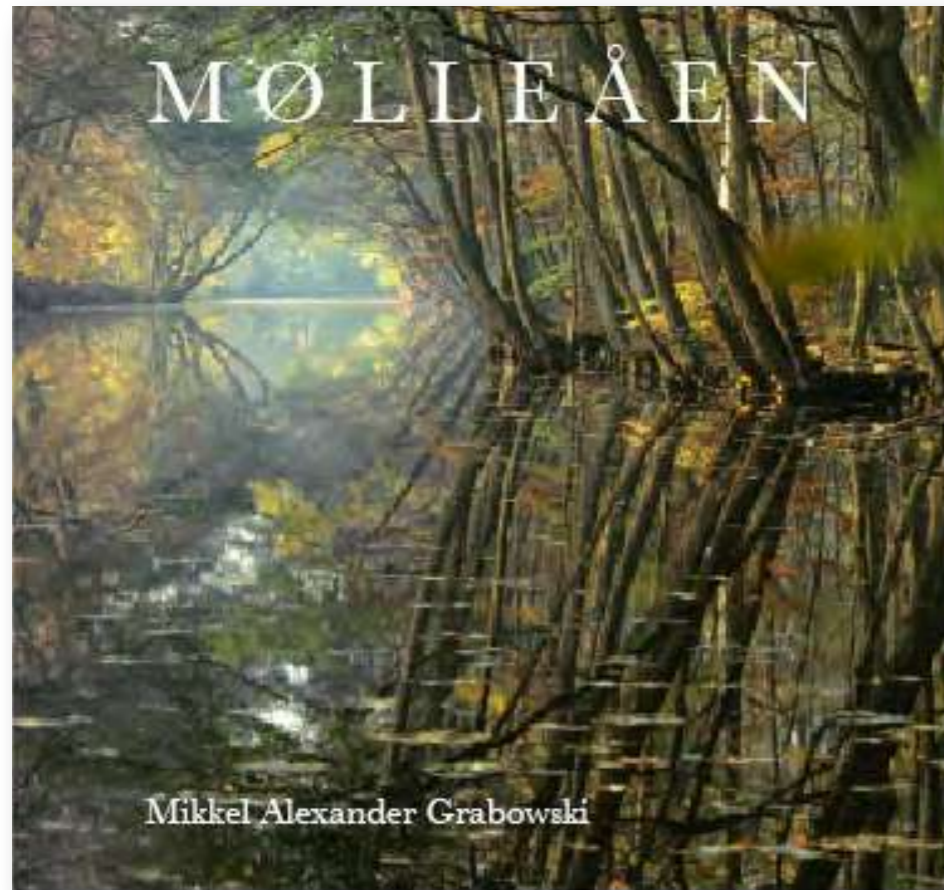
***You can watch a preview and order it at: <http://paludiesquame.wix.com/paludiesquame>***

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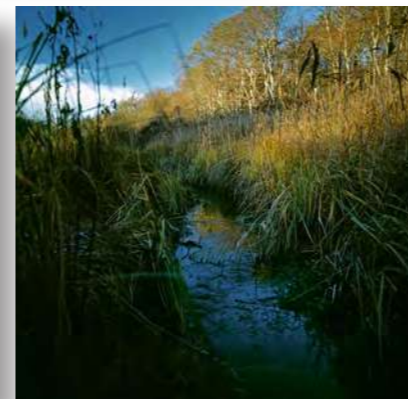
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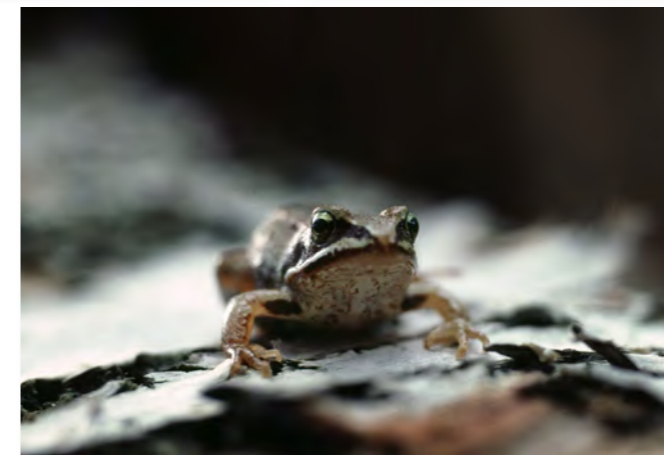
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## INSIDE THE WILDS OF LAWACHARA

Volunteers from all over the world join in a yearly field workshop to help conserve the extraordinary biodiversity of a National Park. And you can be one of them



The Asian Forest Tortoise *Manouria emys phayrei* is one of 25 species of freshwater turtles and tortoises found in Bangladesh - almost 10% of the global diversity of chelonians. Unfortunately, 18 of these, including this *M. emys*, are threatened with extinction. On the title page, a juvenile Burmese Python *Python molurus bivittatus*.



A beautiful juvenile Bengal Monitor Lizard *Varanus bengalensis* - a common lizard, yet seldom seen due to its quick and alert nature.

TEXT AND PHOTOS  
BY SCOTT TRAGESER

Deep inside the Indo-Burma biodiversity hotspot lays a hidden jewel with a unique and diverse confluence of wildlife: Lawachara National Park. This incredible region is still relatively unexplored by researchers, meaning that many of its cryptic denizens still remain to be acknowledged by science. In a recent exploration of the Park under the purview of the Bangladesh Python Project, an independent research effort, some new light was shed on a few of these rare and novel creatures. As one could expect, during these surveys many other charismatic creatures were encountered and subsequently photographed; all in an effort to showcase the importance of maintaining the protection that the park offers to its many endangered hosts.

Caesar Rahman, a Dhaka resident and rising conservationist, is the head herpetological researcher working in Lawachara. With the help of CARINAM, he has become a hero for its scaly, oft-overlooked residents. As with all research though, time and money is needed to make progress, and securing these necessities can be the most challenging part. This is where the participants of the “Bangladesh Python Project Workshop” come to the rescue. Heralding from Australia, America,

India, and Bangladesh, these dedicated volunteers came for ten days to lend a hand surveying the area and to learn about the research and techniques involved with the Project.

In July of 2013, Caesar and I implanted radio-transmitters into three Burmese Pythons *Python bivittatus* to track this locally endangered species’ movements and to learn how they are utilizing the human-altered landscape of Lawachara National Park. Many of the pythons have home ranges that occur in healthy forest but also overlap with tea plantations and even villagers’ backyards. This poses a problem if we are going to help increase their numbers in the park. Villagers don’t respond well to pythons eating their chickens and ducks, and won’t hesitate to elevate the value of their livelihoods over that of the snakes’. It also poses an interesting question for the project: how exactly are the pythons utilizing this ever-changing and ever-diminishing landscape? The most important data we hope to acquire is their day-to-day and seasonal movement patterns. This is what we need to know in order to determine what environmental factors the pythons require so that one day the villagers can peacefully co-exist with these apex predators.

*continued on page 75* ➤





A portrait of what is possibly one of the rarest inhabitants of the Sundarbans, the Northern River Terrapin *Batagur baska*. None have been observed in the wild for several years but during our surveys in the coming summers, hopefully this will change. Notice the mosquito coming in for a landing!



One of Bangladesh's most adorable creatures: the beautifully marked Phayre's Leaf-monkey *Trachypithecus phayrei*, a denizen of the forest canopy.



Finding Elongated tortoises *Indotestudo elongata* in the forest is near-impossible without the aid of dogs or a radio transmitter such as this one.

A similar question also applies to the Elongated Tortoise *Indotestudo elongata*, which the project has recently expanded to include. Very few of these tortoises still exist in the park and, like the python, are still considered a delicacy for many villagers. Though, thanks to the educational outreach efforts of Caesar's team, the locals in the surrounding villages are slowly beginning to understand the importance of coexisting with these animals. The word was quickly spread that we were looking for tortoises and with a little bit of luck, Caesar got a call that a child in the village of Baghmara had found one right before our team was to arrive. Two other tortoises from a nearby forest were also saved from the soup pots of a rural market in order to test the feasibility of a translocation effort. Mortality rates can be high when relocating reptiles but fortunately, our introductions have gone better than anticipated with every individual surviving, sans one poaching victim. Health of the animals was obviously a concern, thus the introduced tortoises were thoroughly checked to ensure no diseases were being brought in. Along with radio-tracking, daily forest surveys were conducted to discover what treasures the forest had in store for us.

Towards the end of our expedition, one of the locally hired trackers stumbled

upon a new python whilst routinely tracking one of our transmitted individuals. Unfortunately we discovered that this python had been relocated by the forest department a few months prior after rescuing it from a property some distance away. With a limited number of transmitters available to use, we have to be picky about which snakes we track. In this case Caesar decided to only insert a less costly PIT tag, as her habits would not be the same as a resident python's and thusly not as useful to the python study. If we encounter her again though, the PIT tag will tell us exactly who she is and data can still be taken.

Ten days in the jungle can take its toll on you so we end the workshop with a leisurely boat ride down the legendary Sundarbans: the world's largest mangrove system. Three days of normally cost-prohibitive birding, mammaling, and herping accompanied by good food and good company.

As the workshop is an annual event, every summer there are several opportunities for enthusiastic individuals to lend their hand at helping to save the herpetofauna of Bangladesh. If this interests you, spots for June are still available so please don't hesitate to contact Scott Trageser at [Trageser.scott@gmail.com](mailto:Trageser.scott@gmail.com). ●



One of the great classic tales of mimicry in nature belongs to Gray's leaf insect *Phyllium bioculatum*.



Red-tailed Bamboo Pitviper *Trimeresurus erythrurus* are one of the more common snakes in most Asian rainforests. Normally found crossing the road after a heavy rain.



Smith's Leaf-litter Frogs *Leptobatrachium smithi* in amplexus, off to find a suitable site to deposit their eggs.



An Orange Blister Beetle *Mylabris pustulata* taking flight.

Participants inserting a PIT tag in a Burmese Python *Python molurus bivittatus*.



This *Micryletta* was one of two potentially new species discovered during 2014.



Red-tailed Bamboo Pitviper *Trimeresurus erythrurus*.



This child in the village of Bagmara saved this tortoise from certain death.





Day and night, throughout the forests of Southeast Asia, one can hear Tokay Geckos *Gekko gecko* from hundreds of meters away calling "Tow-Kay, Tow-Kay!"

Ganges River Dolphins *Platanista gangetica* and Irrawaddy Dolphins were encountered several times during our three days in the Sundarbans.



A fierce persona masks this arboreal, rear-fanged Gray Cat Snake's *Boiga siamensis* rather benign bite.



Assam Snail Eaters *Pareas monticola*, like all *Pareas*, specialize on eating snails and exhibit jaw adaptations to assist with the shucking.



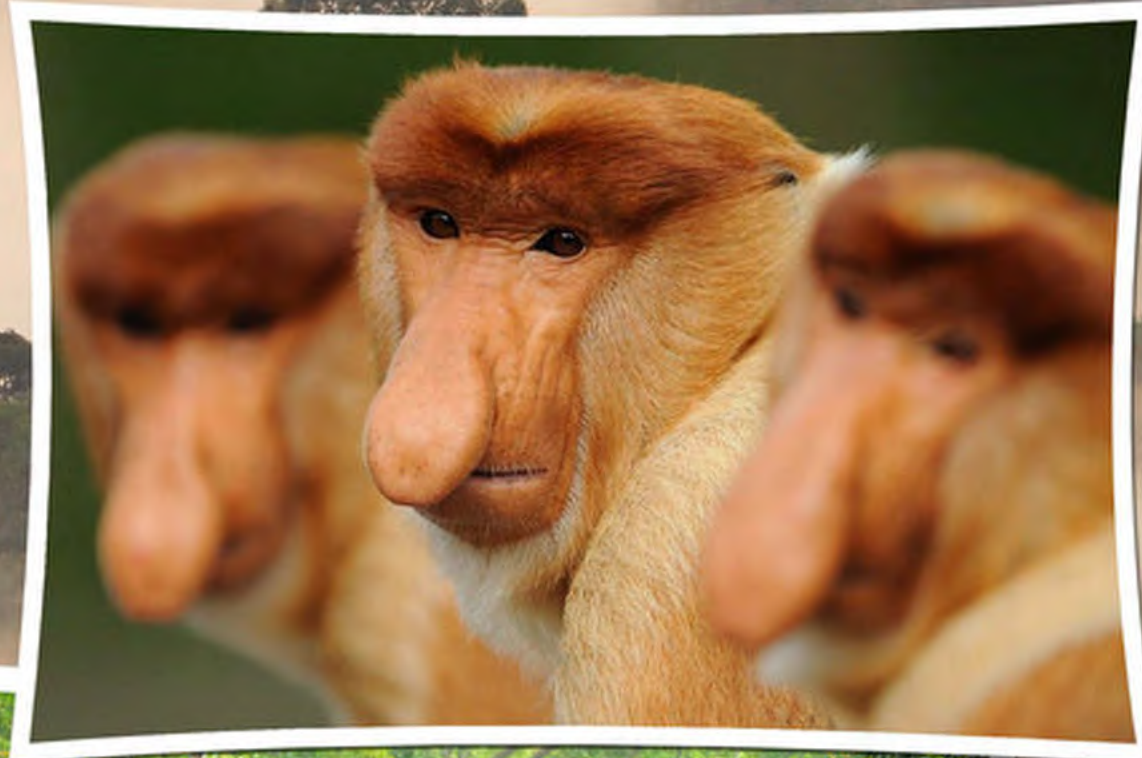
The sexually dimorphic and endangered Western Hoolock Gibbon *Hoolock hoolock* is one of five species of primate that we see every trip.



Elongated Tortoises *Indotestudo elongata* were once very common colonists of the forest leaf-litter, but decades of unsustainable hunting has decimated their populations.

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# Trip Report

HERPING IN NORTH AFRICA

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## ROAD TO MOROCCO

Amateur herpetologist and photographer Marco Sassoe explores a variety of desert habitats in his successful quest for Northern African reptile life



**Tata**

An example of the beautiful lunar landscape of the rugged Anti-Atlas mountains. On the previous page, a stunning Moroccan spiny-tailed lizards *Uromastyx nigriventris* in a pebble desert landscape. Sadly, large numbers of these amazing lizards are captured to be sold to tourists or to be used as food or as a talisman.



**Moila snake** *Rhagerhis moilensis*  
Previously ascribed to the genus *Malpolon*, the Moila snake *Rhagerhis moilensis* is a typical inhabitant of the Saharan regions.

TEXT AND PHOTOS  
BY MARCO SASSOE

The air temperature is 45° C, so the idea of finding some rescue from the oppressive heat down in a water cistern is alluring after all. My face is dripping with sweat as I climb down the rope ladder that swings below my feet. As I reach the bottom several meters below, I spot two horseshoe whip snakes *Hemorrhois hippocrepsis* on small patch of ground emerging from the muddy water that dampens the base of the pit. Similarly, an Algerian orange-tailed skink *Eumeces algeriensis* rests on a sandy islet in one corner of the cistern. Scorpions and other arthropods are floating dead, while a green toad *Bufoles boulengeri* looks for shelter under a plastic can as I approach. I grab the snakes, the skink and the toad, secure them in a cloth bag, and start climbing out of the well, back into the glaring sun.

Common sense would advise against entering water holes in the desert, only to find oneself surrounded by snakes, toads, scorpions, and other potentially dangerous

creatures. However, what laypeople would probably consider as a most horrible nightmare turned out to be a highly effective way to discover reptiles and amphibians during a summer trip to Morocco and Western Sahara.

On a day of August, 2013, I met Gabriel Martínez del Mármol Marin and Baudilio Rebollo Fernández at the Menara airport in Marrakech. I had never seen them before in real life, and I did not know what to expect for the next two weeks that we had planned to spend herping throughout Morocco. I soon realized that ahead of us was a frantic race across the country, that would take us from the extreme heat of the barren Western Sahara desert to the verdant mountain prairies of the Middle and High Atlas.

August may not be the best time of the year for herping in North Africa. Daytime temperatures are extreme and even at night they often remain very high. With such weather conditions, that are prevalent in the

*continued on page 90* ➤



**Spanish terrapin** *Mauremys leprosa*

The Spanish terrapin *Mauremys leprosa* has a wide distribution in Morocco, being found in different bioclimatic domains, including the Saharan zones. This specimen, belonging to the subspecies *saharica*, was photographed in the oued Noun near Bou Jerif.



**Algerian whip snake** *Hemorrhois algirus intermedius*

The Algerian whip snake *Hemorrhois algirus intermedius* is an elegant colubrid of the Saharian biotope whose taxonomic status is still uncertain.



**Mountain viper** *Vipera monticola*  
 The smallest *Vipera*, although its taxonomic relation to *V. latasti* is still unclear.  
 Endemic to Morocco and a palearctic relict strictly associated with montane habitats.

deserted regions east of the Atlas mountains, reptile activity is generally limited, and the usual searching methods are not very effective. August is not particularly good for photography either, as light is too harsh during most of the day. Despite these conditions, we were rewarded with some notable findings, due to a combination of meticulous planning, almost incessant exploration and, certainly, some luck!

**INTO THE DESERT PITS**

The Moroccan desert is dotted with pits, water storage tanks and other rain catchment systems. These builds are a basic solution to face water scarcity, but unfortunately they also constitute formidable traps for many animal species. Once a reptile, a small mammal or an arthropod enters or falls into a water hole, it cannot come out again and faces a period of confinement and fasting. Exploring water holes in the dry season is therefore an efficient way to find reptiles and other elusive creatures, with the added bonus that the entrapped animals can be rescued from an almost certain death.

During their many previous trips to Morocco, Budi and Gabriel had recorded the GPS coordinates of a large number of water tanks, that we investigated systematically during daytime as well as at night, often driving for hundreds of kilometers in a single day. These cisterns can be examined with a powerful torch to assess the presence of any species of interest, in which case a rescue strategy has to be put in place. Some of the most modern cisterns, made of concrete, can be entered easily through metal rungs cemented into one of the walls. In the majority of cases, however, the wells must be climbed down (and then up again!) using a rope or a rudimentary folding ladder. In this case, it is advisable to place any venomous snake in a plastic jar or any other rigid container to avoid a bite during the climbing operation. Many water tanks are bordered by a decantation pit that can be large enough to entrap a small animal or even a large snake. These pits are not protected from the excess heat, therefore animals that fall inside will succumb quite rapidly. It was in a decantation pit near Tan Tan that we found an adult Egyptian cobra

*continued on page 92* ➤



**Sidi**  
The *Euphorbia*-rich vegetation typical of the Atlantic coast south of Agadir.



**Ocellated skink** *Chalcides ocellatus*

One of fifteen species of the genus *Chalcides* occurring in Morocco, with a huge distribution extending from Western Sahara to Pakistan through Southern Europe.

*Naja haje*. The snake had been killed shortly before, as demonstrated by the multiple lesions on its body, likely caused by rocks. There lay at our feet one of the most majestic reptiles of Morocco, a snake that we had wished to find alive in a different context.

During the first day of our trip, I learned the potentials of this herping technique (that I am going to call "pit-herping"), as in a relatively short time we discovered five species of snakes, including a much sought-after Moorish viper *Daboia mauritanica*. I also soon came to appreciate that my new friends were just the best guides I could wish for that trip: they knew where individual species live, and especially they knew how to find them! Pit-herping can be quite unpredictable though. On a particularly hot day, we drove for several hundred kilometers in the Western Sahara, south to Smara and then west to Laayoune. I was fascinated by the extreme desert that extended almost endlessly ahead of us, still just a small taste of the immensity of the

Sahara. Herds of dromedaries crossed the road from time to time, adding a touch of exotic charm to the surreal landscape. We stopped to check two large water tanks located on each side of the road. While Budi and I were exploring quite disappointingly one cistern, in which we only observed a few black scorpions *Androctonus mauritanicus*, Gabriel was rewarded by the finding of two sand vipers *Cerastes vipera* and a large horned viper *Cerastes cerastes* in the other, not-so-far place. The water tank also offered a sheltered setting in which we could photograph the snakes, as these small animals would have rapidly succumbed to the outside heath.

I need to say at this point that pit-herping can be a dangerous practice. Some of the wells are precarious constructions that could collapse with dramatic consequences if stepped upon or during an exploration. I remember climbing down a pit in which I rescued a large diadem snake *Spalerosophis dolichospilus* with some



**Desert horned viper** *Cerastes cerastes*

The desert horned viper can be found in a variety of pre-Saharan and Saharan habitats. This specimen was found at night in the old *palmeraie* visible in the background.

apprehension, as I watched the unstable assembly of rocks and wood sticks creaking above my head. Also, some of the pits are not obvious at all, sometimes being just deep (very deep!) holes that open at ground level, which calls for extreme caution when hiking in the Moroccan countryside, especially at night.

Another drawback of pit-herping is that as this kind of activity will become more popular the chances of finding live animals inside the water tanks will decrease considerably, with the inherent risk of transforming the search in a sort of race among herpers! On the other hand, an increased number of pit explorers would be beneficial for the animals, provided that the rescued specimens are promptly released in suitable habitat.

#### NIGHT ENCOUNTERS

Pit-herping can be done at any time, even when other searching methods are ineffective, but obviously this technique is not as gratifying as finding the animals in their natural environment. Fortunately, we also had the opportunity to visit different types of habitat, including rocky and sandy desert, coastal dunes, palm plantations, wet areas, and a variety of hill and mountain

environments. I have particularly good memories of two *Cerastes cerastes* that we found hiking at night. In one case, we visited a *palmeraie* near Agdz. It was a calm night, with ideal weather conditions, and we walked along ruined buildings and mud walls, at the base of which scorpions waited in ambush for their prey. Despite some geckos (*Saurodactylus brossei*, *Tarentola boehmei*, *Ptyodactylus oudrii*), we did not observe any reptile for quite a long time, but eventually I was lucky to bump into a horned viper right inside the old kasbah. The other *Cerastes* was found while visiting sand dunes near Erfoud on a slightly windy night. The viper was partly buried in sand, with only the head and neck exposed, perfectly camouflaged among the reddish sand. We took photographs of the beautiful snake in situ, before it was startled and tried to escape by side-winding.

#### MONSIEUR, LA PROCHAINE FOIS NOUS CHERCHONS!

No trip to Morocco would be complete without a close interaction with local people. This is something very difficult to avoid in any case, as Moroccans are widely distributed across the entire





**Sand racer** *Psammophis schockari*

The sand racer *Psammophis schockari* is a diurnal opistoglyphous snake distributed throughout the country with three distinct color phases. This specimen with a uniform pattern comes from a coastal area near Tan Tan.

country, and have a curious attitude toward visitors and a great tradition for hospitality. As many of the wells we visited were located close to human settlements, we were frequently approached (at any time of the day and night!) by folks who were interested in what we were doing. Most of the times, these people acted in a friendly way and offered their help in guiding us to explore the territory. Perhaps the most enjoyable episode happened in a village close to Tiznit, where we rescued a sick horseshoe whip snake from a large water tank, attracting the curiosity of a small group. Like most of the people we met in our trip, those individuals were horrified by any snake, and we had to insist quite a lot before some of them dared to touch the harmless serpent. Among those, a young man seemed particularly excited and insisted in showing us more and more pits, taking part with great eagerness to our search. When we eventually decided to leave, he asked me over and over again to come back and spend more time looking for snakes! I can't forget his graceful smile as he invited me one last time: "*Monsieur, la prochaine fois nous cherchons!*"

**Viperine snake** *Natrix maura*

A very common snake in Morocco found almost everywhere water is present, permanently or seasonally. This one was found in the High Atlas at 2600 m.



**BACK TO MOROCCO**

In the Spring of 2014 I am again in Morocco, this time with Greg Meyer and Johan De Smedt. Morocco seems to be a busy destination for European herpetologists, as we meet there Konrad Mebert and Maya, and we decide to join our efforts in the search of the elusive critters. The extreme heat of the previous summer is long gone, and as we start our trip near Casablanca I find myself wandering among lush vegetation, hit by the delicate scent of spontaneous aromatic herbs and graceful flowers. No trip to Morocco can be boring, and in the following days we go through several incidents, that fortunately only add to our good temperament and humor: a kitten found under the car hood (safely transported

to an animal rescue center), a broken car door latch (promptly fixed with a strong webbing), a bite on my nose by a horseshoe whip snake (certainly the most hilarious moment of the trip), the inevitable traffic tickets...

As we spend many hours hiking, quite unproductively, in different habitats, we are forced to reflect on the elusive nature of snakes, and the strategies they have evolved to survive in spite of the threats posed by humans. Morocco is a land of high contrasts, where animals and people subsist in a delicate balance within a harsh, but magnificent environment. "We are lucky to be part of this beauty" I think, as I observe tracks left by small animals on the sandy desert floor.



**Moila snake** *Rhagerhis moilensis*

If threatened, this rear-fanged snake spreads its neck into a hood, hissing and striking repeatedly, for which reason it is also known as the false cobra.



**Mograbin diadem snake** *Spalerosophis dolichospilus*

Considered by many as the most beautiful snake of the Maghreb, a fast and active colubrid frequently encountered in the arid pre-Saharan regions of the East and South.



### Agadir

Overgrazing and overexploitation of argan trees *Argania spinosa* near Agadir results in topsoil loss, exposing the beautifully-colored substrate to erosion and desertification.

**Bibron's agama** *Agama impalearis*  
A female agama *Agama impalearis* showing the typical coloration.



**Morocco lizard-fingered gecko** *Saurodactylus brosseti*  
With twenty known species belonging to three different families, Morocco has an extraordinary variety of geckos.



**Merzouga**  
Climbing sand dunes is a great way to immerse yourself in the beauty and immensity of the Sahara desert.



**Moorish viper** *Daboia mauritanica*  
 A large venomous snake with a length of over 1.5 meters / 5 feet. Widespread in Morocco and the Maghreb, but heavily persecuted and not often encountered.



**Desert horned viper** *Cerastes cerastes*  
 One of the icons of North African deserts. Supraocular "horns" are a distinctive character, although hornless individuals occur. Found at night in the vicinity of Erfoud.



**Desert monitor** *Varanus griseus*

The remarkable Desert monitor *Varanus griseus* can attain a length of 1.4 meters. In Morocco it is widely distributed in the Saharan region, where it is never abundant. Despite being protected, Desert monitors are illegally captured and used for the preparation of folk remedies and for the pet trade.

**Mauritanian toad** *Amietophrynus mauritanicus*

An adaptable species found in a variety of habitats. This large toad is identified by a dorsal pattern of reddish-brown blotches bordered with black.

**Helmeted gecko** *Tarentola chazaliae*

Endemic to a narrow strip along the Atlantic coast of Western North Africa, mainly in sand dune habitat. Emits chirping sounds when captured by hand.

**Dune gecko** *Stenodactylus petrii*

Morocco has an extraordinary variety of geckos, with several endemic species and many others found in other regions.

**Algerian skink** *Eumeces algeriensis*

Commonly found throughout Morocco. This large skink is beautifully decorated with orange, black and white dots that cross its back.



**Horseshoe whip snake** *Hemorrhois hippocrepis*

The beautiful Horseshoe whip snake is an active colubrid that may attain a length of 1.5 meters / 5 feet. It is one of the commonest snakes in Morocco, widespread in the Mediterranean domain as well as in the South of the country along the Atlantic coast, where it is found in sympatry with the closely related *Hemorrhois algirus*.



**Sahara sand viper** *Cerastes vipera*

A highly specialized species restricted to the sand dune habitat of the great Erg on the border with Algeria and the littoral dunes along the Atlantic coast.



**Moroccan spiny-tailed lizard** *Uromastyx nigriventris*

A large agamid found in the Saharan regions East and South of the Atlas. Adults often display a striking yellow-green or orange on a black background.

**Desert wall gecko** *Tarentola deserti*

With twenty known species belonging to three different families, Morocco has an extraordinary variety of geckos.



**North African ocellated lizard** *Timon tangitanus*

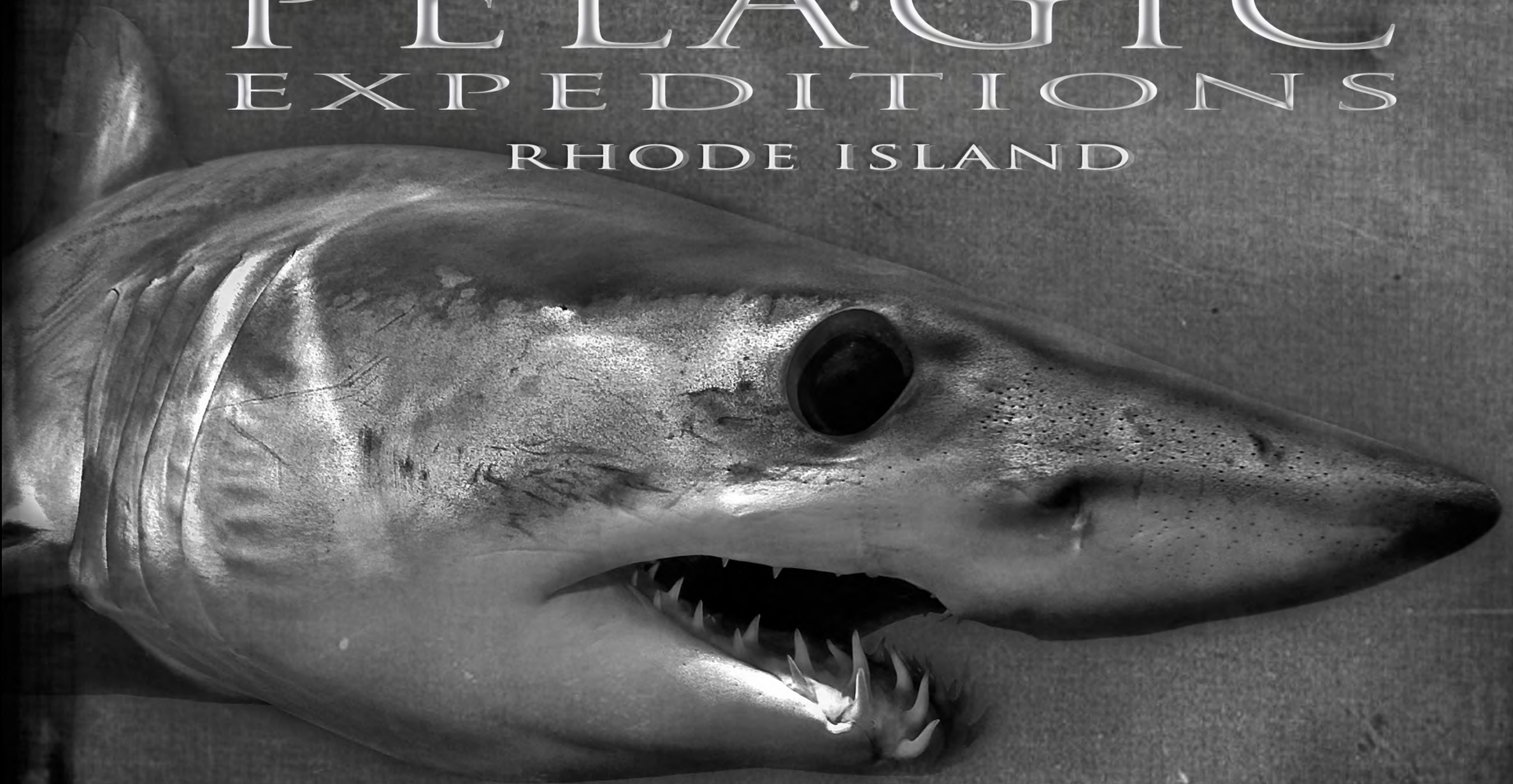
A subadult of the colorful North African ocellated lizard *Timon tangitanus* from the Middle Atlas.



**Common chameleon** *Chamaeleo chamaeleon*

The only representative of *Chamaeleonidae* in Morocco, the common chameleon *Chamaeleo chamaeleon* is widely distributed, being found from sea level to 1800 m in the High Atlas. This specimen was photographed near the old Fort of Bou-Jerif.

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*The Parting Shot*

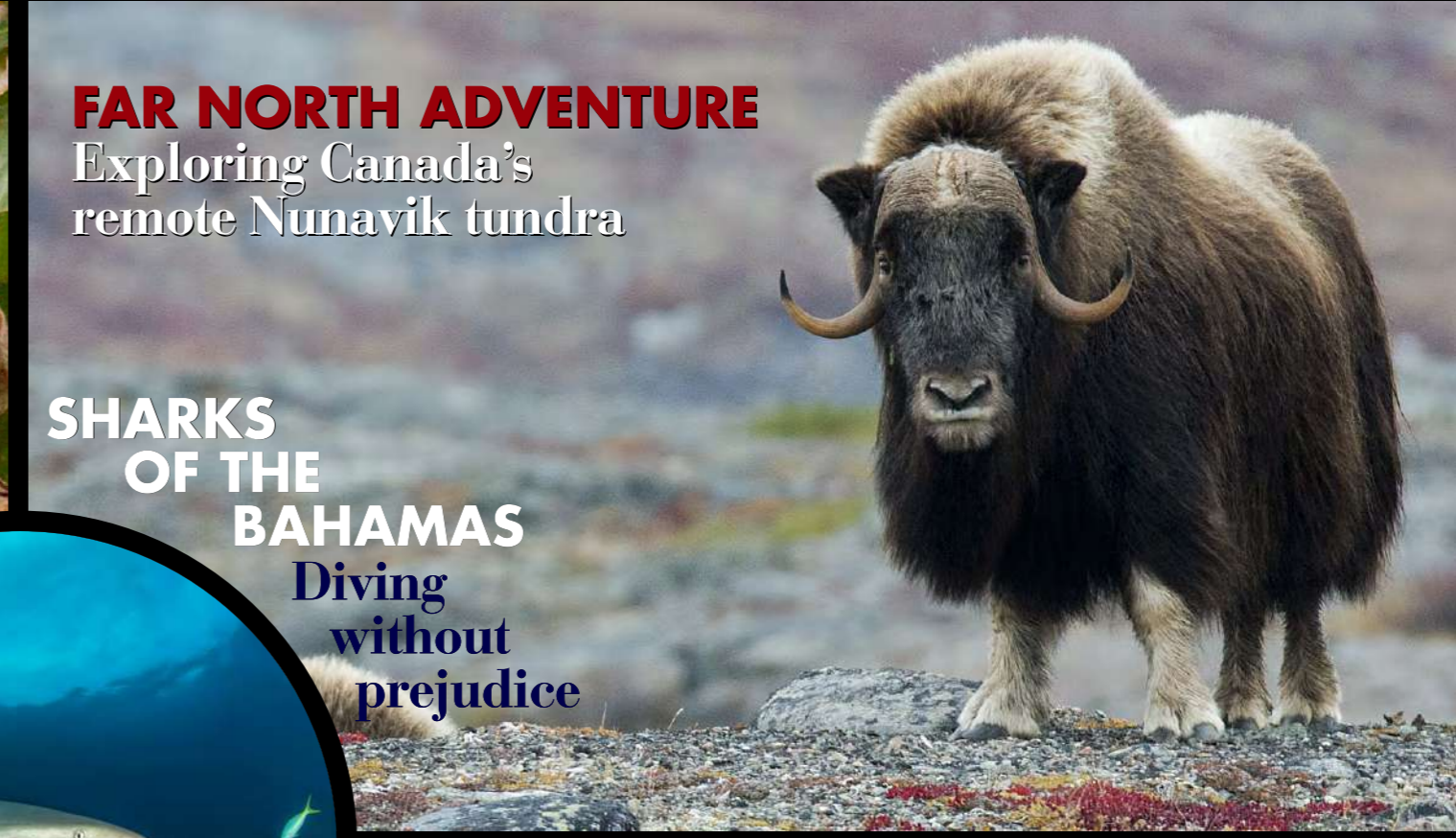
The last surviving patch of true rainforest in Sri Lanka, Sinharaja National Park is famous worldwide for its numerous endemics - Ceylon frogmouths, Blue magpies and several other beautiful, unique species. And of course for its countless leeches, the bane of all photographers visiting the forest and pausing anywhere - albeit briefly - to take a shot. Our attention there was however caught by the staggering numbers of small mantids, which could be seen practically everywhere - if we are not mistaken, Sri Lanka

features more than 50 different species belonging to the order *Mantodea*. The most amazing of all must however surely be this 1cm-long *Odontomantis* sp., an incredible ant-mimic if there ever was one. It ran to and fro, it moved, it behaved and it looked exactly like a large, roving, solitary ant - it fooled us completely until I could spot its raptorial claws through my camera viewfinder. Photographing it proved almost impossible as it frantically ran here and there in a typical ant-like frenzied manner, and when the

leaves on which it was found were slightly moved it immediately jumped (from a height of 1.50 mt!) to the ground without any apparent harm. After a good twenty minutes of extremely hard work (and equally hard swearing) lying on my knees and elbows as I tried to corner it for a second or two, I was covered in sweat (and in leeches, which made a bloody mess of me) - but I finally ended up with this usable shot of our little, incredible ant-mimicking Praying mantis. Was it all worth it? But of course it was! ●



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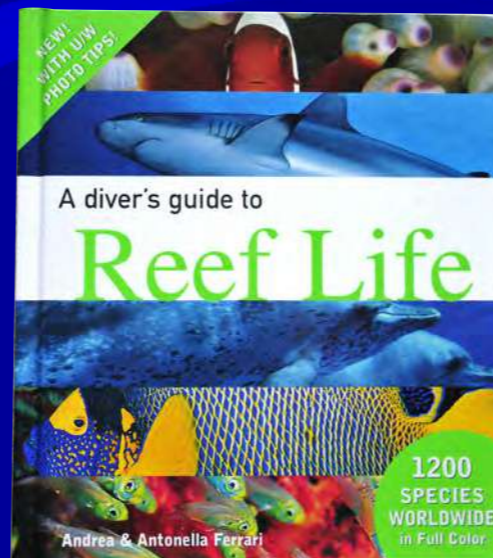
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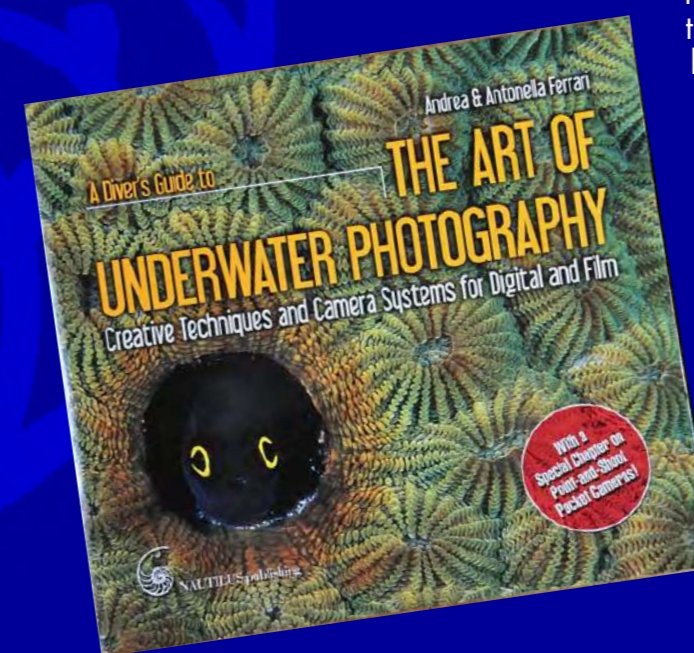
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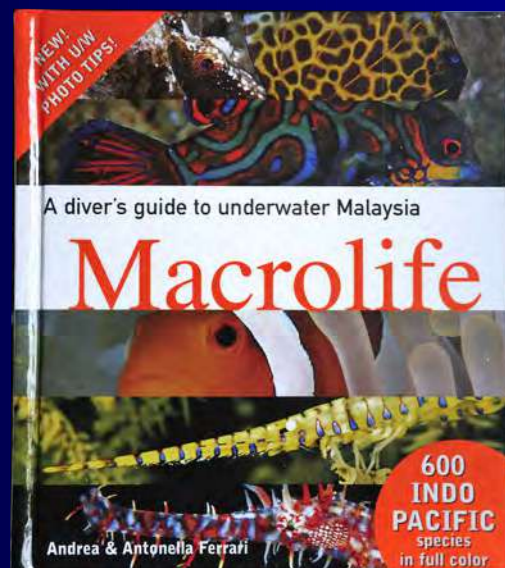
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