

ANIMA MUNDI

Adventures in Wildlife Photography

Issue 1, Year 1 - 1st Quarter, January 2011

In This Issue:

HEAVEN AND EARTH

Sri Lanka's Yala National Park

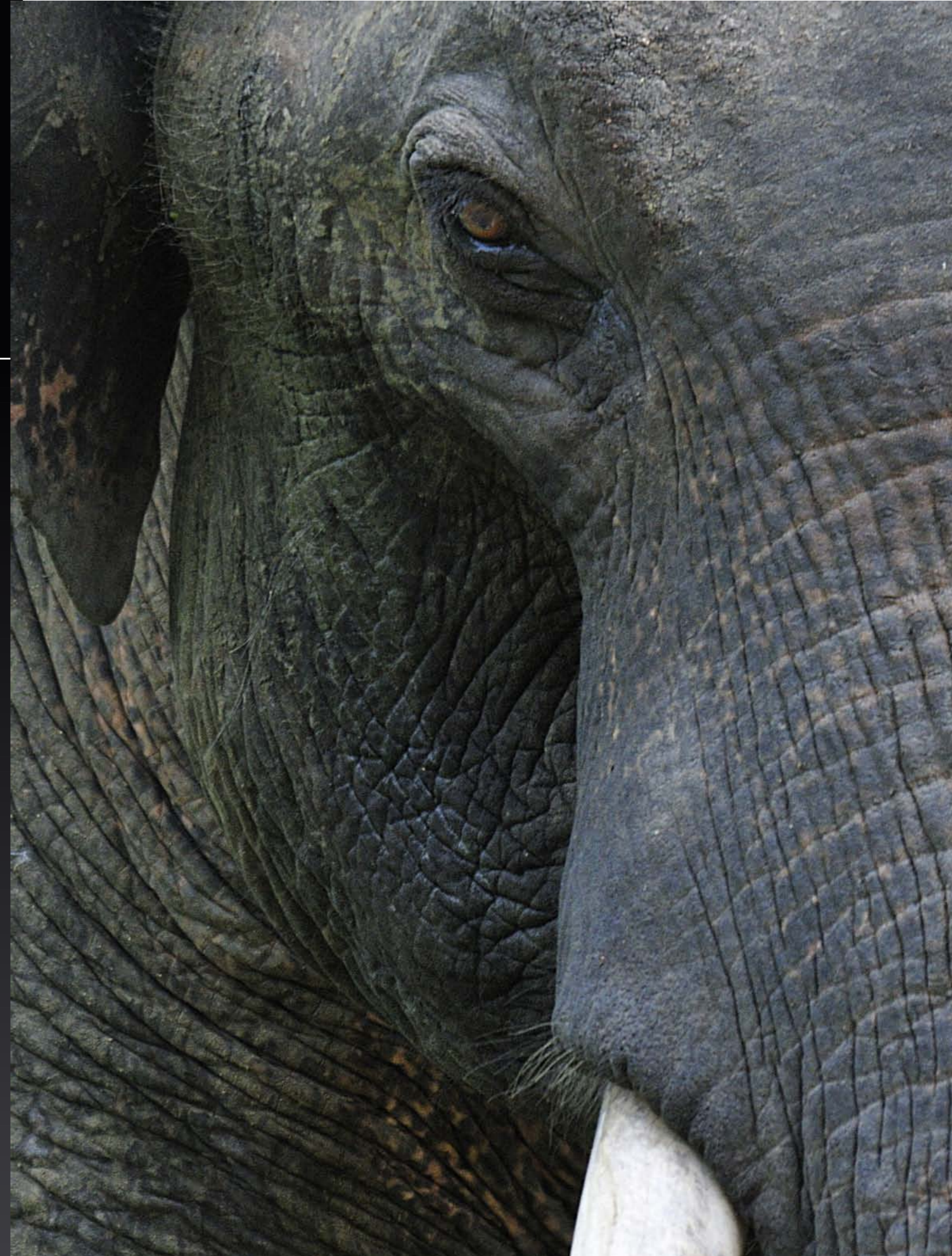
THE LAND WHERE TIME STOOD STILL

Borneo's Danum Valley

THE WOBGONGS OF RAJA AMPAT

Celebrating West Papuan Carpet Sharks





SOUL OF THE WORLD, SPIRIT OF THE WILD

ANIMA MUNDI - in Latin, the ageless language of science, the Soul of the World. Some would stretch the concept a bit, and freely translate those two words as the Spirit of the Wild. We would agree, as that is what we see through our camera viewfinder whenever we travel. We see it in the leaf on a tree, in the grass bending in the wind, in the silent green cloisters of the ancient woods, in the endless blue of the great ocean, in the clear, cold, innocent eyes of all the free, wild animals we are lucky to cross paths with. We feel it on our skin, in the warmth of the sun in the bush, in the cool morning breeze blowing from the hills, in the still mysterious dampness of the rainforest. The Soul of the World, that great ageless undercurrent, bonding us all to the living universe.

So why such a grand - even pretentious - name for our quarterly online magazine? Well, we do not really think of ourselves as uniquely good wildlife photographers, but we certainly are exceptionally passionate about our subjects, and we feel it is important to share our enthusiasm with others. We are firmly convinced ignorance is the great malady of the world of man, and we believe knowledge and direct experience should be shared with all - knowledge defeats fear and superstition, the poisonous offspring of ignorance, kindling interest and ultimately respect. And the few remaining pockets of wilderness in our world truly need respect and protection, now more than ever - experiencing them in person will reward you with a priceless emotional gain, and your contribution as a visitor will directly support their present and

future survival. So what we are doing on these pages is what we probably do best - we tell stories, we bring back images, we share our experiences. Hopefully you'll find them interesting, as four times a year ANIMA MUNDI - which is available online as a PDF for free download - will be constantly offering a variety of features, from thoroughly illustrated nature travel reports to species-specific portfolios, ranging from topside to underwater photography and from temperate to tropical habitats. We obviously assume its contents will mostly prove interesting to wildlife photographers worldwide, and besides offering reliable travel information we'll be constantly striving to keep the visual standards as high as possible.

We hope you will like what you will see, and that you will maybe feel the urge - inspired by these pages - to do as we do as soon as the opportunity arises... pack up, get a plane ticket and go somewhere, close to home or far away, it doesn't matter as long as it's untouched and pristine. To go back to nature and feel a child's awe and wonder beholding its beauty and mystery, to feel once more the primordial pulse of the wild, to get lost in the forest, to dive in the bottomless abyss, to feel the cool wind of the plains in your face. To truly feel alive - to bond once again and forever with the Soul of the World, the ANIMA MUNDI.

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

We appreciate your feedback - constructive criticism, useful suggestions and interesting contributions are most welcome.

Please drop us a line at nautilus@reefwonders.net

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Publishers
Andrea and Antonella
Ferrari
nautilus@reefwonders.net

Editor-in-Chief
Andrea Ferrari
andy@reefwonders.net

Layout Design & Art
Direction
Laura Genovese
nautilus@reefwonders.net

Videographer
Antonella Ferrari
anto@reefwonders.net

Video Editing
Leon Joubert & Claudia
Pellarini-Joubert
info@bittenbysharks.com

Distribution & Technical
Support
Peter Symes
editor@xray-mag.com

Agile, alert and inquisitive, an alarmed Langur male peeks at the photographer from its leafy hideout in Yala National Park.

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THE PARTING SHOT

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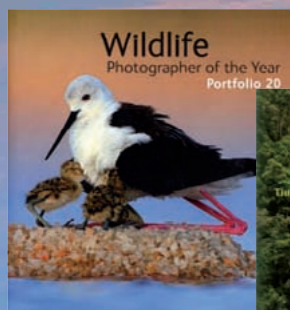
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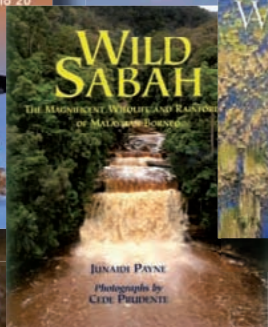
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A large male Asian elephant *Elephas maximus* faces the camera. Yala National Park numbers more than 350 individuals of these majestic animals.

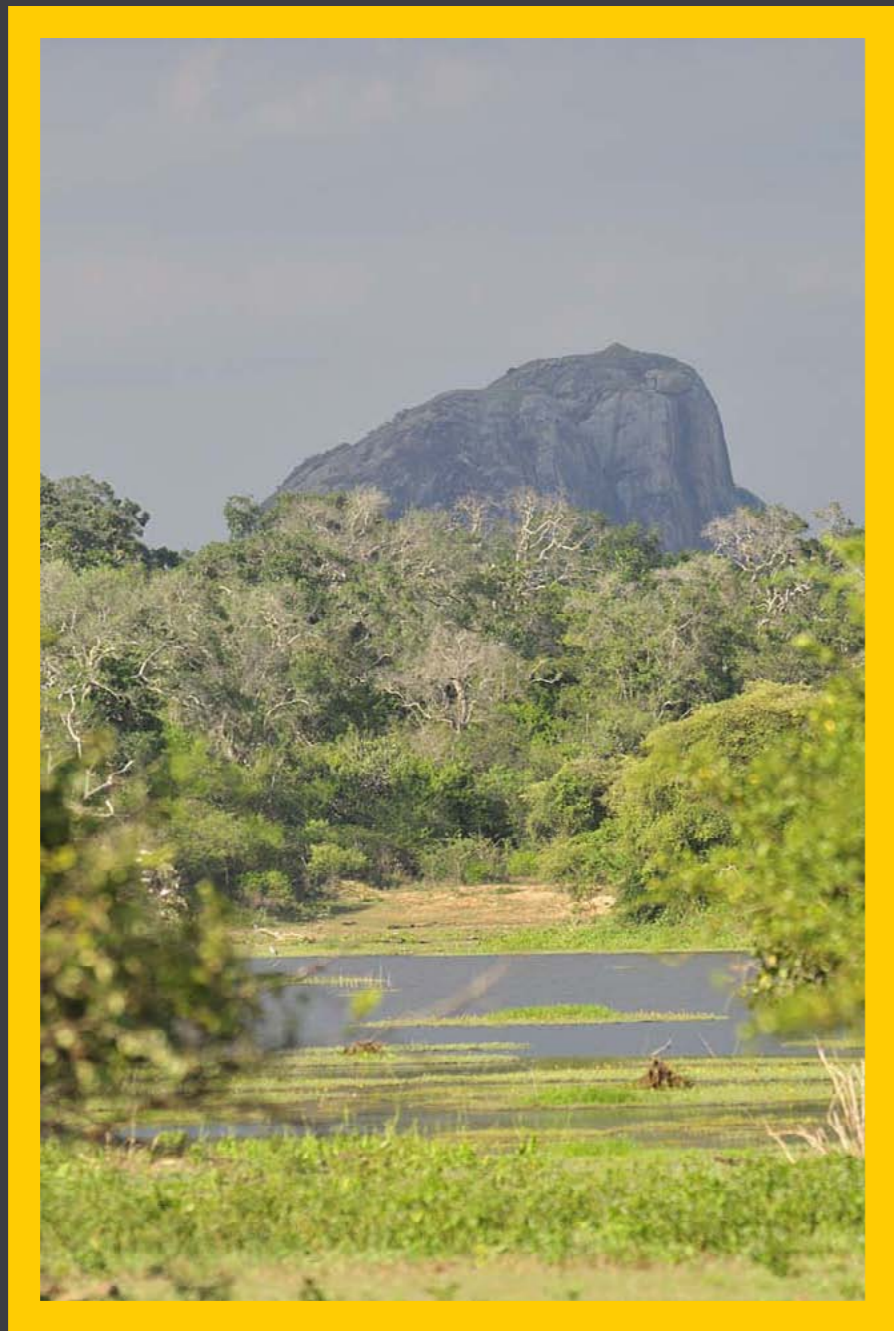


SRI LANKA'S YALA NATIONAL PARK
HEAVEN AND EARTH

Camping among leopards and elephants
in one of the Resplendent Island's most beautiful protected areas



An Asian elephant peacefully feeds among flowering water lilies in one of Yala's countless lakes and man-made reservoirs.



Leopards languorously stretched like exhausted lovers

■ The unmistakable profile of Elephant Rock (above) and a young male leopard *Panthera pardus* relaxing at dawn (right).

TEXT BY ANDREA FERRARI
PHOTOS BY ANDREA & ANTONELLA FERRARI

Now picture this, my fellow traveller, my reader, my friend. Picture a verdant land of a thousand ponds and lakes, their clear still water blanketed by the rose-pink frost of endless water lilies in bloom, a gentle breeze in the sweltering heat, the air shimmering and vibrating in the silent distance. Picture gentle meadows stretching in the sun, and flowering acacias, and the bright yellow of cassia flowers cascading among delicate bluegreen leaves, and the silver-white naked branching trunks of old dead trees, evenly spaced like chesspieces on this landscape of heartbreaking beauty and peaceful elegance, every single detail of the picture perfectly planned as if by a divine gardener. Picture, then, long dusty red trails snaking along muddy oxbow lagoons and over grassy bunds, among immense rotund boulders of shiny mica and granite, the primeval playground of capricious gods.

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Indian pond herons *Ardeola grayii* are commonly observed along Yala's lakes and ponds, where they hunt for frogs.

And picture leopards as smooth as the night purring lazily in the pink of dawn, languorously stretched like exhausted lovers on top of those same granite mounds, their long ringed tail curled up and sexily undulating in the cool air of a glorious new morning. Picture great old leathery elephants, grazing silently on the morning peaks, their wise and slightly mad brown eyes in a network of ancient wrinkles, their ears flapping in slow motion like big

grey dusty carpets. And antique crocodiles, the hypnotic pattern of their bony scaled armor shining in the dawning sun by the ponds' dark cool water, and great herds of spotted deer, the fawns and females and stags quietly by themselves by the forest's edge, having survived another night, their softly airbrushed coats being one with the early sunlight playing among the leaves above. And rainbow-colored, iridescent peacocks haughtily roosting

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Left, a typical Yala hillside landscape, comprising dry forest, low bushes and gigantic granite boulders, split and smoothed by erosion. Red-wattled Lapwings *Vanellus indicus* (above) are a common sight on open grassy plains.

Single specimens of the stunningly elegant Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* can be frequently observed as they wade in shallow ponds.



In the early sunlight by the ponds' dark cool water

by themselves on low branches, lime-green, red beaked, screeching parakeets shooting like noisy arrows through the sky, crested eagles arrogantly perched like medieval knights on the ramparts of their tree fortresses, their piercing, impossibly yellow, cruel eyes coldly gazing at passerbys like there were no tomorrow. And so much more, there's no way to describe it. And when a day's wonders are temporarily over, and tired limbs are slowly stretched anew, and the day's choking dust has been washed away under a cool shower's trickle, then picture this again, my fellow traveler, my reader, my friend.

Picture the sapphire blue endless great vault of the night sky stretched all over the world, a million silver pins quilting its velvety bottomless void, the Milky Way shimmering from one end to the horizon to the other, and the immense round chinese lantern of the moon hanging above, so close one feels like touching it, its impossibly bright spotlight throwing pitch-black shadows as if it were daytime over the silvery landscape. Picture a long line of flaming torches on top of wrought-iron posts leading the way - as in a fairy tale - to

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— This is how most visitors to Yala usually glimpse their first leopard - a memorable sight of the big cat as it straddles a large, thick horizontal branch several meters above the ground. Such splendid encounters can last a long time if the animal is fully at ease and if one observes absolute silence.



■ The abundance of Yala's waters is a blessing for the resident elephants, often seen bathing or drinking.



the top of the most immense granite mound you can imagine, and at the end of the crackling, whispering trail a true forest-wood bonfire roaring to the heavens, bright orange sparks shooting towards the night sky before cascading back again to earth in a merry, oddly comforting way, and sitting in the perfume of wild jasmine a perfectly set dinner table for two, two candles gently flickering in the night, the camp's staff smiling happily all around, sharing your happiness, proud of their work. Picture this all, if you can, and more,

and let me tell you about camping in the heart of beauty itself, in Sri Lanka's Yala National Park.

A LAND OF PLENTY

Despite having suffered the cruel devastations of a thirty-year long civil war which only recently has finally seen its end, Sri Lanka - "The Resplendent Island"- is as friendly, welcoming and incredibly beautiful as I remembered it, having visited it twice, all by myself, in 1980-1981.

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A colorful paddy field frog floats in the featureless void of a muddy rainwater puddle. Deeper bodies of water such as ponds and lakes (left) boast clear water and an abundance of vegetation.



■ A strikingly beautiful young female leopard - relaxed and yet ever alert - languidly gazes down from her lofty tree perch.





■ An adult male Malabar Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros coronatus*, one of Yala's most striking and recognizable bird species.

Yala's beautiful and unmistakable inselberg panoramas, typical of the Park's stunning landscapes. Leopards and Sloth bears often have their dens among these enormous granite boulders.



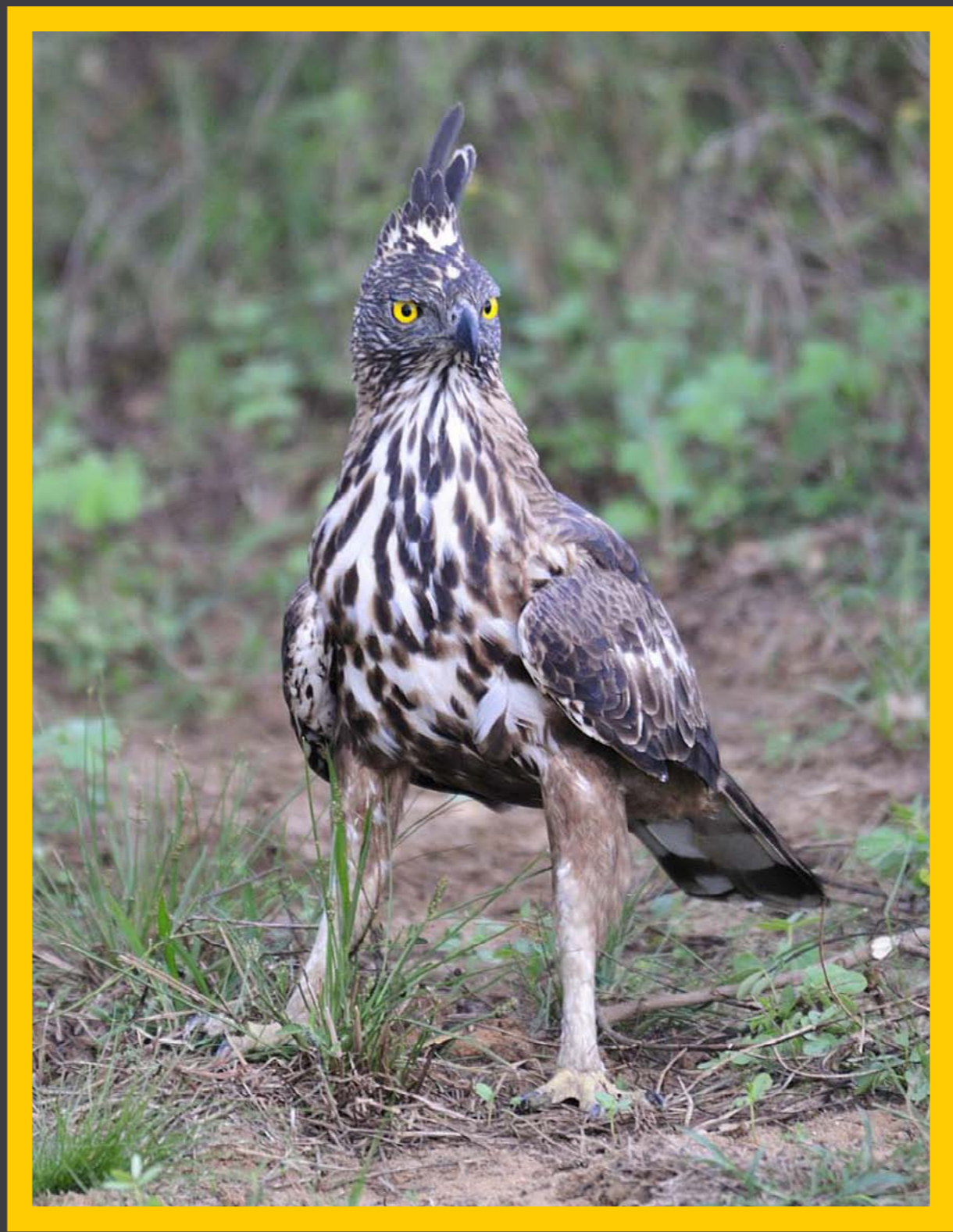
■ A Wild Asian buffalo Bubalus arnee strikes an unexpected pose atop a giant sun-flaked granite slope. Such sights will sadly become ever rarer as Wild Asian buffaloes intergrade more and more with domestic ones gone feral.



The thousand-year old Buddhist tradition of tolerance and deep respect towards all living things is deeply ingrained in its people, and wildlife has long shared, unmolested, the country's natural abundance and wealth with its human inhabitants. This is a place where wild elephants invading orchards are not shot on the spot but relocated to National Parks at the Government's expense, and where drivers risk collisions swerving at the last moment to avoid monitor lizards or snakes sunning themselves on the road tarmac. Carefully managed under the UNESCO umbrella, the country's unique artistic

and archeological treasures are easily visited - one cannot miss the so-called "Cultural Triangle" encompassing the three ancient capitals of Anuradhapura, Polonnaruva and Kandy, plus several minor but equally fascinating sites - and the locals' long standing and deeply felt devotion to Buddhism is part and parcel of every day's occurrences. Kindness, hospitality and a joyful passion for this worlds' pleasures are a way of life in Sri Lanka, making it a quite unique destination in our experience – nowhere else (except maybe in some parts of Italy or France) one can savour beauty, art, nature,

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■ Left, an imposing Spotted Deer *Axis axis* stag showing its splendid set of antlers. Above, a Changeable Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus cirrhatus* caught in a threat display as it claims its territorial stakes to competitors. Yala is home to several species of impressive, easily observed large raptors.



culture and great food at the same time, in such generous measure and in such relaxing, conducive atmosphere. Many other neighbouring countries and cultures in the general area should have carefully noted this in their past history (particularly regarding the beneficial effects of Buddhism on the natural environment), but sadly this has not been the case. In fact, no other destination in Asia can probably boast such a large number of extensive, well-managed and perfectly organized National Parks and Nature Reserves in relation to its territory: large areas with dense wildlife populations and exceptional biodiversity, which make of Sri Lanka a destination not to be missed by wildlife enthusiasts and nature photographers.

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A thousand-year old Buddhist tradition of tolerance

■ The Little Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis ceylonicus* is a common sight on low bushes and branches.



A baby Langur Semnopithecus priam looks very surprised. The Langurs - also commonly known as Hanuman monkeys - found in Yala belong to the subspecies thersites, endemic to the island.



CLICK ON THE TITLES AND WATCH FOUR SHORT VIDEOS ON SOME OF SRI LANKA'S MOST SPECTACULAR NATURAL AND CULTURAL HIGHLIGHTS

ANURADHAPURA



YALA NATIONAL PARK



SIGIRIYA



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■ A rare view as a large adult male Indian or Marsh crocodile (also known as Mugger) *Crocodylus palustris* adopts a threat display during mating season, bellowing deeply and splashing water with its head. Large male crocodiles can become very aggressive and dangerous during courtship. Large specimens of this normally peaceful species can reach a length of 5 meters and a weight of 450 kilograms.





Female *Pavo cristatus* ■
Peacocks - known as Peahens - are strikingly beautiful birds in their own right. Few birds can however compete with the blindingly colorful plumage of the Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis* (right). Both species are exceedingly common in Yala.



With its bright yellow eyes and feathered crest, the Changeable Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus cirrhatus ceylanensis* is a very martial-looking, intimidating raptor. This subspecies is endemic to the island.



While the recent conclusion of the conflict will hopefully allow the depleted wildlife populations of some Parks (notably those of celebrated Wilpattu in the North) to rebound soon, the island's Park system has a lot to offer – and among the country's many National Parks, Yala certainly reigns as one of the most attractive, interesting and fruitful for visitors, a truly enchanting destination.

A STRONGHOLD FOR ASIAN LEOPARDS

Covering about 1297 square km or 129,700 hectares, Yala is one of the oldest and - together with Wilpattu - probably the most famous among the National Parks of Sri Lanka. Ecosystems represented within its boundaries range from moist monsoon forest to dry monsoon forest, semi-deciduous forest,

thorny forest, grassland, freshwater and marine wetland and even sandy beaches along the coastal line, where it is not unusual to sight elephants quietly strolling by the pounding surf. Swifly-flowing rivers such as the Kumbukkan Oya in the North-East and the Menik Ganga and its tributaries in the West flow through the area, providing an abundant and much-needed source of water to the animals even during the driest months of the year. In fact, it is the abundance of freshwater which is one of the most striking aspects of the area's environment (the dry season falls between May and August, and the park normally closes for a short time during September and October to avoid undue disturbance to animals, which at this time of the year tend to congregate around waterholes).

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Watercolors of a deceptively peaceful heaven

■ A watercolor-like study in contrasts, as a large Marsh crocodile lurks half-submerged and waiting for its prey in the heavenly, deceptively peaceful environment of one of Yala's numerous lakes.





■ A large, beautiful Marsh crocodile basking in the late afternoon sun.

■ A strange sight, typical of Yala's unique environment, as a large Asian elephant ambles ponderously on the surf-pounded beach by the Indian Ocean.

Given its long history and large size, Yala National Park has long played a very significant role in the conservation of a large number of species in the country: sites such as Kataragama, Sithulpahuwa and Magul Maha Vihara add historical and religious importance to the area. Yala West (also known by its original name, Ruhuna) National Park is well recognized as one of the best National Parks in the world to observe and photograph leopards. The park covers an area of over 100,000 hectares and is divided into five blocks: block one is the most visited area, since it contains the highest density of leopards (about thirty-five). Other areas

of Yala, such as Yala East, have been closed to visitors for some years, and it will take some time to research leopard numbers there.

Yala West consists of scrub jungle, brackish lagoons, freshwater lakes and man-made reservoirs and stunning, enormous, smooth granite formations rising from the bush (technically known as "inselbergs" or island mountains) scattered throughout the Park, whose eastern edge is bounded by the South East coast of the island: its range boasts a population of well over thirty leopards, probably the highest density anywhere in the world in relation to the extension of the area.

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Serene landscapes alive with a primeval allure

Sambar deer *Rusa unicolor* - here seen bathing in a brackish lagoon by the ocean's edge - are relatively uncommon in Yala despite having no natural enemies once they reach adulthood.



*Oriental
Darters* *Anhinga
melanogaster*
are commonly
seen perched
above water,
and can be
easily identified
by their typically
crooked neck.



Yala is rightly famous for its bird fauna. This is a Little Cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger*, a relatively common species.





Yala's exceptional biodiversity is mirrored in these images of its diverse fauna. Top left, a perfectly camouflaged Hump-nosed viper *Hypnale hypnale* lying in ambush in leaf litter; top right, Intermediate Egret *Mesophoyx intermedia* hunting frogs. Bottom left, the Sri Lanka Junglefowl *Gallus lafayetti* - as colorful as it is wary, a prized photographic trophy as it is one of Yala's most difficult camera subjects. Bottom right, a rare encounter with an adult male Sloth bear *Melursus ursinus inornatus*, endemic to the island and highly feared by all locals as it often attacks without provocation.



■ A stunning adult leopard male drinking at a rockpool after having gorged itself. Adult Spotted deer represent the main prey item of leopards in Yala National Park.

Sri Lankan leopards (*Panthera pardus kotiya*, Deraniyagala, 1956) belong to a distinct sub-species which is separate from the Indian one, and are the largest of their species in Asia. These are stunningly beautiful and extraordinarily elegant animals, their lustrous, brassy, spotted coat and languorous gracefulness a sight to behold - but Asian leopards are also exceptionally cunning, shy animals, which are usually sighted only briefly and with the utmost difficulty anywhere else given their being in constant conflict with man and in competition with the much larger tiger (African ones have to deal with lions).

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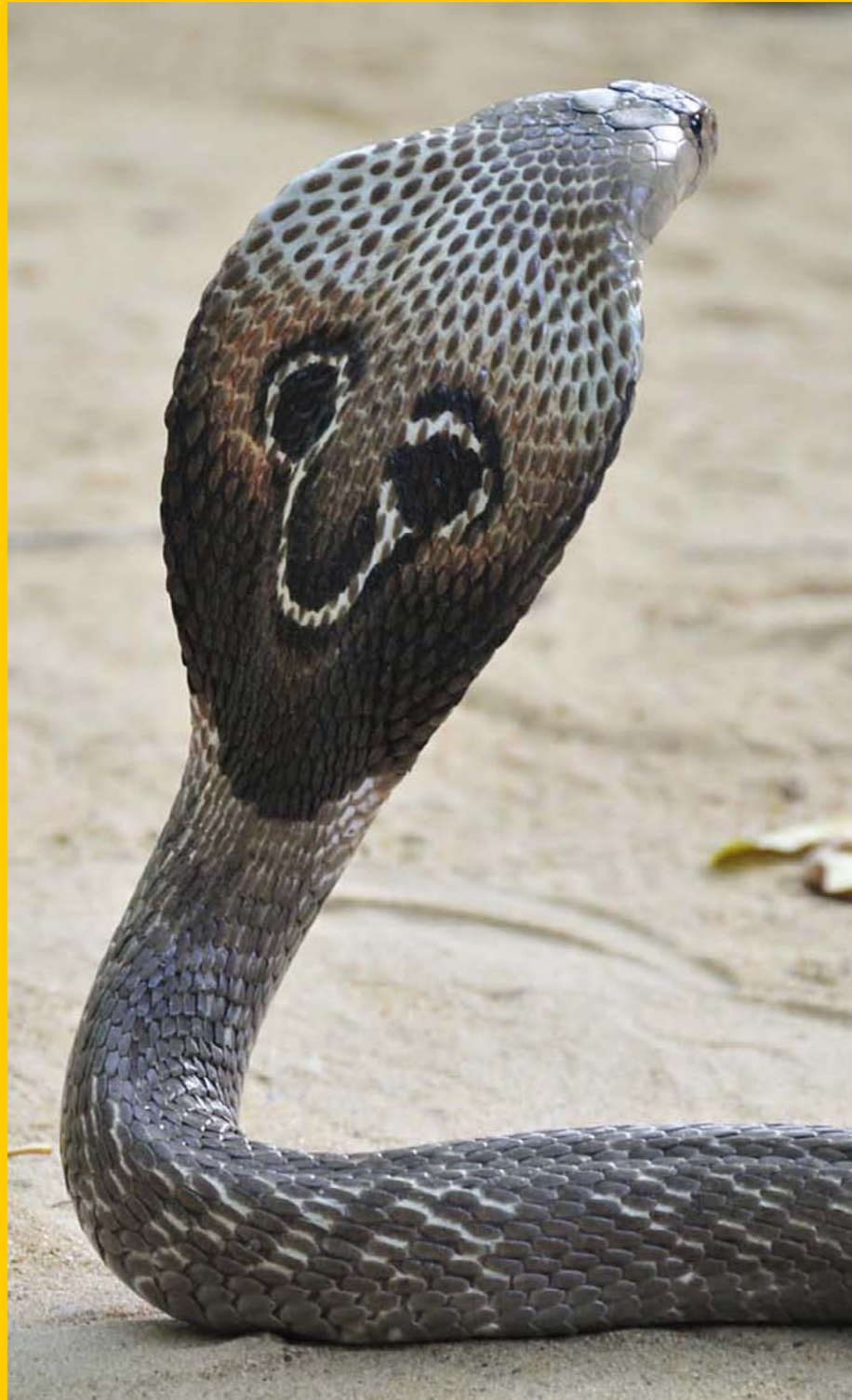
Left, Orange-breasted Green Pigeons *Treron bicincta leggei* are as beautiful as they are shy, seldom allowing a close approach. The pimbura subspecies of the Rock python *Python molurus*, above, is endemic to Sri Lanka and severely threatened by the pet trade. Adult individuals of this impressive species can reach a length of 4 meters.



A Little Cormorant ■ dries itself in the sun after having pursued its fish prey underwater. This gregarious species is common in the dry zones of the island.

Unwilling to give way, this tusker faces the car and the camera, its forward-facing ears and its searching trunk betraying unease. Asian elephants have to be approached with caution in the wild, as they have a habit of charging at the slightest provocation.





Left, a large adult Indian cobra *Naja naja* rears up, spreading its trademark hood in the unmistakable threat display when approached on a dust trail. The venomous bite of this impressive and highly dangerous species can prove rapidly deadly if let untreated. Right, a Crested Serpent Eagle *Spilornis cheela*, a forest-dwelling raptor specialized in preying on snakes and other reptiles.



The eternal battle between predator and prey



Its left eye scarred and possibly impaired by a past fight with a competitor, a huge leopard male looms dangerously close above the car. Luckily, accidents involving humans are almost unheard-of in Yala.

■ A typical lowland landscape in Yala: an open, scenic environment with low bushes, shallow lakes, wide grassy plains and granite mountains looming in the background.



■ A huge Marsh crocodile basks among the reeds and water lilies at a lake's edge. Once it has reached adulthood this impressive species has no natural enemies in Yala. Sri Lankan populations possibly belong to the subspecies *kimbula*.



Due to such good reasons, these stealthy predators have normally adopted strictly nocturnal habits, and are rarely observed by man, despite being not uncommon locally and occasionally inhabiting suburbs and even cities, where they prey on poultry and stray dogs. The best chances to observe one of these elusive felines within Yala's boundaries come generally early in the morning, and then again at dusk, but the good news is that the Park offers, hands-down, what undoubtedly are the best opportunities in the world of seeing and photographing Asian leopards in the wild. Trying long and hard - and thanks to the untiring tracking by our guide Dilan Peiris, our jeep driver Priyanka and Pradip, the Park warden accompanying us daily - we have bagged a stunning twenty-two sightings (some of which exceptionally clear and one lasting well over 30 minutes) in a two-week period, which would be totally unheard-of anywhere else in the world! Long undisturbed and unmolested, the leopards of Yala are very confident, and adult males are occasionally seen walking the tracks even during the day, busy marking their range by urinating

against trees and generally scenting the area. Young males in particular seem to have no fear of jeeps, which can lead to some excellent photographic opportunities. In this respect there are some similarities between Yala and some of the best Tiger Reserves in India: in both locations the big cats have become used to the jeeps' presence, thus enabling visitors to enjoy a frequent, privileged and quite unique view of these magnificent animals. Besides its beautiful leopards - understandably Yala's main claim to fame worldwide - the Park boasts also a substantial population of Asian elephants (including several impressive tuskers) along with enormous herds of Spotted deer. Sambar are often sighted, together with Wild buffalo (sadly often intergrading with large numbers of domestic buffalo, which enter freely the Park from surrounding properties and go feral), Jackal, Mongoose, Langur and hundreds of impressive, large Marsh crocodiles. Sloth bear and Pangolin are more rarely sighted but are present nonetheless - we had two sightings of Sloth bear during our stay.

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A pair of White-throated Kingfisher Halcyon smyrnensis perching by the water's edge. The individual on the left has just caught a large centipede. The bright blue flash of their wings when in flight is one of the unmistakable sights of Yala.



■ A family group of Asian elephants visiting a forest pond to drink and bathe offer us a memorable, moving spectacle as the youngest baby plays and stumbles in the mud under the watchful eyes of two adult females. Babies are cared for and looked after by mothers and aunts, as adult males live by themselves or in bachelor groups.

■ A mixed flock of Spot-billed Pelicans *Pelecanus philippensis* and Painted Storks *Mycteria leucocephala* crowds a brackish lagoon by the Indian Ocean. Such spectacular (and quite noisy) aggregations are typical of Yala's salt-sprayed, humid coastal environment.



Bird life is stunningly rich and comprises over 120 species, ranging from Lesser flamingos to Paradise flycatchers, Crested hawk eagles, Little green bee-eaters, Malabar hornbills, Green pigeons, Peacocks and many other colorful species, while reptile species commonly encountered include - besides crocodiles and large numbers of Savannah monitors - snakes such as Indian Cobra, Rock python, Hump-nosed Sri Lankan pit

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■ A Grey-headed Fish Eagle *Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus* (now that is a tongue-twisting name!) on its perch with some freshly-caught fish prey. Yala offers many opportunities to watch and document species behaviour.



■ A pair (note female peeking from behind branch) of Brown Fish Owls *Bubo zeylonensis zeylonensis*. This large endemic species - easily recognized by its yellow eyes - is often sighted in forested areas close to water.

viper and Russell's viper, these however being rather more secretive and difficult to observe.

VISITING YALA – THE RIGHT WAY

When visiting a National Park we always try whenever possible - and despite the occasional lack of comfort - to stay, live, eat and sleep within the protected area's boundaries: that's where the action is, of course, and we love the feeling of isolation and remoteness. Moreover, one is right there when the Park gates open in the very early morning, so jeep safaris start much earlier and last longer than for visitors staying outside and having to drive all the way to the gates (especially since all safari cars have to be out of the Park or back at the camp

by 6.30 pm sharp). Indeed, spending twenty-four hours a day inside a National Park is not possible everywhere, but thankfully it is in Yala, and we have chosen the most romantic option of them all - electing to spend two full weeks in **Mahoora tented camp**, a lovely option offered by Sri Lanka's highly specialized and experienced nature and wildlife travel agency **Eco Team**, who operate their own tented camps in most of the island's National Parks. Eco Team is very well organized and highly reliable - we were picked up by their driver upon our arrival at Colombo's international airport and were immediately whisked away to our final destination, a few hours away, where our private naturalist guide and very comfortable 4-wheel drive

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*A rather splendid
adult male leopard
strides down
a forest track,
its determined look
meaning business
to trespassers.
Encounters such
as this one are
Yala's pride and joy.*



The endless patrolling of the dominant male



■ A large Savannah or Land Monitor *Varanus bengalensis* basks on a tree trunk at right. This impressive species can reach 1.74 cms in length and is exceptionally common in Yala. Above, a Common Mynah *Acridotheres tristis melanosturnus* predated a frog it has just caught and killed.





In an almost mystical encounter, a lone elephant emerges silently from the forest, stops a few feet from us and starts splashing mud on itself with deliberate, ritualized motions. Suddenly we have the unmistakable feeling of being witnesses to a secret, ancient ceremony belonging to a long-lost past.

vehicle were to be at our disposal for the duration of the stay.

The tents are quite comfortable (clients can choose between luxury and standard, the former being somewhat larger and offering private toilet and shower), the staff is absolutely delightful and very efficient, the food is simply wonderful (and very abundant - ask the cook for some traditional Sri Lankan recipes!), privacy is guaranteed and the experience of dining by candlelight and under the stars on a perfectly appointed table for two by a roaring bonfire is really priceless. The exhilarating feeling

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While an Oriental Darter dries itself in the sun (left), a stately Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus* (below) seems to be secretly smiling at itself, a touch of elegant irony gleaming in its beautiful plumage.



of being one with unspoilt, virgin nature is almost overwhelming, and camping in Yala truly offers a unique, romantic experience - despite the occasional fire ant bite, the big forest scorpions lurking around and the huge pesky tusker forcing us to vacate our tent twice in the dead of night (or maybe thanks to such little additional details too), this is how life should

always be when in the wilderness. All serious wildlife photographers interested in experiencing the nature and wildlife of Yala (and most other National Parks of Sri Lanka) are strongly advised to choose the same option - we certainly shall again, in the very near future, when returning once more to the breathtakingly beautiful Resplendent Island. ●

Painted Storks Mycteria leucocephala are very elegant, slow-strutting birds. Here one in full adult plumage is hunting for frogs, insects and other prey in shallow water.





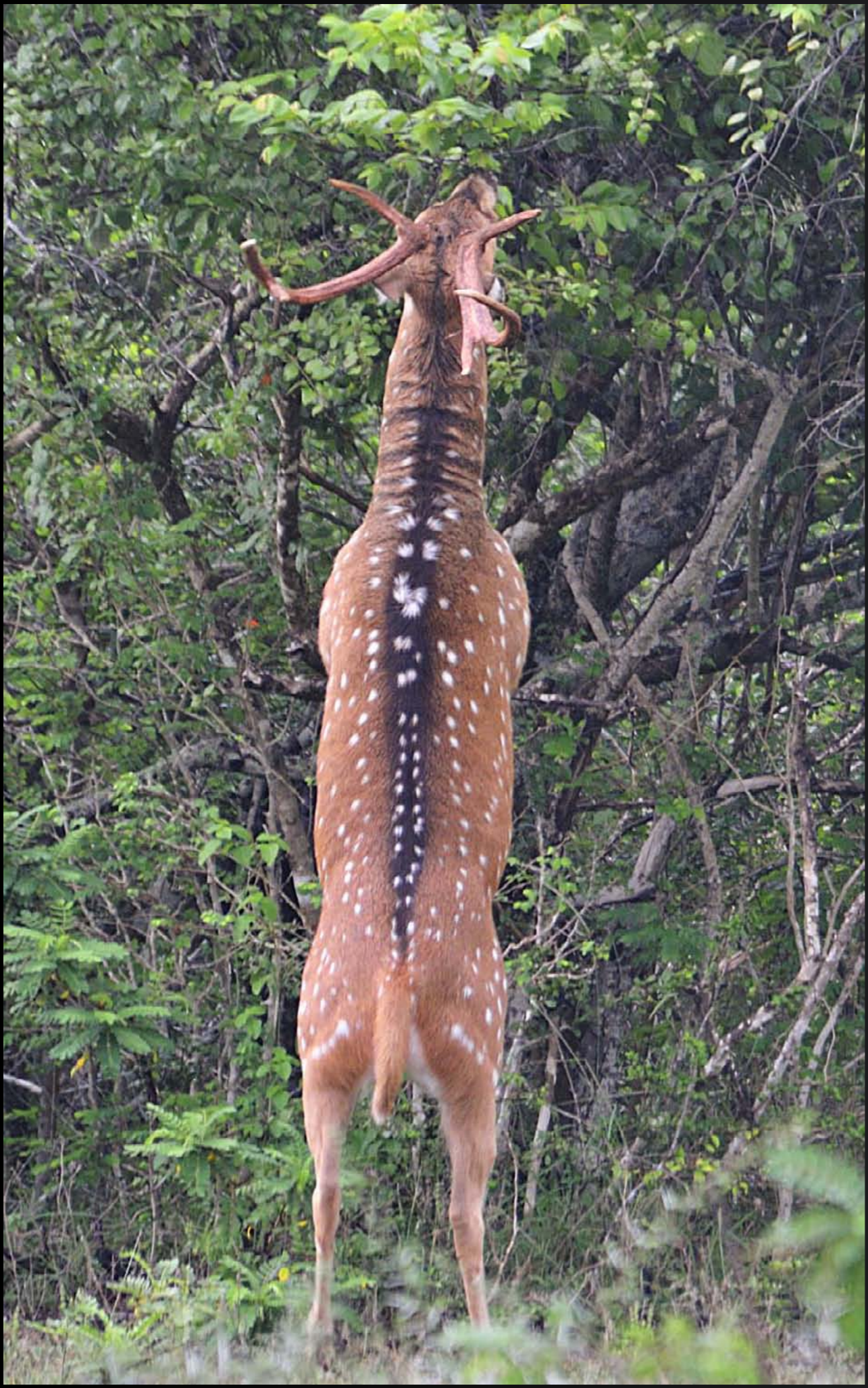
More examples of Yala's stunning biodiversity and interesting behaviours. Top left, a rare sight as an adult Land Monitor Varanus bengalensis swallows a young Black-naped Hare Lepus nigricollis it has just caught and killed; top right, a large forest scorpion, probably belonging to the genus Isometrus, whose venomous sting is painful but rarely fatal. Bottom left, a male Peacock Pavo cristatus avoids most predators by perching above ground and keeping an alert look-out; bottom right, a Yellow-wattled Lapwing Vanellus malabaricus with a dung beetle it has just caught.

■ Stepping directly out of a Sri Lankan Jungle Book, a huge male leopard strides purposefully towards the camera, its grey-green eyes coldly meeting our awed gaze. This is the Anima Mundi, the Soul of the World, at its raw, unflinching, gut-wrenching best!



In a dazzling display of legerdemain, an Asian Openbill *Anastomus oscitans* catches water snails and swallows them one after the other after having torn them out of their shell - without even pausing to stop walking.

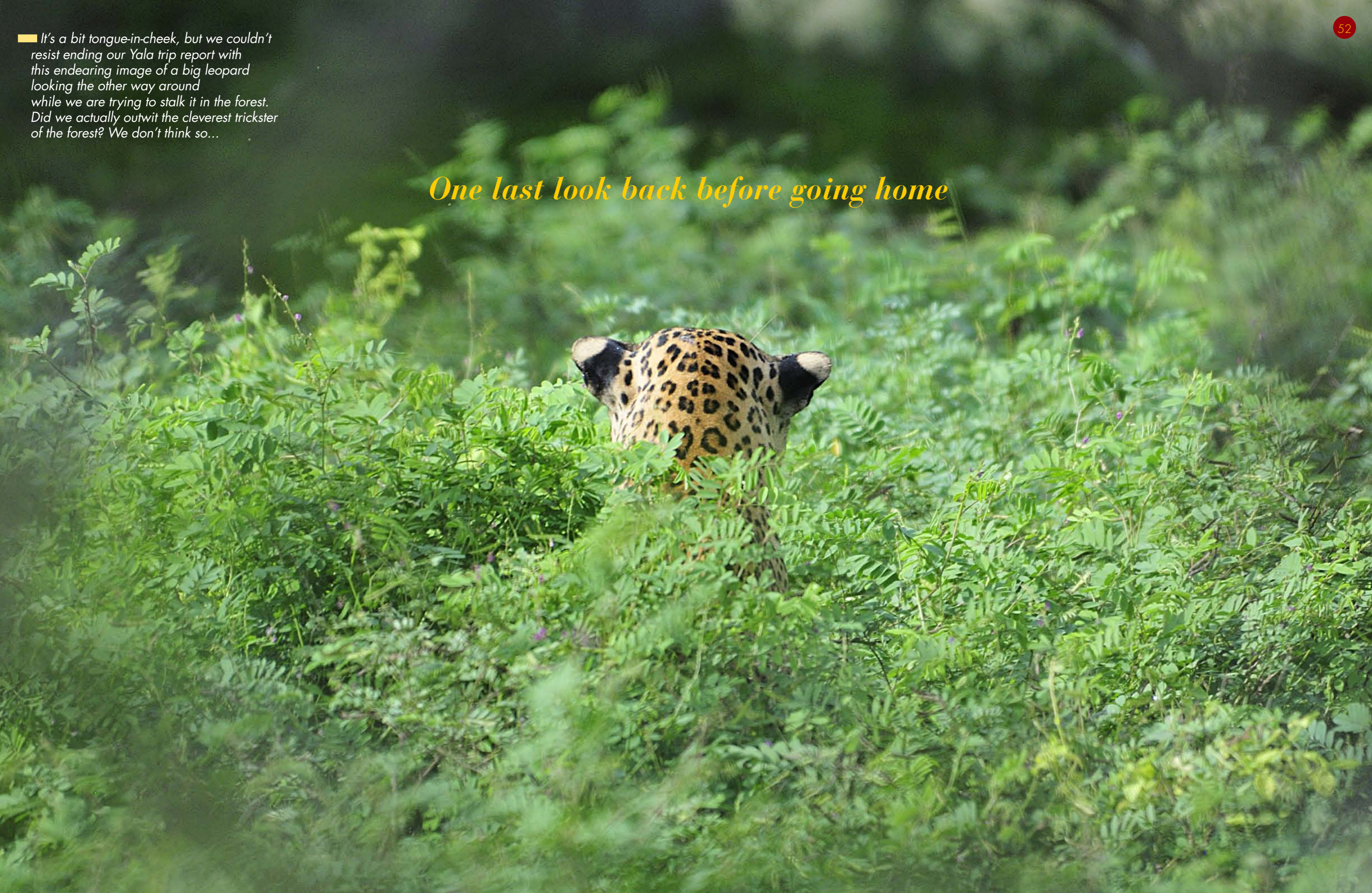




More mammal species from Yala, too often upstaged by the ubiquitous leopard. Far left, a Chital or Spotted deer *Axis axis* stag stands on its hind legs to catch some green succulent shoots - momentarily forgetting about predators. Top left, a rare shot as a wary, ever moving Golden Jackal *Canis aureus* pauses briefly to lap at a rainwater puddle. Its cautious, alert gaze never left us for a second. Bottom left, the very common but not easily photographed Grey Mongoose *Herpestes edwardsii*, a very active and perennially roving small predator.

■ It's a bit tongue-in-cheek, but we couldn't resist ending our Yala trip report with this endearing image of a big leopard looking the other way around while we are trying to stalk it in the forest. Did we actually outwit the cleverest trickster of the forest? We don't think so...

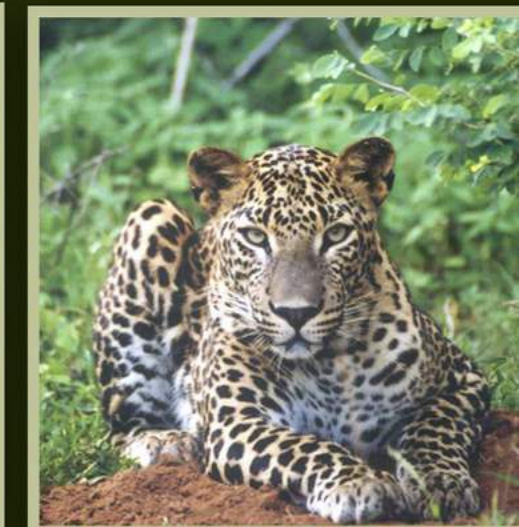
One last look back before going home



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One of the world's most pristine and ecologically relevant Nature Reserves, Danum Valley is stunningly rich in biodiversity, offering visitors fascinating glimpses into the complex habitats of the Asian rainforest. Here animal and plant species often offer truly exceptional photographic opportunities.

SABAH'S DANUM VALLEY

THE LAND WHERE TIME STOOD STILL

An immense stretch of pristine, untouched rainforest in the wild heart of Borneo

TEXT BY ANDREA FERRARI
PHOTOS BY ANDREA & ANTONELLA FERRARI

*T*he crown jewel of Borneo's wild nature, legendary Danum Valley Conservation Area is the largest protected lowland dipterocarp primary forest left in Sabah, Malaysia. This pristine, untouched area of stunning beauty holds a unique status among other gazetted nature reserves in the country: before it was declared a conservation area there were no human settlements within its borders, meaning that hunting, logging and other damaging human interference were almost completely non-existent.

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A scenic view of Danum river, winding its way among mist-shrouded, rainforest-cloaked banks. The valley's typically tropical environment features a constant, stable combination of intense heat and extremely high humidity, with daily torrential downpours and thick early morning mists.

- Danum's suspended walkways are remarkably long and high above the ground, offering dizzying views of the surrounding multi-layered rainforest canopy.



A bird's eye view of the multi-layered forest canopy environment



The canopy walkways - steel cables and wooden planking - offer unique views of the surrounding rainforest, 40 meters above the ground. Far right, an unfurling young leaf.



This particularity makes the area almost unique among other protected areas in Sabah - and this is immediately apparent to visitors, both in the number of wild animal sightings and in the sheer scope of its water-soaked, luxuriant rainforest. Danum Valley covers an area of 438 square kilometres and is currently managed by the Yayasan Sabah Foundation, created in 1966 for conservation, research, education and physical training purposes.

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■ Undetected, a mosquito is sucking blood from an unsuspecting White-lipped frog *Rana chalconota*, sitting in ambush and waiting for some insect prey to pass by.

Stealthily preying on the unsuspecting predator...The life cycle goes on



Another atmospheric view of the Danum river and its forest- and mist-cloaked banks. Center, a tiny Intermediate Sticky frog *Kalophrynus intermedius* - less than 3 cms long - is guarding its clutch of eggs, laid in a tree buttress cavity filled with rainwater. Right, a hazy sun and stormy sky are reflected in a rain puddle on the forest floor.





■ Hanging from a leaf by a forest trail, a colorful Tiger leech *Haemadipsa picta* wait for its prey to pass by. If needed, leeches can survive on one single feeding a year. Above, a giant scorpion *Heterometrus spinifer*, a large, nocturnal predator of the forest floor.

The nearest town, Lahad Datu – a quiet, smallish provincial settlement situated at the crossroads between Sandakan and Tawau and which can be easily reached by car or twin-engine turboprop flight from both centers - is about 82 kms away (about two hours' journey by four-wheel drive vehicles on corduroy, unpaved roads in good weather, which may become a much longer, Camel Trophy-style slog in deep mud if it has been raining). Given its formidable isolation and impenetrable rainforest cover, accomodation in the area is presently

limited to two basic choices: the Danum Valley Field Centre is a research establishment reserved for scientists and education purposes only, while the rather splendid (and understandably quite expensive) Borneo Rainforest Lodge has been created - with conservation and low-environmental impact in mind - for tourists to stay. From its beautiful, well-appointed bungalows visitors can take long, guided walks through lowland rainforest trails and on long, well-maintained suspended canopy walkways.

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Comfortable, roomy and unobtrusive, the Borneo Rainforest Lodge chalets sit on stilts, deep in the forest by the river Danum. The environmental impact of the resort is minimal.



Left, a Lantern bug (probably *Pyrops* sp., family Fulgoridae) perches on a tree trunk, while, above, a minuscule Planthopper (fam. Cicadellidae) sits on a leaf. Equally colorful, both species feed on plant saps and are somewhat related to common cicadas.

Other activities include night walks (serious wildlife photographers should not miss these) and night drives (avoid these instead at all costs since the lorries used for the purpose are crowded, noisy and not really suited to the local environment – rainforests are made for walking).

FAUNA AND FLORA WITH FEW EQUALS

The biodiversity shown by the area is absolutely stunning. Danum Valley is a well-known destination for passionate birdwatchers worldwide, but its

undisturbed, virgin and forbidding lowland rainforest environment - structured in a complex, puzzling, endless maze of microhabitats - is home to an enormous number of other animal species, including several large mammals, many beautiful reptiles and amphibians and countless numbers of exceptionally attractive insects.

Mammals regularly sighted in Danum include wild Orangutans, gibbons, leaf monkeys, long-tailed and pig-tail macaques, wild bearded pigs, mouse deer and sambar deer - lucky visitors may also occasionally encounter several species of wild cats (including

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Left, a male Rhinoceros Hornbill *Buceros rhinoceros* - a spectacular and large bird which can weigh 3 kgs and reach a length of 130 cms. A very wary species, it can usually only be photographed from a great distance. Above, the colorful inflorescences of a wild banana, *Musa sp.*

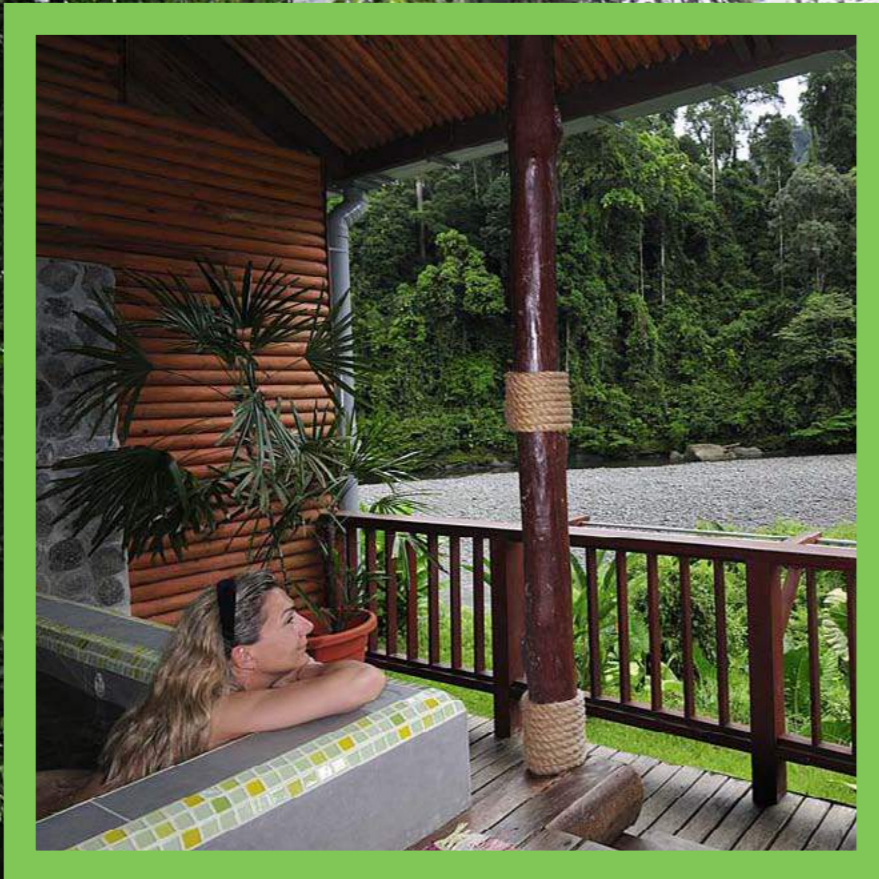
The delicate, abstract curling of a forest leaf —
and a vividly red Dragonfly - belonging
to an unidentified species - perching on a wild
banana leaf by a muddy stream.



the dream date of South-East Asian rainforests, the strikingly beautiful and incredibly elusive Clouded Leopard), Bornean Pygmy elephants - which however are much more easily observed along the Kinabatangan river basin in the Sukau area - and even Malay Sun bears or Sumatran rhinos (the latter, given their scarcity, being exceptionally uncommon). Birds commonly observed along the forest trails or near the Lodge number several species of Hornbills (including Rhinoceros and Helmeted), colorful bee-eaters and kingfishers, warblers, several species of forest raptors and many others, while among the

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Abstract shapes in which function always meets form



Riverfront chalets of the Borneo Rainforest Lodge offer beautiful views of the pebbled banks of Danum river and the surrounding landscape. It is not unusual to sight wild Orangutans and hornbills from the balconies. Acting as a giant sponge - first absorbing water, then releasing it - the valley environment is rich in small rivers, forest streams and scenic waterfalls.



■ Notwithstanding its spectacular rainforest landscapes, Danum offers its best in the details - such as these delicate flowers and the nocturnal sight of a ferocious looking - but harmless - uropygid Whip scorpion or Vinegarroon (family Thelyphonidae).



numerous reptile and amphibian species encountered the impressive Reticulate python, at least two different species of Pit viper, the strikingly marked Paradise snake, the colorful Forest dragon lizard and the splendidly camouflaged Borneo horned frog all deserve to be mentioned. A lot of first-time visitors to rainforests spend most of their time looking in the distance and hoping

for the large animals, but the most interesting and fascinating denizens of this mysteriously beautiful environment are in fact the small, secretive and surprisingly well camouflaged dwellers of the forest floor and canopy: diminutive reptiles, tiny amphibians and most often strange insects and arthropods of all shapes and sizes, which are usually quite hard to spot and which

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Thick foliage offers refuge, concealment and nourishment to an enormous number of widely different species: a large nocturnal unidentified spider (above), a Red leaf monkey *Presbytis rubicunda* (center) and a Harlequin tree frog *Rhacophorus pardalis* (far right) all share heavily forested habitats.





are most easily observed during the guided night walks.

NOTES ON RAINFOREST TREKKING

Long, physically challenging day and night walks doubtlessly offer the best chances to fully appreciate the demanding Danum Valley rainforest environment. Despite the apparent drawbacks and discomforts – waking up at 5am, slogging in the mud for hours on end, being literally drenched in sweat and very often even heavy rainfall, dealing with the occasional but messy leech bite – this is really the only sensible way to enjoy the place and fully savour the wonders it offers.

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■ A Red-sided or Triangle Keelback *Xenochrophis trianguligera*, a harmless colubrid snake, rests half-coiled above a muddy stream. Night walks usually offer the best chances to encounter interesting snakes and amphibians.

A secret world where frogs can fly and birds have horns



Harlequin tree frogs ■
Rhacophorus pardalis are small, very colorful flying tree frogs. They are able to glide for short distances - using their widely webbed toes - when jumping from an elevated perch to escape predators.



■ A dazzling variety of life forms inhabits the primeval rainforest of Danum Valley. Colorful, common examples are the tiny Orange cup mushrooms (left), several species of minuscule but often quite showy Salticid Jumping spiders (a specimen is guarding its egg clutch laid on the lower face of a leaf, bottom) and the striking, ubiquitous Borneo Forest Dragon or Anglehead lizard *Gonocephalus borneensis* (a female on its tree perch, right). The latter are very territorial and can be approached quite closely if one moves slowly, cautiously and avoiding unnecessary vibration. All individuals share a common reticulated pattern, but color variations - depending on age, sex and mood - can be delightfully dramatic.



Complex and relatively unexplored environments such as that of the rainforest can offer unexpected, surprising and occasionally puzzling observations. This strange object is in fact the woody, grapefruit-sized seed capsule of a large tree, now lying - already rotting and colonized by fungi - on the damp forest floor.



Passionate photographers and seriously interested visitors should book the services of an experienced private guide from the [Borneo Rainforest Lodge](#) - as usual this will make the experience completely different - and wear lightweight cotton clothes with long trousers, long thick socks to tuck them into, and long-sleeved shirts.

Surprising shapes wait in the forest at every step

Be aware that you will be drenched most of time - in your own sweat and/or downpours - so it makes no sense trying to keep dry at all costs wearing nylon ponchos or raincoats, which also rapidly become unbearably stifling in the heat.

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■ Rainforest environments - and Danum's in particular - are the empire of the weird, the colorful and the grotesque. Clockwise: a technicolored grasshopper, a beautifully patterned Lynx spider, the monstrously large and ferociously spiked Jungle nymph or Giant spiny Stick insect *Heteropteryx dilatata* (one of the world's largest insects) and a Keith Haring-esque "dance of the nymphs" - in fact a group of minute, brightly colored, newly-hatched Shield bugs, literally holding hands by their now empty egg capsules.

A pair of good hiking rubber-soled ankle boots will prove invaluable in such an hostile environment - synthetic, breathable fabrics are strongly recommended, since footwear will be constantly and thoroughly soaked: natural materials such as leather and canvas would rapidly rot or mould, often in the course of a single night, with fascinating but, predictably

uncomfortable effects in the morning. A sun hat and a rainproof torch will be important items to take along too. Since we are on the subject, do not let the local all-pervasive obsession and paranoia about leeches scare you - these fascinating, small rubbery creatures (which can survive with a single feeding a year if needed) are completely harmless and do not transmit any diseases.

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The stunning rainforest landscape, wreathed in the morning mists. Here Dipterocarp Shorea and Koompassia trees can be over 70 meters tall.



More striking samples from Danum's weird and wonderful universe of insects. Left, a large leaf-mimicking grasshopper; below, a tiny - less than 1 inch or 2 cms long - Bark mantis, a very well camouflaged and active predator exclusively found on tree trunks and branches. Right, an extreme close-up of another unidentified grasshopper.





If you get bitten by one you will feel no pain - maybe just a little itching later on - but you will certainly bleed freely and massively for quite a few hours, as their saliva contains both an efficient anesthetic and a powerful anticoagulant. The blood's staining and apparently unstoppable trickling can look very scary to the uninitiated, but it's no big deal really – after a long tiring day's trekking in the rainforest you would have to thoroughly wash yourself and your soiled clothes anyway!

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Adult male Borneo Angleheads *Gonocephalus borneensis* (left) display a very distinctive, well-developed nuchal and dorsal crest. Giant crab spiders *Heteropoda* sp. (right) are commonly observed on large tree trunks. Far right, the unfurling of a new leaf.





One of the world's largest beetles, and in proportion possibly the world's strongest living creature, the Borneo Rhinoceros beetle *Chalcosoma moellenkampi* feeds on fruit and rotting vegetable matter.



■ A wolf spider (left) sits in patient ambush on the underside of a leaf, making good use of its superlative camouflage. Blooming flowers instead gaudily advertise their presence in the gloom of the rainforest floor, using strong colors and strange shapes to attract pollinators. Notice the brightly colored and minute bug on the stem!



At night, a pair of Jade Tree Frog *Rhacophorus dulitensis* (the male is on top) embrace and mate under a downpour. In a few seconds they will be laying and fertilizing eggs in a foam nest whipped up by the female. Far right, a beautiful cicada has just molted, leaving behind her empty shell.

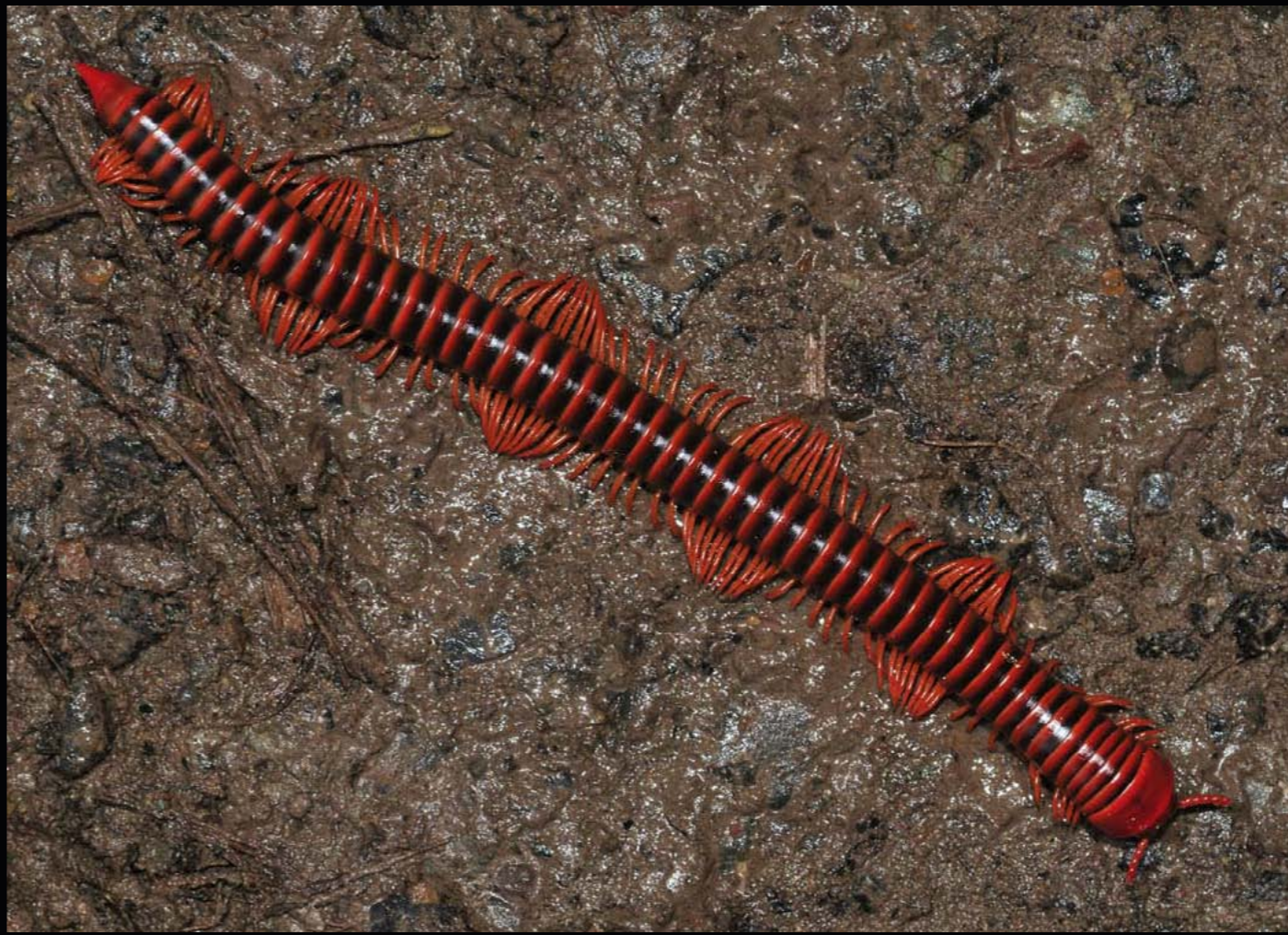


On the good side, Danum Valley is almost completely (and rather surprisingly) mosquito-free, and that is really important since most serious tropical diseases - such as malaria or dengue - are transmitted via the bite of these obnoxious little winged pests.

A UNIQUELY IMPRESSIVE ENVIRONMENT

Despite our lifelong experience in rainforests exploration and photography worldwide, we could not help being deeply impressed and in fact even awed by the beauty, richness and sheer

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Still more fascinating creatures from the stifling, wet nights of Danum's rainforest. Clockwise, a tiny unidentified toad, a garishly-hued millipede, a nightmarish portrait in extreme close-up of a large Giant Crab spider *Heteropoda* sp., and finally a large Wolf (or possibly Huntsman) spider female carrying her egg-sack in her pedipalps. Many impressive spider species are well represented in the area, often making excellent photographic subjects.





Red leaf monkey *Presbytis rubicunda* (left) come in fact in a variety of hues - from pale grey to honey to Titian red - and can be occasionally observed in the very early morning, just before dawn. Like most arboreal primates, they live in well-structured groups and are generally very shy - this, plus their choice of habitats and the very low light levels of the forest canopy, makes photographing them a rather difficult proposition. Right, a curiously X-Files-ish climbing root slowly and implacably applies its strangling grip on the tree host. Notice how wet the bark is - Danum's air is literally dripping with moisture.

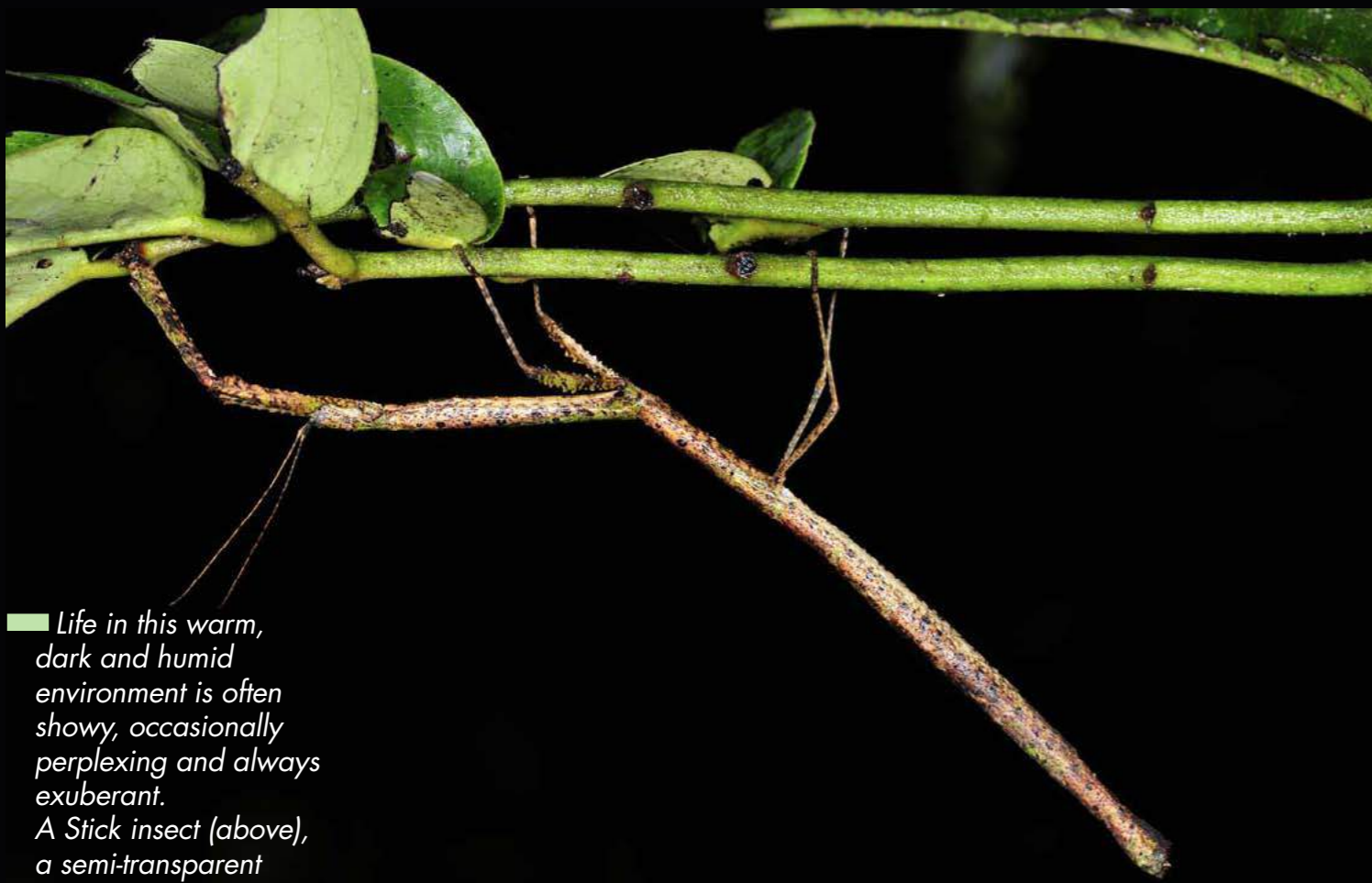




■ A female Green crested lizard *Bronchocela cristatella* pauses briefly on a wooden handrail at the Borneo Rainforest Lodge, while a newly-molted cicada (above) is leaving its empty shell on the tree trunk it climbed, and is now hardening its exoskeleton and stiffening its wings.

Plant species of Danum come in a dazzling variety of colors, shapes and sizes - from fungi growing out of rotting wood (below) to wild orchids in bloom (center) and gigantic Dipterocarp trees standing on serpentine buttress roots (far right). The latter is an adaptation to shallow soil, characteristic of rainforests.





Life in this warm, dark and humid environment is often showy, occasionally perplexing and always exuberant. A Stick insect (above), a semi-transparent newborn Praying mantis (below) and a wild ginger in bloom emerging from the forest litter (right) all bear witness to the many different survival strategies adopted by rainforest species.



isolation of Danum Valley. This is a virgin, primordial, occasionally demanding environment of steaming lush vegetation and glutinous ankle-deep mud, of steep ravines and quietly murmuring clear forest brooks, of gigantic buttress roots and coiled, climbing lianas, pervasively bathed in oppressive heat and humidity.

Shockingly violent downpours are sudden and frequent, and even when bathed in searing sunshine the whole environment is perennially immersed in a prehistoric, Jurassic-like atmosphere. Animal sightings are surprisingly frequent and close despite this being a rainforest habitat, and photographic opportunities for professionals and

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Successful survival strategies to feed and reproduce





serious amateurs are simply endless. We have spent a whole week at the Borneo Rainforest Lodge, and despite going daily on long, arduous treks we feel we have barely scratched the surface - every few steps along the forest trails a new fascinating subject would be sighted, and during night walks lasting over three hours it would not be uncommon for us to cover only a few hundred meters due to the number of subjects encountered. Thanks to its own very specific nature, the Danum Valley environment offers a unique chance to the careful observer - the possibility not only to encounter otherwise shy rainforest species, but also to pause at length and leisure and watch them actually feed, hunt and mate. This is a rare and precious gift, and the untouched wilderness of Danum Valley offers it generously to those willing to listen to the sounds of the rainforest and put their eyesight to good use. ●



■ A juvenile Bornean Horned Frog *Megophrys nasuta* offers an amazing example of its leaf-mimicking camouflage as it sits undetected among the forest litter.



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Now you see him, now you don't: a big Tasselled wobbegong *Eucrossorhinos dasypogon* lies in ambush among the corals of West Papua's Raja Ampat reefs. Notice the fleshy frills around its mouth - the "tassels" which give this species its common name.

CELEBRATING WEST PAPUAN CARPET SHARKS

THE WOBBERGONGS OF RAJA AMPAT

Beautifully adapted to an ambush predator existence, Wobbegongs rely on their exquisitely cryptic coloration to avoid detection and catch their prey by surprise

TEXT BY ANDREA FERRARI
PHOTOS BY ANDREA & ANTONELLA FERRARI

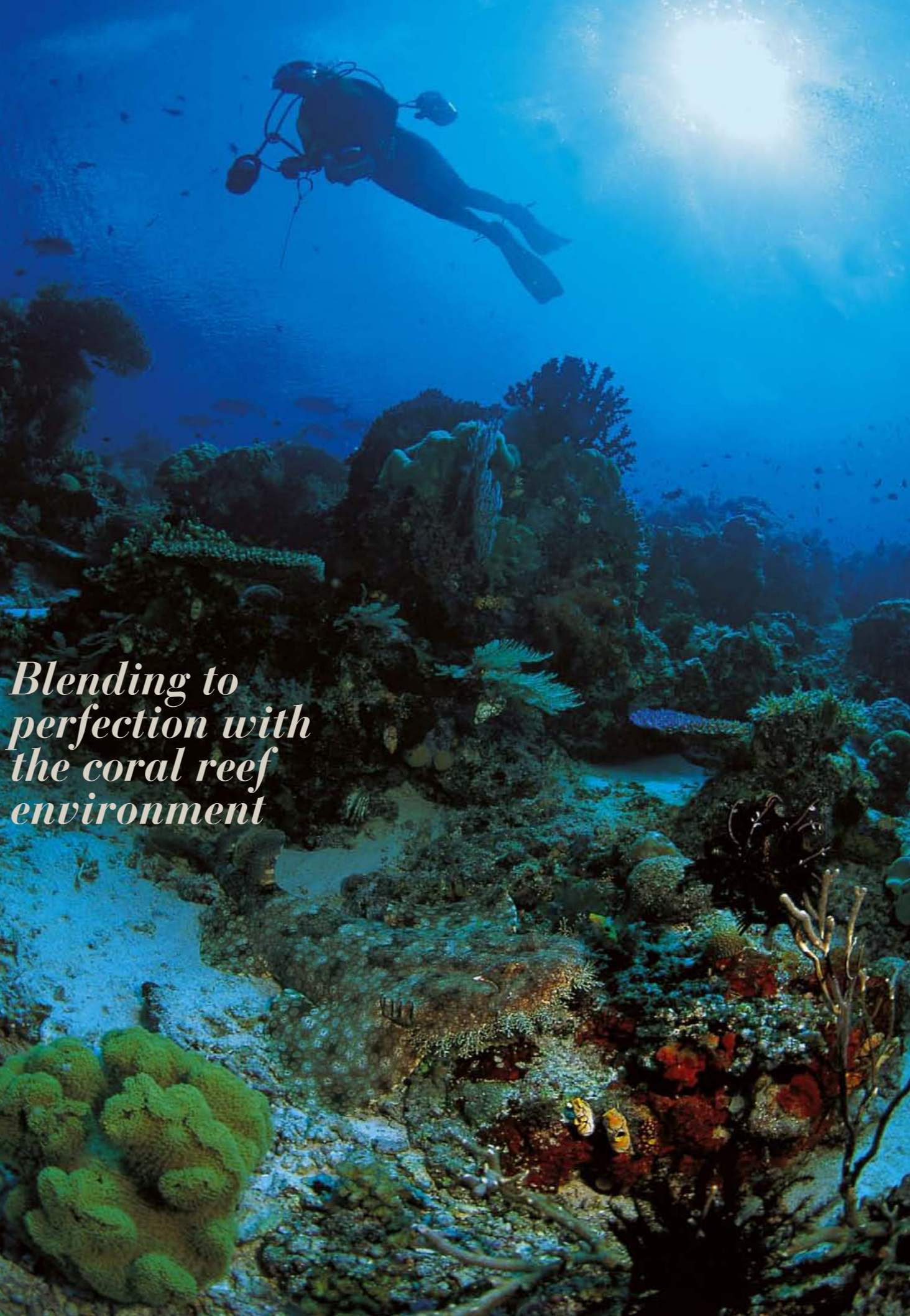
*W*obbegongs - also commonly known as Carpet sharks due to their velvety and highly ornamented livery - are currently grouped into three genera and eleven species. All are found in the Western Indo-Pacific, mostly in shallow Australian and Indonesian waters: their common name derives from the Australian aboriginal language, meaning "shaggy beard" and referring to the flaps

and tassels growing around their wide mouths. The specimens featured in these pages were all photographed during several separate dives in the Raja Ampat area (an archipelago of four large islands and several islets located in front of the Vogelskop peninsula), and are easily identified as Tasselled wobbegongs *Eucrossorhinos dasypogon*, a species frequently observed in West Papuan

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Unlike free-swimming sharks, Wobbegongs are able to breathe while lying still thanks to the presence of the spiracle - a modified gill slit found behind the eye - which actively pumps in oxygenated water.





Blending to perfection with the coral reef environment

Two good examples of the Tasseled wobbegongs' extraordinary camouflage, an evolutionary adaptation which allows these benthic predators to blend perfectly with their reef environment. Notice in the far left image the presence of two bright white "false eye" spots behind the real ones, evolved to avoid bites and nips by other predators, noticeably triggerfish.

waters, where it reaches a maximum size of 1,30 meters (the largest species of Carpet shark, the Spotted wobbegong *Orectolobus maculatus*, is found in Western Australia, where it grows up to an imposing 3.2 meters). Only one of these - clearly identified in the caption of this page - is a very rare and apparently still undescribed Indonesian species which we have photographed in Bali.

Most Carpet sharks are rather small, but in fact they belong to the same order - the Orectolobiformes - of the Whale shark *Rynchodon typus*, the biggest living fish in the world.

Their muscular body wide and flat, finely patterned in yellowish and pale blue-grey spots, bands and rosettes neatly arranged on a light tan background,

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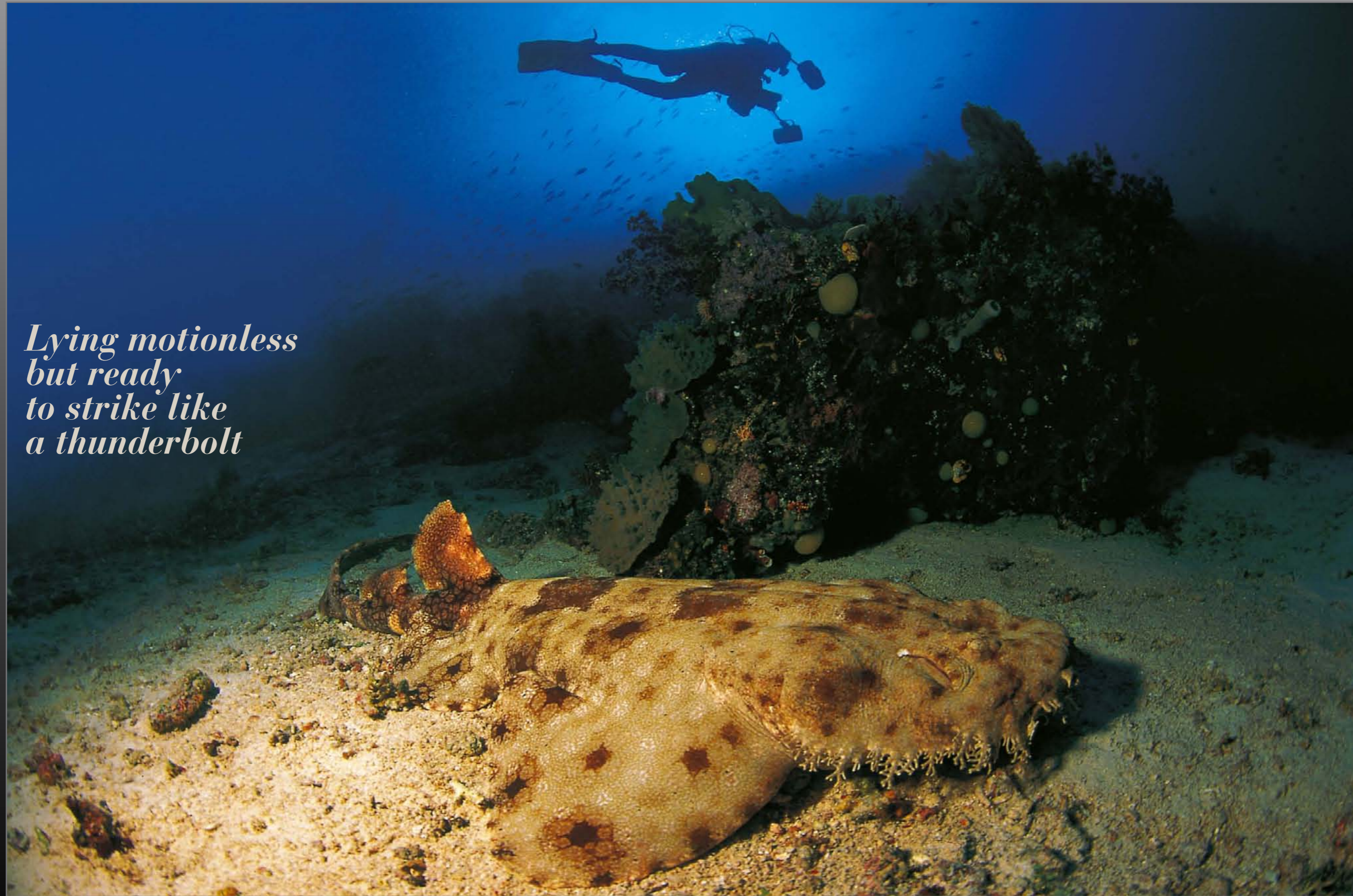
A very rare fish indeed - this is the only known photo of a yet undescribed Indonesian Wobbegong species we photographed while diving in Bali's freezing waters off Nusa Penida, where it shared a small cave with a large Moray. It might be present in Raja Ampat too. Notice the differences in pattern and coloration and the sparse, reduced tassels by the mouth.

ANIMA MUNDI ON YouTube

WOBBERGONGS OF RAJA AMPAT




*Lying motionless
but ready
to strike like
a thunderbolt*



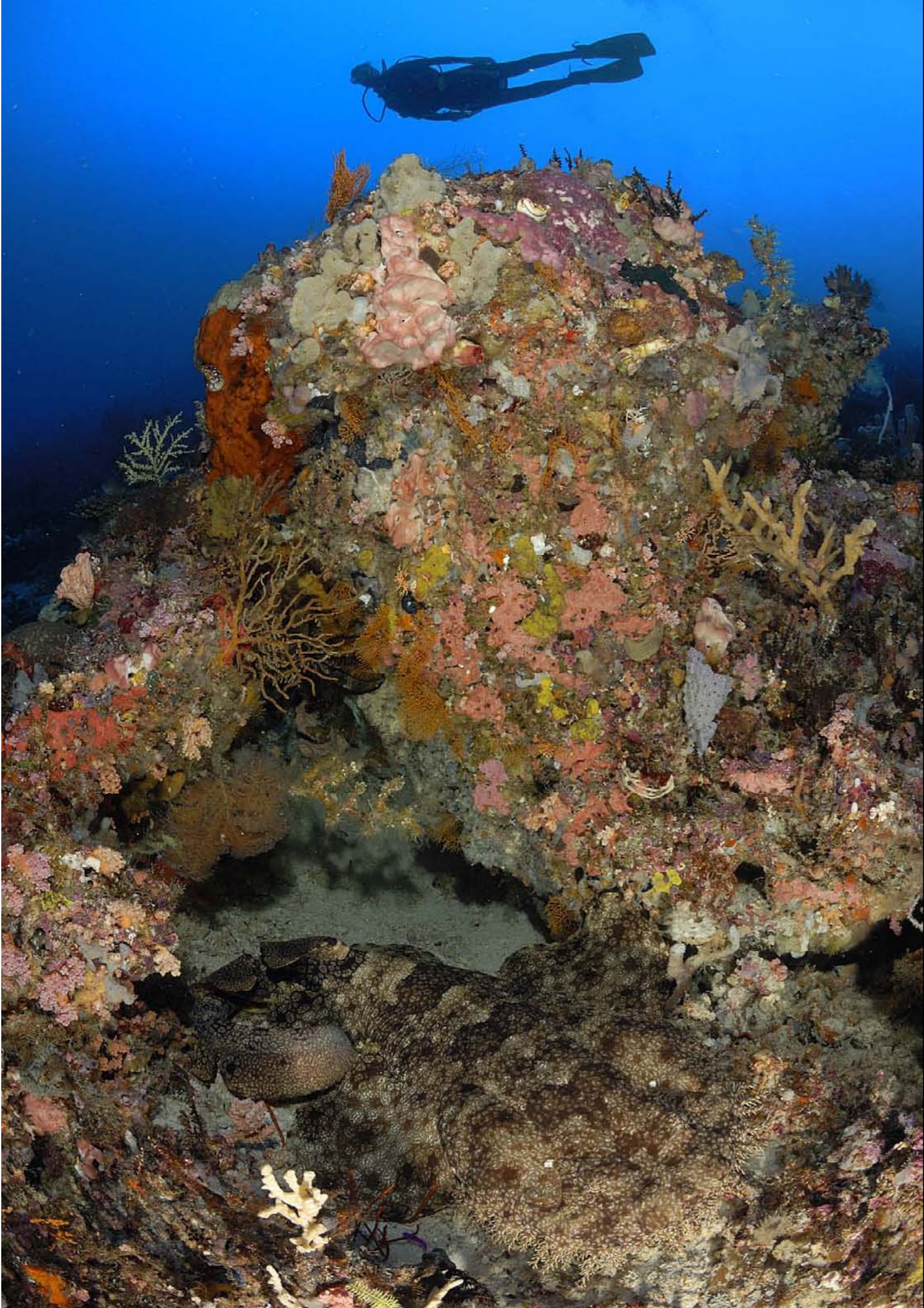
Swimming against a strong current, Antonella carefully manouvers herself in a good position while Andrea inches his way forward, until the camera's fish-eye dome actually brushes against the Tasselled wobbegong's right pectoral fin. When dealing with Carpet sharks as camera subjects, slow movements and a good understanding of the shark's body language are imperative.

Antonella poses by a good-sized adult Tasselled wobbegong, found under a coral overhang it shares with a school of Golden sweepers. The robust build and flattish, unusual appearance of this species are quite apparent. One has to imagine Sweepers benefit from the presence of the shark in their lair - a good deterrent to other predators even if, presumably, it will occasionally gulp down a few of them.

Wobbegongs are a true wonder of nature to behold as they lie motionless in ambush on large table corals – a far cry from the popular image of the shark as a torpedo-like, steel-grey, sleek predator patrolling the blue void of the open ocean. Their incredibly wide, highly compressed head and mouth profile broken by an array of dermal flaps and tassels, their small, beady and slightly malevolent eyes cleverly hidden in a confusing maze of reticulations, their broad, paddle-like pectoral fins widely spread out and their dark, ribbon-like tail curved at a sharp angle, Tasselled wobbegongs are almost impossible to detect in the layered, highly structured environment of West Papuan coral reefs - despite sitting out in the open and in full sunlight most of the times, as if brashly defying divers and prey alike to find them out. Their apparently peaceful,

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A macro close-up image of the tassels surrounding the Wobbegong's mouth reveals all the details - their branched appearance and the dermal denticles covering the skin. All sharks are in fact literally covered with teeth. Far left, a Tasselled wobbegong lies in patient ambush among the corals - notice once more its perfect camouflage.

A splendidly camouflaged sit-and-wait reef predator

even torpid attitude - as it usually happens in nature - can be mortally deceptive however, as when needed they will also unexpectedly explode into action and strike with lightning speed at fish passing within reach of their cavernous mouth, usually gulping prey down in a matter of seconds. Territorial and sedentary, Carpet sharks make wonderful and obliging subjects - careful divers moving slowly and

cautiously can actually approach them within inches - but one must never forget these are perfectly adapted and highly evolved sit-and-wait ambush predators after all, gifted with an exceptionally big mouth displaying a formidable array of sharp teeth (including a set of frontal snake-like curved fangs to get a better grip on their slippery prey) and a supple, muscular, highly flexible body (Wobbegongs can easily bend over and

continued on page 94 ➤

Tasselled wobbegongs show a marked - if somewhat understated - capability to alter at will the intensity of their coloration. This specimen - lying on white sand - has opted for a much lighter tone of its livery than it would adopt among hard corals.





Disruptive patterns to vanish on the sea floor



A macro close-up of the dorsal dermal denticles and two wide-angle shots of Wobbegongs in their habitat clearly show the amazing degree of camouflage this species can attain. This is a brilliant example of somatolitic (ie shape-breaking or disruptive) pattern and coloration. Notice how the color intensity of the brown patches varies between the two specimens illustrated, clearly depending on the substrate of choice.

Lying flat on a large table coral, a Tasseled wobbegong draws a puzzling, enchanting picture of animal abstraction. Notice how the mouth frills, the broad pectoral fins and the differently patterned and hued tail of the animal efficiently break its shape. This specimen has just "switched off" its bright white "false eye" spots.



Claudia Pellarini/bittenbysharks.com



More extreme close-ups show the fang-like front teeth and the slit-like spiracle opening just behind the eye, which allows breathing when the shark lies still. Notice once again the rough, sharp skin texture - dermal denticles optimize water flow when swimming and form a hard, flexible coat of armor which protects sharks from abrasions and bites.



bite their own tail, so don't pull it): reluctant to move if not unduly disturbed and relying on their spectacular camouflage to avoid detection instead, they are also well known to have inflicted serious bites on waders and snorkellers who stepped on them in coastal waters. Like most ambush predators (one only has to think of several arboreal snakes to remark the striking similarities), Wobbegongs not only have fearsome front fangs, but also show a worrying tendency to hold tight with pitbull-like tenacity once they have bitten, so one has to be very careful in dealing with them as camera subjects. Divers also have to remember, as with most other large fish, never to block their escape route when one is found in a cave or under a coral overhang -

however small, a shark intent on leaving its lair in a hurry will not hesitate to trash violently and strike blindly at anything obstructing its way. Regularly sighted on the colorful, overwhelmingly rich coral reefs of Indonesia's easternmost province, the Tasselled wobbegongs of West Papua are a source of endless wonder and amazement to divers. Stunning examples of the science of camouflage in its most evolved form, superbly adapted at their sun-dappled shallow water habitat, they lie still on flat table corals like some exquisite work of abstract art, the weird and wonderful creation of an underwater inside decorator gone slightly mad: marvelous icons of nature's whimsy and a wildlife photographer's dream. ●

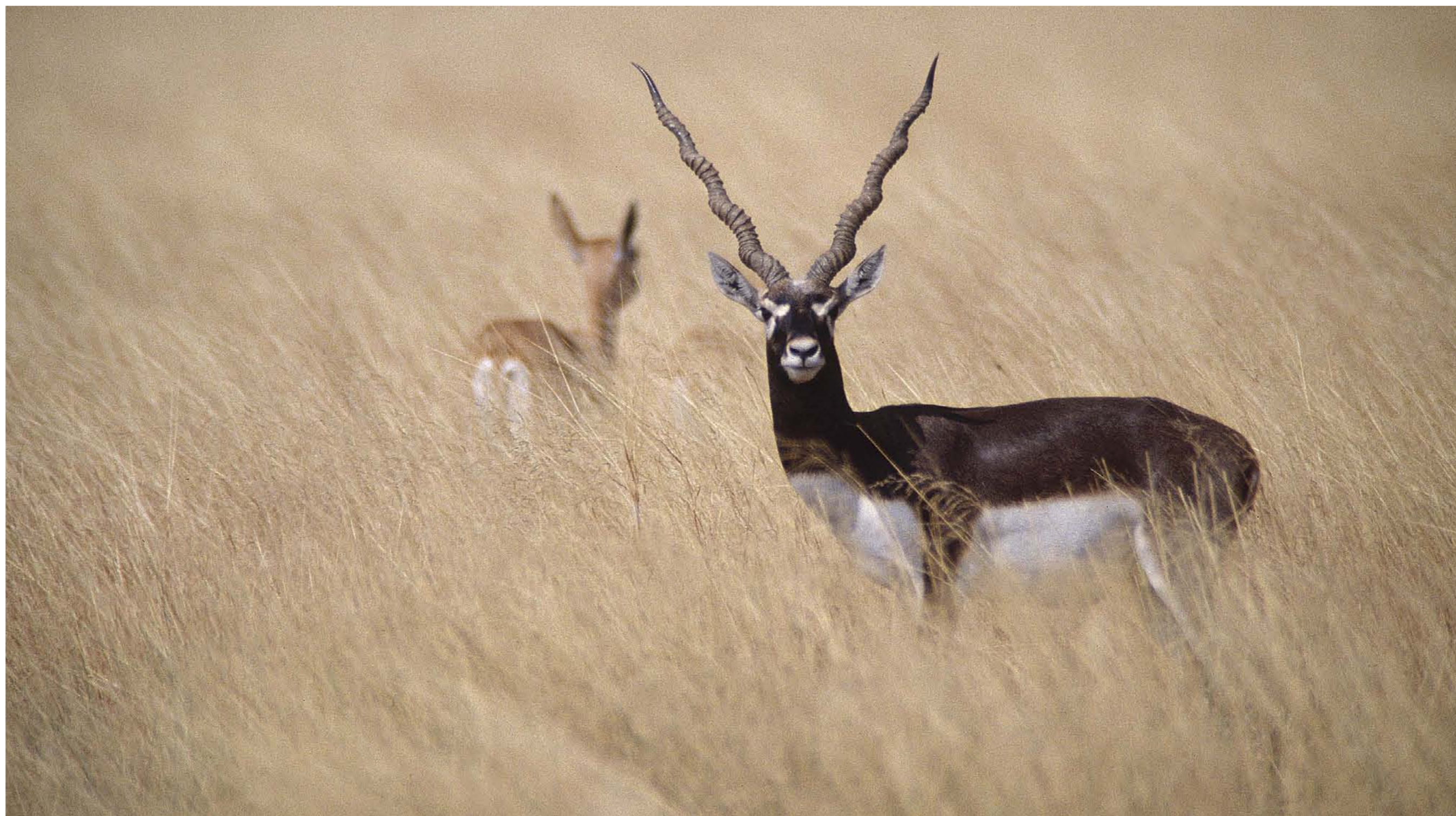
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The Parting Shot

Many (probably too many) years ago we spent several months travelling all over the country and nation of India, tirelessly working on a big illustrated volume about that subcontinent's beautiful National Parks. The book – alas – never materialized. All is left now of those often demanding trips are so many wonderful memories of enchanting India and several thousands

grainy Fujichrome slides, now slowly fading to oblivion as time passes. Of the many good shots we took in the course of our trips there, we are particularly fond of this one – a serene image of a timid and peaceful creature, the Indian Blackbuck, emerging for a few precious seconds from the ocean of scorched dry grass it calls home, the Velavadar Blackbuck National

Park in the remote State of Gujarat. Back then, getting there was a real adventure, and nothing was granted. But we can still hear the sound of silence and feel the searing hot wind in our faces whenever we look at this stunning adult male, which paused and turned briefly, just long enough to meet our gaze, before gracefully vanishing in the sea of grass again. ●

IN ANIMA MUNDI 'S NEXT ISSUE No.2, Second Quarter, April 2011



SECRET REALM OF THE DRAGON SNAKE
Extreme trekking searching for rare reptiles in Malaysia's Cameron Highlands



IN THE HALLS OF THE BISON KING
Walk with us in the primordial forest of Poland's Bialowieza National Park



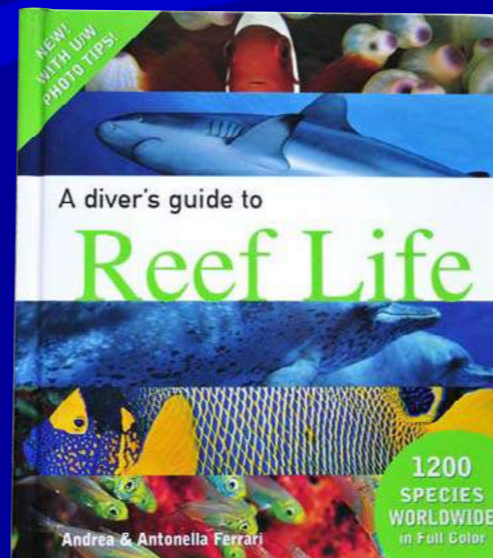
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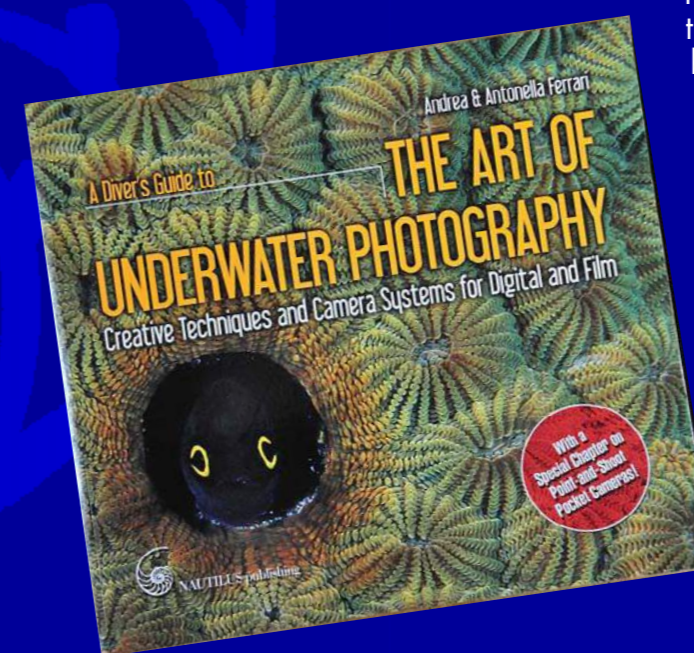
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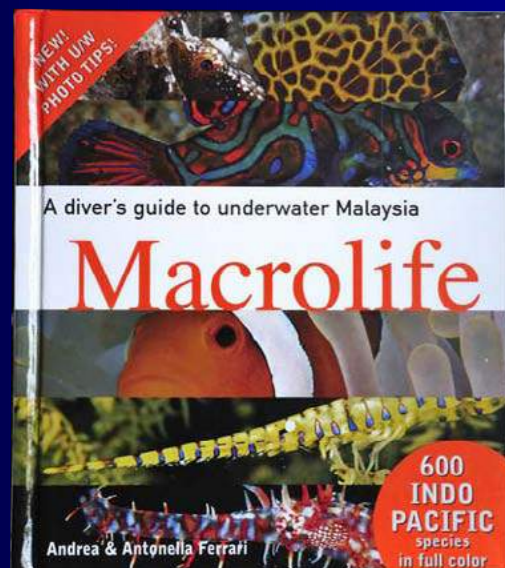
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