

ANIMA MUNDI

Adventures in Wildlife Photography

Issue 23, Year 6 - July 2016

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BLUE-TAILED BEE-EATERS Birds of beauty and bliss

FIELDWORK A new frog species from Ecuador





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Dear Andrea & Antonella,

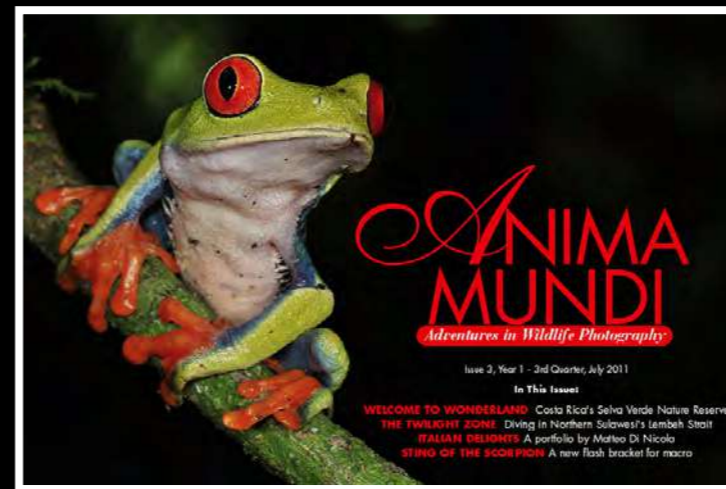
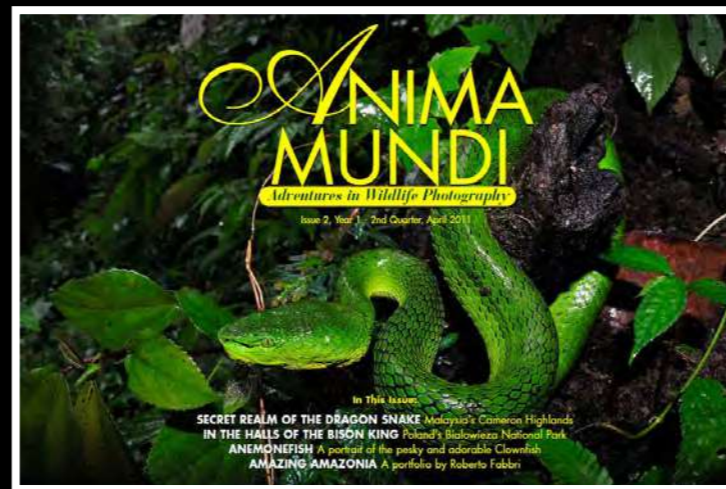
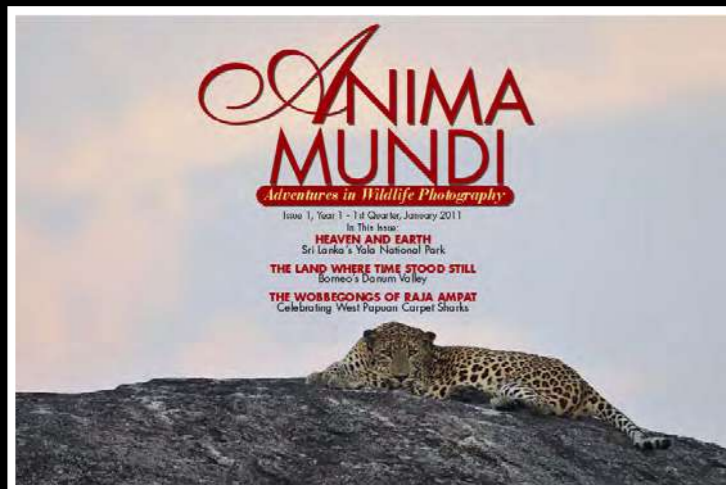
I have just finished reading your latest edition of Anima Mundi and I was inspired to write and say how much I am enjoying your publication and following your adventures. My wife and dive/photo partner Cherie and I were so inspired by your feature on Yala National Park that we booked a Safari with Eco 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
Dive 2000
Sydney, Australia.
www.dive2000.com.au



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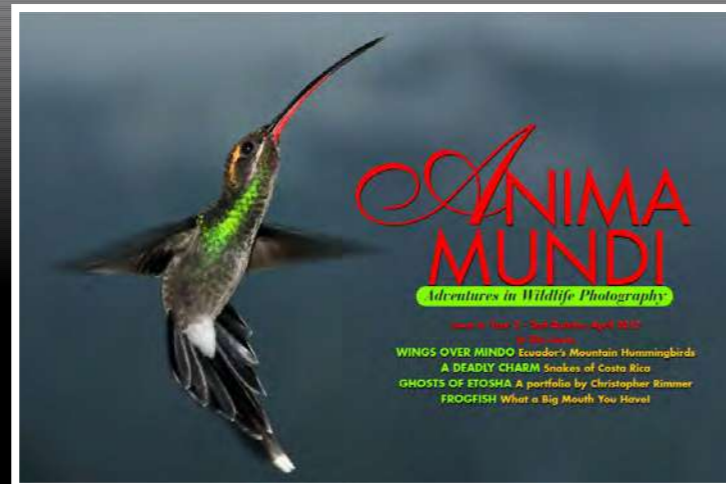


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ANIMA MUNDI

Adventures in Wildlife Photography

A new alliance for the environment

This new issue of *Anima Mundi - Adventures in Wildlife Photography* starts with a bang and some great news! Besides our long-standing and successful association with ASA - Amphibian Survival Alliance, we are now exceedingly happy to announce the start of a strategic alliance with our partners of **Tropical Herping**, that wonderful Ecuador-based company founded by our long-time friends, young biologists, field researchers and very successful photographers Lucas M. Bustamante and Alejandro Arteaga. Both have already seen their spectacular and often exceedingly innovative work featured on these pages in the past, and it was only natural that after several years of firm friendship and mutual admiration we'd join forces.

How does this translate in real life? Well, both *Anima Mundi - Adventures in Wildlife Photography* and Tropical Herping operate in the fields of biological research, educational tourism, wildlife photography, habitat and species conservation and environmental education. We both strive to disseminate easily accessible knowledge about wildlife and the environment and to create awareness about biodiversity worldwide - we do have much in common, indeed. So, thanks to our travel experience *Anima Mundi - Adventures in Wildlife Photography* will help Tropical Herping in discovering new unique, truly field-tested destinations and local operators in the remotest parts of the globe to be added to their growing list of exclusive wildlife photography trips (look out for their new expeditions to Madagascar and Sri Lanka, two favourite destinations of ours!). Again, Tropical Herping will instead make available to our magazine unique, exclusive material and articles from its field research activity and photo-

graphic expeditions - a very good first example of this co-operation is actually featured in this very issue with our joint article about the newly discovered and severely endangered Mashpi frog from the Chocò region of Ecuador. As you can see, our enthusiasm is well justified - and you, our readers, will soon be reaping the fruits of this new alliance.

But what about our current issue? As usual, we have tried to make it as interesting and varied as possible. We have a fascinating feature on a very unusual (if not actually undescribed) pit viper from Assam (page 4), an extensive and heavily illustrated trip report from the spectacular Ranomafana National Park in Madagascar (page 11), a photographic tribute to the stupendously graceful flamingos of Walvis Bay in Namibia (page 54), a Personal Portfolio by Pakistan's Yasir Mehamood (page 75), an essay on Blue-tailed bee-eaters by Indian photographer Raghavendra Pattar (page 84) and finally the aforementioned field research feature on a newly described frog from the threatened ecosystem of the Ecuadorian Chocò (page 91). Plus - another big surprise! Our Parting Shot image (on this issue's page 100) is now open for publication to reader's photos, and the first lucky author is young Arghya Adhikary, again from India, with a very interesting picture. So the gauntlet is thrown - if you would like to be featured in our coming Parting Shots just send your best images to editor@animamundimag.com and we'll pick the best ones!

In the meantime...

Have a good trip!
Andrea & Antonella Ferrari
www.animamundimag.com

■ Assam's fabulous golden pit viper - the subject of our Scoop from page 4.

We appreciate your feedback
- constructive criticism, useful
suggestions and interesting
contributions are welcome.
Please drop us a line at
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A vibrant green grasshopper nymph with long antennae and spiky hind legs, perched on a large, textured red leaf. The background is a soft-focus forest floor with more red leaves.

■ A *Cyrtacanthacridine*
grasshopper nymph - one of the
many fascinating life forms
found in Madagascar's
Ranomafana National Park.

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THE PARTING SHOT



Great news!

We are happy to formally announce our collaboration with Anima Mundi Magazine.

Welcome to Andrea and Antonella Ferrari to the TH team! From now onwards, they will be Honorary Fellows and ambassadors of Tropical Herping in the ecotourism world.

So many exciting plans and deals are coming for nature, wildlife and conservation lovers. Stay tuned!

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THE GOLDEN PIT VIPER
OF ASSAM
MY PRECIOUSSS!

A RARE ENCOUNTER WITH A SPECTACULAR
AND POSSIBLY NEW SPECIES
IN THE *TRIMERESURUS ALBOLABRIS* COMPLEX

*Rather than the usual
bright green shown by the
pit vipers belonging to the
T. albolabris complex, this
Assamese morph is bright
golden yellow overall.*



■ A close-up portrait shows very clearly the thermosensitive pits located between the eye and the nostril. These are utilized by Crotalinae snakes to locate prey utilizing infrared radiation.

TEXT BY ANDREA FERRARI
PHOTOS BY ANDREA & ANTONELLA FERRARI

Tantalizing news about a mysterious yellow pit-viper occasionally observed in the Jorhat area had been following us since our arrival in Assam, India's beautiful north-eastern region. We were obviously very familiar with the bright green, yellow- or red-eyed arboreal pit vipers belonging to the genus *Trimeresurus* (renamed in a few instances *Cryptelytrops* or *Popeia* by some researchers) which inhabit the thick understory of Assamese forests - but a bright yellow one? That sounded very interesting! So it was with unique enthusiasm that - after much searching and

with the help of our friend Diganta Gogoi - we finally were able to observe one of these elusive and apparently undescribed snakes in flesh and blood, when a small male specimen was located in a nearby tea plantation. And look and behold - bright golden yellow it was, with a luminous orange-yellow back fading to an impossibly bright yellow on its sides and a much paler yellow-white on its venter. A creature of unique beauty, despite the fact that the individual found was rather thin - almost emaciated - and obviously heavily parasitized by several subcutaneous

worms. But what species does this stunning and quite venomous reptile belongs to? Local herpetologists and field researchers such as Samrat Sengupta and Anita Malhotra prefer describing it as a local, highly localized variant (i.e. cf) of the well-known White-lipped Pit viper *Trimeresurus albolabris*, while European specialists such as Gernot Vogel are convinced it actually is better described as *Trimeresurus septentrionalis*, which has the same scale count of *T. albolabris* but is found within a different geographical range. All agree on the state of flux currently

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A faint dark-orange ■ temporal line is visible going from the bright yellow pupil to the corner of the mouth. As in *albolabris*, the lip is of a paler tone than the rest of the body.

■ The body of the male individual encountered near Jorhat showed heavy parasitizing by subcutaneous worms, with several nodules of different sizes all over its emaciated body.





Depending on light conditions, the dorsum occasionally appears of a toned-down, mustard-like color. The tail is however brick-red as in most bright green *Trimeresurus* species.



Strangely enough, all the sightings of this wonderful morph we heard of have taken place in tea plantations - none have been observed (yet) inside the forest proper. An indication of habitat preference or rather better chances to bump into one when actively picking tea leaves?

pervading herpetological research in NE India however, and given the furious and highly specialized debate about the constant (and often rather useless) revisions going on in the *Trimeresurus* complex, we'll just describe our wonderful find as a bright yellow, relatively uncommon and seldom described "new" morph of a pit viper belonging to the *Trimeresurus* complex, cf *albolabris* or *septentrionalis* (or even a new species which might be described in detail in the future, who knows). This beautiful color morph appears to be highly localized and with a remarkably restricted range, with most if not all individuals being found in tea estates and tea plantations exclusively; the specimen we observed appeared to be quite feisty and defensive, resorting on several occasions to intense tail rattling first and defensive lunges and bites immediately afterwards during our photographic session. Despite its relatively poor physical condition it was extremely active, ready to bite and very little inclined to allow gentle manipulation; at the very first opportunity to flee it dropped to the ground from the branch it was coiling on and immediately disappeared in a hole among the tree root system. Despite this proclivity to defend itself with alacrity, accidents in the plantations with tea-pickers seem to be extremely rare. In any case, it is quite obvious that further research is needed - the Golden viper of Assam is waiting for our next visit!



■ A close-up side view of the impressive head of this beautiful and enigmatic species or morph confirms all the visible external features of the *Trimeresurus albolabris* and *septentrionalis* complex.

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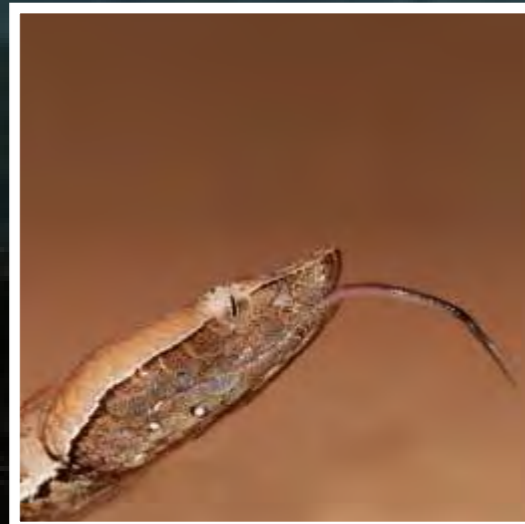
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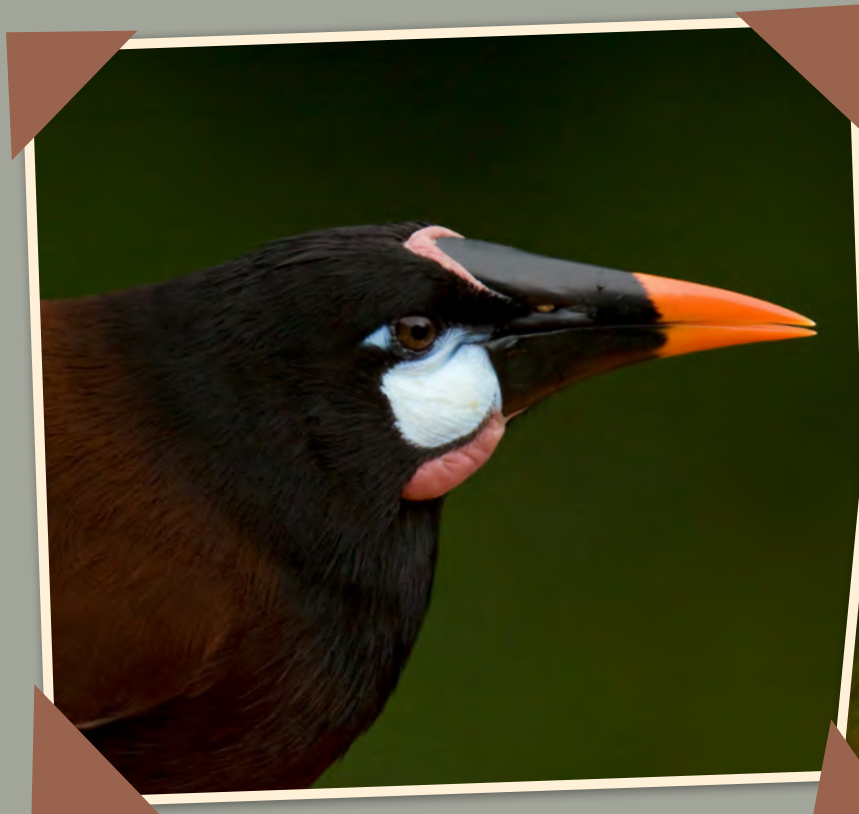


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RANOMAFANA NATIONAL PARK

IN THE LAND OF LEMURS

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*A virgin rainforest
crisscrossed by streams, waterfalls
and a main roaring river*



Namorona river waterfalls and rapids, Ranomafana National Park, Madagascar. On the opening spread, Milne-Edwards Sifaka *Propithecus edwardsi*.

TEXT BY ANDREA FERRARI
PHOTOS BY ANDREA & ANTONELLA FERRARI

As we have already written in the past (see *Anima Mundi - Adventures in Wildlife Photography* issues 13, 14, 15 and 16), the island of Madagascar is one of those literally stupefying destinations which the passionate naturalist and wildlife photographer cannot afford to miss visiting at the very least once in life. Its stunning biodiversity, the unique percentage of fascinating endemisms,

the beauty of its landscapes and - last but not least - the dazzling numbers and variety of wildlife one can easily observe inside its protected areas and National Parks (and even outside of them, very often) make Madagascar one of those places the lovers of nature dream about. Sadly, much of

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Comet Moth
Argema mittrei,
adult male.



Red-fronted
Brown Lemur
Eulemur rufus.



the original wilderness of the Red Island and its inhabitants are already gone, and what is left is seriously threatened by unchecked logging, subsistence poaching and criminal wildlife trafficking (especially of endemic geckoes, tortoises and chameleons), so the future of the natural heritage of Madagascar - already much reduced - is seriously in doubt at the moment. In any case, so varied are its habitats and consequently the species inhabiting them, that attempting to soak them in during a single visit is a simply hopeless endeavour - the best one can

do is first to get a general taste of it during a cross-country expedition, and then come back to concentrate on some specific locations of particular interest. One of these certainly is Ranomafana National Park, which we had the opportunity to explore at leisure thanks to our friends of **TanalaHorizon**, a highly specialized, very experienced German tour agency which offers custom-tailored trips to Madagascar. Ranomafana (which means "hot water" in Malagasy) is without a doubt one of the most spectacular National Parks of Madagascar. Due to its good access

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Blue-legged Chameleon *Calumma crypticum*.

A living jewel encrusted in precious gems





■ *Satanic Leaf-Tailed Gecko*
Uroplatus phantasticus,
adult male.
Ranomafana is
one of the best
locations in
Madagascar to
observe this
unique and very
striking species.

and suitable location near the RN7, its great biodiversity (an amazing total of 12 lemur species are found here) and its developed infrastructures, it has become one of the most visited places of the island. Established in 1991, it expands over a rugged, steep, mountainous terrain of 415 km², totally covered by dense wet primary and secondary forest, at altitudes varying between 800m and 1.200m. In 1986 the critically endangered Golden bamboo lemur was discovered here by Dr. Patricia Wright, and this luckily pushed the government to create a National Park. Aside from the Golden bamboo lemur, visitors can also encounter the Eastern woolly lemur, the Red bellied lemur, the Eastern grey bamboo lemur, the Greater bamboo lemur, the Red-fronted brown lemur, the Black-and-white ruffed lemur, plus the Milne-Edward's sifaka, the Small-toothed sportive lemur, the Greater dwarf lemur, the Brown mouse lemur and - with much luck - the very rare Aye-aye. It can be very confusing, and one certainly needs a specialist guide to successfully differentiate among several of these species! Other mammals inhabiting the area include 7 species of tenrecs, 8 of bats and 6 carnivores, such as the Malagasy striped civet and some mongooses. Birds are also quite numerous in Ranomafana. There are at least 115 species catalogued (30 are

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Yellow-spotted Tree Frog
Heterixalus alboguttatus.



Left, Red-bellied Lemur *Eulemur rubriventer*; top right, Greater Bamboo Lemur *Hapalemur simus*; bottom right, Red-bellied Lemur *Eulemur rubriventer*.





Cryptic ground
Mantella frog
*Gephyromantis
sculpturatus.*

local endemics, exclusively restricted to this part of Madagascar), among them the Henst's goshawk, Rufous-headed ground-roller, Velvet asity, and the threatened Crested ibis. The enormous amount of wildlife one can hope to observe in Ranomafana is more or less completed by 62 species of reptiles (several chameleons, a few snakes and the fascinating Satanic leaf-tailed geckos are rather easily observed here, especially at night), 98 frogs, 90 butterflies, 350 spiders and several fishes and crayfishes. As in another spectacular National Park of Madagascar, the legendary Andasibe-Mantadia, most reptiles and frogs are best seen during night walks, when chameleons in particular initially reflect white in the beam of a torch. Among the plants which grow in these rain forests, many are used by the Tanala and the Betsileo for medical purposes. There are precious wood and palm trees, many orchids and carnivorous plants. In addition to its densely forested hills, the protected area is characterised by numerous small streams, which plummet down to the beautiful Namorona River, which bisects the park and produces electricity for the surrounding areas at the hydroelectric power station of Ranomafana.

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Red Giant Spider
 Megaloremnius leo,
 family Sparassidae,
 preying on cricket.

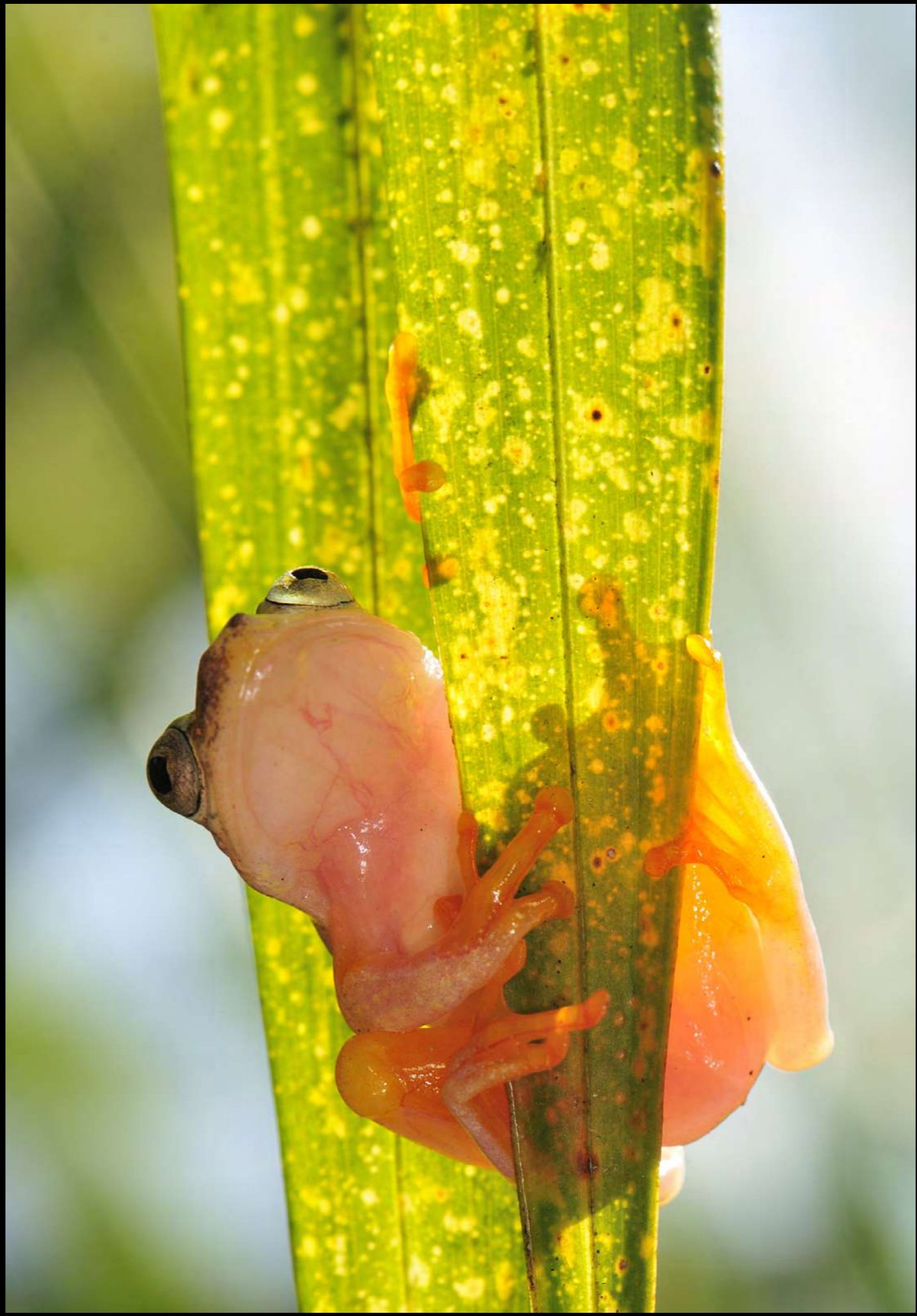


Left, Golden Bamboo Lemur *Hapalemur aureus*, one of the world's most endangered mammals with less than 1,000 individuals surviving in the wild. Right, Red-fronted Brown Lemur *Eulemur rufus*.



*Murmuring brooks
and enchanted waterfalls*

An enchanting
corner of the
Ranomafana
rainforest.



Far left, Four-spotted Day Gecko *Phelsuma quadriocellata*. Left, Yellow-spotted Tree Frog *Heterixalus alboguttatus*.

However, beware! The climate is warm and very humid all year long, and even if the best months to visit Ranomafana go from May to November, and although the dry season extends from April to December, the North East and Central East regions of Madagascar have in fact no months (or even weeks) that go completely without rain. This basically means that 1) the thick, lush, pristine and quite impenetrable rainforest of Ranomafana will make wildlife photography a very tricky business indeed, as light levels beneath the canopy can be abysmally low, and 2) the more or less daily torrential downpours will make hiking often uncomfortable, as most trails can be steep and can rapidly turn slippery and muddy. Ranomafana National Park is basically a very deep valley - some would even call it a gorge - with steep walls cloaked in rainforest and thick bamboo groves, falling precipitously to the roaring, boulder-strewn river below. Waterfalls large and small - some quite scenic and truly exquisite in beauty - are everywhere. The humidity of this primeval environment is spectacularly high, rich in rainfall and water spray, and much of the terrain never gets in the sun long enough to dry up. We were incredibly lucky during our stay - we had just a couple of downpours in ten days - but according to our local guide we were the first ever to experience that, as in Ranomafana it usually rains every single day of the year.

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Yellow-striped Tree frog Heterixalus betsileo.



Will's Chameleon or █
Canopy Chameleon *Furcifer*
willsii, adult male.



The fast-running Namorona river is rich in waterfalls and rapids.

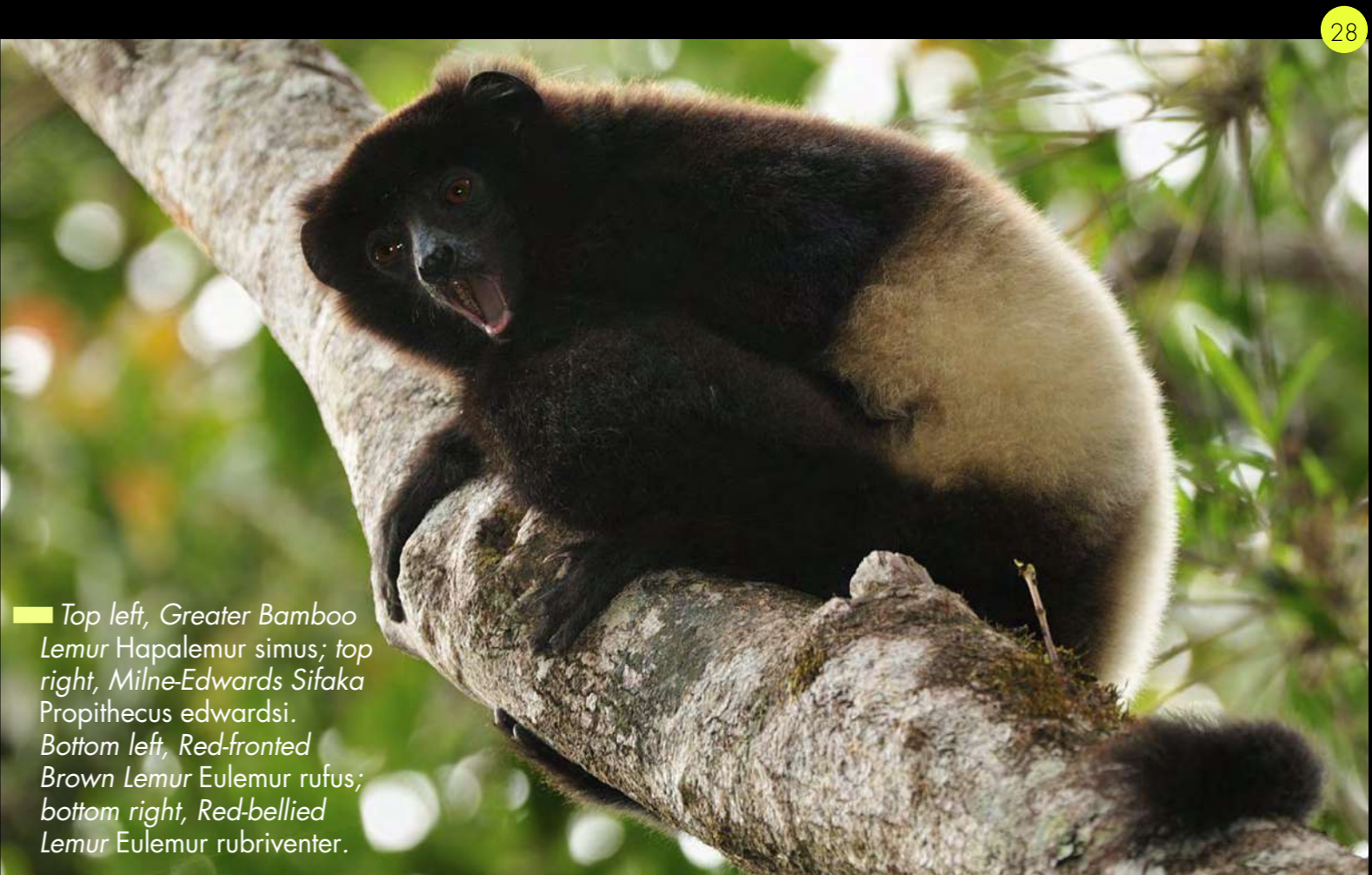
EXPLORING RANOMAFANA

As in most National Parks of Madagascar, it is always highly advisable to make good use of a local naturalist guide - they usually are extremely experienced and quite enthusiastic naturalists, offering their services for very reasonable fees, and it is a wonderful thing to be able to support them and the local economy. Never forget that most of Madagascar is desperately poor, and that every penny or cent is important here - especially to those working in conservation. It takes a lot of guts and sincere passion to follow this way of life here, where many factors - from social to political or even criminal - conspire in the shadows against nature conservation and the protection of nature, and the bare minimum overseas visitors can and should do is according to the local naturalist guides the respect they deserve. According to available literature, there are at least five different circuits in order to explore the Park. Keep in mind that the shortest treks are also the most popular ones and trails can get quite crowded, especially during the high season. Some lemur species survive here in the smallest of numbers, occupying grotesquely small patches of bamboo groves or forest, and that is where most visitors will congregate. The longer treks are much quieter and arguably more rewarding from a wildlife watching point of view - what follows is a small selection of the trails which most visitors will do, from

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■ Parson's chameleon
Calumma parsonii,
 found in an orchard near
 Ranomafana village.



■ Top left, Greater Bamboo Lemur *Haplemur simus*; top right, Milne-Edwards Sifaka *Propithecus edwardsi*. Bottom left, Red-fronted Brown Lemur *Eulemur rufus*; bottom right, Red-bellied Lemur *Eulemur rubriventer*.



Yellow-spotted Tree Frog ■
Heterixalus alboguttatus.
This is an extremely variable
and equally common species
in Ranomafana.



the shortest to the longest.

Varibolomena circuit: easy trek of 4 hours, a good chance to spot bamboo lemurs in the secondary forest passing by a very scenic waterfall.

Sahamalaotra circuit: a 10 km trek through the forest looking for lemurs and birds.

Vohiparara circuit: 2 days trek across the National Park (20 km up and down) spotting lemurs, birds and other animals and visiting a sacred lake.

Varijatsy circuit: 1 or 2 days trek (15 km of rough path) across the primary forest looking for lemurs and birds and passing by a waterfall and a natural pool where one can take a bath.

Soarano circuit: 2 or 3 days hard trek (at least 20 km) through the primary forest discovering plants while looking for lemurs and other animals.

However, there are plenty of other possibilities, and the good thing is that all itineraries can be easily tailored according to one's specific needs and interests by the private guide - so no need to worry about that. Tell him or her what you want to see and how long you are willing to walk, and you'll start from there - they can be very accomodating, and know the forest well. Most of our day treks started very early in the morning - occasionally taking a light packed lunch with us -

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Parson's chameleon Calumma parsonii, near Ranomafana village.

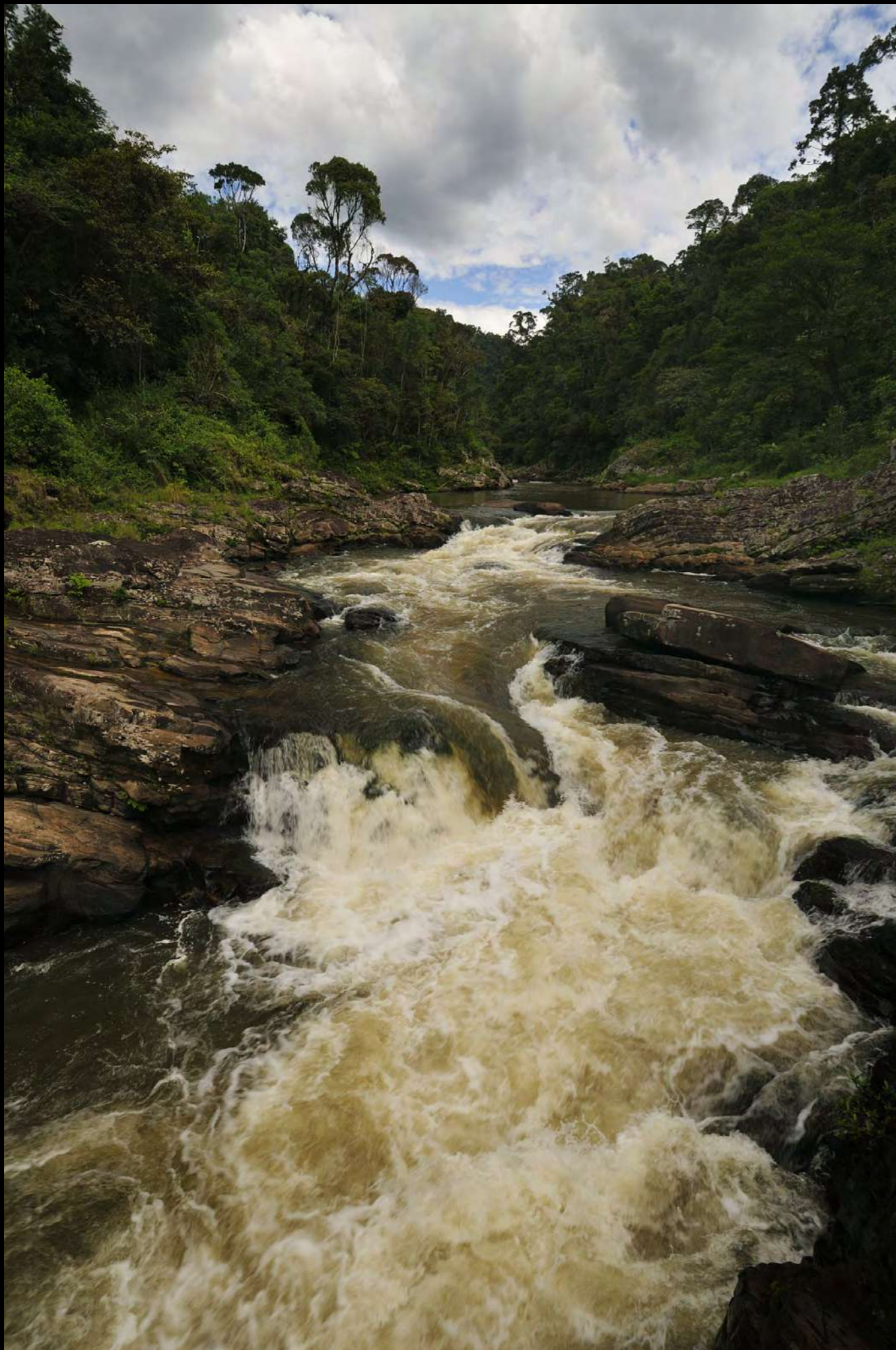



■ Left, Leaf or Dwarf
 Chameleon
Brookesia
superciliaris; center,
 Short-horned
 Chameleon
Calumma brevicorne,
 juvenile asleep on
 branch; right,
 Satanic Leaf-Tailed
 Gecko *Uroplatus*
phantasticus, adult
 female, diurnal livery.





■ Green-eared
Chameleon
Calumma malthe,
adult female.



Left,  a typically cloudy sky over the Namorona river rapids; right, Antonella is astonished by the enchanted glamour of the Ranomafana rainforest.



and ended, after a lot of walking up and down the valley slopes, in early or mid-afternoon, when light levels usually get too low for wildlife photography and the risk of rain increases. One word of advice about night walks, which are an absolute must and which can be exceptionally productive in Ranomafana (particularly for chameleons and Satanic leaf-tailed geckoes): in agreement with our guide, we opted to stick to the sides of the Route National - which crosses the Park and Ranomafana village itself - to maximize chances of sightings and to make photography easier. One can leisurely walk on tarmac and look at the steep banks thickly covered in vegetation without risking to twist an ankle or miss a good subject in the impenetrable vegetation of the Park itself. The only downside of this is that once in a while a huge, noisy, loaded truck will drive by at full speed, and that there have been armed robberies in the deep of night, with foreign visitors being robbed of their expensive cameras at gunpoint - so it is better always to be with a local guide and above all to go back after a couple of hours.

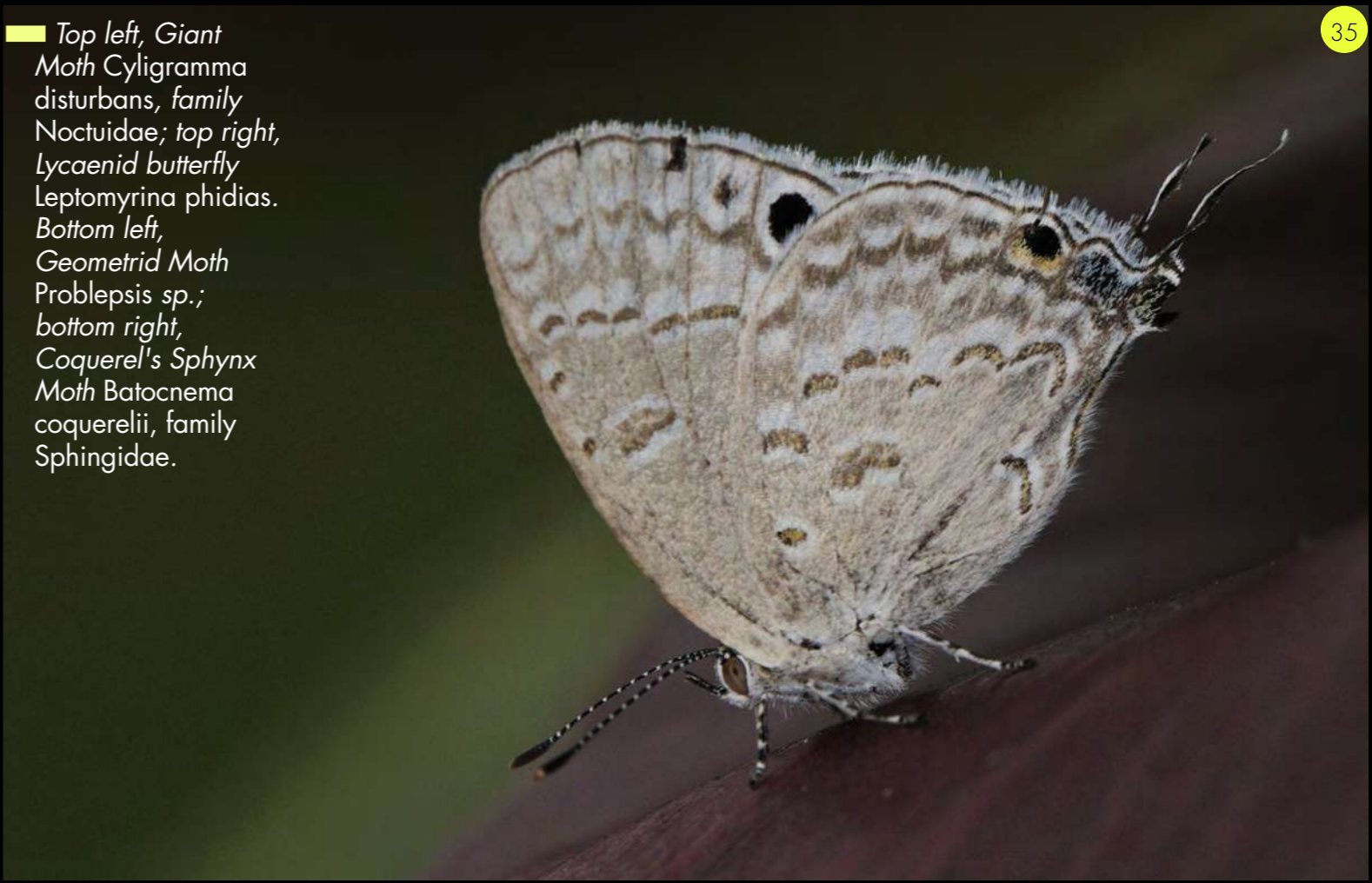
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Tree frog ■
Plethodontohyla
inguinalis, one of the
 world's largest
 microhylids.



Top left, Giant Moth *Cyligramma disturbans*, family Noctuidae; top right, Lycaenid butterfly *Leptomyrina phidias*. Bottom left, Geometrid Moth *Problepsis* sp.; bottom right, Coquerel's Sphinx Moth *Batocnema coquerelii*, family Sphingidae.



*A pristine landscape
arrested in time*

The Namorona,
river rapids seen
from a vantage point
from the steep slopes
of the Ranomafana
valley.





Left, Lined Day Gecko *Phelsuma lineata*, Ranomafana village; center, Blue-legged Chameleon *Calumma crypticum*; right, Four-spotted Day Gecko *Phelsuma quadriocellata*.





Red-fronted █
Brown Lemur
Eulemur rufus.

Left, Leaf or Dwarf
Chameleon
*Brookesia
superciliaris*; right,
Red-bellied Lemur
Eulemur rubriventer.



GETTING THERE AND BACK AGAIN

Ranomafana National Park is very easy to access by car. It lies about 60 km north from Fianarantsoa, and 400 south from the capital Antananarivo. There are two tarred roads which actually cross the Park: the RN25 from Ambohimaso and the RN45 from Alakamisy. Both of them are practicable all year around, although it can take longer during the rainy season. There is also a good taxi-brousse connection to Ranomafana village from Antananarivo and from Fianarantsoa. The entry costs Ar 25,000 for one day visit and Ar 37,000 for two days. The fees for the circuits depend on the number of participants and the duration of the trek. Average is 50,000 to 80,000 Ar a day for one to five people. There are plenty of comfortable - even relatively luxurious by Malagasy standards - small hotels and little restaurants in - or very close - to Ranomafana village. One word of caution to the traveller, again - the last third of the Route National from Tana to Ranomafana is exceptionally twisting and brimming with hairpin bends, and those prone to car and motion sickness are well advised to tackle this in advance with a couple of tablets! ●





Blue-legged ■
Chameleon *Calumma*
crypticum.



■ Red Giant Spider
Megaloremnius leo, family Sparassidae, feeding at night on its unlucky cricket prey.



Left, O'Shaughnessy's Chameleon *Calumma oshaughnessyi*, female; right, O'Shaughnessy's Chameleon *Calumma oshaughnessyi*, male.





Left, Red-fronted Brown Lemur *Eulemur rufus*; right, the steep, jungle-clad slopes of the Namorona river gorge.

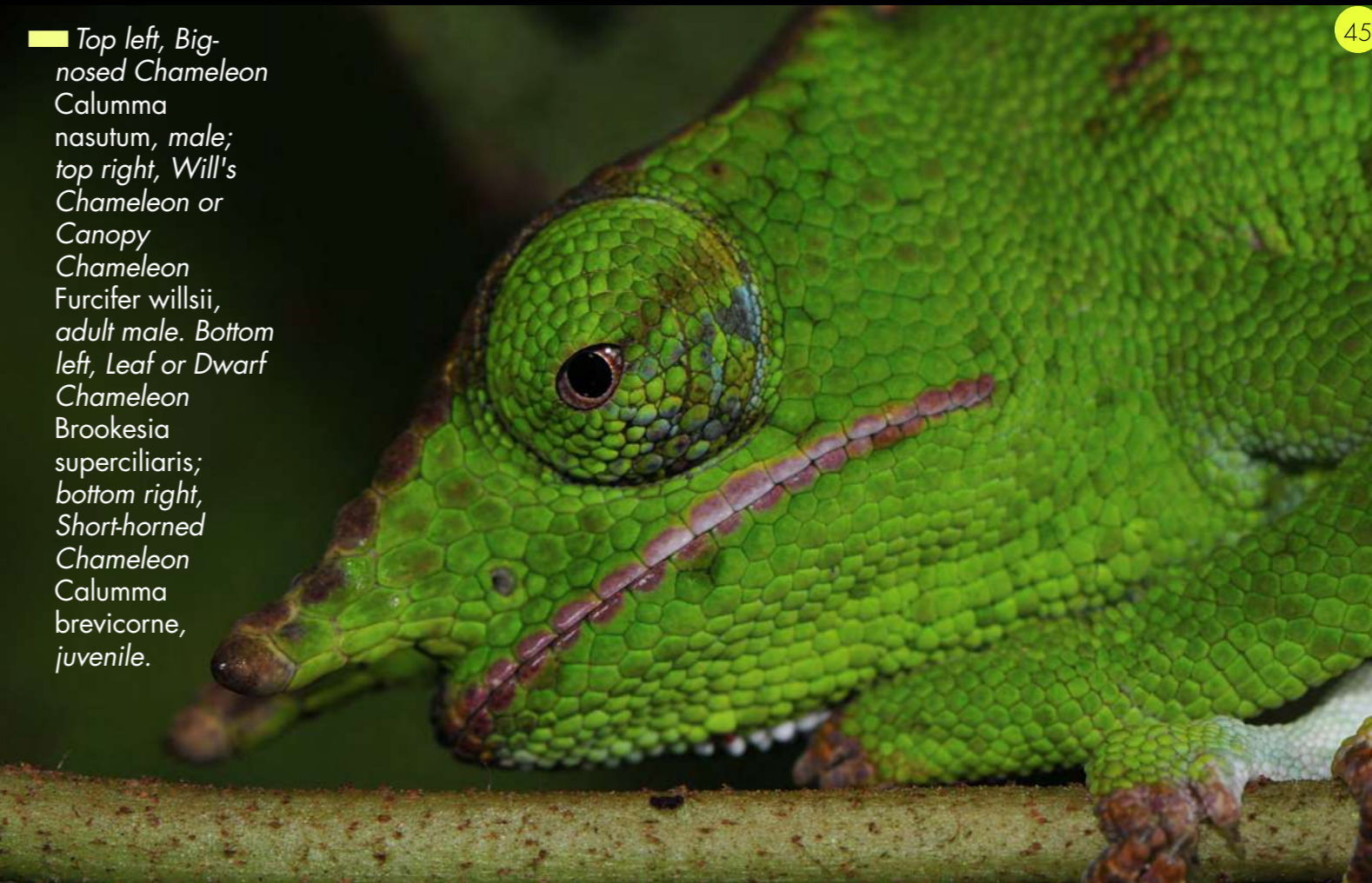


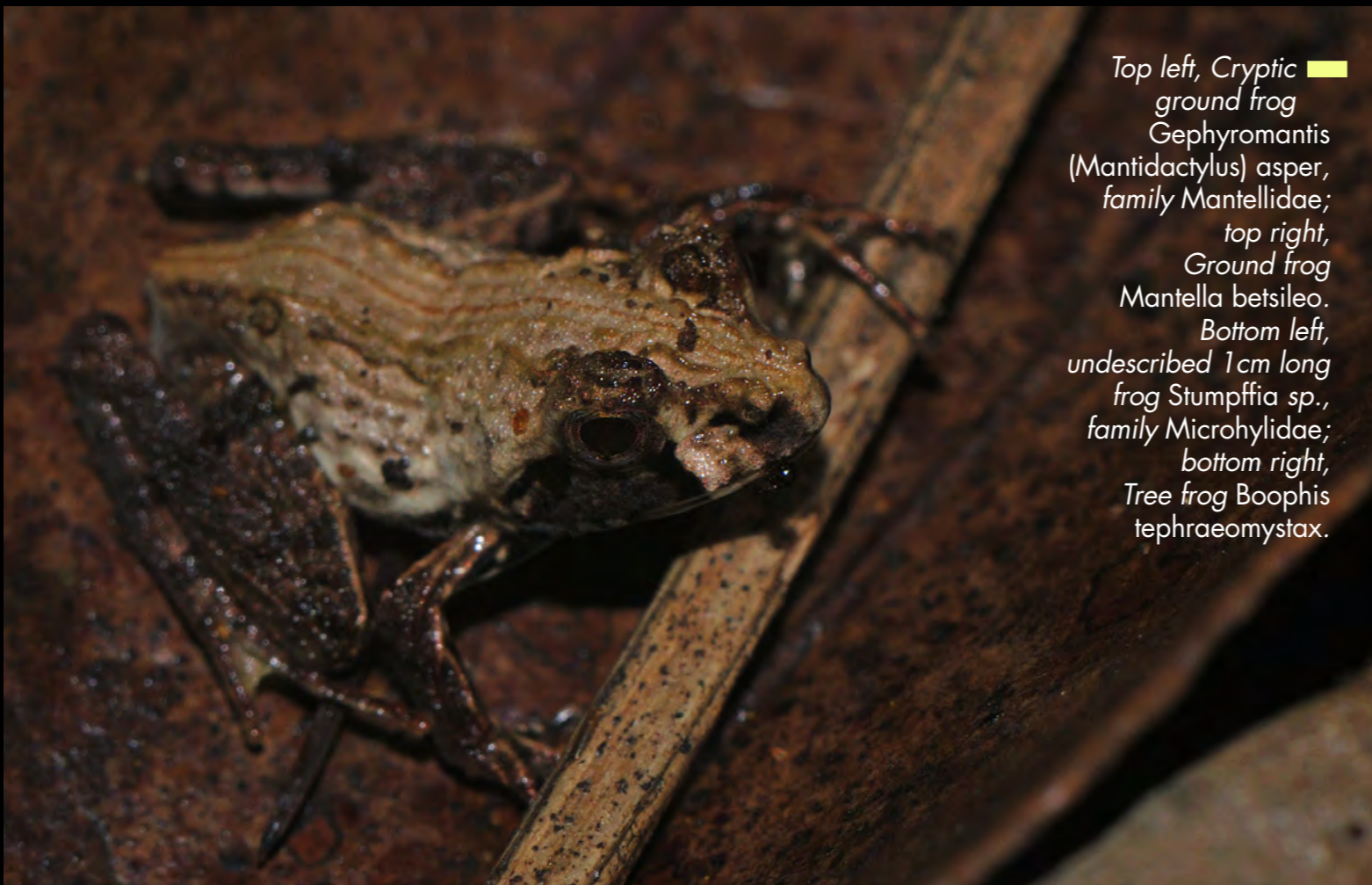
*The Ranomafana
night is alive with
amazing creatures*



■ Blue-legged
Chameleon
*Calumma
crypticum*,
head detail.

■ Top left, Big-nosed Chameleon *Calumma nasutum*, male; top right, Will's Chameleon or Canopy Chameleon *Furcifer willsii*, adult male. Bottom left, Leaf or Dwarf Chameleon *Brookesia superciliaris*; bottom right, Short-horned Chameleon *Calumma brevicorne*, juvenile.





Top left, Cryptic ground frog *Gephyromantis (Mantidactylus) asper*, family Mantellidae; top right, Ground frog *Mantella betsileo*. Bottom left, undescribed 1cm long frog *Stumpffia* sp., family Microhylidae; bottom right, Tree frog *Boophis tephraeomystax*.





Many beautiful waterfalls are found in the rainforest of Ranomafana.



■ Far left,
Satanic Leaf-Tailed Gecko
Uroplatus phantasticus,
 adult female;
 center, *Four-spotted Day Gecko*
Phelsuma quadriocellata;
 right,
Perinet Chameleon
 or *Side-striped Chameleon*
Calumma gastrotaenia,
 female.



Left, Milne-Edwards Sifaka *Propithecus edwardsi*; right, Red-bellied Lemur *Eulemur rubriventer*.





■ Left, Bark Spider *Caerostris* sp., pair with large female and smaller male; center, Thorn Spider *Gasteracantha* sp.; right, Golden Silk Orb-Weaver *Nephila madagascariensis*.





■ The rural landscape surrounding Ranomafana shows the amount of deforestation and farming currently threatening all protected areas in Madagascar.

At-a-glance travel guide

COUNTRY OF DESTINATION: MADAGASCAR



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 in Antananarivo (called Tana by most), the present capital and largest city of Madagascar, usually after a mid-flight stop-over in South Africa or La Reunion. Arrange in advance for your tour operator (we can safely recommend the highly specialized German agency **TanalaHorizon**) to come and pick you up. The day-long, scenic road trip to Ranomafana starts on the morning of the day after, so your agent will book you a basic hotel room for the night.

MEANS OF TRANSPORT: If you are serious about your comfort, safety, baggage and wildlife photography equipment forget about local transport

(mostly represented by the chaotic *taxi-brousse*, typically African, overcrowded, noisy and usually run-down private minibuses). When driving all the way to Ranomafana with **TanalaHorizon** we had at our disposal a very well-maintained, comfortable vehicle managed by a experienced, responsible driver (a must on Madagascar's pot-holed and often dangerous roads). Inside National Parks one can safely walk (there are no large terrestrial predators or venomous snakes in Madagascar).

CURRENCY: Malagasy Ariary. Changing foreign currency such as Euros or US\$ is not always easy in the countryside, so change upon arrival.

ACCOMODATION: The small village of Ranomafana is a popular destination for wildlife enthusiasts, offering a variety of accomodation, from budget dormitories to high-end lodges. We can safely recommend staying at Hotel Manja - where one can find very clean rooms with a lovely view on the river valley and a good restaurant offering good food. Hotel Manja is spread on a hillside, so be prepared to walk up and down a lot of steps!

FOOD: The Malagasy are the world's greatest consumers of rice, which is grown wherever possible, and most often consumed with charcoal-grilled Zebu meat (a wonderfully tasty and soft beef).

A deep river gorge draped in thick rainforest and forgotten by time



Strict vegetarians might have a hard time in Madagascar, and the fare can be monotonous, especially when off the beaten track and away from the usual tourist traps and beach resorts. Beware of street food, which has spoiled many a visitor's holiday.

LANGUAGE: Malagasy and French. Professional guides speak fluently a variety of languages.

WORRIES: Crime - theft and armed robbery - in cities. The countryside is safer, but it is better not to be around after dark with money or camera equipment. The Malagasy are a very kind, sweet people, but their recent post-colonial history and turbulent politics have left many in abject poverty.

HEALTH: We did not experience any problems, but malaria is prevalent in several locations (the use of Malarone is advised by most health authorities).

Ticks and other parasites may present a hazard when walking in the forest, but the major cause of illness and serious discomfort is the consumption of contaminated street food and the drinking of tainted beverages - stick to food safely cooked and bottled drinks if you want to avoid troublesome, debilitating gut problems. Beware of petting the occasional semi-domesticated lemur, as they have been known to bite and might force you to suffer an extremely painful course of anti-rabies shots.

CLIMATE: Expect high tropical temperatures during the day, but climate is extremely variable and highly dependent on season and coastline. The Ranomafana valley environment is noted however for its heavy rains, overcast skies and high humidity, and it's quite unusual having a stretch of sunny days there. Wildlife photography inside the rainforest will suffer accordingly due to very little light available.

BESIDES: The island of Madagascar - 1.500 km long and sited in the Indian Ocean in front of Mozambique - is extraordinarily diverse, with an apparently endless variety of habitats and landscapes, from the steaming coastal rainforests to the cool central highlands and from the beautiful beaches of the resort islands such as Nosy Be to the baobab-dotted deserts of the South. Indigenous culture - with its peculiar cult of the ancestors and the dead in general - is of great interest to many, but Madagascar's most appealing aspect lies in its extraordinary fauna and flora, rich in endemisms but currently severely endangered throughout the island. Several National Parks and Nature Reserves - some privately managed - offer exceptional chances for close observation and photography, but the dizzying abundance of species makes it highly advisable to concentrate only on some and tailor one's itinerary consequently. ●



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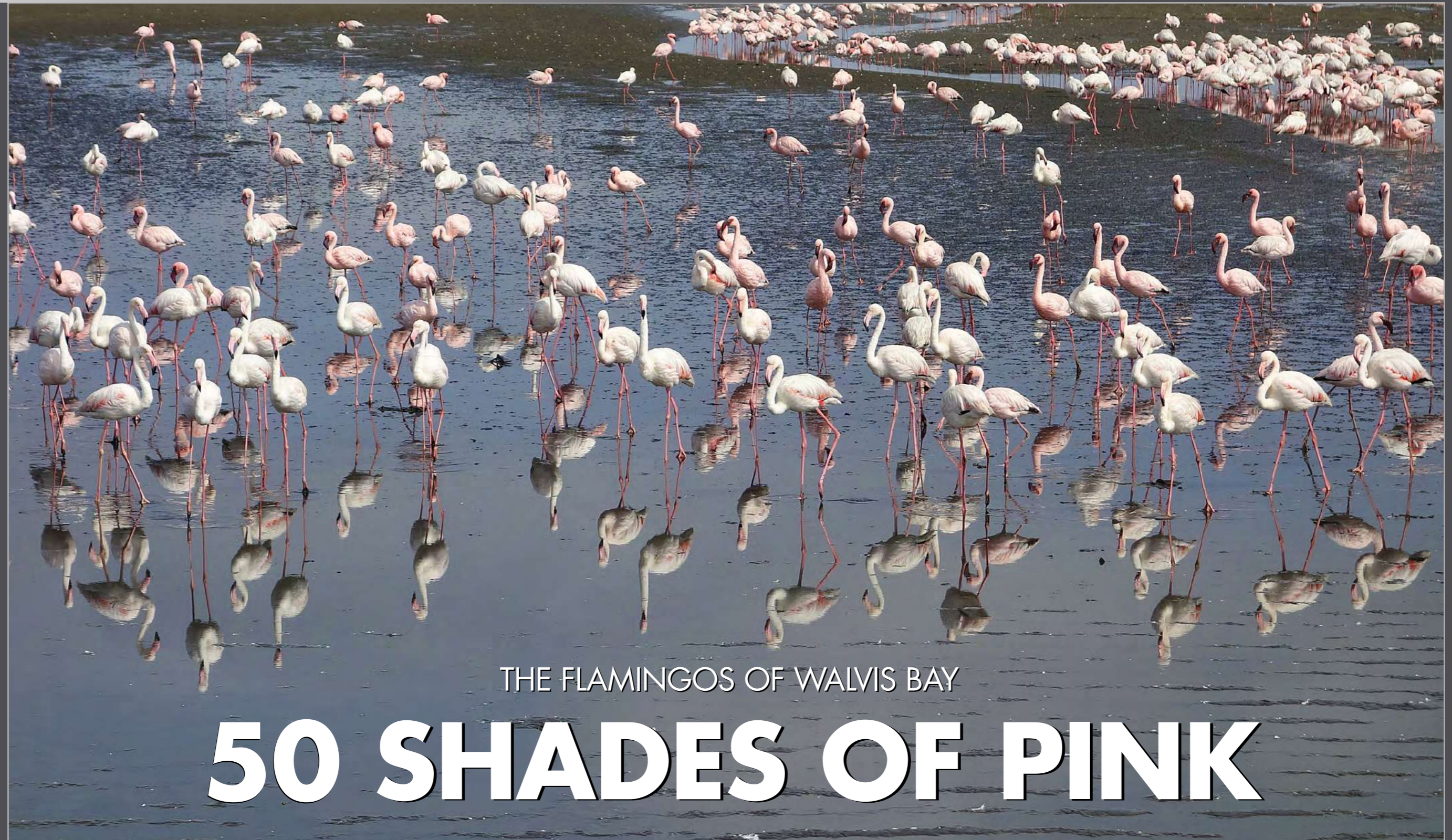


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WorldWideWonders



THE FLAMINGOS OF WALVIS BAY

50 SHADES OF PINK

A graceful ballet suspended between the Atlantic ocean and the African sky unfolds along Namibia's gate to the Skeleton Coast



Greater flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus* and Lesser flamingo *Phoeniconaias minor*

The Greater flamingo population size is very large, and hence is not considered vulnerable. Lesser flamingo, on the other hand, despite being the most numerous species of flamingo is classified as near-threatened due to its declining population and the low number of breeding sites, some of which are threatened by human activities.



Greater flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*

This is the largest species of flamingo, averaging 110–150 cm (43–59 in) tall and weighing 2–4 kg (4.4–8.8 lb).

TEXT BY ANDREA FERRARI
PHOTOS BY ANDREA & ANTONELLA FERRARI

Whenever driving across Namibia and travelling along its legendary Skeleton Coast on the route from Windhoek to Etosha, one should never forget to put aside a couple of days for a spectacular photo date with the flamingos of Walvis Bay. Walvis Bay (Afrikaans Walvisbaai, German Walfischbucht or Walfischbai, all meaning "Whale Bay") is both a coastal town and the name of the bay on which it lies. The town has 85,000 inhabitants and has a total area of 29 square kilometres of land. The bay itself is a safe haven for sea vessels because of its natural deepwater harbour, protected by the Pelican Point sand spit, being the only natural harbour of any size along the country's coast. Being rich in plankton and marine life, these waters in the past also drew large numbers of Southern right whales, attracting whalers and fishing vessels. The town is situated just north of the Tropic of Capricorn in the Kuiseb River delta, lying at the end of the TransNamib Railway to Windhoek, and on the B2 road. Its seafront promenade - on good days, and usually in the morning - is the perfect verandah to admire from a vantage point (and photograph) the huge flocks of Greater and Lesser flamingos (plus several shorebirds, waders and gulls) feeding in the shallow waters and mudflats by the bund. It's easy, it's comfortable - and on good days it's absolutely stunning. Mixed flocks - with the bright white and delicate pink, stately Greater flamingos and bright pink,

deep red, daintier Lesser flamingos - move in great waves, strutting in unison, squawking in a joyful cacophony of sounds and oscillating in great, spreading, undulating sheets of color against the mirror-like shallow pools reflecting the bright blue sky, offering wonderful photographic opportunities to those with an eye for such things, and simple plain bewilderment to all bird and nature lovers. As it should always be with nature and true wildlife photography, full satisfaction depends on the vagaries of the weather and above all on the behavior of the birds, which are free to move closer to the bund or not, and even to show up at all or not (they usually do). There's no way to try getting closer to them (it's muddy and they just move away, keeping a distance): the only real alternative a photographer has is the choice of lenses (a 600mm or a good zoom are the best) and the option of standing up, sitting down or even - for the most motivated - lying down on the wet concrete. But even that wouldn't make a big difference, as the promenade is slightly elevated anyway. This spoils many shots (it's almost impossible getting the flamingos against the sky) and makes magic with others (as shooting from above shows plenty of beautiful reflections in the water). In any case, the spectacle is so beautiful that just being there is a privilege, so there's also the possibility of simply relaxing, breath the cool Atlantic sea breeze and soak the view in. Just take a look at the following pages, and decide what you would like best. ●



Lesser flamingo *Phoeniconaias minor*

The Lesser flamingo is the smallest species of flamingo, though it is a tall and large bird by normal standards. The species can weigh from 1.2 to 2.7 kg (2.6 to 6.0 lb). The standing height is around 80 to 90 cm (31 to 35 in).



Greater flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus* and Lesser flamingo *Phoeniconaias minor*

The Greater flamingo is seen from West Africa eastward throughout the Mediterranean to South West and South Asia, and throughout sub-Saharan Africa. The Lesser flamingo occurs in sub-Saharan Africa with another population in India. Birds are occasionally reported from further north, but these are usually considered vagrants.



Lesser flamingo *Phoeniconaias minor*
 The clearest difference between this species and the Greater flamingo, the only other Old World species of flamingo, is the much darker color of the bill.



Greater flamingo and Lesser flamingo
 These two species can be observed coexisting peacefully side by side on the mudflats of Walvis Bay.



Greater flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*

The most widespread species of the flamingo family. The Palearctic population (including West Africa, Iran and Kazakhstan) is estimated to number between 205,000 and 320,000, the South West and South Asian populations combined at 240,000, and the sub-Saharan African populations between 100,000 and 120,000.



Greater flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*
 Most of the plumage is pinkish-white, but the wing coverts are red and the primary and secondary flight feathers are black.



Greater flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*
 The bill is pink with a restricted black tip, and the legs are entirely pink.



Greater flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*

This species resides in mudflats and shallow coastal lagoons with salt water. Using its feet, the bird stirs up the mud, then sucks water through its bill and filters out small shrimp, seeds, blue-green algae, microscopic organisms and mollusks.



Greater flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*

Sub-adult flamingos are whitish-grey and only attain the pink coloration several years into their adult life. The coloration comes from the carotenoid pigments in the organisms that live in their feeding grounds.



Greater flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus* and Lesser flamingo *Phoeniconaias minor*

The Greater flamingo *Phoenicopterus ruber* has been split into *P. roseus* and *P. ruber*. The Lesser flamingo was classified in genus *Phoenicopterus* until 2014, but is now classified as the only species in the genus *Phoeniconaias*, the only monotypic genus of flamingo.



Lesser flamingo *Phoeniconaias minor*

The Lesser flamingo may be the most numerous species of flamingo, with a population that probably numbers up to two million individual birds.



Greater flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*

Average lifespan of this species (in captivity) is over 60 years, but probably much shorter in the wild.



Greater flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*

Flamingos are highly specialized filter-feeders, which feed with their head down. The upper jaw is movable and not rigidly fixed to the bird's skull.



Lesser flamingo and Greater flamingo
The differences between the two species are clearly visible in this side-by-side image.



Greater flamingo and Lesser flamingo
Both species can be observed on the mudflats of Walvis Bay.



Greater flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*

This species is found in parts of Africa, southern Asia (Bangladesh and coastal regions of Pakistan and India), the Middle East (Cyprus, Israel) and southern Europe (including Spain, Albania, Greece, Turkey, Portugal, Italy and the Camargue region of France).



Greater flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus* and Lesser flamingo *Phoeniconaias minor*
A panoramic shot of the Walvis Bay mudflats with a small portion of their resident flamingos.



Hartlaub's Gull *Larus hartlaubii*
A resident endemic to the Atlantic Ocean coastline of South Africa and Namibia.



Curlew sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*
A small wader that breeds on the tundra of Arctic Siberia.



Lesser flamingo *Phoeniconaias minor*

This species feeds primarily on *Spirulina*, algae which grow only in very alkaline lakes. Presence of flamingo herds near water bodies is indication of sodic alkaline water which is not suitable for irrigation use. Although blue-green in colour, the algae contain the photosynthetic pigments that give the birds their pink colour.



Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

Also known as the Black-bellied plover in North America, this is long-distance migrant, with a nearly worldwide coastal distribution when not breeding.



Greater flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus* and Lesser flamingo *Phoeniconaias minor*
Shallow pools of still seawater create wonderful reflections when the flamingos cross them or pause to feed.



Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*
A medium-sized plover species which breeds in Arctic regions.



Greater flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*
Like all flamingos, this species lays a single chalky-white egg on a mud mound.



Greater flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*

Largest males have been recorded at up to 187 cm (74 in) tall and 4.5 kg (9.9 lb)



Damara Tern *Sternula balaenarum*

A species whose natural habitats are shallow seas, sandy shores, and coastal saline lagoons. It is threatened by habitat loss.

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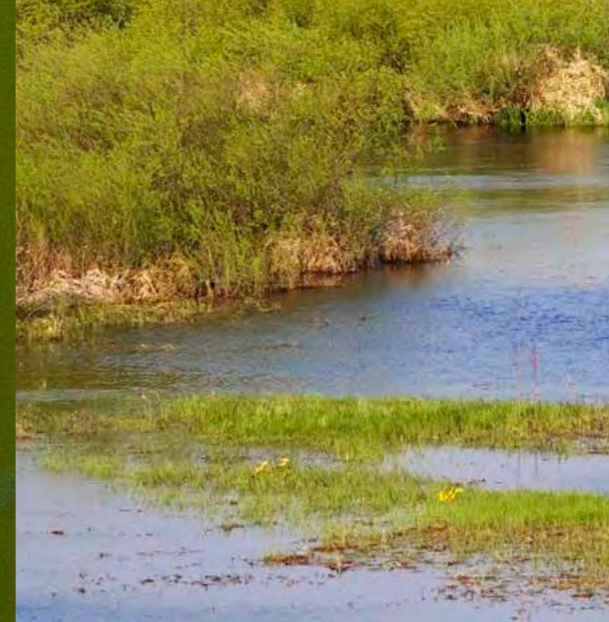


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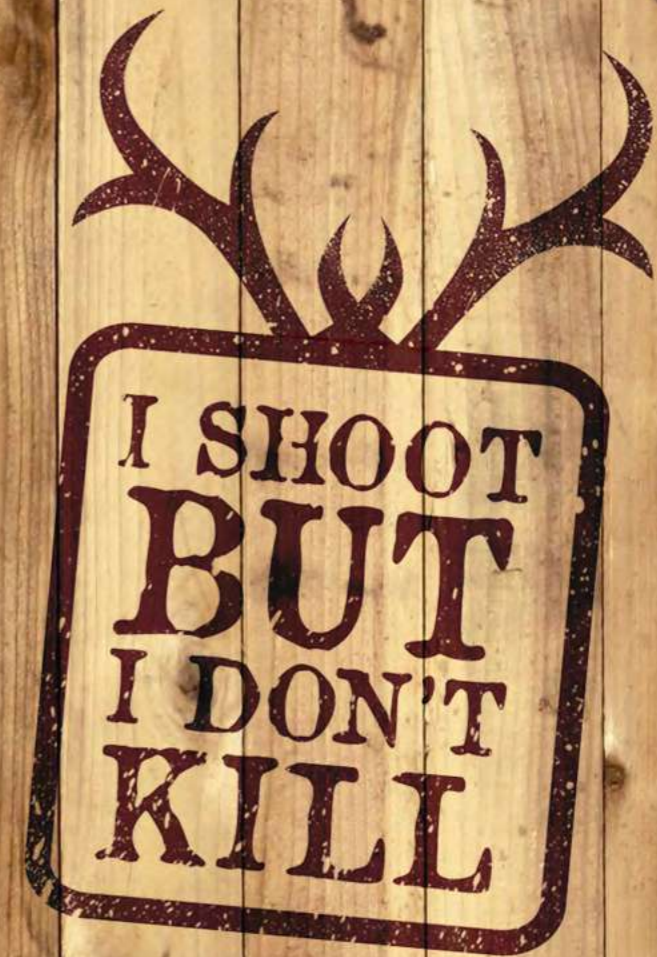


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A Designer's Eye for Nature

Yasir Mehamood – A Wildlife Photographer in His Own Words

A young Pakistani interior designer brings his instinctive grasp for pattern and design to his own camera's viewfinder - creating beautifully balanced insect images of subtle elegance

Although Yasir is an Interior Designer by profession from Islamabad, Pakistan, his real passion is photography in general but nature and wild photography in particular. To him photography is synonymous with oxygen, as he has to make a few clicks of camera everyday to keep his spirit satiated and healthy. For Yasir photography is not just a hobby, rather for him it is a tool of insight into nature. He specializes in insect photography, where with Yasir gift of seeing nature differently, he sees insects as objects of beauty, which are as beautiful as any other element of nature

and worthy of being photographed. This passion of his does not only make him see things differently, but it is a means of introspection for him as well. With every angle, every frame and with every shutter of the lens, it is actually an aspect of his personality and the gift he is born with; that unravels to Yasir. It might seem a cliché, but photography is what he likes to do, it is what he was born to do and wishes to continue doing it for the foreseeable future so that more and more people could see the world as Yasir sees it and the wild that is worthy of being praised and cherished. ●

<http://capturewild.com/>

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Peek-a-hopper

Olympus E-410

f11

ISO 400

1/25

The life drop
Nikon D5200
f11
ISO 200
1/40





I am the leaf

Nikon D5200

f11

ISO 125

1/30

Escaping a trap

Nikon D5200

f11

ISO160

1/40





The golden dragonfly

Nikon D5200

f14

ISO100

1/30

Surfing the golden path

Nikon D5200

f11

ISO 100

1/25



Sleeping

Nikon D5200

f11

ISO 100

1/30



Mother love
Nikon D5200
f11
ISO100
1/25

Just got my nails done

Olympus E-410

f14

ISO 400

1/40



The life

Nikon D5200

f11

ISO 125

1/20





Butterfly walk
Nikon D5200
f14
ISO 200
1/20



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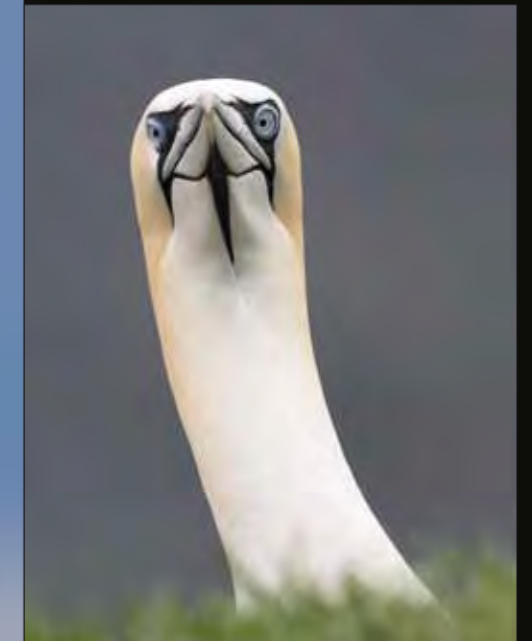
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David Hemmings - President, Nature's Photo Adventures



"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



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Beauty of the Beast

THE BLUE-TAILED BEE-EATER

BIRDS OF BEAUTY AND BLISS

A photographic tribute and a scientific documentation of an iconic bird species by our Indian contributor Raghavendra Pattar





Merops philippinus

The Blue-tailed bee-eater *Merops philippinus* is a near passerine bird in the bee-eater family *Meropidae*. It breeds in southeastern Asia. It is strongly migratory, seen seasonally in much of peninsular India. This species is sometimes considered to be conspecific with the Blue-cheeked bee-eater *Merops persicus*. Here a bee is offered by the male to the female during courtship.



TEXTS AND PHOTOS
BY RAGHAVENDRA PATTAR

*A*midst the enveloping dusk, the spotted ducks and egrets were a delight to watch in the magical village of Naguvanahalli. Situated in Shrirangapattana Taluk in Mandya district, this small village is a part of Mysore division and is located at 32 kms toward west from District headquarters of Mandya and 3 kms from Shrirangapattna which is 137 kms from the State Capital Bangalore. I set my journey to Naguvanahalli, a 3-hrs drive from the capital city, which is slowly making a mark on the birding map of India. Inhabited with nearly 46 species of birds, I found the Little green bee eaters had excavated their nesting tunnels on the earthen bund counting close to 60 to 70 active nests. Many bird watchers have a special love for bee-eaters—there’s just so much power and personality packed in that tiny bundle of feathers.

reach and took to air in a jiffy. In mid-air it clicked its pointed beak over the winged insect, fluttered for a moment, cartwheeled and sallied back to its perch. In no time, it battered the dragonfly on the perch and took it to the nest to feed its chicks. The bee-eaters at the nesting colony were maintaining contact with each other, with their pleasant unmistakable jingling tree-tree-tree and teerp-teerp-teerp calls, all day long.

Across the river lay a barren stretch that had nearly hundreds of Blue-tailed bee-eaters swarming around in the air and perching almost at ground level. I was ecstatic! Blue-tailed bee-eaters are rare, colorful birds which feed on dragon flies and bees and are found in grassland, thin scrub and forest often quite far from water. To make sure this was no mirage, we proceeded towards this patch - crossed a small canal, got all muddy, before realizing we have another track that can lead us straight to this patch by road, and yes this place was for real! We settled down and were awestruck at the sight –

We formally began bird watching and photography by 8.00 am. Our first Little green bee-eater was smugly perched on a twig, and glancing on all sides, as if admiring the landscape. It detected a dragonfly about 100 feet away, where no human eye could

Merops philippinus

Like all bee-eaters, this species predominantly eats insects - especially bees, wasps and hornets - which are caught in the air by fast, swooping sorties from an open perch, to which the bird usually returns after catching its prey.



Merops philippinus

This species probably takes bees and dragonflies in roughly equal numbers. The insects that are caught are repeatedly beaten on the perch to kill and break the exoskeleton before being tossed in the air and eaten. This habit is seen in many other members of the coraciiformes order.

Blue-tailed bee-eaters are supposed to be strongly migratory and are seen seasonally in much of peninsular India, and finding these slender, richly colored birds in the midst of a dhobi ghat (quiet literally) was definitely like paradise! A paradise because of the sheer number of these birds found here and because of the joy true nature enthusiasts experience up and close with them. On the flip side, these birds choose sandy banks or open flat areas as their nesting grounds and unfortunately this particular site is a dhobi ghat often used by villagers, who make the banks as colorful as the bird itself by littering it with plastic and other harmful wastes. Also, these birds frequent this area by March to breed and abandon nests by end of April, and during breeding time the birds often face a lot of disturbance due to the dhobi's who let their donkeys loose to graze, which often scare and disturb these birds from their nesting grounds.

Like other species, Blue-tailed bee-eaters predominantly eat insects, especially bees, wasps and ants, which are caught in the air by sorties from an open perch. Before swallowing prey, a bee-eater removes stings and breaks the exoskeleton of the prey by repeatedly thrashing it on the perch. Migration is not known but they make seasonal movements in response to rainfall. These

birds are somewhat sluggish in the mornings and may be found huddled next to each other on wires sometimes with their bills tucked in their backs well after sunrise. Blue-tailed bee-eaters sandbathe more frequently than other bee-eater species and will sometimes bathe in water by dipping into water in flight. They are usually seen in small groups and often roost communally in large numbers (200-300). The birds move excitedly at the roost site and call loudly, often explosively dispersing before settling back to the roost tree. This behavior is generally observed between the hours of 7:00 and 8:00am, and after 4:00pm.

The breeding season is from March to June. Unlike many bee-eaters, these are often solitary nesters, making a tunnel in a sandy bank. Bee-eaters are seasonally monogamous, and some species are monogamous over multiple seasons. Migratory species however are thought to form new pair bonds each breeding season. The courtship displays of the bee-eaters are rather unspectacular, with the exception of the "butterfly display" (where the wings of both sexes are held out while calling). Most members of the family engage in courtship feeding, where the male presents prey items to the female, and such feeding can account for much if not all of the energy females



Merops philippinus

These bee-eaters are gregarious, nesting colonially in sandy banks or open flat areas. They make a relatively long tunnel in which the 5 to 7 spherical white eggs are laid. Both the male and the female - here seen mating - take care of the eggs. These birds also feed and roost communally.

require for egg creation. Like almost all Coraciiforms the bee-eaters are cavity nesters. The nests are burrows dug into the ground, either into the sides of earth cliffs or directly into level ground. Both types of nesting site are vulnerable, those on level ground are vulnerable to trampling and small predators, whereas those in cliffs, which are often the banks of rivers, are vulnerable to flash floods, which can wipe out dozens or hundreds of nests. Many species nest either on cliffs or on level ground but prefers cliffs, however the Blue-tailed bee-eater always nests on level ground. The burrows are dug by both birds in the pair as well as any helpers that have joined the pair. The soil or sand is loosened with jabs of the sharp bill, then the feet are used to kick out the loose substrate. There may be several false starts where nests are dug partway before being abandoned; in solitary species this can give the impression of colonial living even when they are not. The process of nest building can take as long as twenty days to complete, during which the bill can be both blunted and shortened. Nests are generally used only for a single season and are rarely used twice by the bee-eaters, but abandoned bee-eater nests may be used by a host of birds, snakes and bats as shelter and breeding places. Bee-eaters may nest as single pairs, loose colonies or dense colonies. Smaller species tend to nest solitarily, while medium sized species do so in the smaller colonies and larger and

This species, like other bee-eaters, is a richly coloured, slender bird. It is predominantly green; its face has a narrow blue patch with a black eye stripe, and a yellow and brown throat; the tail is blue and the beak is black.

It can reach a length of 23–26 cm, including the two elongated central tail feathers. Sexes are alike, and The call is similar to that of the European bee-eater *Merops apiaster*.



Merops philippinus

migratory species nest in large colonies that can number in the thousands. In some instances colonies may contain more than one species of bee-eater.

A note to photographers: Please avoid going too close to the nest as this prevent the parents from taking food to the chicks inside the nest.

Conservation: Human activities can and will disrupt Bee-eater nests built in active mines or quarries. The local villagers visiting to the river bank to wash clothes have started drying their clothes on the ground or on the boulders, thus hindering nesting of the birds. Sand mining in the area too has led to the decrease in bird nesting. This place in particular used to see birds numbering to thousands, which have now drastically reduced. If the same continues, in the long term the birds may stop migrating here. ●

Author Raghavendra Pattar is a working professional with a passion for wildlife photography. He is a certified Eco Volunteer from Government of Karnataka, India, and has travelled extensively to document the country's rich bio-diversity. He is also deeply committed to the cause of wildlife conservation and follows ethical practices while photographing his subjects in the wild. He is a firm believer that education is the first step in the process of conservation.

Pairs will often briefly perch at the entrance of their burrow, using their stiff tail feathers to prop themselves up on soft sand banks.

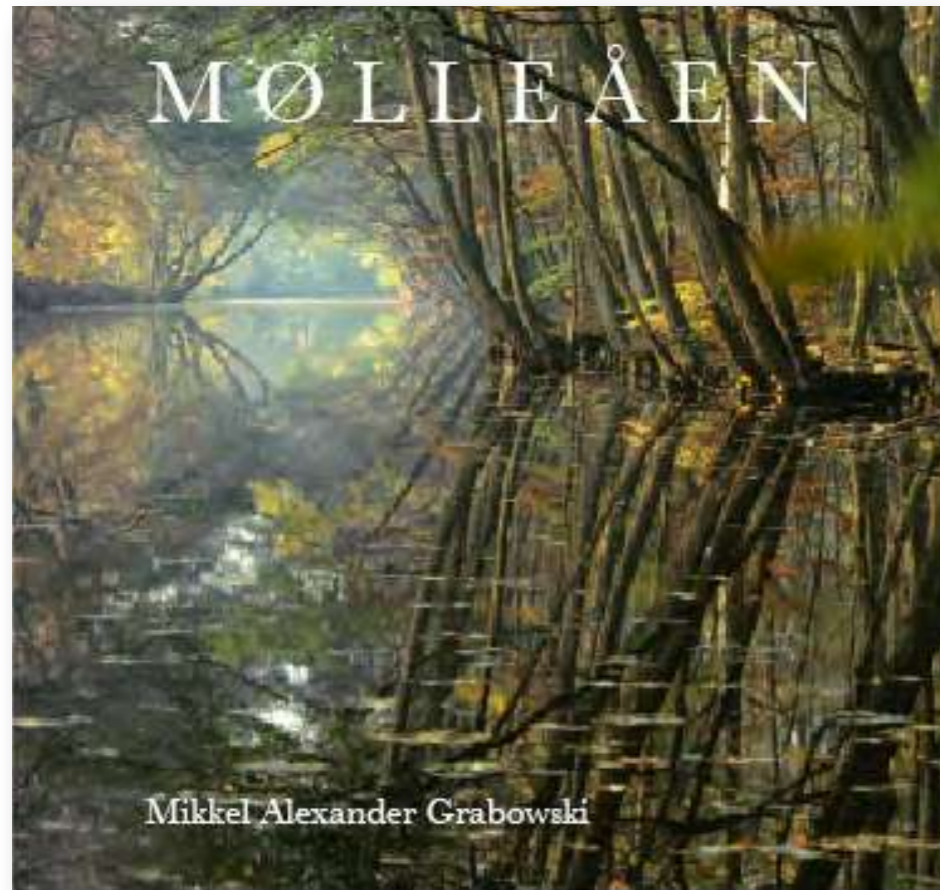


Merops philippinus

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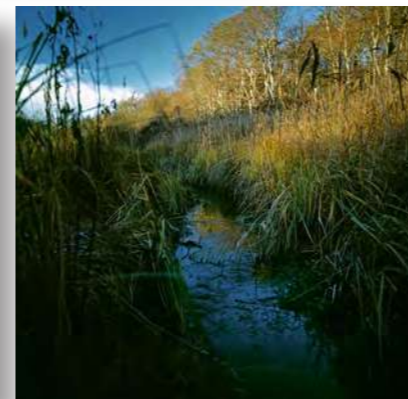
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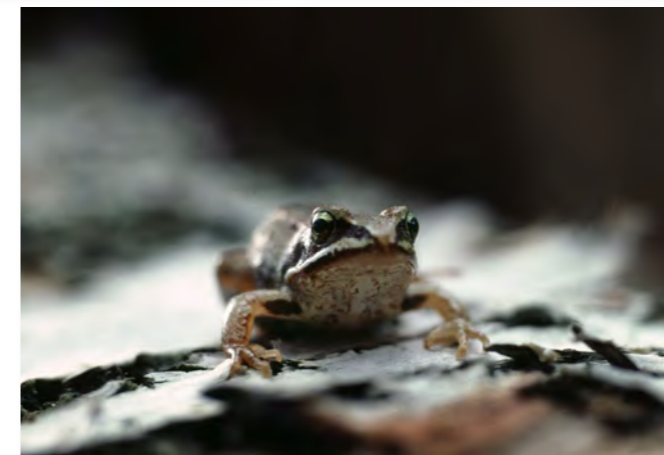
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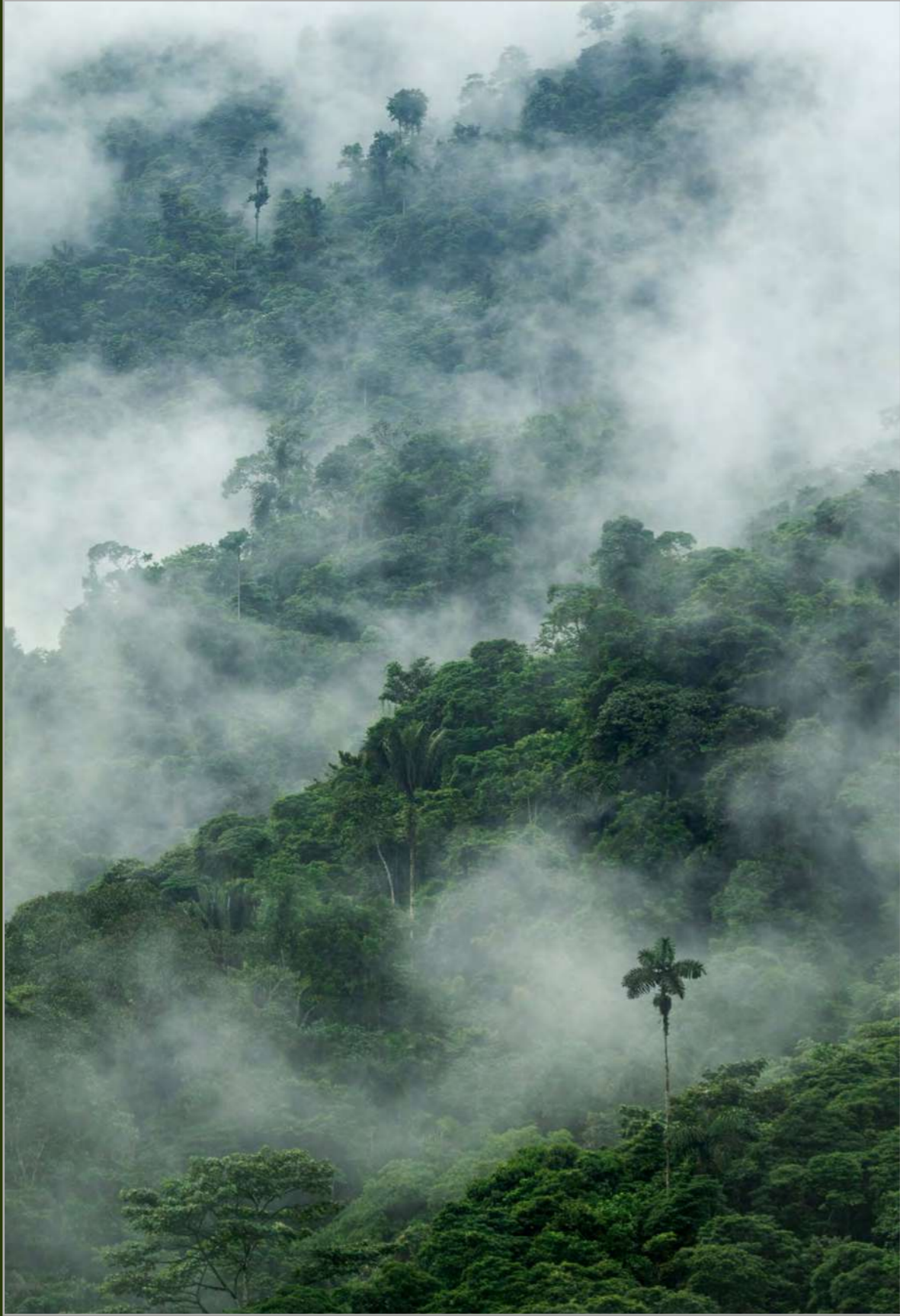


A NEW FROG FROM THE CHOCÓ

An undescribed species surfaces from the endangered South American rainforest thanks to the efforts of Universidad Indoamérica, Tropical Herping and Mashpi Lodge



The genus *Hyloscirtus* is part of the diverse tree frog family *Hylidae*, and represents a conspicuous component of the anuran fauna in the Andean foothills and cloud forests. This genus currently contains 34 recognized, extant species, all of which reproduce in streams. Most of the species are restricted to specific microhabitats.



The habitat of the Mashpi Torrenteer is located in the Ecuadorian Chocó forest, one of the most threatened ecosystems in South America.

TEXT BY LUCAS M. BUSTAMANTE - TROPICAL HERPING
PHOTOS BY LUCAS M. BUSTAMANTE AND
ALEJANDRO ARTEAGA - TROPICAL HERPING

*The recently described Mashpi Torrenteer *Hyloscirtus mashpi* increases the already numerous array of amphibians in Ecuador to more than 550 species.*

"The first time I saw it was four years ago, while doing night photography besides one of the streams of the reserve" says Carlos Morochz, Research Director at Mashpi. "I sensed it was something different, so I went to Luis Coloma, of Centro Jambatu, who suggested that the frog required more detailed study".

"This kind of frogs live associated with water bodies. They call at night along the stream banks. In the particular case of this new species, we are pleased to see that this frog is quite abundant in the reserve and its reproductive cycle goes throughout the year" says Juan M. Guayasamin, director of the Center for Biodiversity and Climate Change, at Universidad Tecnológica Indoamerica. This institution and Tropical Herping maintain a research agreement with Mashpi since 2013, with the aim of studying the communities of amphibians and reptiles in the reserve.

Since that year, we began monitoring all streams at Mashpi. "We started to take pictures of all the individuals we found because they had a lot of color variation. In addition, we made recordings of their calls, chytrid analysis- the fungus that infects amphibians- and blood samples for genetic and molecular studies" adds Carlos Morochz.

"Although we had hints that it was a new species, it was exciting to confirm it with the genetic analysis" continues Alejandro Arteaga, researcher at Tropical Herping. "With such news we knew immediately that there was a great urgency to describe the species to assign accurate conservation priorities".

But one of the things that called scientists' attention about the discovery of this new species is that researchers managed to record videos of the as yet unknown reproductive behavior of this group of frogs. "Males of Torrenteers of the bogotensis group have a gland on the chin (upper throat) which was suspected to be used to stimulate the female at the time of courtship. With these video recordings we have now evidence of such behavior. This becomes

continued on page 96 ➤



Metamorph of *H. mashpi* at Reserva de Biodiversidad Mashpi, Ecuador. This is a nocturnal species restricted to riverine vegetation in primary evergreen foothill forests, which perches on leaves and branches 30–400 cm above ground/stream level, and is active under a variety of climatic conditions.



The Chocoan rainforest as seen from the verandah of Mashpi Lodge, one of National Geographic Unique Lodges of the World. Universidad Tecnológica Indoamerica and Tropical Herping maintain a research agreement with Mashpi since 2013, with the aim of studying the communities of amphibians and reptiles in the reserve.



Abundance is patchy and can be as high as four adults per square meter; frogs have been found either hidden between leaves or exposed.

an unprecedented record of the natural history of these enigmatic species” continues excitedly Mauricio Correa Rivera, co-author and researcher at the Herpetological Group of Antioquia in Colombia. Additionally, a good news is that the species is able to survive with abundant populations, despite it resulted positive for the analysis of the chytrid fungus. “This could give us some guidelines for searching methods or strategies to protect those species that have been brought to the brink of extinction by the fungus” confirms Arteaga.

The habitat of the Mashpi Torrenteer is located in the Ecuadorian Chocó forest, one of the most threatened ecosystems in the country and in South America in general. Urban sprawl deforestation, monocultures and logging are the main reasons that make less than 2% of the Ecuadorian Chocó remain intact. To Roque Sevilla, majority Mashpi shareholder and mentor of the project, this finding only confirms the importance of conserving these forests. *“It has been a great joy because it endorses what I felt the first time I went to Mashpi: a sublime place full of life and biological value; much of which has not been registered by science or perceived by us, the Ecuadorians. Therefore I felt it was a moral obligation and a great dream to preserve such a rich area”.*

Roque decided to start research projects parallel to ecotourism projects in Mashpi Lodge, which since this year was declared as one of the National Geographic Unique Lodges of the World. *“Travelers who pass through the experience at Mashpi, become true ambassadors of nature conservation, which is definitely the major success. However, the aim is also to show that it is possible to carry out a viable economic project and still be respectful with our environment. Both aspects are being achieved at Mashpi”* adds Sevilla. To Roque, the discovery of the Mashpi Torrenteer is only the beginning of a major long-term preservation project, which works thanks to a strong and successful institutional collaboration on behalf of the study of biodiversity in Ecuador.

The scientific paper that describes the new species was published on August 28, 2015, at the Neotropical Biodiversity journal, an initiative from the Ecuadorian Secretary of Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation, to promote the publication and dissemination of biodiversity research in Latin America. All the articles are freely available. You can access the publication on this link: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23766808.2015.1074407> - .VeTNQLRCnIM



The diversity of neotropical frogs, particularly Andean groups such as *Hyloscirtus*, has been drastically underestimated, as revealed by the number of recent descriptions of new species. This underestimation of diversity highlights the continued need for field expeditions to under-studied areas and habitats such as Andean torrents.



H. mashpi n. sp. is an abundant species with seemingly healthy populations.



The chytrid fungus *B. dendrobatidis* (Bd) was found in 6 of 34 adults of *H. mashpi*.

Typical specimen of *Hyloscirtus mashpi* from Reserva de Biodiversidad Mashpi.



A variation of *H. mashpi* n. sp. from Reserva de Biodiversidad Mashpi.



The word *mashpi* is a Yumbo word that means "friend of water" - a precise description of this treefrog, which is always found along pristine streams.

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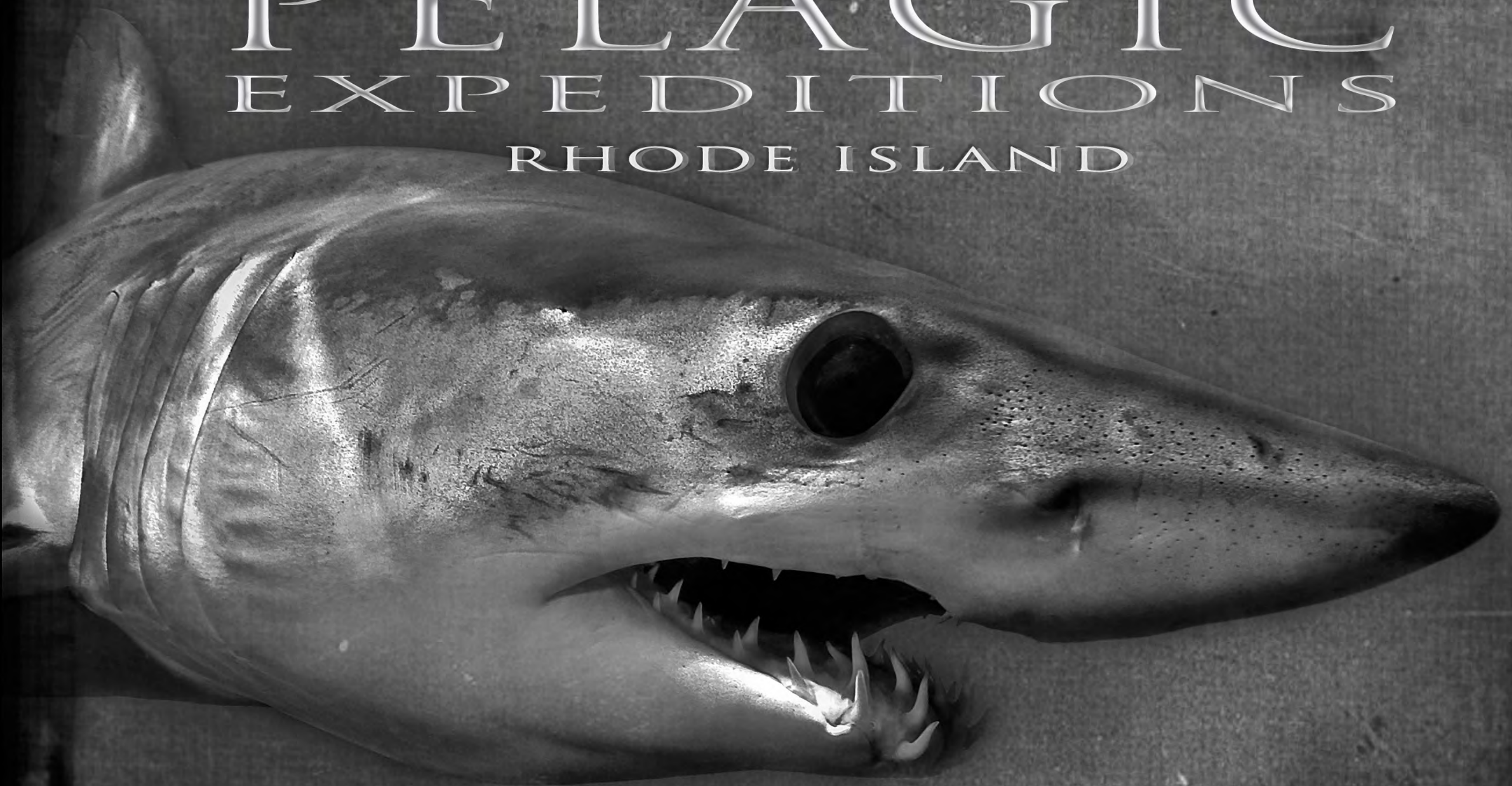
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The Parting Shot



Young Indian photographer **Arghya Adhikary** inaugurates the first Parting Shot taken by one of our readers, and here's his story on this beautiful and rare image of a feline from the Himalayas: the Leopard Cat *Prionailurus bengalensis*. "Though it is considered to be one of the most common felines after the Jungle Cat, spotting the Leopard Cat in the wild and clicking it in the open is a dream for every wildlife photographer on the Indian subcontinent. I had tried to click it before in the mangroves of the Sunderbans and in the forests on the foothills of the Himalayas but never got lucky. But this

mid-February, while trekking through the forest of Buxa Hills, my dream came finally true. From yellowish brown to yellow-orange in color, this feline has some white in front of its head and spotted underparts. With the body, legs and tail covered by a mixture of black rosettes and solid black spots, the Leopard Cat looks like a miniature leopard and hence the name stands justified. There are two white stripes between eyes and nose and two black stripes between eyes and ears. The tail is spotted with some solid black spots near the buff-colored tip. Irises are golden brown. There are variations in

size and appearance of the species across their distribution. Nocturnal and arboreal, it hunts both in the trees and on the ground, mostly at dusk and dawn. Rodents, small birds, and domestic poultry are common prey items. It is found in twenty-one Asian countries, from southern India to the Russian Far East and down to Southeast Asia. In India, they are found from the Himalayan Terai region to the northeast and southwards of the Western Ghats, inhabiting shrubs, undergrowths, grasslands, moist deciduous forests and mangroves." Thank you for a great shot and story, Arghya! ●



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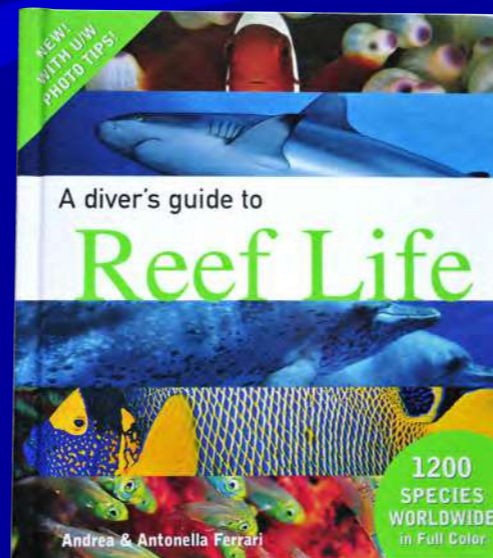
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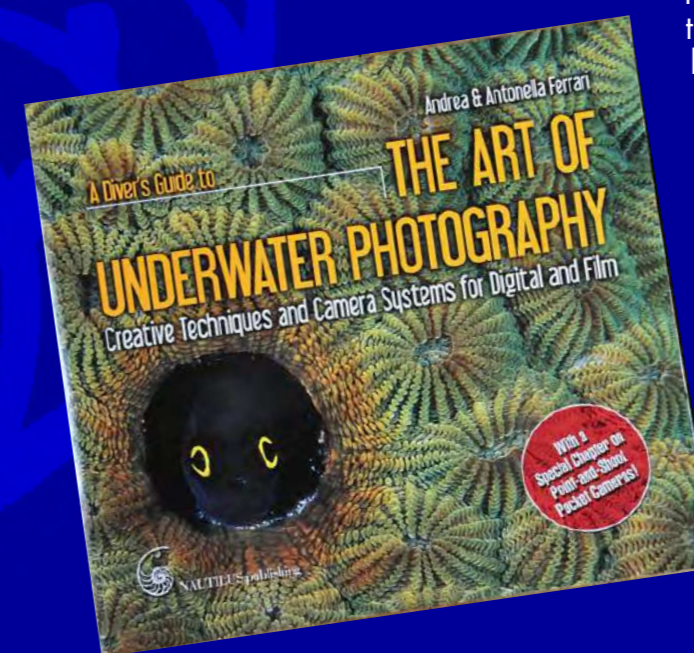
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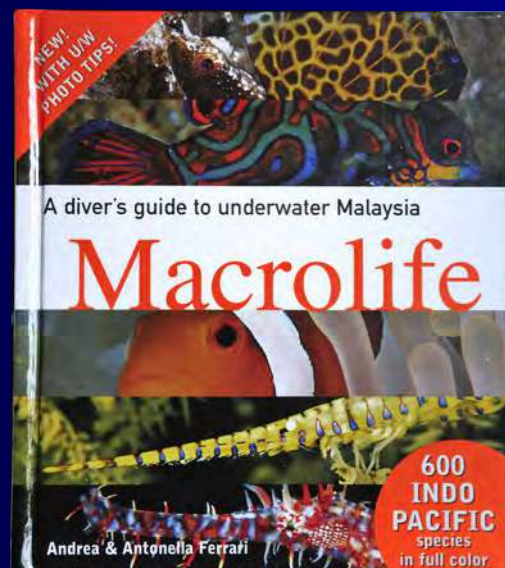
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