



ANIMA MUNDI

Adventures in Wildlife Photography

Issue 3, Year 1 - 3rd Quarter, July 2011

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THE TWILIGHT ZONE Diving in Northern Sulawesi's Lembeh Strait

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STING OF THE SCORPION A new flash bracket for macro

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WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD

What a wonderful world indeed, as Louis "Satchmo" Armstrong used to sing a long, long time ago! Despite man's incessant tampering with nature, despite colonization, overpopulation, deforestation, pollution, the depleting of natural resources and general disregard of the human race towards the planet hosting it, there are still many beautiful, peaceful, wild places left on Earth. And here we are, with issue 3 of our free quarterly online magazine, to show them to you once more.

In this issue we start with an exhaustive look at Selva Verde Nature Reserve in Costa Rica – a relatively small private property with a very interesting history which is also a treasure trove for wildlife photographers and for nature lovers worldwide. Selva Verde shines as a textbook example of what the vision and stubbornness of a few - in this case one - individuals can do to protect and preserve a fragment of our wild world for all of us to enjoy. Kudos to Giovanna Holbrook, the indefatigable lady who fell in love with this stretch of untouched tropical forest and devoted her life to its preservation against all odds! So come with us and discover toucans and trogons, basilisks and iguanas, sloths and howler monkeys, caimans and crocodiles in a stunningly beautiful voyage across Costa Rica's wild and well-protected environment - in fact, our exploration of Selva Verde Nature Reserve, our "Trip to Wonderland", was such a pleasant and fruitful one that we decided at the last minute to split our trip report in two parts, so don't miss Part Two in our next issue.

After the sweltering heat of the Central American lowland rainforest, our second feature of this issue will provide some welcome cooling off with a dive trip to Indonesia - our destination, the fabled (and murky) Strait of Lembeh in Northern Sulawesi, muck diving Grand Central and the undisputed realm of some of the underwater world's most bizarre and fascinating creatures. A far cry from the unspoilt wilderness of Selva Verde, the Strait of Lembeh is littered with man-made garbage and it is a generally rather oppressive environment, but it also shows to a tee how cleverly and readily some species will adapt to a very

specific and rather unique habitat. Be prepared – there's some very weird stuff in there, and we bet you'll be discovering some quite strange creatures new to you in our article...

The icing on this issue's cake comes with the personal portfolio by Matteo Di Nicola, a very young and gifted nature and wildlife photographer who shows us beyond any doubt how wild beauty and stunning subjects can be found even in one's backyard - in this case Italy, a heavily developed and industrialized Country which doesn't readily come to mind when one talks about unspoilt nature and wildlife images. And yet - see for yourself! And there's more: with a detailed feature on a very interesting flash bracket which is ideally suited for macro work we also have the first of our Field Equipment and Techniques articles.

So we truly believe ours is a wonderful world indeed, as we repeat to all those who ask "But why are you doing this?". Well, many seem to find this difficult to believe, but we put together every single issue of ANIMA MUNDI – *Adventures in Wildlife Photography* with the same passion and enthusiasm we put in our nature voyages and expeditions - we lovingly handcraft our magazine (take a look at our staff column - there's very few of us!) because we love to do it and we like to share with others everywhere what we know and what we have seen. This is why ANIMA MUNDI is free for anybody, anywhere in the world, to download and enjoy, to save and share, and this is why it will stay so in the future. We explain it all in the interview we recently gave to the Hoopoe, NHBS's influential and much respected blog. And to those who look at us in disbelief and shake their head when we reply to the other question, "But how do you make money out of it?", the answer is equally simple and straightforward – we don't. We don't make a penny out of it and we work for free, because that's what we like. It's a wonderful world, remember?

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



TO TRAVEL IS TO LEARN.

When Giovanna Holbrook took on the challenge of leading two University of Florida science professors and a group of naturalists to the Galápagos Islands in 1971, she had no way of knowing the lasting impact that experience would have on her life and on the lives of those traveling with her. The group journeyed throughout the archipelago aboard a retired navy vessel, propelled by their spirit of adventure and thirst for knowledge. At that time, the Galápagos was just celebrating its twelfth year as a national park, conservation work at the Charles Darwin Research Station was still in its infancy, and tourism in the islands was virtually non-existent.

More than thirty years later, Holbrook Travel continues to serve the needs of teachers, students, academic institutions, and nature lovers. Although many changes have taken place over the years, Holbrook Travel has taken great care to remain true to its roots. As news of environmental concerns and world conflicts continue to fill the airwaves, it seems more important than ever to help people gain a better understanding and appreciation of the natural world and other cultures through firsthand experiences. In the words of Andrea Holbrook, president: “Our goal is to try to continue the great work my mother started.”

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Please drop us a line at nautilus@reefwonders.net

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*A Chestnut-mandibled Toucan
Ramphastos swainsonii emerges from its
nest cavity, a fruit in its beak for its progeny
inside. This is a typical species of Selva
Verde Nature Reserve in Costa Rica.*

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THE PARTING SHOT

Dear Anima Mundi Reader,

This month we are focusing on a review of the Stealth Gear One Man Chair Hide by TV naturalist Nick Baker.

This is one of our favourite products at NHBS - we think it's the perfect value-for-money answer for wildlife photographers who want to keep hidden and dry while waiting for that perfect shot!

We look forward to seeing you at www.nhbs.com

The NHBS team

"If, like me, you've spent time trying to conceal yourself from your wildlife subjects, then doubtless you will have found yourself wrestling with scrim, and swearing and cursing as it gets caught on tripods, zippers and Velcro. The other extreme - and until now the only solution - would be to buy a 'blind' - a wildlife hide with many of the complexities associated with putting up a tent - a puzzle of poles and guy ropes. As well as often confounding the wildlife watcher/photographer, the whole set-up was both expensive and heavy. I've been aware of these Stealth Gear hides for a year or so now and judging by the high demand, they seem to have caught on - and for good reasons. It's a robust camping chair design with a fan of hoops that unfurl from behind and over the seat. This in turn drags with it the polyester fabric of the hide itself.



The hide comes with a bag of ground pegs, also in a Camo-Tree design. Come on guys, you put the bag down in the long grass because you are in a rush to set up, and of course the wind starts to blow and where are your pegs to secure the thing to the ground as it fills up like a balloon and its skirts start to ruffle uncontrollably in the breeze? In a camouflage bag! Which is where? Somewhere in the long grass, doing its best to be not to be seen... I've attached a piece of orange baler twine now I've recovered it, so hopefully this won't happen again. Slight niggles: stitching holes let through pinpricks of daylight, and water does come spattering through in a torrential downpour. Leaving the hide is difficult - keeping your set-up and not totally blowing your cover requires agility and contortional abilities that are beyond most naturalists over 40! But having said that, all these problems can be applied to all but the most expensive hides and blinds I've used, so on balance I think this hide is great value for money. (Note: if you have children and are fed up with the gaudy primary coloured plastic wendy house that jars with your aesthetic sensibilities then there is a hidden bonus to this hide - 4 year olds love them! And being made of camouflage material, you can sit it in the corner near the shrubbery and barely notice it's there. It kept my daughter occupied for hours!)"

Nick Baker reviews the Stealth Gear One Man Chair Hide

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There is a little mesh pocket on one of the arms for your beer, which also can function as a lens holder - pity it doesn't have two of them! The whole caboodle comes in a Camo-Tree design (photo-realistic leaves and bark, and woodland scenes) which in my experience works, pretty much anywhere, to break up the outline of the unit - and, almost as importantly, hides the contraption and the watcher from the unwanted attentions of his own species! I found it best to sit in the chair with my gear in front of me and simply flip the hide over my head. Once inside it can be a little fiddly, and your personal organisation is tested a little, but so it is in any blind. If you have big elbows, lots of gear, a mate or intend to be waiting a long while, consider the two-seat option, otherwise you might find it a little too cosy for comfort. But the one-man works very well for me. There are five apertures through which you can peer or shove a telephoto lens, all of which can be opened or closed easily with Velcro attachments, either opening them fully or leaving a printed mesh panel in place which enables the hide user to see out, while nothing can see in. The five windows are adequate enough, but you can't see behind - which would on occasion be useful. That said, it would be a bit challenging to turn around even if there were a rear-facing window, especially with a hide full of gear. If full, all-round vision is what you require then this is available in the two-seat version.

Stealth Gear Chair Hides

For all your outdoor photography adventures, NHBS stock a wide selection of top quality hides, and other accessories. [Click here to see our range of the best camouflage gear.](#)



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■ The Red-eyed Tree Frog *Agalychnis callidryas* is one of Costa Rica's most iconic species. This one is in its darker green, nocturnal livery.



COSTA RICA'S SELVA VERDE NATURE RESERVE

WELCOME TO WONDERLAND

A stretch of carefully preserved Caribbean lowland rainforest proves to be pure heaven for nature lovers and wildlife photographers

TEXT BY ANDREA FERRARI
PHOTOS BY ANDREA & ANTONELLA FERRARI

The suspension bridge we're standing on - a somewhat flimsy looking affair of criss-crossing steel cables and planks spanning the width of the Sarapiquí river at a rather worrying height - swings and bounces like a taut rubber band as we scan the surrounding forest canopy, the first light of dawn creeping on the undulating, endless tree tops with a pale golden sheen. Suddenly, without a word, Antonella grabs my arm and points straight forward. Emerging from the shadows and starkly silhouetted against the pale blue-grey sky, a mother Howler Monkey carrying her baby on her back is gingerly moving towards the end of the branch she's standing on, clearly toying with the idea of crossing across the bridge's width by jumping across

and grabbing the closest branch of the opposite tree. Fascinated, we watch how carefully and gracefully she moves on all fours, at least a hand and a foot always in contact with the branch, using her thick, muscular, prehensile tail as a safety line. A few meters from us, she pauses momentarily, giving us a cursory glance and briefly evaluating the distance separating her from her next objective. She stretches forward, holding to her perch by her feet and tail, reaching for the branch facing her - as the flimsy twig she's holding on gives treacherously way, bending under the combined weight of the female and her child. Horrified, we watch her helplessly as she crashes noisily down, missing the steel cables by a few inches.

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A large Green Iguana (Iguana iguana) displaying its bright breeding colors as it basks on a sandy bank of the Rio Sarapiquí, the region's most important watercourse.

*A living false leaf
patiently waiting among
a million other real ones*

Have they both fallen to their death on the forest floor below? But we needn't worry: Howler Monkeys - out of necessity - learn to be stupendous acrobats very soon, and our mommy breaks her fall a couple of meters below, a good thirty meters above the ground. Unfazed, she climbs back to her starting point - her baby still straddling her back like a miniature furry jockey and apparently enjoying himself immensely - and pauses for several seconds, evaluating the situation, sitting at the tip of a perilously swinging, thin branch. I could swear she's scratching her head in frustration as she's considering the problem facing her. Abruptly, she turns and unceremoniously dumps her baby,

which promptly grabs the branch with everything he's got. We stare incredulously at each other - is she going to cross safely now, unencumbered by the weight of the baby, and abandon her progeny behind? Once again, we are put to shame. The female holds tight to the branch tip with her feet and tail and launches herself through the void with a somewhat purposeful abandon - there, she has grabbed the opposite branch and now she's spanning the void between the two tree canopies! Stretched between the two towering trees, she turns her leonine head, and we can see her dark eyes glinting as she silently looks at the baby behind. Without a moment's hesitation, the

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*A Green Leaf Mantis
Choeradodis rhombicollis
is all but invisible as it
mimics the foliage of the
creepers growing on a
tree trunk. This is one of
Costa Rica's most
fascinating insects, a
stunning example of
highly evolved
camouflage.*

■ An early morning image of Costa Rica's eastern lowland rainforest - a rich, moist environment which hides among its luxuriant vegetation an immense number of species. Selva Verde's forest receives its highest rainfall between May and September, but it remains humid for the rest of the year.





A Red-eyed Tree Frog *Agalychnis callidryas* displays its pale green day coloration and its climbing prowess. This tree-dwelling species can usually only be encountered when it descends from the forest canopy to breed, at the start of the rainy season.

baby rises, stands on all fours - and crosses the chasm on her mother's back, using her a suspension bridge. In less than a couple of seconds, it's done. The baby straddles its mom's back again, the female lets go the old perch, grabbing with all fours (or fives?) the new branch, and they both silently vanish in the canopy again. Ecstatic, Antonella and I look at each other, swinging in unison with rubber legs at the suspension bridge's bouncing, a big smile on our faces, as the roaring chorus of the Howler Monkeys troop heralds a new glorious day in Selva Verde, Costa Rica.

HEAVEN ON EARTH FOR WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHERS

Despite having been to Costa Rica twice in the past, this has been our first "serious" wildlife photography trip to the lovely Central American country, and we have to admit we've been once again deeply impressed - by the friendliness of the people, the quality of the infrastructures, the proficiency of the local naturalist guides and, above all, by the stunning richness, diversity and quantity of its wildlife. *Pura Vida*, as the locals are fond of saying at every possible occasion! Be it incredibly colorful birds, shy forest mammals, dazzling amphibians and reptiles or stunning insects, Costa Rica is bound to leave the discerning visitor totally awed - and with a substantial

amount of very satisfying photographic trophies in the bag. Carefully geared and organized towards the eco-tourism industry (its main source of income at the moment), the country of Costa Rica is blessed with a variety of diverse tropical habitats, environments and biotopes, all of which are easily visited and rapidly reached thanks to the Country's small size. A network of carefully maintained National Parks and Nature Reserves (often privately owned) offers unbeatable wildlife viewing opportunities to visitors: from the nesting sea turtles at the aptly named Tortuguero NP to the stunning Resplendent Quetzals of the Monteverde cloud forest, from the dry deciduous forest of Guanacaste on the Pacific coast to the perennially moist lowland forests of the Caribe, Costa Rica truly is a nature lover's wonderland. During the time of the year chosen for our visit (ie April), the Caribbean rainforest habitat in particular seemed to offer good chances to see and hopefully photograph most of the species we were especially interested in for an extensive *ANIMA MUNDI* article, and our search for a suitable location soon provided us with several interesting options, as the Sarapiquí region (which takes its name from the river crossing it) is dotted with a number of National Parks and Nature Reserves.

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A few examples of the Caribe's extraordinary wildlife, which can easily be observed in several protected areas of Costa Rica's eastern side. Left, a Great Kiskadee Pitangus sulphuratus; right, a Mantled Howler Monkey Alouatta palliata; bottom right, a Chestnut-mandibled Toucan Ramphastos swainsonii; and bottom left, a Green Parrot snake Leptophis ahaetulla.



■ An unidentified cicada-like species, possibly related to Fulgorid planthoppers, displays a curious protuberance on its head. Neotropical forests host an immense number of species, most of which are still unnamed.



Among these, Selva Verde offers, hands-down, the best compromise between a very comfortable and perfectly managed tourist Lodge (with spacious and spotlessly clean accomodation and excellent food) and a surrounding pristine lowland forest habitat, a 500-acre private Nature Reserve crossed by the river Sarapiqui and mostly comprising undisturbed primary forest habitat. Skilled guides from the lodge are permanently available for day and night excursions along the Reserve's immaculately maintained trails (we were lucky to often have with us in the forest our eagle-eyed friend Alejandro Esquivel Gaitàn, who spotted several of the highly camouflaged subjects of the photos gracing these pages), while several interesting trips can be easily organized to other nearby Reserves - notably La Selva Biological Station (a University-founded facility mostly aimed at researchers, which however charges high prices to visitors) and La Tirimbina.

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Strange and mysterious creatures still waiting for a name



A Mantled
Howler Monkey
Alouatta palliata
enjoys its early
morning fruit
breakfast. Notice the
clever use of the
muscular, prehensile
tail - a veritable fifth
limb and a highly
functional adaptation
to an exclusively
arboreal existence.
The dawn chorus of
Howler Monkeys is
truly unmistakable -
and deafening.

■ A leaf-mimicking Praying Mantis waits on a stem for its unwary prey. Tropical mantids often offer some of the most extraordinary examples in the art of disguise.



Comfortable boat trips along the rio Sarapiquí also offer priceless chances to view Collared peccaries, Spectacled caymans and - with some luck - uncommon, highly endangered species such as Neotropical river otters and American crocodiles. Within Selva Verde itself - be it in the garden-like, carefully managed area surrounding the Lodge cottages or inside the Nature Reserve proper across the Sarapiquí - one can expect to easily see most typical Costa Rican lowland rainforest species such as Chestnut-mandibled and Keel-billed toucans, Violaceous, Black-throated and Slaty-tailed trogons, Montezuma

Oropendolas, hummingbirds belonging to several species, parrots, tanagers and Broad-billed motmots among birds, and Kinkajous, Howler monkeys, Two-toed and Three-toed sloths, Tayras, squirrels and armadillos among mammals; Plumed basilisks, ameivas, large Green iguanas, river turtles and several species of snakes are also commonly observed among Costa Rican reptilian species, while Strawberry poison dart frogs, Green and black poison dart frogs and Red-eyed tree frogs are some of the most spectacular, iconic and easily observed amphibians of Selva Verde, especially at the start of the rainy season in April-May.



A dazzling high speed air ballet by the masters of the forest sky



Swooping in a dazzling display of aerobatics and aerial prowess, Montezuma Oropendolas *Psarocolius montezuma* enter and exit their basket-like nests, which hang in colonies from the canopy of the tallest trees available. Nests are built at the tip of single, thin but robust branches, and the birds carefully select only straight-trunked, stand-alone trees on which no creepers or lianas grow.



The forest at dawn, still cloaked in mist and dripping with moisture. Later on in the day, when the sun comes out, the Pale-billed Woodpecker *Campephilus guatemalensis* (far left) will look for grubs in old or rotting trees. Notice how this large bird holds firmly to the trunk by splaying its clawed feet, using its stiff wide tail for extra support.



A scenic vista of the Rio Sarapiquí at its lowest, towards the end of the dry season. With the coming of rain this pebbled stream will rapidly transform itself into an impassable, raging mass of muddy water.



■ An extraordinary sight as a Neotropical River Otter *Lontra longicaudis* emerges briefly from the waters of the Rio Sarapiquí to munch on its fish prey. This is a rare and endangered species.

The Great Green Macaw *Ara ambiguus* is somewhat of a symbolic species for the Sarapiquí region with its imposing size and its greatly endangered status, and pairs can be occasionally heard squawking loudly far away in the forest canopy or sighted at dawn and just before sunset, as they fly high up and in close formation to their feeding grounds, usually fruiting Almendro (*Dipteryx panamensis*) trees. Insects are too numerous to name, but they are represented by several imposing, exceptionally photogenic species - including the Leaf Praying Mantis, Leaf and Cone-headed katydids, *Morpho* and Owl butterflies and the stunning Hercules and Harlequin Longhorn Beetles. Even the huge tarantulas lurking on the tree trunks are big and beautiful here! The layout of the Lodge and its surroundings greatly facilitate the viewing of wildlife, as the property is criss-crossed by a somewhat initially confusing maze of roofed concrete trails - which allow the unexpected luxury of safe, comfortable and perfectly dry walks at night or in the rain.

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■ The fairy-tale, dragon-like looks of the Green Basilisk *Basiliscus plumifrons* belie the peaceful nature of this splendid reptile. This is a fully mature male in its blue-tinged breeding livery.





■ A Bark Mantis (left), a Longhorn Beetle (right), a Ground Anole *Norops humilis* (bottom right) and a Yellow-headed Gecko *Gonatodes albogularis* (bottom left).



*Burning bright among
the forest's shadows,
asking to be seen by all
to avoid being eaten by one*



■ A spectacular Green-and-Black Poison Dart Frog *Dendrobates auratus* advertises its toxicity thanks to its stunning aposematic colors. 4,5 cm long, this is a common species.

Nothing like the real deal in the primary forest, of course – but a welcome extra touch for those who are understandingly unwilling to walk at night, possibly in a torrential rain, in a virgin rainforest where a few seriously dangerous and perfectly camouflaged creatures might actually lurk among the dead leaves. To top it all, the Reserve is within easy reach from the capital, San Jose - just a couple of hours' driving on good paved roads crossing at length the famed Braulio Carrillo National Park, offering stunning scenic vistas along the way. If we had to find a minor fault in Selva Verde, it would have to be just that – its close proximity to civilization and a high traffic road, but that is close to being unavoidable in a small and relatively developed country like Costa Rica, where to find total isolation one would have to stay further south, in the jungles of Corcovado National Park, close to the border with Panama.

THE FASCINATING STORY OF SELVA VERDE

The story of Selva Verde Nature Reserve and Lodge is as fascinating and complex as its own tropical rainforest habitat, and it certainly makes for some good reading. Rather than reiterating what has already been written, we'll quote directly from the [Nature Reserve's website](#):
"Selva Verde exists today because of one woman's desire to make a difference."

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Top left, a Chrysomelidae Tortoise Beetle with its eggs; top right, a Micrathena sp. Two-spined Spider; bottom right, two unidentified Leafhoppers, and bottom left a Red-throated Ant Tanager *Habia fuscicauda*.



— A Brown-throated Three-toed Sloth *Bradypus variegatus* hanging from its perch is hardly visible to the casual observer. Notice the greenish tinge of its fur due to symbiont algal growth.

As a pioneer in the business of ecotourism, Italian-born Giovanna Holbrook traveled the world creating unique adventures for avid naturalists. In 1982, already based in the USA, Giovanna arranged an ornithological field study in Costa Rica for the National Aviary. At the last minute, accommodations for the explorers fell through and they found themselves stranded in the middle of nowhere, without a place to stay. Giovanna raced to Costa Rica to rectify the situation. A full day drive from San Jose, over barely passable dirt roads, found her deep in the canton of Sarapiquí - a place that would forever etch itself upon her heart. During her stay, Giovanna discovered a large tract of old growth forest was up for sale and was ready to fall to the chainsaw. Never one to shy from a challenge, Giovanna bought the property on the spot and embarked on an adventure that continues to this day. Selva Verde's early days were full of excitement. Shortly after purchasing the property, Giovanna discovered squatters staking claim to her land. She enlisted her good friend Dr. Tom Emmel and with the help of a local conservationist, confronted the squatters. After some intense and heated negotiations, a deal was struck. If the squatters agreed to vacate her property, they would be offered jobs once the project was completed.

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■ Another lucky shot as a Neotropical River Otter emerges in a bend of the Rio Sarapiquí to feast on its Tilapia fish prey. Such sightings are extremely rare in Central America today.





Looking like a proverbial bad-omen trio from a cowboy movie, three Black Vultures *Coragyps atratus* scan the forest floor, looking for carrion and small living prey.



Over the next several years, Giovanna continued to travel back and forth between the US and Costa Rica as the dream of Selva Verde began to take shape. Soon the original house was hosting visiting researchers and plans were underway to build additional guest rooms and a dining hall. A quarter of a century later, Selva Verde is a world renowned eco-lodge committed to advancing the practice of sustainable tourism. Selva Verde began with one woman's dream of preserving nearly 500 acres of endangered tropical forest and the multitude of species that call it home. Through her unwavering devotion, Selva Verde is now a premier ecotourism destination, protecting the most accessible rainforest in Costa Rica, and attracting nature

enthusiasts from around the globe". Despite its relatively small size, Selva Verde offers exceptional if not downright ideal viewing opportunities to those interested in the exuberant Central American fauna and flora, with easy and permanent access to large tracts of untouched primary forest and photographer-friendly, more open plots surrounding the Lodge itself. The rainforest surrounding Selva Verde provides habitat for over 300 bird species, 120 species of mammals, 48 amphibian species, 89 reptile species, more than 10,000 species of insects, 330 species of trees and countless plant species. Costa Rica itself, by the way, is home to 5% of the world's known species. As such, it is often the destination of choice for several highly regarded

professional wildlife photographers, who regularly conduct group workshops there. But there is more – let us quote again Selva Verde's informative website: "Thirty years ago, rainforest stretched from Costa Rica's Central Valley to the Atlantic coast. Today this area is a patchwork of small fincas, agricultural plantations, and a handful of rainforest reserves. Selva Verde is one of those reserves - protecting an important remnant of the forests that once blanketed the area. In order to maintain optimal levels of biodiversity within the reserve, Selva Verde is working with local conservation organizations such as the Sarapiquí Conservation Learning Center and the Great Green Macaw Project to create forested pathways between Selva Verde and other preserves in the area.

A four-meter long adult American Crocodile *Crocodylus acutus* warily basks on the river edge, ready to slide into the water at the first disturbance. This is a mostly fish-eating species.



Small but nonetheless somewhat dangerous, a juvenile Hog-nosed Pit Viper *Porthidium nasutum* lies in wait for a passing prey, confiding in its cryptic coloration and pattern. Notice the light-colored tail tip, used as a lure to attract lizards and mice.

Heat sensors silently and implacably scanning the darkness



A close-up of an adult Hog-nosed Pit Viper reveals its characteristic upturned rostral scale and the heat-sensitive loreal pits - placed between the eye and the nostril - which help this crotaline snake in detecting warm-blooded prey at night.



“Two-headed butterflies” (left) refer to a number of species featuring antennae-like streamers on the posterior edge of their wings, evolved to distract a predator’s attention. Fulgorid planthoppers (right) are related to cicadas and are often exceptionally colorful but equally difficult to identify correctly. Both can be easily observed in Selva Verde Nature Reserve.



These pathways, known as biological corridors, will allow rainforest wildlife to migrate more freely and ensure a brighter future for the area's biodiversity. Selva Verde's Rainforest Reserve has been identified as a critical piece of a much larger corridor initiative known as the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor (MBC). The MBC is an international initiative that links critical habitats from southern Mexico to Panama in an effort

to conserve biodiversity and promote sustainable development throughout this ecologically fragile region. Selva Verde sits in the middle of the San Juan - La Selva section of the MBC and provides habitat for one of the corridor's most endangered species - the Great Green Macaw. Less than 200 of these birds can be found in Costa Rica. The macaw's very existence is tied to the Almendro tree - the bird's preferred nesting and food

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Roaring under a torrential rain, the Rio Sarapiquí makes a fittingly dramatic background to a gigantic *Megasoma elephas* Rhino beetle, one of the world's largest, heaviest and strongest insects.





A group of caterpillars (left) display an apparently aposematic (ie warning) coloration, while an unidentified and possibly undescribed lichen katydid (right) proves itself to be an indisputed master of camouflage. Less than 3cm long, this extraordinary species was completely invisible to the naked eye once it stopped moving.



A whole existence which unfolds on the vertical plane, from the lowest branches to the loftiest forest canopies



The Variegated Squirrel *Sciurus variegatoides* is the largest and most colorful of the squirrels found in Costa Rica: with its tail it can reach a length of 60cm.



Colors and shapes from Selva Verde's rainforest: from left, a wild banana *Musa* sp. terminal stem with apical flower and fruits, a *Paullinia* sp. in flower - showing its unnerving eye-like seeds - and a blooming *Heliconia*.

■ The otherworldly appearance of a Cone-headed Katydid Copiphora rhinoceros, a predatory nocturnal grasshopper quite able to inflict painful bites to those careless enough to handle one. It feeds on other insects and even small reptiles and amphibians, which it grabs using its spined forelegs.



source. The wood of the Almendro is also a very desirable building material and has been extensively logged throughout the Sarapiquí. Selva Verde's reserve protects one of the largest Almendro trees in the region and macaws are frequently seen in and around the preserve. Selva Verde is committed to working with local and regional conservation organizations to save Great Green Macaws and the Almendro trees - within our preserve and beyond our boundaries. Protecting the Great Green Macaw's habitat also protects habitat needed by many other rainforest birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and plants - ensuring a future for rainforest biodiversity and for Selva Verde".

The images we have taken in Selva Verde should hopefully speak for themselves, and more (and even more spectacular ones!) will follow in our next issue with the second and final part of our trip report. Until then - start thinking about your next photographic trip to Costa Rica, a wildlife and nature lover's wonderland!

DON'T MISS THE SECOND INSTALLMENT OF OUR SELVA VERDE STORY - COMING IN OCTOBER 2011 ON ISSUE 4 OF ANIMA MUNDI - ADVENTURES IN WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY!



Left, a Saturniid moth caterpillar with highly urticating bristles; right, a male Chestnut-mandibled Toucan *Ramphastos swainsonii* in full display; bottom right, a Strawberry Poison Dart Frog *Oophaga (ex Dendrobates) pumilio*; bottom left, an Olive-backed Euphonia *Euphonia gouldi* feeding on ripe berries. As anywhere else, wildlife photography in Costa Rica requires a degree of patience and some specific knowledge.



— Selva Verde's forest canopy - as most of Costa Rica's rainforests - is alive with scores of spectacular bromeliads, plants thriving on air humidity and rainfall which are host to a multitude of insects, amphibians and small reptiles.





Top left, a male Slaty-tailed Trogon *Trogon massena*; top right, a Montezuma Oropendola *Psarocolius montezuma*; bottom right, a Keel-billed Toucan *Ramphastos sulfuratus*; bottom left, a Blue-gray Tanager *Thraupis episcopus*.



Unfazed by the rain, a pair of Black River Turtles *Rhinoclemmys funerea* sit by the river bank. The male, in breeding livery, is on the right and can be identified by its bright orange throat and front legs.

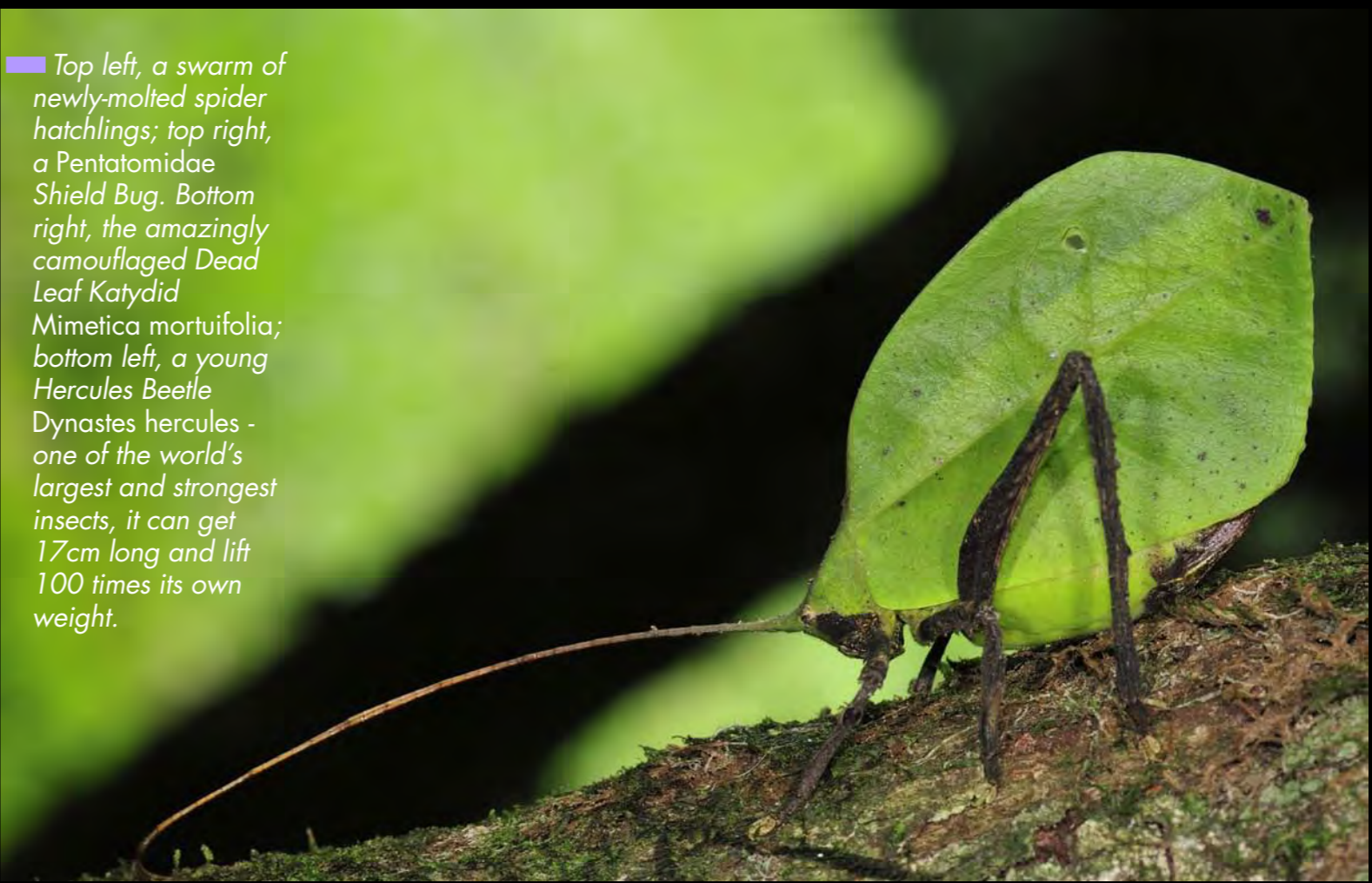


Large or small, the wild denizens of Costa Rica's lowland rainforests can be often exhilaratingly beautiful. Left, an adult male Green Basilisk *Basiliscus plumifrons* in its blue-throated breeding livery; right, a jewel-like Turquoise Cicada *Cicada Zammara smaragdina*, one of Central America's most colorful insects. Despite their apparent showiness, most rainforest animal species are in fact rather difficult to spot in the field.





Left, a male and his harem of Proboscis Bats *Rhynchonycteris naso*, often see roosting head-down on tree trunks by the river side. Right, an unidentified and splendidly camouflaged Bark Mantis.




Top left, a swarm of newly-molted spider hatchlings; top right, a Pentatomidae Shield Bug. Bottom right, the amazingly camouflaged Dead Leaf Katydid *Mimetica mortuifolia*; bottom left, a young Hercules Beetle *Dynastes hercules* - one of the world's largest and strongest insects, it can get 17cm long and lift 100 times its own weight.



More somberly colored than its close relatives, the Striped Poison Dart Frog *Phyllobates lugubris* is also the most toxic among Costa Rica's members of the Dendrobatidae family.

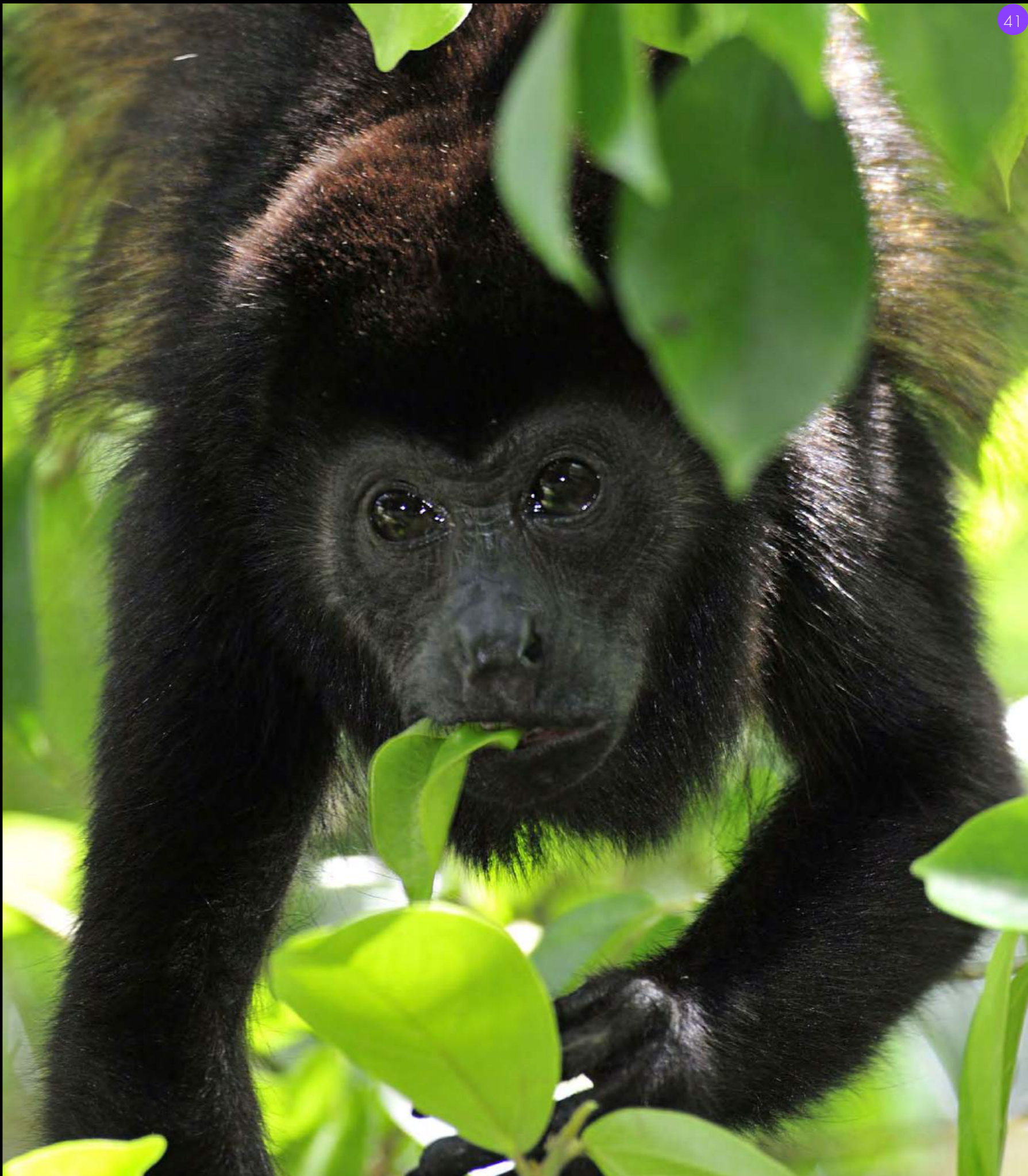


Click on the images and watch six short videos about Selva Verde Nature Reserve and its wildlife

- Selva Verde Intro 
- The Leaf Mantis 
- The Almendro tree 
- The Red-eyed Tree Frog 
- The Hercules Beetle 
- The Poison-dart Frog 

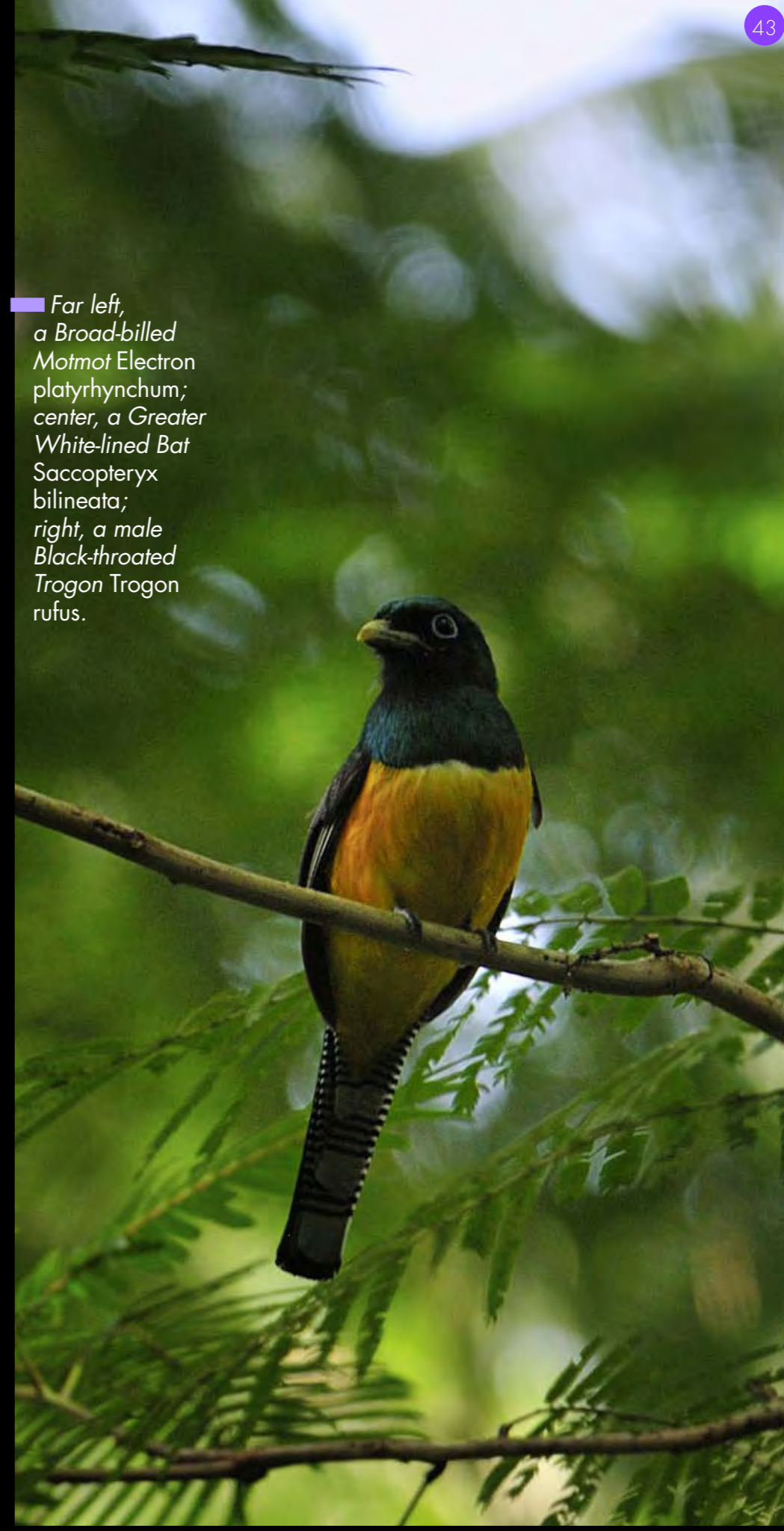


Left, a female Black-throated Trogon *Trogon rufus* - a colorful and relatively common but easily unnoticed species usually found in the forest understory. Right, a close-up of a feeding Mantled Howler Monkey *Alouatta palliata*, a highly social species whose territorial, deep-throated roaring at dawn and dusk is one of the most unmistakable (and occasionally startling to newcomers) sounds of the lowland forests of Central America.





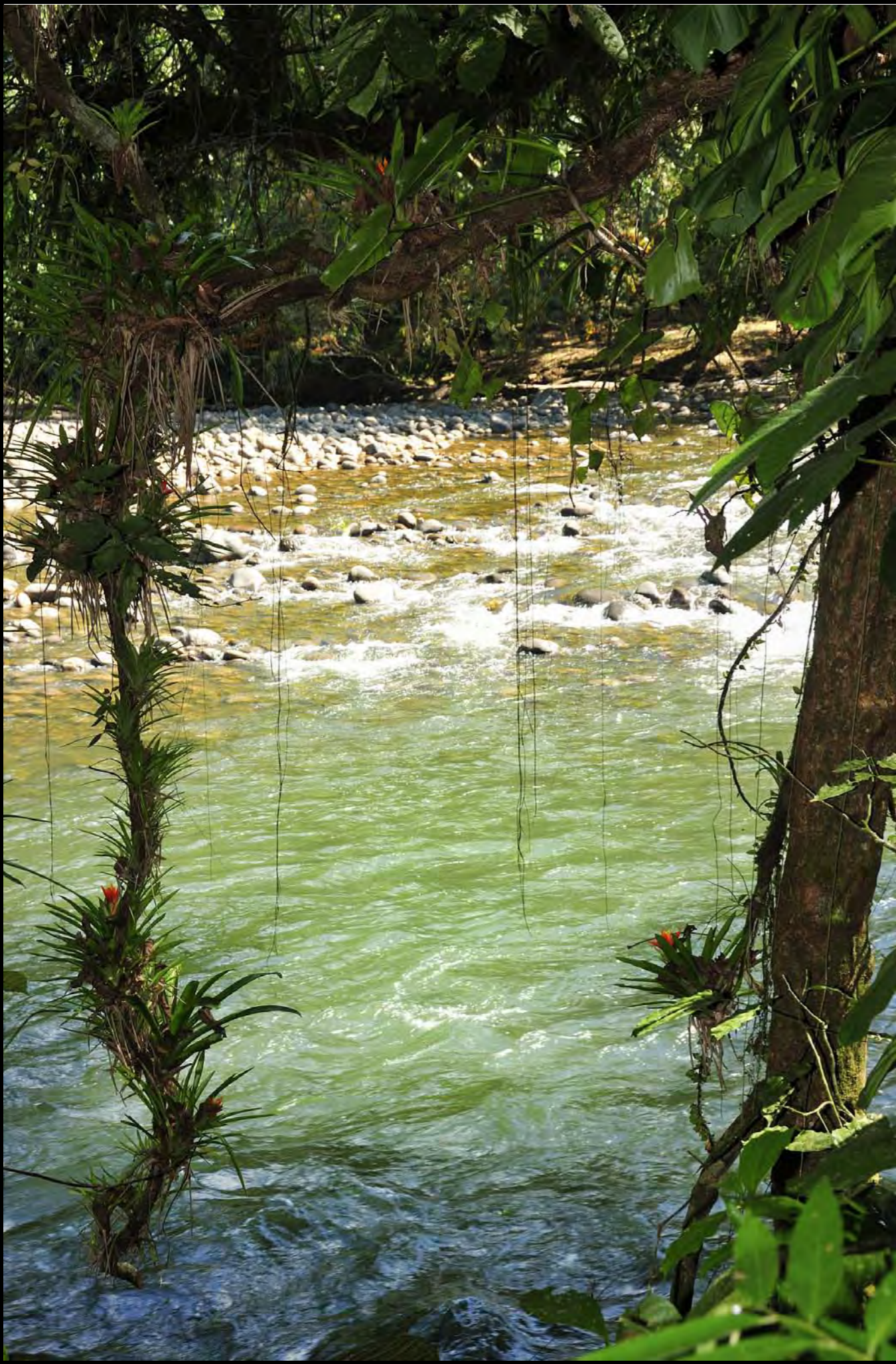
A large male adult Green Iguana (*Iguana iguana*) basks high up in the forest canopy. Selva Verde is home to stunning specimens of this common but nevertheless imposing, beautiful species.



Far left, a Broad-billed Motmot *Electron platyrhynchum*; center, a Greater White-lined Bat *Saccopteryx bilineata*; right, a male Black-throated Trogon *Trogon rufus*.



Two *Heliconius hecale zuleika* Spotted Longwing butterflies joined in mating. The arrival of the rainy season in April-May triggers reproductive behavior in most tropical species.



Selva Verde Nature Reserve encompasses several different lowland rainforest environments, often offering open landscapes and scenic vistas. Left, a view of the Sarapiquí river framed by hanging lianas and bromeliads; right, Antonella is dwarfed by a 50 meter-tall, 600 years-old giant Almendro tree (*Dipteryx panamensis*), an endangered species which is crucial to the survival in the wild of the Great Green Macaw *Ara ambiguus*.



Sun-loving, peaceful dinosaurs addicted to bananas



The highly textured, prehistoric-looking profile of a fully mature, adult Green Iguana *Iguana iguana* male at his strapping best and in full breeding livery. This 2-meter long species is diurnal and exclusively vegetarian.

At-a-glance travel guide

COUNTRY OF DESTINATION: COSTA RICA



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 flight will land at Juan Santamaria International Airport in San Jose, smack in the middle of the Country. From the capital it's a two-hour long car drive to Selva Verde – your driver will be waiting at the passengers' exit to pick you up with the resort minibus. Keep your camera at hand - it's a very scenic drive as the road passes through the beautiful forested hills and ravines of Braulio Carrillo National Park.

MEANS OF TRANSPORT: None since you won't need one. For excursions to nearby Nature Reserves or the Sarapiquí river, the Lodge will

gladly organize some private transport or get a taxi for you - public buses are also available. Renting a car and driving around isn't really a good idea at all - it might save you some money but truck drivers in Costa Rica are a reckless, dangerous breed and deadly road accidents are a daily occurrence.

CURRENCY: Trips are usually paid in advance, but extras and bills at [Selva Verde Nature Reserve and Lodge](#) can be settled in Euros or US currency. The local currency is the Costa Rican Colon or CRC. All trips and excursions can be paid to the Lodge together with your bill at the end of your stay - very convenient.

ACCOMODATION: Selva Verde Lodge is a beautifully organized, spread-out compound comprising a main body with two restaurants, plus about 40 double rooms and several bungalows broadly dispersed on a huge, semi-wild forested and gardened area. All buildings are on stilts and are connected by long, paved and roofed walkways, very useful for a short post-dinner stroll if you're not up for a night walk in the primary forest (which can only be visited with a guide). There's also a lovely and perfectly maintained swimming pool, but you'll probably be too busy photographing animals to make much use of it.

A nation where “eco-tourism” is not just an empty word



FOOD: Excellent and abundant - you can choose between the Italian Restaurant on the ground floor, La Terrazza, for a dinner *à la carte* (and the Italian recipes are done properly for once!), or opt for a rich buffet in the self-service restaurant right above it. Food is healthy and absolutely safe - we consumed staggering amounts of fresh salads and fantastic fresh tropical fruit juices every day for four weeks and never had the slightest problem. Don't miss the typical Costa Rican breakfast - *Gallo Pinto*, a rustic, country-style dish of fragrant rice steamed with chili, black beans and coriander and with fried eggs on the side.

LANGUAGE: English and Spanish.

WORRIES: Costa Rica is a safe country with a very high rate of literacy and a reasonably high standard of living: “Ticos” (colloquial for Costa Ricans) are usually extremely friendly and pleasant and we love

them! However - as in most countries - it's better not to walk around at night with an expensive camera dangling from your neck if you're in some dubious neighbourhood. Inside the Selva Verde compound you'll be perfectly safe obviously as there's security round the clock. More dangerous might actually be the silly habit of walking around barefoot at night and without a torch - this is the home of the much feared (and rightly so) *Terciopelo* or *Fer-de-Lance* *Bothrops asper*, a big, fast, very irritable and extremely dangerous venomous snake.

HEALTH: No worries. Botflies (1cm-long parasitic maggots of the fly *Dermatobia hominis* which develop in the living flesh of mammals before pupating) are present, but cases of human infestation are rare in the Sarapiquí area.

CLIMATE: Warm, tropical, occasionally rather humid

- but not as stifling or hot as you might imagine in the early mornings or at night (in fact it can be refreshingly cool at night, especially if it rains). The rainy season from April to September is the best for insects, amphibians and reptiles, but birdwatchers might instead want to visit from November to February.

BESIDES: Not much art or local culture, but an incredible amount of wildlife and wilderness which will dazzle even the most seasoned nature travellers - from beautiful beaches (both on the Pacific and Caribbean coasts) to mangroves, from cool montane cloud forests to warm lowland rainforests, from seasonally dry biotopes to perennially humid ones, Costa Rica has it all. Nature travel destinations are mostly easily accessible, well organized and easily explored - just remember that prices honestly aren't the lowest in the world, so inquire carefully about options before choosing. ●

Selva Verde Lodge & Rainforest Reserve

Sarapiquí,
Costa Rica



Somewhere in the middle of a 500-acre tropical rainforest reserve is a place where you can get away from the world and be surrounded by it at the same time. That place is Selva Verde Lodge & Rainforest Reserve.

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



www.selvaverde.com
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WEIRD WONDERS OF THE LEMBEH STRAIT
THE TWILIGHT ZONE

Dive with us to discover unexpected beauty
among the monstrous denizens of an unappealing
murky underwater universe

Close-up portrait of a Cockatoo Waspfish *Ablabys taenianotus*. Facing page, a Hairy Frogfish *Antennarius striatus*. On the previous page, a Painted Frogfish *Antennarius pictus* masquerades as an orange sponge.



TEXT BY ANDREA FERRARI
PHOTOS BY ANDREA & ANTONELLA FERRARI

The Twilight Zone - a dark limbo where dream and reality meet, a shadowy world suspended in a perennial dusk where stunning beauty and nightmarish horror uneasily share a foggy, horizonless netherworld. Suspended in a ghostly silence, mysterious, graceful shapes briefly shimmer and rapidly vanish in the murky distance. Others, horrid and perennially hungry, sit like motionless deformed gargoyles on the bare sand, patiently waiting to pounce and feed on the unsuspecting passer-by. Danger lurks everywhere for its inhabitants - especially at night, when darkness falls and the weirdest, strangest and most fantastic denizens of



the Twilight Zone creep, crawl and drag themselves out of their holes and their muddy, shadowy lairs to hunt and be hunted in the cold gloom. Fanged mouths silently explode from the ground, jelly-soft transparent flowers inject paralyzing acid in the soft bodies blindly bumping into them, strange shapes frantically dance and twist in mid-air, trying to escape their destiny, only to be

instantly devoured. Night - the pitiless time for the piercing sting, the slimy tentacle, the poisoned barb, the gaping, gulping mouth spasmodically swallowing down armored and flaccid prey alike. Anything is possible here - for this limbo of ravishing beauty and nightmarish sights is the fabled Strait of Lembeh. For the uninitiated, it just looks like a dark, unappealing sea channel on

the eastern coast of Northern Sulawesi, less than forty meters at its deepest and less than three kilometers at its widest, walled in along its black sand shores by steep volcanic cliffs, its inky waters leading from the dingy harbor town of Bitung to the open sea and with a bit too much garbage of very dubious origin

floating around. For muck diving connoisseurs, however, it's pure unadulterated heaven, a dream destination to be visited at least once in a lifetime. Muck diving - the concept of searching for rare, strange, grotesque and usually very small marine tropical species in areas with little coral and in medium or downright bad visibility - was in fact born right



A Hairy Frogfish —
Antennarius striatus is luring prey close to its cavernous mouth by waving its worm-shaped esca (or lure), a fleshy appendage positioned at the tip of its fishing-rod like illicium. The shape of the esca - mimicking that of a living creature - is often the only clue to the actual Frogfish species being observed.

A 15 cm-long Ambon Scorpionfish *Pteroidichthys amboinensis* sits in the open, mimicking to stunning perfection a lump of seaweed lying on the silty substrate of the Lembeh Strait.



here, in the Lembeh Strait, Indonesia, almost twenty years ago.

A TRULY UNIQUE HABITAT

What is so special about the place? Well...everything. Despite the atmospheric (and admittedly somewhat over-dramatized) description above, the setting is really idyllic. The topside panorama is truly enchanting - steep rocky slopes covered in thick tropical greenery, sea eagles soaring high in the sky, colorful local fishing boats passing by. But it's the diving which makes Lembeh so unique. Being close to a very deep underwater trench featuring daily cold-water upwellings, the sandy and silty sea bottoms of the Strait of Lembeh host an enormous variety of rare species which are common here but almost unheard of anywhere else. Even several of the more common species found here display dazzling and often unique color phases, this being due both to the dark volcanic sand they are living on and some other undiscovered factor. The weird, the grotesque, the rare and the downright absurd are a daily occurrence on its dive sites. This is a destination where it's not uncommon for the observant and experienced underwater photographer to encounter "holy grails" such as Weedy and Paddle-flap *Rhinopias*, Ambon Scorpionfish, Mimic Octopus and Wonderpus, Pygmy seahorses, Blue-ring octopus, Hairy octopus, Flamboyant cuttlefish, Boxer crab and tiny orange-rimmed baby Batfish on

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The demonic, sculpted features of a Devil Scorpionfish *Inimicus didactylus* often remind one of a Samurai mask.

Usually half-submerged in the soft substrate, this species features a disarrayed clump of highly venomous and very sharp dorsal spines.

It can be occasionally observed as it drags itself on the bottom using the free finger-like rays of its pectoral fins.

■ A tiny Yellow Pygmy Goby - *Lubricogobius exiguus* - guarding the entrance of its lair, a discarded glass bottle. The bottom of the Lembah Strait abounds with such man-made, colonized artifacts, which offer refuge to an exceptional number of species.



a daily or weekly basis: a place where after a few days it is easy to become so complacent that most divers just give a passing glance and nothing more to quite uncommon and strikingly beautiful species such as Painted and Clown rogfish, Thorny seahorse, Cockatoo waspfish or Mandarinfish. To underwater photographers looking for unusual (and usually stunning) subjects, the Lembah Strait offers unsurpassed opportunities.

EXPERIMENTS IN WIDE-MACRO

The apparently contradictory choice of adding teleconverters to fish-eye lenses in order to obtain arresting "wide-macro" images has long been adopted by many rainforest and insect specialists - notably Frans Lanting, the grand master of them all - while several Japanese authors have pioneered its use in underwater photography since the last two decades. This unusual combination allows an extremely close approach to small subjects, offering at the same time the opportunity to keep a

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■ A Weedy Scorpionfish *Rhinopias frondosa* in its bright orange color phase - one of the most bizarre and sought-after species of Lembeh. Its richly ornamented livery makes it all but invisible among the coral rubble of the bottom.

A bizarre living tapestry of unusual colors and shapes defying imagination



The strange sight offered by an Urchin Crab *Dorippe frasnica*, carrying on its back a Fire Urchin *Astropyga radiata* to keep predators at bay.



large area of surrounding environment or background in the image frame - with little or no peripheral distortion and with the added bonus of a spectacular depth of field. This technique allows the photographer to obtain truly unique and very personal images which deeply contextualize the subject in its natural habitat - something most macro lenses rarely do. We absolutely love the effect, and we often use this combination whenever the opportunity arises in our topside wildlife photography, especially with reptiles, amphibians and large insects and arthropods. The same effect, or a very similar one, may be obtained today - I hasten to add - with several of the new close-focusing wide angle zooms, such as the 10-20mm Sigma and several others, which have become widely available today. I had long been intrigued by this visionary technique since admiring many close-up and truly arresting rainforest reptile and insect images taken by Lanting more than fifteen years ago, but the long years of work undertaken to put together all the images necessary to publish our books *A Diver's Guide to Underwater Malaysia Macrolife* and *A Diver's Guide to Reef Life* had restricted us to documentary-style profile shots to be strictly used for identification purposes by other divers and photographers - an enjoyable job which however prevented us experimenting with more creative options. The right opportunity to try this technique underwater presented itself

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Close-up portrait of a Fingered Dragonet *Dactylopus dactylopus*, a rather active bottom forager which is often spotted in pairs. Notice the finger-like, free first rays of the pectoral fins, used for locomotion.





The Lembeh Strait abounds with cephalopod species, some of which are still undescribed. The small species illustrated - perfectly camouflaged on the silty bottom - probably belongs to the horridus complex. At the far right, a large Ceratosoma trilobatum nudibranch feeding on a sponge colony.



during our fourth visit to the Lembeh Strait. Having just completed our latest book, *A Diver's Guide to the Art of Underwater Photography*, I suddenly found myself strangely dissatisfied by my 105mm, a lens which for many years past had been a "must" for me. Macro portraits seemed all of a sudden to have lost visual power - creative apathy had set in. Fiddling in frustration, I suddenly realized that going "wide-macro" as I already had done on land could offer the solution to the impasse - even if by definition this technique might prove restrictive in the choice of subjects and could create severe backscatter problems in the notoriously murky depths of the Lembeh Strait.

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■ Diving in Lembeh offers unparalleled opportunities to the lovers of the weird, the strange and the grotesque, as these two portraits show. Left, the boar-like snout of a Paddle-flap Scorpionfish *Rhinopias eschmeyeri* in its gaudy bright-pink color phase; right, the ominous yawn of a small Dwarf Lionfish *Dendrochirus brachypterus*, a very colorful but equally cryptic species which is often observed in small aggregations. Both species belong to the Scorpaenidae family and are gifted with a highly protrusible mouth.



A *Cerianthus* sp. sea anemone displays its Gorgon-like mass of floating, highly urticating tentacles, waving in a mild current. The actual body of the animal is hidden in a mucus-coated tube emerging from the silty substrate.

The Gorgon's head, its deadly hair softly waving in the current



Anyway, there seemed to be no real choice - so I set up my Nikon 10.5mm plus a 1.5 Kenko teleconverter and had it mounted on my D300 behind the smallish polycarbonate fish-eye dome of my Sea & Sea housing. I find the results intriguing, and I like using this combination, as most species do not associate the approaching, reflective dome with an impending danger, and do not perceive it as the gaping mouth of a looming predator as it always happens instead with the 105mm tubular port. A slight peripheral distortion of the image becomes quite noticeable at extremely short focusing distances, so framing becomes an enjoyable challenge - a few degrees above or under the horizontal will generate dramatic differences in the final composition. Since most subjects in the Lembeh Strait are generally found lying camouflaged on the sand, silt or rubble bottom - and not perched on coral heads or walls as it would happen on pristine reefs elsewhere - one has to literally dig the lower third of the dome in the soft substrate to frame them more or less horizontally and not from above. This is where a smallish polycarbonate fish-eye or wide-angle dome proves to be more practical than a bigger and much more expensive glass one - there's little risk of scratching it while rubbing it against the coarse sand (or even small sharp pieces of coral rubble), and even in this eventuality the optical effects are quite negligible since small surface

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■ A tiny, less than 1 cm-long Fingered Dragonet *Dactylopus dactylopus* juvenile in its post-larval stage. Notice the already highly developed flag-like first dorsal fin, typical of this very showy species.



A Zebra Crab *Zebrida adamsii* sits well protected among the highly venomous spines of a Fire Urchin *Astropyga radiata*. The tiny crab is securely attached to its host by specially-evolved hooks on its rear legs.



scratches can easily be erased later on (a glass dome would be ruined for good). This technique however requests a delicate hand and some nerve, since sand, muck and grit rapidly collect around the main O-ring grooves - a dangerous proposition. The remarkably short focusing distances involved also present the very real risk of actually bumping the dome into corals or rocks with serious risks of damage. My suggestion regarding the positioning of strobes while doing "wide-macro" is to use them as they would be in normal fish-eye photography - widely spread and positioned as far behind the actual dome as the length of the strobe arms allows. Even when burdened with a tele-converter, fish-eyes allow perfectly exposed images at low light levels, ensuring razor-sharp focusing and exceptional depth of field. This is another wonderful side effect of this technique - shooting in macro mode without having to worry too much about losing sharpness and correct focus. If used correctly and creatively, the fish-eye + teleconverter combination can successfully handle any stationary subject ranging in size from a couple of inches to more than two feet in length, ie anything from a reasonably large nudibranch to a Crocodilefish. It gives its most striking results in the middle range - permitting stunning shots of frogfish, lionfish, scorpionfish, sea snakes and octopus, all spectacularly contextualized in a wide expanse of their natural habitat. Stationary or semi-

— An unidentified scorpionfish - possibly *Scorpaenopsis possi* with unusually developed frontal "tendrils" - sits by a *Goniopora* coral head. In the barren expanse of the Lembeh sea bottom all sorts of hide-outs and shelters are promptly exploited by predator and prey alike.





Two more exercises in the nightmarish and the grotesque. Left, the sculptured, almost abstract features of an unusually garish but nonetheless perfectly camouflaged Reef Stonefish *Synanceia verrucosa*, one of the most dangerous inhabitants of rubble seabottoms. Its dorsal spines can inflict exceptionally painful wounds, injecting a venom which can prove deadly to humans. Right, the ghastly, skull-like countenance of a Whitemargin Stargazer *Uranoscopus sulphureus*, whose box-like body lies buried in the substrate.





Looking like a miniature creature of ancient mythology, a small Cockatoo Waspfish *Ablabys taenianotus* lies camouflaged among the drably colored sponges which have colonized the coral rubble. Its long dorsal fin rays can inflict very painful wounds.

Two of the most unusual and striking encounters one can make in the dark waters of Lembeh - an eel-like Snake Blenny *Xiphasia setifer* surprised out of its burrow and a striking Zebra Batfish *Platax batavianus* juvenile, whose striped livery helps it camouflage among crinoids.

A dark, cold realm where only the most cunning survive another night



stationary subjects offer the best opportunities obviously, but one is free to experiment given the broad latitude in the focused area. To be truly successful with this technique, however, the photographer has to combine the "macro frame of mind" (visually focusing on the main subject) with the "fish-eye one" (ie giving much importance to the background) - an interesting and engaging exercise in creative flexibility which often leads to compelling visual results.

A FRAGILE ECOSYSTEM

The Lembeh Strait is an almost unique ecosystem, and as such it deserves all the protection visitors and supporters can give it. While most resorts are today enforcing a strict no-gloves dive policy (something we actually do not agree with, as we believe fingertip control can actually avoid damage by clumsy divers - it also seems a rather ridicu-

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A study in flexible, boneless grace - a tiny, coin-sized *Wonderpus wonderpus* strikes a pose trying to intimidate the observer. Lembeh is an excellent location to encounter and photograph both this species and the equally interesting Mimic Octopus *Thaumoctopus mimicus*.



■ A pair of Horned Flatheads
Thysanophrys carbunculus - strictly related
to the more commonly observed
Crocodilefish - sit side by side on the sea
bottom, half-submerged in the soft silt
and perfectly camouflaged. These two
individuals are probably courting,
as this is normally a solitary species.



— A Weedy Scorpionfish *Rhinopias frondosa* sits among the rubble. Its gaudy bright-orange livery hides it well in this textured environment, as red is one of the first colors of the spectrum to disappear at depth in natural light.

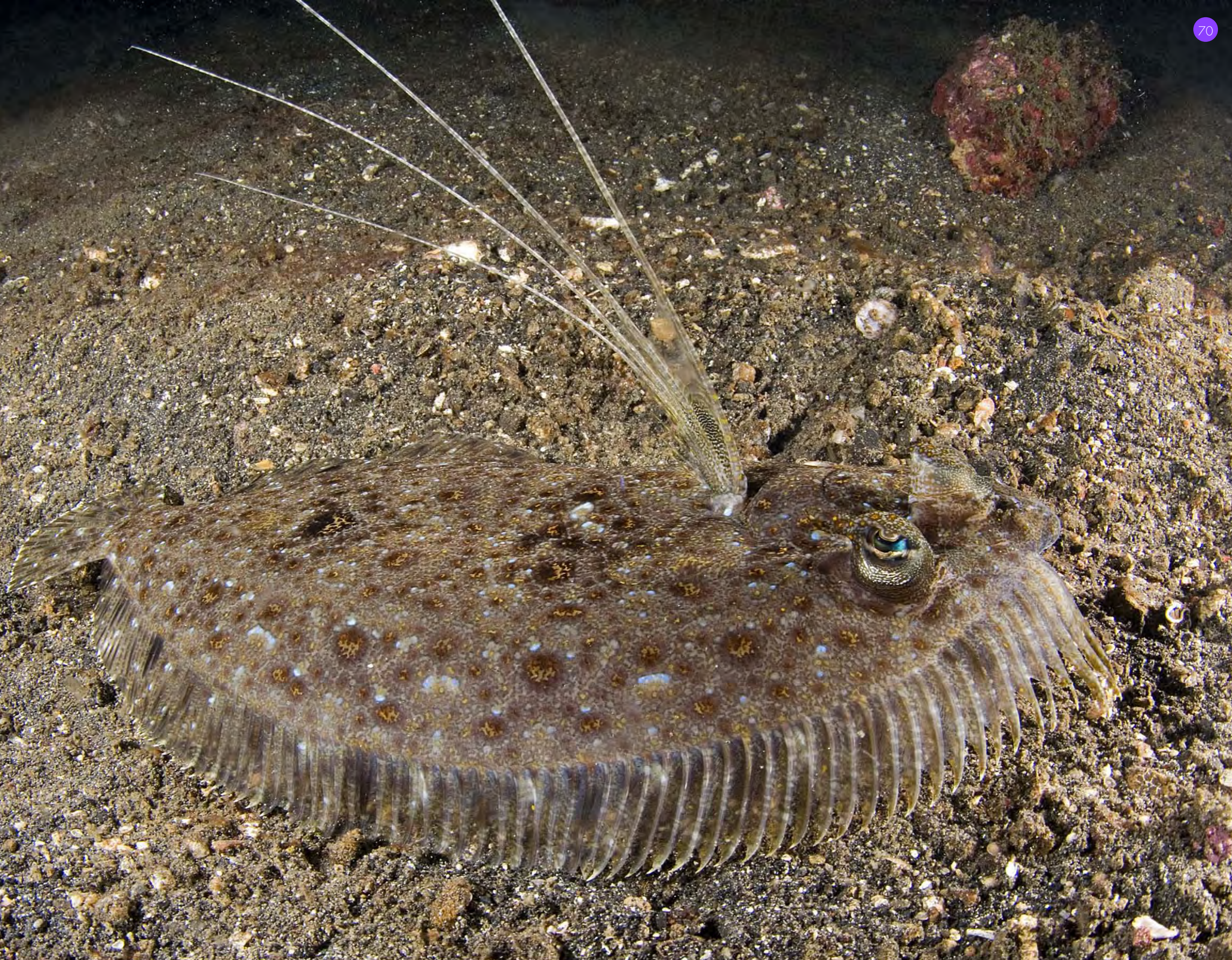
lous request when in the Lembeh Strait one mostly dives in, well...garbage), it is a fact that the success of the place has led to an exponential increase in the numbers of resorts and consequentially visiting divers. Some dive sites - especially the most famous ones - currently risk being severely overdived on a daily basis, provoking the disappearance of those same rare and often timid species people are coming to see from all over the world. The area is supposed to become a National Park soon, but in the meantime it is imperative for all the dive operators in the area to agree on common, strict rules: divers - especially photographers - must learn not to pester their guides with obsessive requests, and a firm rotation on the most frequently visited dive sites like Hairball, Jahir or Nudi Falls must be enforced as soon as possible. Lembeh is a fragile masterpiece, and none of us wants to see it hopelessly shattered by uneducated divers or overenthusiastic, greedy dive operators.

TRAVEL TIPS

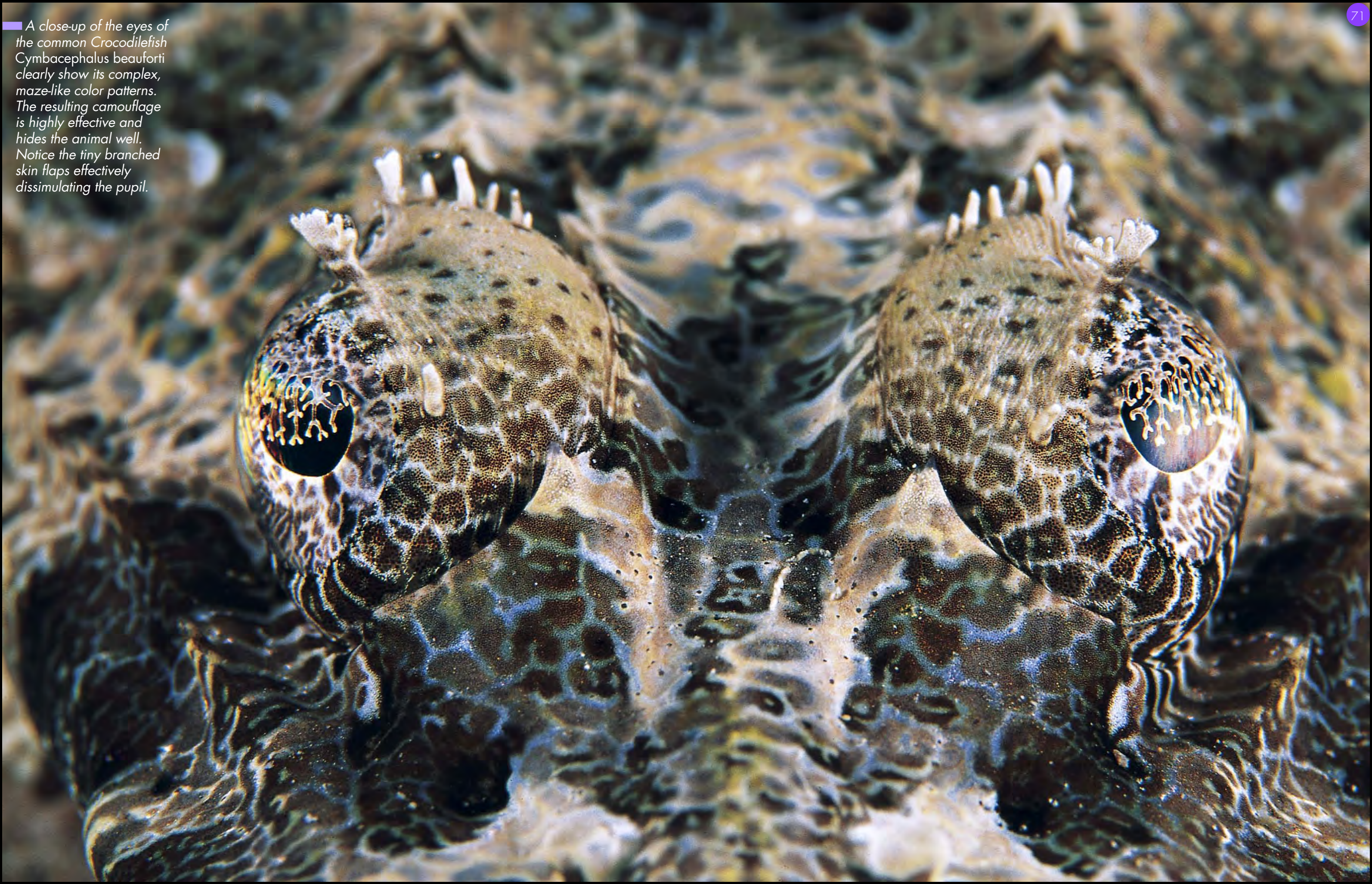
Most dive resorts on the Lembeh Strait are just a couple of hours drive from Manado: your travel operator will arrange everything for you. Water temperature in the Lembeh Strait is appreciably lower than could be expected (think 24/27 C°), so a 5mm wetsuit or a vest under a 3mm wetsuit will be handy. A full hood will also help in avoiding head- and neck-aches in the cold

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— A male Peacock Flounder *Bothus mancus* displays its greatly elongated pectoral fin rays. In natural light its highly ornamented livery makes it invisible on the textured seabottom of the Lembeh Strait.



A close-up of the eyes of the common Crocodilefish *Cymbacephalus beauforti* clearly show its complex, maze-like color patterns. The resulting camouflage is highly effective and hides the animal well. Notice the tiny branched skin flaps effectively dissimulating the pupil.



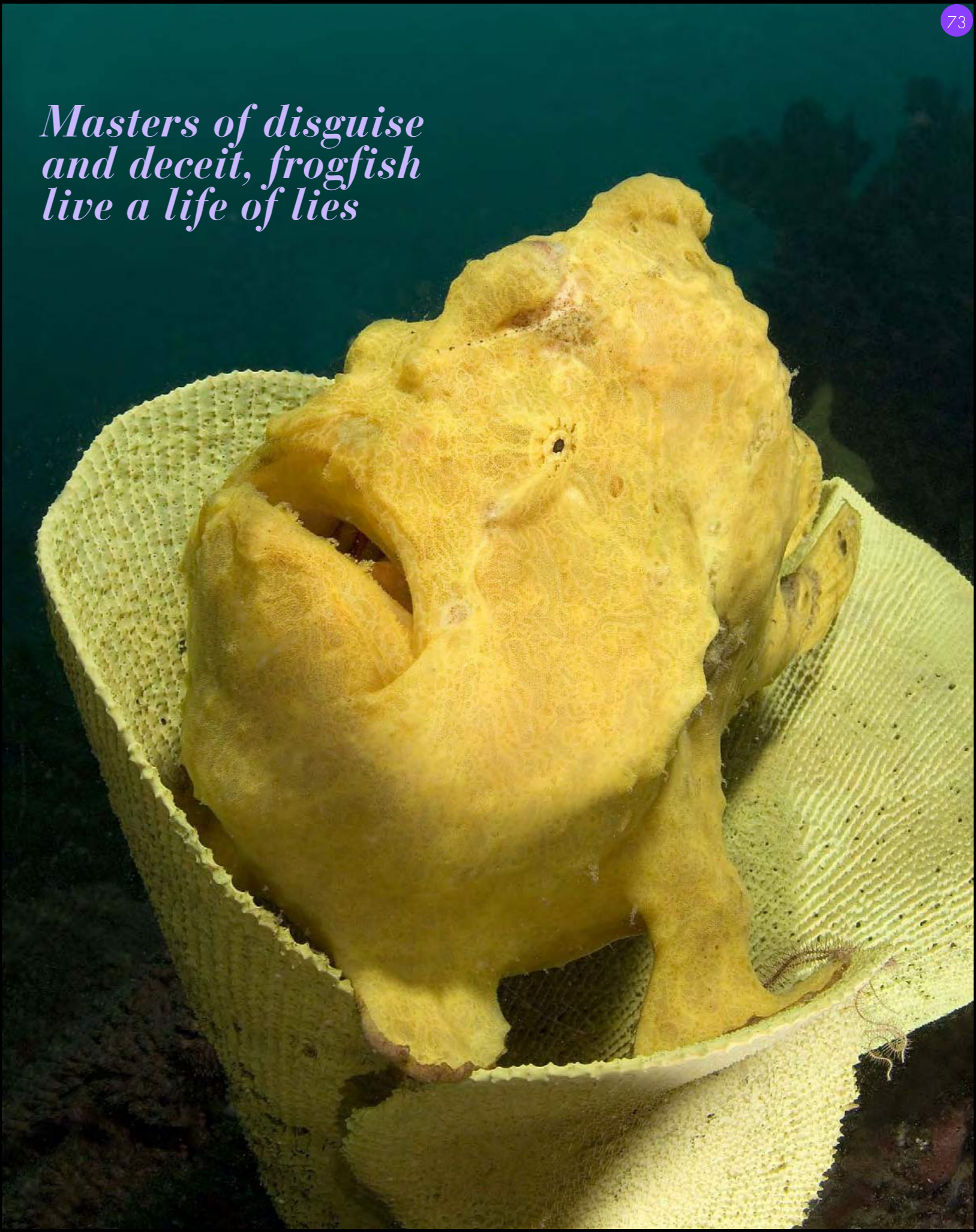
A common sight on the mucky sea bottoms of Lembeh, as a Black-saddled Snake Eel *Ophichthus cephalozona* emerges like a miniature periscope from the slime-coated substrate. If approached too rapidly this species will immediately retreat into its vertical burrow.



water. Stinging hydroids are also prevalent on several dive sites, so be prepared to get stung and avoid touching anything underwater. The diving is very easy, mostly taking place in shallow water, with little or no currents and in the company of experienced dive guides. In fact many dive guides - especially the younger ones - are not only eagle-eyed and highly motivated, but also maybe a bit too eager to please their clients in the hope of getting a good tip. Regardless of the resort one is staying at, most dive sites are just a few minutes away by speedboat - and after night dives (not to be missed here!) one will usually find a warm, dry towel and a mug of hot chocolate waiting back on the boat. Most resorts normally offer three dives a day - two in the morning and one in the early afternoon - plus night dives and unlimited house reef diving: groups are kept to a minimum, with no more than four divers for each guide (in some resorts no more than three), allowing maximum freedom and optimizing photo opportunities. Most dive resorts also offer mosquito-screened camera rooms by the dive center, where photographers and videographers can leave their equipment overnight to dry and reload batteries: 220 and 110 volts are both available. No visas are needed upon entry in Indonesia, but nationals of several western countries have to pay an hefty fee in Manado Sam Ratulangi Airport's immigration office both when entering and exiting the country.

*Masters of disguise
and deceit, frogfish
live a life of lies*

Two Giant Frogfish *Antennarius commersoni* individuals, perching on widely different microhabitats, demonstrate the great latitude in coloration and the exceptional camouflage this relatively large species can achieve. Coloration and possibly pattern on several frogfish species is dependant on the chosen perch and habitat, and it can accordingly change in the course of several days or weeks.



— This is how an angry Devil Scorpionfish *Inimicus didactylus* looks when flushed from the substrate under which it lied - its beautifully marked fins now widely spread in warning and its erect dorsal spines ready to impale the disturber, injecting a large dose of very painful venom. One of the many good reasons never to lie or sit on the seabottom in the Lembeh Strait.





The unmistakable front view offered by a Paddle-flap Scorpionfish *Rhinoptias eschmeyeri* - a very uncommon and much sought-after species.

Barren, stretching in all directions, often murky, the Lembeh underwater landscapes transform even relatively mundane subjects like this Spotted Lionfish *Pterois antennata* in magical encounters.





■ Lembeh - by its own murky, dark nature - is an environment ideally suited to macrophotography. Left, a partially backlit Cockatoo Waspfish *Ablabys taenianotus*; right, a more conventional portrait of a Bicolor blenny *Ecsenius bicolor* emerging from its abandoned tubeworm lair.





An aptly-named White-eyed Moray eel *Siderea thyrsoidea* glares madly from its lair among clumps of *Goniopora* corals, their flower-like polyps fully expanded in the current.

For some unexplained reason - possibly its black volcanic sand bottoms - the Lembeh environment seems to intensify the colors of its inhabitants, as this normally blandly colored species - the Zebra Lionfish *Dendrochirus zebra* - clearly shows.

Sudden flashes of bright colors in a landscape of utter drabness



In an underwater world of deceit and illusion nothing is ever as it seems - can you spot the Painted Frogfish *Antennarius pictus* hiding in silent ambush among the sponges, debris and algal growth on the bottom?





A large Paddle-flap Scorpionfish *Rhinopias eschmeyeri* shows its unmistakable gargoyle-like profile. Notice the algal growth on its body, which will be shed together with its skin at the next molting.

Most adult Clown Frogfish *Antennarius maculatus* found in Lembeh show a bright yellow livery rather than the more customary white observed elsewhere.



■ A lonely Seahorse - probably Hippocampus taeniopterus - hangs tenaciously to its little perch in the endless, gloomy waste of the Lembeh seabottom.





A cornucopia of patterns and colors - clockwise, from left top: Weedy Scorpionfish *Rhinopias frondosa* in a rare golden phase; close-up of a Wonderpus *Wonderpus photogenicus* in full display; close-up of the suction feet of the highly venomous Flower Urchin *Toxopneustes pileolus*; and the "tiled" bottom face of a Pincushion Seastar, *Halityle regularis*.



A stunning example of exceptional camouflage is offered by this large Crocodilefish *Cymbacephalus beauforti*, brazenly sitting in the open. Its maze-like reticulations create a surprisingly effective disruptive pattern, disguising completely its body shape. The marine environment of the Lembeh Strait is the ultimate field laboratory for those interested in camouflage, mimicry and general survival strategies of benthic marine species.



More interesting patterns, colors and body shapes. From left, a Harlequin Shrimp *Hymenocera elegans* feeding on a seastar, the razor-thin front profile of a Leaf Fish *Taenianotus triacanthus* and lastly the flowing, indiscernible shape of a still undescribed Hairy Octopus slinking among a clump of fire-red *Dendronephthya* soft corals.



Another uncommon sight as a Napoleon Snake eel *Ophichthys bonaparti* emerges from its burrow in the silt, showing its colorfully banded but usually hidden body. Snake eels are nocturnal predators which feed on small fish, crustaceans and cephalopods.





More Lembeh faces and profiles - sometimes elegant, often horrid, always stunning. Clockwise, from left top: the mad-doctor glare of a White-eyed Moray *Siderea thyrsoidea*, the monstrous looks of a Devil Scorpionfish *Inimicus didactylus* hiding in the sand, the technicolored display offered by a Dwarf Lionfish *Dendrochirus brachypterus* and the dead-leaf profile of a Cockatoo or Spiny Waspfish *Ablabys* sp.



A large Tasselled Scorpionfish *Scorpaenopsis oxycephala* lies in ambush on a sea anemone, apparently unaffected by the latter's stinging cells.

A living laboratory to study and admire the fine art of camouflage



■ A face-on portrait of a rare golden Weedy Scorpionfish *Rhinopias frondosa* shows to good effect its grotesque features - notice the upturned snout, the leaf-like tassels above the eyes and around the mouth and the transparent "windows" in the huge lattice-like pectoral fins.



A coin-sized
Flying Gurnard
*Dactyloptena
orientalis* juvenile
flares its huge
pectoral fins,
which will be
the salient,
unmistakable
feature of the 30
cm-long adult.
The peacock-like
colors are atypical
for the species
and are observed
almost exclusively
in the Lembeh
populations.



Variations in blue: clockwise from left top, a male Thorn-back Cowfish *Lactoria fornasini*, a Bubble Shell *Bullina lineata* prowling at night, the snout of a Blue-spotted Sand Diver *Trichonotus setigerus* emerging from the substrate and the unmistakable dragon-like features of an adult Blue Ribbon Eel *Rhinomuraena quaesita*.

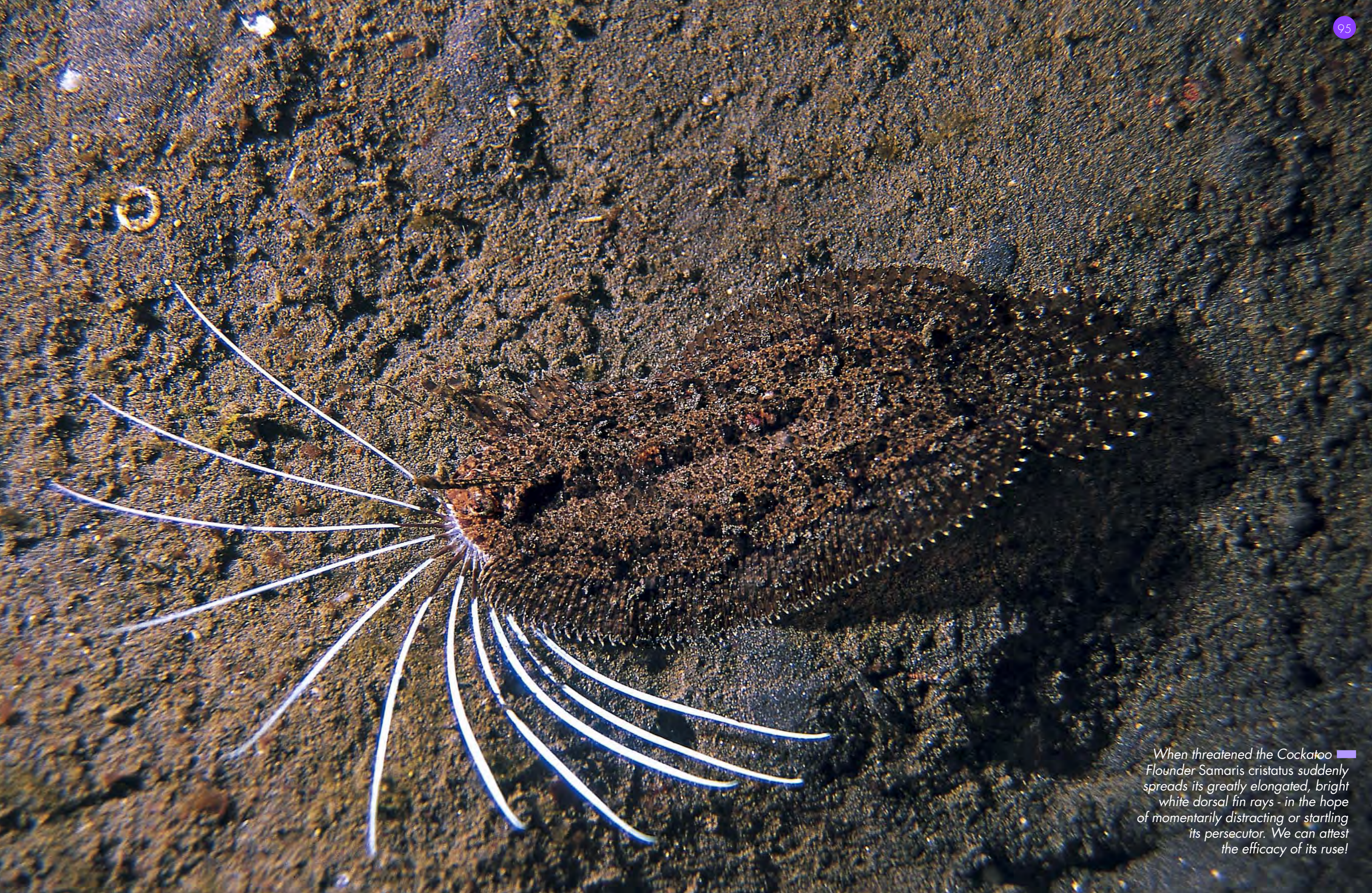


— The deadly elf of the underwater world - a tiny Blue-ring Octopus *Hapalochlaena lunulata*, whose fluorescent markings warn of a deadly bite. Its neurotoxic venom has proven fatal to humans in several instances - beware its aposematic (ie warning) livery and never try to handle it if you are lucky enough to find one.



Benthic, static and exquisitely camouflaged sit-and-wait predators form the majority of Lembeh's most interesting denizens - from a scientific but also from a photographic point of view. The unusual "hairy" local morph of the Striped Frogfish *Antennarius striatus* (left) and the bright yellow and purple Clown Frogfish *Antennarius maculatus* (right) are only two of many fascinating subjects.





When threatened the Cockatoo Flounder *Samaris cristatus* suddenly spreads its greatly elongated, bright white dorsal fin rays - in the hope of momentarily distracting or startling its persecutor. We can attest the efficacy of its ruse!

A tiny, post-larval sized Zebra Crab *Zebrida adamsii* stands out on the hellish, lava-hot red background of its protecting host, a Fire Urchin *Astropyga radiata*.



The purest essence of the Lembeh Strait's gloomy underwater universe - the skull-like, bone-white stark features of a Devil Scorpionfish *Inimicus didactylus* half-buried in the silt, silently ambushing its prey.

The art of disappearing - or looking like something else - is the essence of Lembeh

Tangkoko National Park

Northern Sulawesi encompasses a large area of exceptional natural beauty, with breathtaking landscapes and unique fauna. Divers have the despicable habit of seldom looking around when on holiday, but on this occasion it would really be a pity not to engage in some hiking or car touring, especially since most dive resorts readily offer affordably-priced excursions with excellent English-speaking guides and extremely comfortable transportation. Two destinations the discriminating traveller cannot afford to miss while in the area are Tangkoko National Park and the Minahasan Highlands. The former can be reached from most resorts in the Lembeh Strait with a scenic drive lasting from one to two hours and then can easily be visited on foot – the coastal lowland deciduous forest is the home of at least three large troops of the endangered, endemic and highly sociable Black or Crested Sulawesi macaque (*Macaca nigra*) and the haunt of several family groups of the fascinating Sulawesi Tarsier (*Tarsium spectrum*), the smallest primate in the world, usually found nesting inside the hollow trunks of strangling figs and observed just before twilight at several locations inside the Park. Park Rangers have habituated several of them to accept the large grasshoppers being offered, so sightings are usually guaranteed. With Sulawesi macaques it's a matter of luck, basically – sometimes they're found on the beach by the entrance gate, scavenging among the trash and litter left by the locals, but on other occasions visitors have to walk for hours to catch a glimpse of a troop.

continued on page 100 >

*The Black Ape:
endemic,
expressive,
endangered*

■ The highly social Black or Crested Sulawesi macaque *Macaca nigra* is a primarily terrestrial primate which lives in troops of 5 to 25 animals.



A quick day trip to Tangkoko is clearly not enough to fully explore the photo opportunities offered by its lush environment, but with some care and attention it's quite possible to bring home some perfectly good shots. Insects, arthropods and interesting vegetation details - such as those illustrated in this page - abound in every corner of the Park.



■ *Tangkoko is home to the largest remaining population of the endangered Crested Macaque in Sulawesi, where only 5000 individuals survive. Another interesting species of the Park is the Sulawesi Tarsier Tarsium spectrum (below), a strictly nocturnal and very nimble insectivore.*



Longer (from three to five hours) hikes in the forest will also result in sightings of shy but spectacular hornbills, snakes, agamids and insects. This is a reasonably pristine environment, and long walks or night excursions commonly deliver very interesting encounters – sadly however the Park facilities are woefully inadequate and underfunded, so it's almost impossible spending the night on the premises to take full advantage of the visit. Getting to Tangkoko from Lembeh is a rather lengthy drive, and one isn't able to spend as much as needed in the protected area in the course of a single day trip. Granted, there are a couple of simple backpackers' "lodges" (small private homes in fact) renting rooms for the night just besides the Park's entrance gate, but we've heard too many tales about lice-infested beds and rats scurrying in the toilets about them to be willing to try them out. The second trip lasts all day and will take you to the cool and beautiful Minahasan Highlands, rich in local culture and scenic landscapes. One of the highlights of the excursion is the midday visit to the colorful and noisy local market at Tomohon, which offers many interesting opportunities to photographers. Just make sure to avoid the "meat" section of the market, where unaware visitors will be faced by the gruesome and heart-rending spectacle of desperately yelping dog puppies being slaughtered for the table, together with roadside stands offering kebabs of freshly grilled jungle rats and half-roasted, scorched fruit bats which have just been blow-torched alive. With all due respect to local culture, telling your guide in advance will guarantee you'll be spared most of these shocking sights if you - like us - would rather avoid facing them. Besides the market, you'll also enjoy spectacular sights of rice paddies, terraced cultivations and jade-green volcanic lakes: the local Minahasans inhabiting this verdant, fertile area are very active in farming, pottery making and woodworking. They are also quite good looking, exceptionally friendly and said by other Indonesians to be of Cambodian origins. ●



Jumping spiders of various species - all belonging to the Family Salticidae but often very difficult to identify correctly - abound among the dead leaves littering the forest floor (above). Checking tree trunks and branches will often reveal the presence of exceptionally colorful - but equally problematic to identify - Fulgorid planthoppers (below).



Checking carefully among the green leaves of the shrubbery will often provide sightings of colorful grasshoppers (top) and, with a bit more luck, of graceful and very well camouflaged Praying Mantids (above).

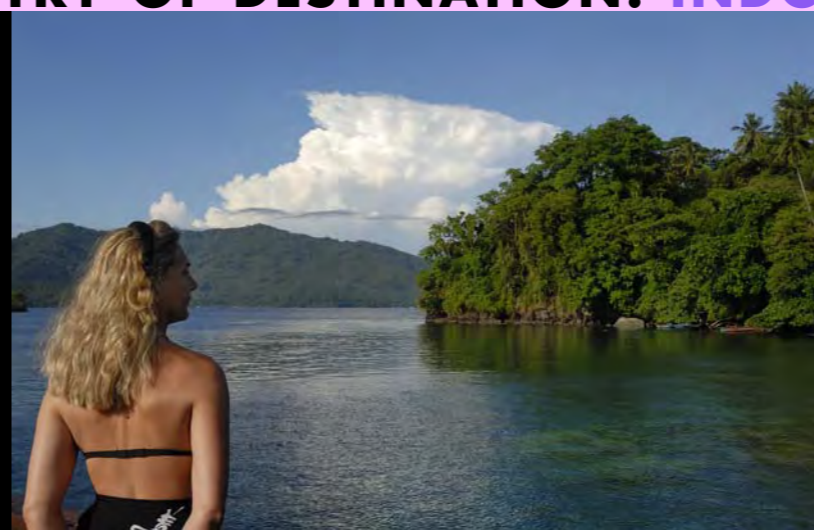
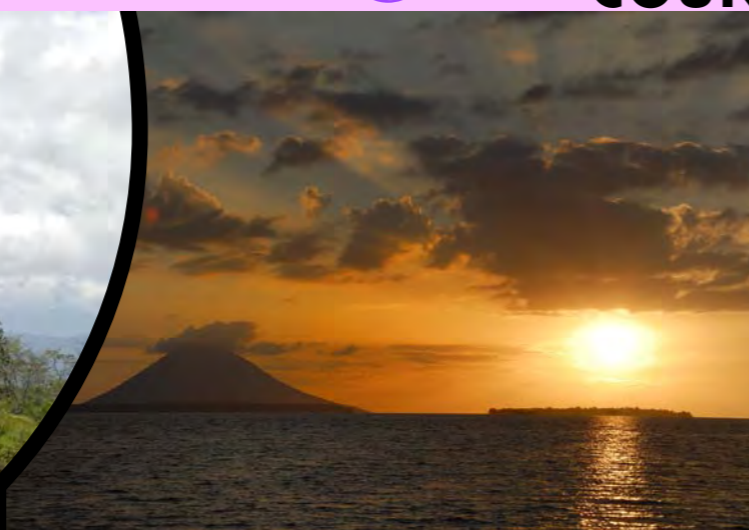


The sheer number of Salticid Jumping spider species which can be observed in Tangkoko - even in the course of the briefest of visits - can be quite stunning. Particularly interesting are those featuring greatly elongated jaws (above and below), mostly showing a stunning metallic sheen and observed as they actively hunt on vertical tree trunks.



At-a-glance travel guide

COUNTRY OF DESTINATION: INDONESIA



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 flight connection (presumably from Singapore, Jakarta or Kuala Lumpur) will land at Sam Ratulangi International Airport in Manado, North Sulawesi. Visitors from several Western countries are expected to pay a hefty entrance tax at Immigration. From Manado it's a two-hour long car drive to the Lembeh Strait, where you'll find your dive lodge of choice – they'll be waiting at the passengers' exit to pick you up with the resort minibus.

MEANS OF TRANSPORT: None since you won't be doing much except diving. If you want to visit Tangkoko National Park or the Minahasan Highlands your dive resort concierge will be glad to

organize a car rental with driver/guide for you at a very reasonable price.

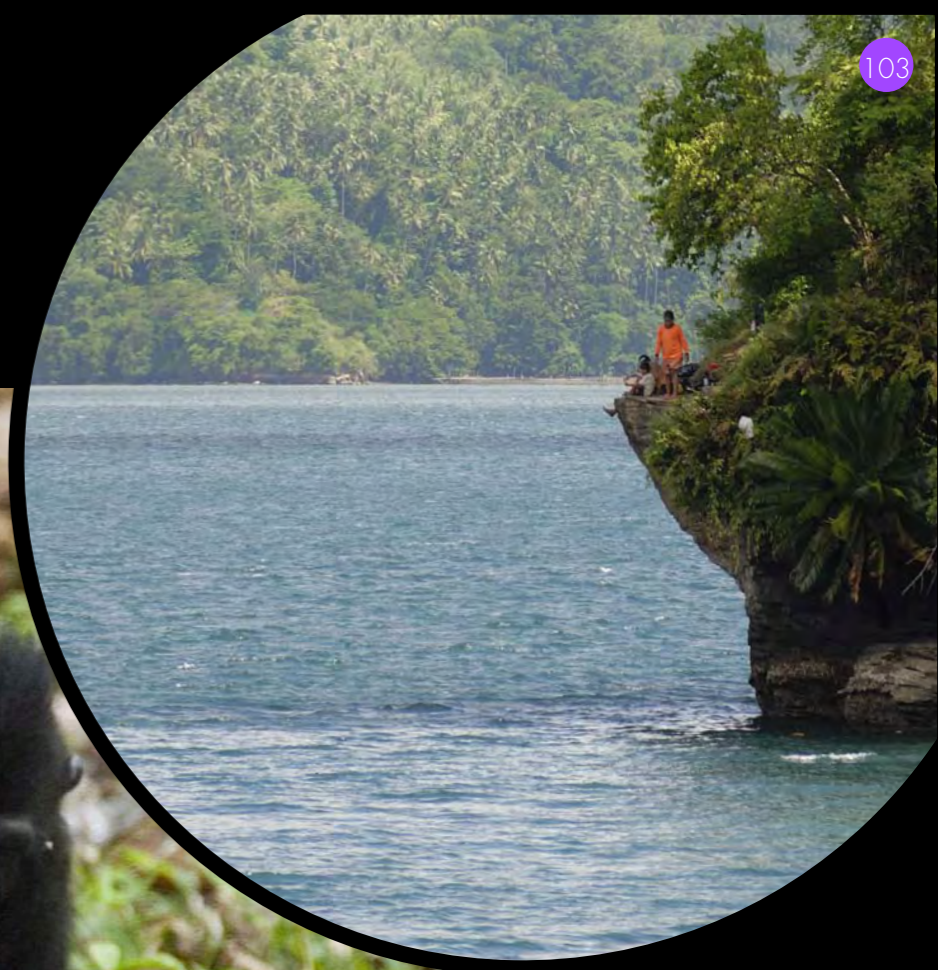
CURRENCY: Trips are usually paid in advance, but extras can usually be settled in Euros or US currency. The local currency is the Indonesian Rupiah.

ACCOMODATION: Since the old days - when the legendary (and now rather run-down) Kungkungan Bay Resort was the only choice in town, amounting to an exclusive and expensive country club – things have changed radically. Now the Lembeh Strait is replete with a wide variety of dive resorts, from rather expensive and relatively

luxurious ones to more affordable options. We can safely recommend Jim and Cary Yanny's **Eco Divers** as one of the most serious and dependable operators, otherwise some dive Forum sleuthing on www.wetpixel.com or www.divephotoguide.com will help you in choosing the right one for your needs and pockets.

FOOD: Depends on where you are staying – despite the many wonders and mouth-watering flavours of Indonesian traditional cuisine, most dive resorts in the Lembeh Strait opt to offer westernized, sanitized, unappetizing menus as the great majority of US and European visitors seem totally unable to

Unique diving, stunning natural landscapes and exotic wildlife



deal with the spicy, fiery condiments of Manadoese food. Don't worry however – you'll have overcooked pasta, concrete-like burritos, flavorless nasi goreng and other watered-down, bastardized international dishes but at least you'll be spared the roasted rats and barbecued dog of the traditional local cuisine.

LANGUAGE: English and Bahasa Indonesia.

WORRIES: The waters of the Lembeh Strait certainly aren't the cleanest in the world (it's basically a filthy garbage dump in front of a big dirty industrial harbour) so it's better to avoid diving with open cuts. More importantly, always refrain from touching marine species or kneeling on the sea bottom – this is the preferred habitat of a great

number of highly venomous and perfectly camouflaged species. Hydroids can also cause severe rashes, painful sores and maddening itching in several dive sites (notably Nudie Falls). Be very careful if walking barefoot or with flip-flops at night and when sleeping in ground-level wooden bungalows – large tropical centipedes (*Scolopendra* sp.) are exceedingly common in rainy weather, and they have the unpleasant habit of inflicting horrendously painful bites when brushing against naked flesh at night. You have been warned!

HEALTH: Apart from the above, no worries worth mentioning even if dengue is present.

CLIMATE: Strictly tropical and exceedingly humid,

often stifling. Rain showers are an almost daily occurrence. The water of the Strait is surprisingly cold however – which explains the presence of so many unusual and uncommon species.

BESIDES: Besides its fascinating sealife and stunning natural landscapes, the area offers interesting trips to the colorful Minahasan Highlands and Tangkoko National Park – both offering exceptional photo opportunities. An evening stroll or dinner in nearby Manado – a colorful, noisy, smelly town - will also provide glimpses into the lives of the locals. Sadly, most visitors to the Lembeh Strait seem to be exclusively interested in the diving – a trait shared by most of the scuba community worldwide. ●

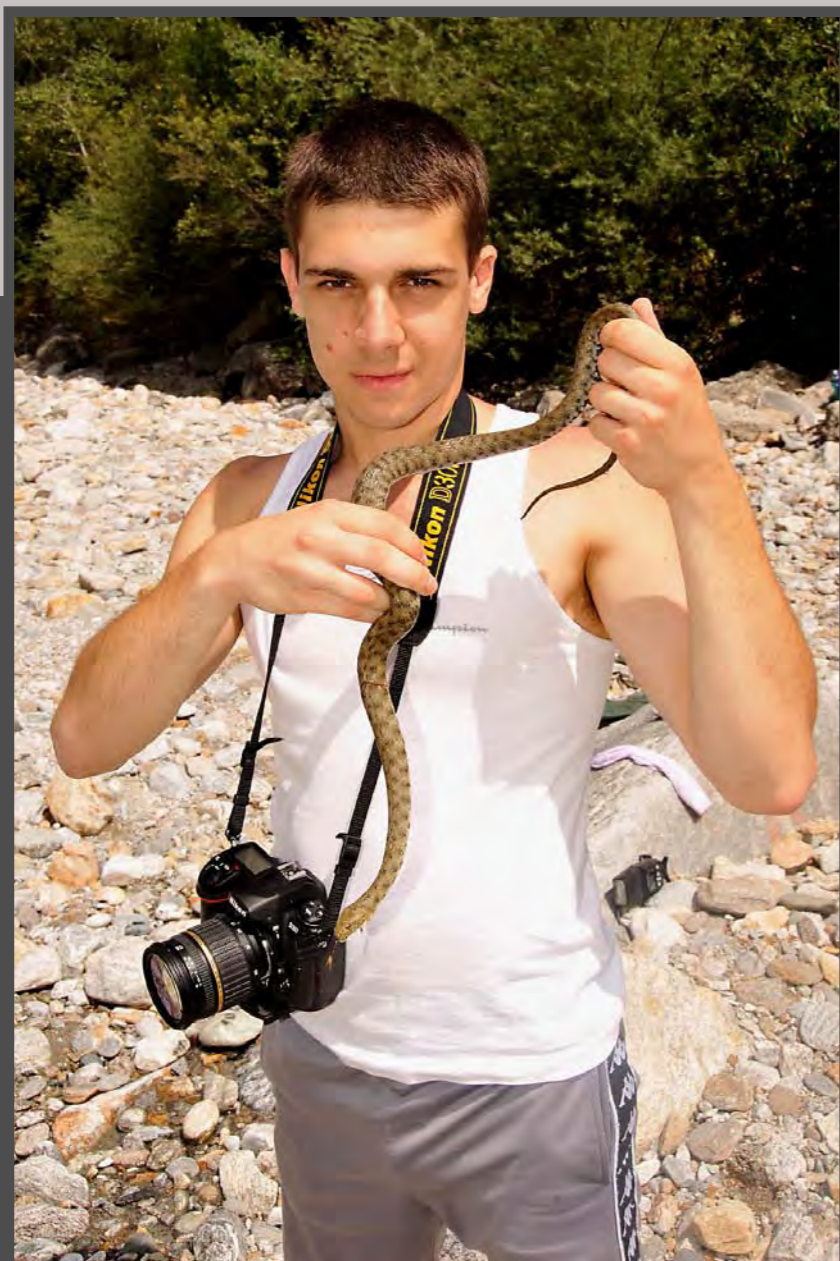


DPG *Expeditions*

Underwater Photography Trips to
Exotic Destinations



Italian Delights



Heavily industrialized and populated, Italy doesn't readily spring to mind when one thinks about wildlife or untouched nature. And yet there is beauty to be seen for those who know how to look – as our Guest Photographer shows us with his stunning images

Matteo Di Nicola: A Wildlife Photographer in his own words

My name is Matteo Di Nicola. I live in Northern Italy, where I was born in 1986. I have a degree in Natural Sciences and I am still a student in science teaching and divulgation at the State University of Milan. I have chosen this path following my passion for nature and wildlife, being well aware it won't be easy finding a job in this field - at least in the near future. Since when I was still very young, an all-consuming love for any kind of small creature had me taking it home to care for it, and in the process I learned about its morphology, life habits and needs. Growing up, I soon learned animals would rather live free and wild in their own environment: my love for photography stems then from the desire to "collect" and classify the creatures I sighted during my hikes without bringing undue suffering upon them. Taking home a good shot of an animal I had encountered during a walk in the wilderness was like having that same animal with me - forever. This - even today - allows me to take home animals, flowers, trees and even full landscapes! Wishing to share with others what I saw I gradually developed a better technique, trying to obtain images which are not only faithful to real life but are also pleasing to the eye. This is not easy by all means - for the implicit difficulties posed by subjects and situations and by the high costs

of a professional camera equipment. It goes without saying that in getting a good shot the photographer himself is the most important element - but without a good set-up the matter gets even more complicated. I want to stress that I only shoot free specimens, found in the wild after long and occasionally difficult searches, in the total respect of the animal or plant and its environment. Situations and places vary a lot. Italy offers an enormous variety of close-by and easily reachable habitats, from its Mediterranean sea coasts to the alluvial plains and the tall Alpine mountain ranges, but it is densely populated and it is almost impossible finding areas untouched by man's activities. This means that finding and approaching wild animals is exceptionally difficult. In fact, many Italian wildlife photographers have been forced to look for their subjects abroad as wild specimens here are frustratingly wary of man and close to unapproachable. In the future I shall certainly wish to visit other areas of bigger biodiversity where subjects are more easily approached. In the meantime, I'm doing my best to refine my technique and in looking for interesting subjects in Italy, the country I live in and whose wildlife deserves to be known, pictured and protected as much as that of any other place on Earth. ●

**Red Fox**

(*Vulpes vulpes*),
March 2011,
Aosta Valley, Italy.
Nikon D300,
17-50mm f2.8,
24mm 1/640 f11
iso200, handheld,
flash SB600.

One of the beautiful foxes found in the Gran Paradiso National Park. Somewhat used to the presence of trekkers and skiers, this individual – however alert – allowed a closer than usual approach. Given the short distance, I chose to use a wide-angle, with the stunning meteorological conditions of the day providing perfect lighting.



Wasp Spider and sunrise (*Argiope bruennichi*), August 2010, Lombardy, Italy. Nikon D300, 90mm f2.8 macro, 1/250 f4 iso320, flash R1, handheld. A relatively common but truly beautiful spider which I photographed at dawn in the River Ticino Park, with the early morning's sun fiery ball in the background.

Common Adder (*Vipera berus*), September 2010, Lombardy, Italy. Nikon D300, 300mm f4, 1/800 f4 iso500, handheld, no flash. A stunning Common Adder female with an uncommonly contrasted pattern. This beautiful specimen was encountered just before the arrival of autumn in the mountains close to the town of Bergamo.



**European Robin**

(*Erithacus rubecula*),

January 2010,

Lombardy, Italy.

Nikon D300,

300mm f4, 1/500

f4 iso500, tripod,

no flash.

Birds in Italy are invariably and exceptionally wary due to hunting pressure. The only way to get close to them is by using a hide and baiting them for several days - often in freezing cold as in this case. I love the soft lighting of this image, provided by the overcast weather.

Black-headed Gull

(*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*), February 2009, Adda river, Lombardy, Italy.

Nikon D300, 300mm f4, 1/1600 f5 iso250, handheld, no flash.

A winter afternoon's encounter along the river Adda, where ducks and gulls are often found, looking for scraps of food on the water surface.

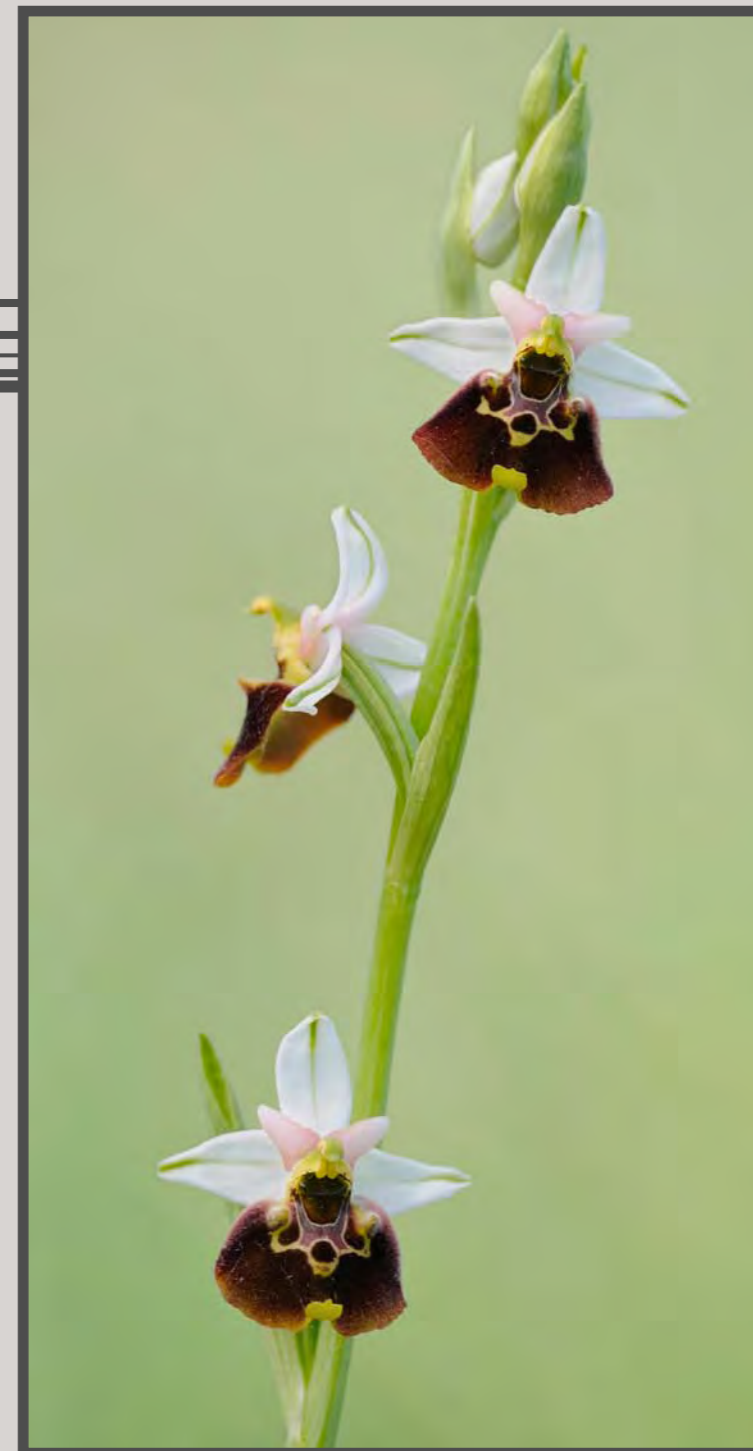
I tried to freeze the action choosing a high shutter speed.



Late Spider-orchid (*Ophrys fuciflora*), May 2010, Lombardy, Italy.

Nikon D300, 300 f4, 1/500 f5.6 iso200, tripod, no flash.

A stunning orchid – to blur the confusing vegetation in the background I used my 300mm on a tripod, filtering sunlight through a small white umbrella.



Grass Snake in the water (*Natrix natrix*), July 2010,

Sesia river, Piedmont, Italy. Nikon D300, 300mm f4, 1/320 f4 iso640, handheld, no flash.

An uncommonly large and truly imposing specimen of this harmless snake, which I gently cornered in a shallow water bend of the river. Here I decided to use the 300mm lens to uniformly blur the background.

Blue Tit

(*Cyanistes caeruleus*), January 2010, Lombardy, Italy.
Nikon D300, 300mm f4, 1/500 f4 iso640, tripod, no flash.
Another shot taken in freezing cold and from a hide, baiting birds
with the food they cannot find in the wild at this time of the year.

**Sticky Primrose and habitat**

(*Primula glutinosa*), July 2010, Aosta Valley, Italy.
Nikon D300, 17-50mm f2.8, 17mm 1/250 f16 iso200,
handheld, flash R1.
A clump of colorful Primroses in the dramatic Aosta Valley
alpine environment. Some soft strobe lighting
was used to avoid sharp shadows.

**Common Toad**

(*Bufo bufo*), June 2010, Piedmont, Italy.

Nikon D300, 17-50mm f2.8, 17mm 1/5 f14 iso200, handheld, flash R1.

A large Common Toad female which I found among some dramatic ruins just before sunset.

I used Nikon R1 macro strobes to light up the foreground details.

Ceramica pisi

September 2010,
Lombardy, Italy.
Nikon D300,
90mm f2.8 macro,
1/200 f22
iso200, handheld,
flash R1.
A beautifully
colored and
patterned
caterpillar which
I found while
looking for adders
in the mountains
around Bergamo.



Cinquefoils and habitat

(*Potentilla* sp.), July 2010, Aosta Valley, Italy. Nikon D300,
17-50mm f2.8, 17mm 1/160 f14 iso200, handheld, flash R1.
The Aosta Valley is a splendid alpine region of Northern Italy.
Close to Rutor glacier, this clump of Cinquefoils offered
a lovely subject with its scenic mountain lake in the background.





Grey Heron
(*Ardea cinerea*),
April 2009,
Lombardy, Italy.
Nikon D300,
300mm f4 +
converter 1,4X,
1/1600 f5.6 iso500,
handheld, no flash.
April is nesting time
for these birds,
which group in
large rookeries.
This low-flying
individual was
shot in poor light
conditions with my
handheld 300mm
extended to 420mm.



Green Lizard (*Lacerta bilineata*), September 2010,
Lombardy, Italy. Nikon D300, 10-17mm f2.8,
13mm 1/100 f16 iso320, handheld, flash R1.
I love the rocky, almost prehistoric environment
in which I shot this elegant Green Lizard female.

Wall Lizard

(*Podarcis muralis*),
April 2009,
Piedmont,
Italy.
Nikon D300,
17-50mm
f2.8, 17mm
1/250 f18
iso320,
handheld,
flash SB600.
A common
Wall Lizard
enjoys the
last minutes
of warmth
before hiding
for the night
among the
ruins of an
ancient fort.

**Fagus and stars**

September
2010,
Piedmont,
Italy.
NikonD300,
10-17mm
f2.8, 10mm
30sec f4
iso800,
tripod,
no flash.
I opted for
a very long
exposure to
get both the
stars in the
winter sky
and the enor-
mous, leafless
Beech rising
towards
them.



Slow Worm

(*Anguis fragilis*), September 2010, Lombardy, Italy.

Nikon D300, 10-17mm f2.8, 14mm 1/100 f14 iso200, handheld, flash R1.
 Another very difficult species to shoot in macro-wide - as it moves incessantly - the harmless Slow Worm is found in several hill and mountain habitats. This beautiful species is invariably mistaken for a snake (and often killed) while it is in fact a limbless lizard.



European Common Frog

(*Rana temporaria*), March 2009, Lombardy, Italy.

Nikon D300, 17-50mm f2.8, 17mm 1/250 f10 iso200, handheld, flash SB600.
 I had no rubber boots or waders with me – so I had to get in the water fully dressed to shoot this European Common Frog among its freshly laid egg clutch.

**Spurge Hawk-moth**

(*Hyles euphorbiae*), September 2010, Lombardy, Italy.

Nikon D300, 90mm f2.8 macro, 1/125 f6.3 iso200, tripod, no flash.

I used a tripod to shoot this stunning Spurge Hawk-moth caterpillar.

**Swallowtail**

(*Papilio machaon*),

September 2010,

Lombardy, Italy.

Nikon D300,

90mm f2.8

macro, 1/200

f6.3 iso200,

tripod, no flash.

A beautiful Swallowtail caterpillar just

before the arrival of autumn.

European Owl

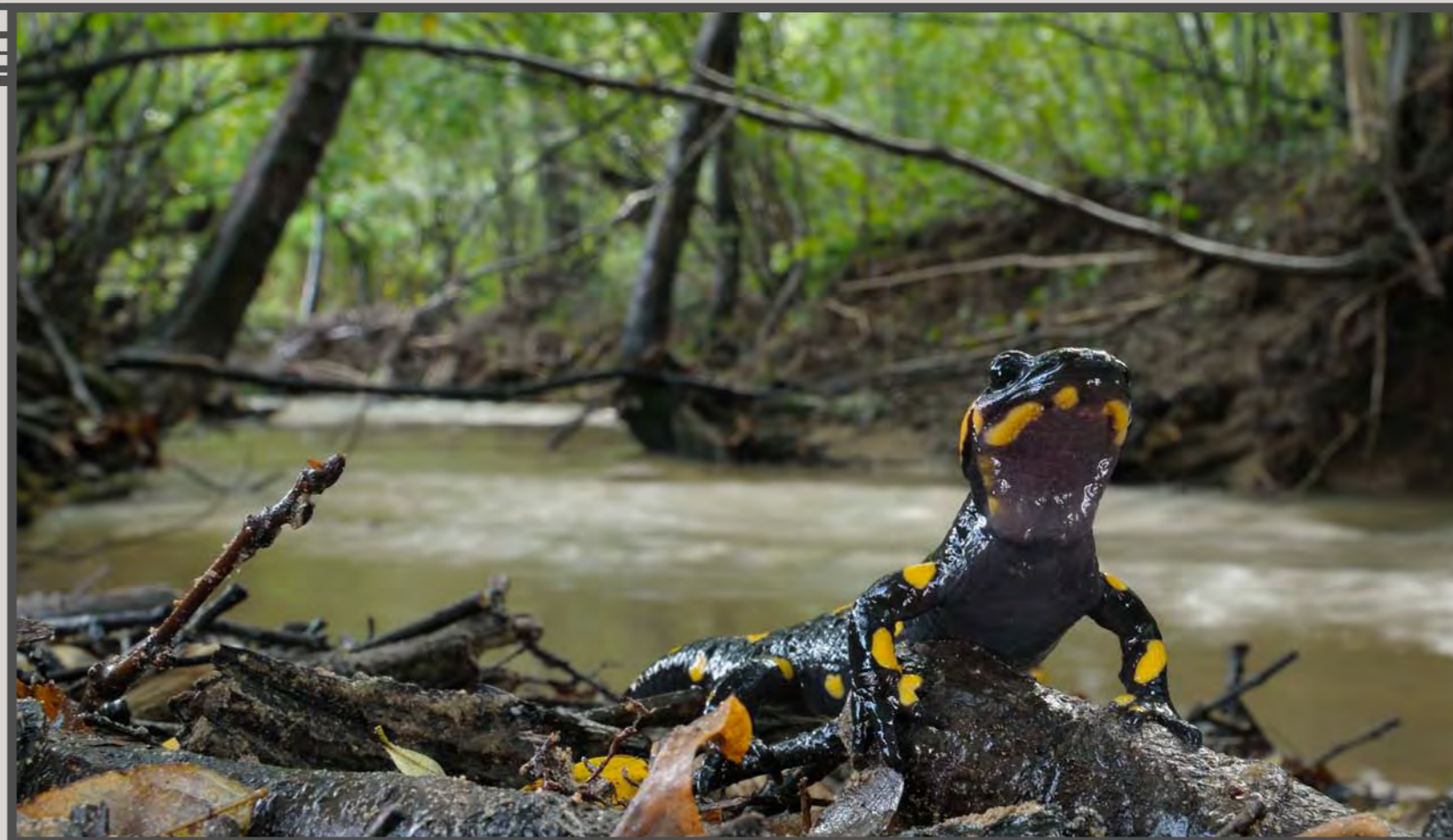
(*Asio otus*),
November 2010,
Lombardy, Italy.
Nikon D300,
300mm f4, 1/320
f4 iso200,
handheld,
flash SB600.

During winter time
European owls
group in roosts
– this was a very
lucky and
extremely
uncommon
encounter.



Common Salamander

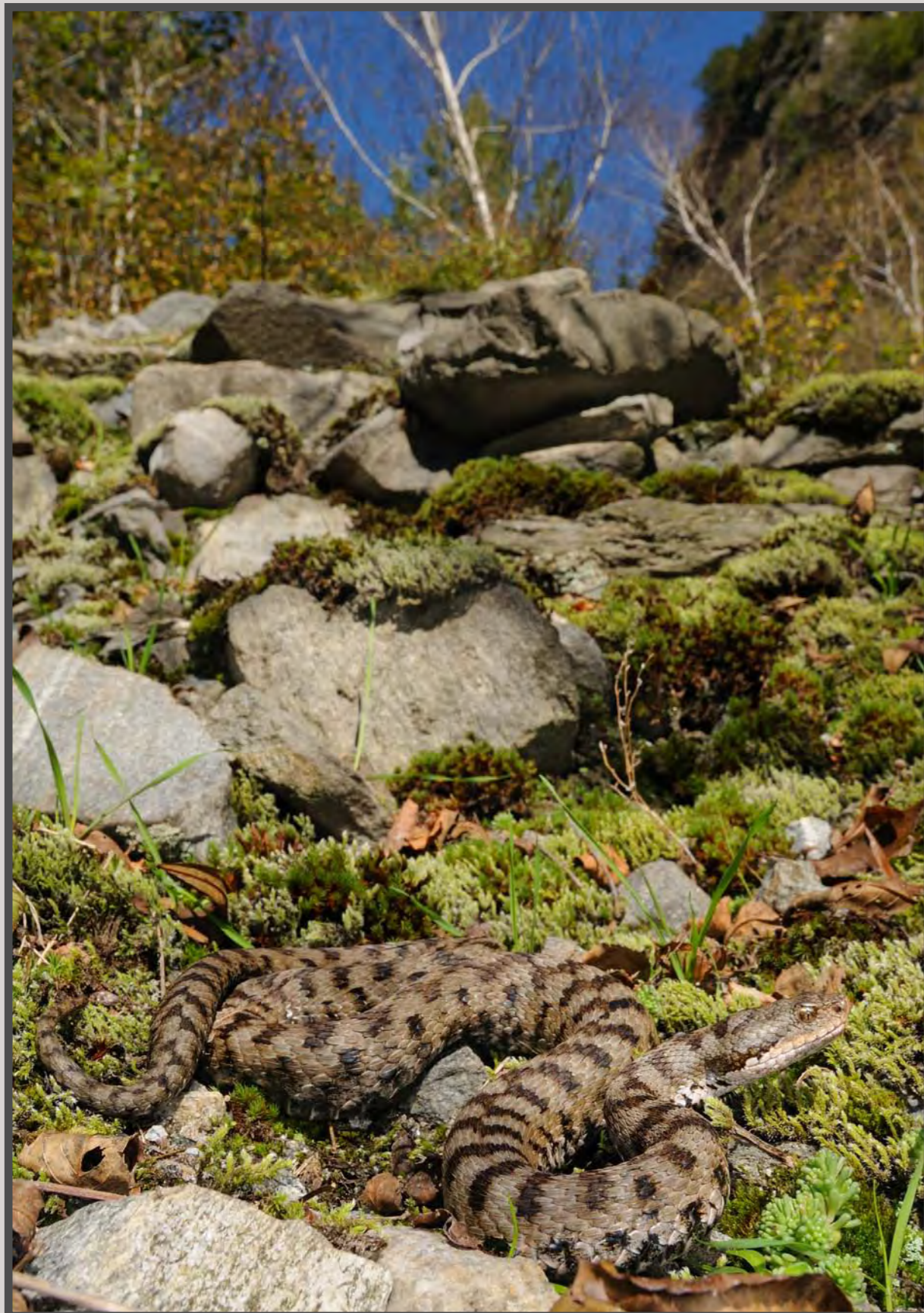
(*Salamandra salamandra*), October 2010, Lombardy, Italy.
 Nikon D300, 17-50mm f2.8, 24mm 1/200 f14 iso200, handheld,
 flash R1. Rainy days offer the best chances
 to happen upon these colorful salamanders moving about
 among the leaf litter and along woodland streams.



Common Toad (*Bufo bufo*), March 2009, Liguria, Italy.

Nikon D300, 17-50mm f2.8, 17mm 1/80 f13
 iso500, handheld, flash SB600.

A Common Toad by a stream in a small
 wood – alas, light levels were too low for my liking.



Crested Tit

(*Parus cristatus*),

December
2010, Engadin

Valley,

Switzerland.

Nikon D300,

300mm f4,

1/500 f4

iso200,

handheld,

flash SB600.

A truly delightful

Crested Tit

– possibly the

most beautiful

among Tits in

my opinion.



Asp Viper

(*Vipera aspis atra*), September 2010, Canton Ticino, Switzerland.

Nikon D300, 17-50mm f2.8, 24mm 1/100 f16 iso200, handheld, flash R1.

A stunning Asp Viper specimen which I chose to portray in its exceptionally scenic habitat.



Louisiana Crayfish

(*Procambarus clarkii*), September 2010, Lombardy, Italy.

Nikon D300, 17-50mm f2.8, 24mm 1/100 f14 iso400, handheld, flash R1.

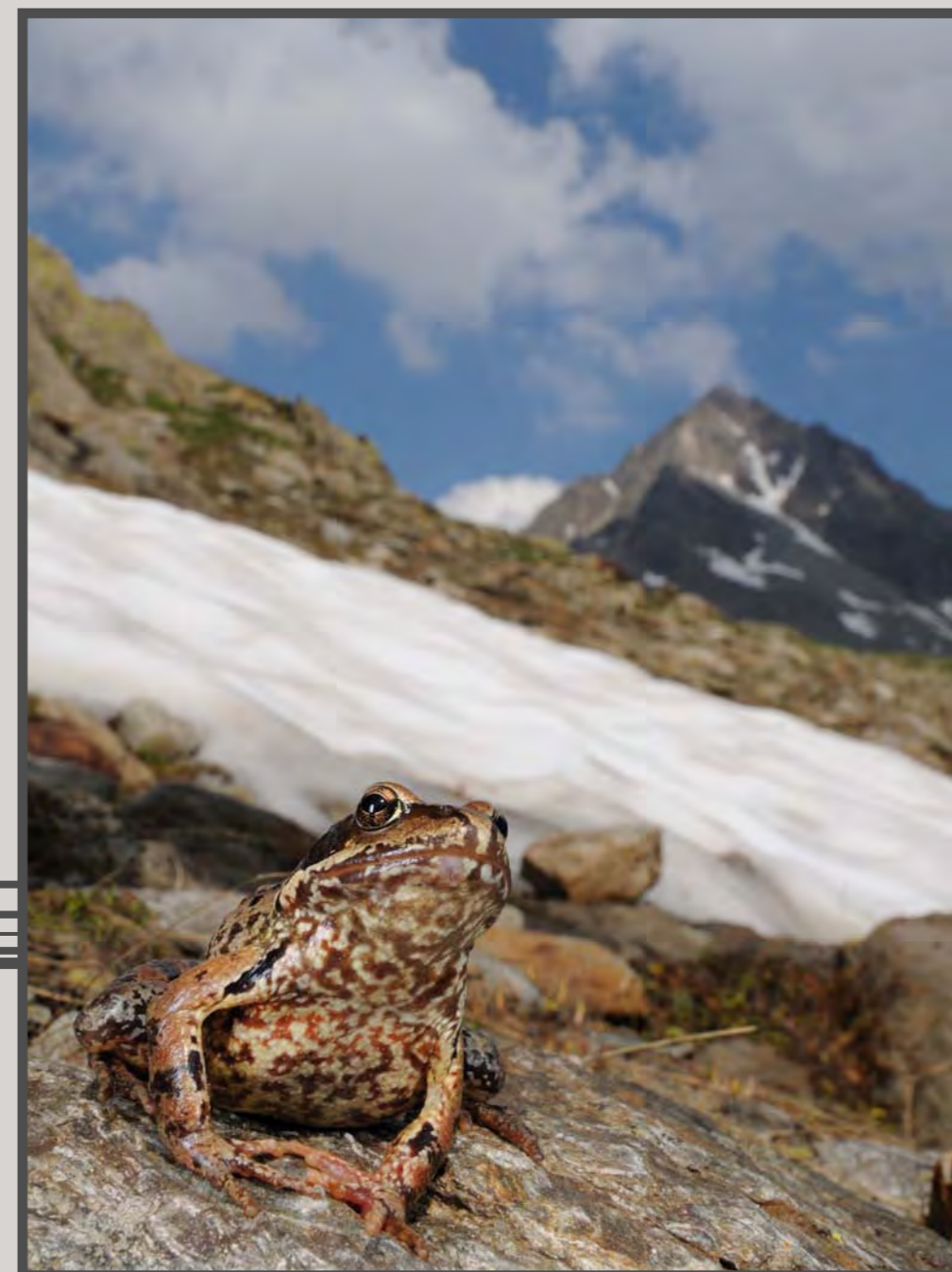
An alien and invasive species but also a very colorful one – this one is adopting its impressive defensive display.

Louisiana Crayfish have adapted very easily to Italy's environment.

European Common Frog (*Rana temporaria*), July 2010, Lombardy, Italy.
Nikon D300, 17-50mm f2.8, 28mm 1/200 f20 iso200, handheld, flash R1.

In Italy, the European Common Frog is only found in hilly and mountain environments, often at high elevations and low temperatures.

Shooting in macro-wide, my favourite technique, requires speedy actions, as one's subjects seldom stay still for more than a few seconds before fleeing.



**Red Squirrel**

(*Sciurus vulgaris*),
March 2009,
Engadin Valley,
Switzerland.

Nikon D300,
300mm f4,
1/200 f5.6
iso200, handheld,
no flash.

I was in snow,
freezing cold and
without a tripod –
but this delightful
Red Squirrel
stopped long
enough
to allow me one
sharp shot.

Raja Ampat ...

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Photographing a Green Leaf Mantis
Choeradodis rhombicollis and
a Sri Lankan Pit Viper *Trimeresurus*
trigonocephalus (bottom left) with the
Scorpion strobe bracket in
conjunction with our Nikon D300
and SB-R200 flashes set-up.



STING OF THE SCORPION

Flexibility and protection are top priorities when shooting dangerous subjects in macro mode



We love macro and we love photographing dangerous animals - small venomous insects, arthropods and snakes usually make highly interesting and often stunning subjects. Being exceptionally cryptic or - on the opposite - brightly colored (but always very hard to find), such creatures never fail to elicit our enthusiasm in the field. However, small or smallish venomous species can also be rather pugnacious and quick to defend themselves from a real or perceived threat, and the last thing one wants to happen while in the field and far from medical attention is

being stung or bitten by a dangerous animal - even non-life threatening venoms can cause an acute degree of discomfort, painful infections and local necrosis. Just the same, one desperately wants to get really close to such beautiful subjects, especially since several of them will not flee or display signs of aggression if not actually touched. Finding oneself in very close proximity to many of these animals (we are talking about centimeters/inches here) can however prove dangerous. Pit vipers - usually treacherously lethargic by day - are quick to lash out by night,

as they can detect body heat and minute temperature variations via their loreal pits, which are beautifully effective infrared detectors; many boas and pythons have a nasty attitude and are quick to bite; large scorpions have the disconcerting habit of actually running at breakneck speed towards the camera (and the hands which are holding it); several huge bird-eating spiders can release their urticating hairs and bristles; and in general one simply doesn't really want to put bare hands holding camera bodies or strobes within striking distance of such



The real trick is getting close to the subject while staying out of reach of its strike



Above, a good example of what one is really trying to avoid when shooting wide-macro in the field! Many snakes - such as this Reticulate Python *Python reticulatus* - have a long strike and an impressive array of sharp teeth, while venomous species are even riskier for obvious reasons. Left, the Scorpion strobe bracket system shown ready for use (3) and with its disassembled components (1 and 2). While not perfect (what is?), this sturdy, light and reasonably flexible bracket has shown its worth on several occasions in demanding field conditions.

nuisances. Bulky, heavy camera set-ups or the use of assistants can prove dangerous and counter-productive, as one wants to remain agile to quickly move out of harm's way and simultaneously intrude as little as possible in the subject's environment - clumsily bumping into a branch might easily scare it away or provoke a defensive reaction. After some thinking and a little research, we have successfully solved the conundrum with the adoption of a very simple, light and highly flexible system. We use two Nikon SB-R200 strobes -

extremely powerful, light and compact units, which work only in remote (being controlled by the camera pop-up flash or by a separate controller as per Nikon's Creative Lighting System) - mounting them however on the highly innovative **Scorpion Medical Close-up bracket** rather than using Nikon's own cumbersome ring SX-1 mount. The Scorpion bracket was designed and developed in Italy by a specialist company, **AgnoS**, for indoor dental close-up photography, but it has in fact proven itself as a reliable strobe mount which allows a high degree of flexibility in

difficult field conditions thanks to its robust alloy components, which can be almost limitlessly articulated. It is a light, easily dismantled metal structure comprising an extendable sled (which is fixed by means of a screw to the camera body bottom) and two modular arms which can be positioned at will using friction joints - a simple, no-frills and highly effective design. We like it so much that we now use it on all our flash-lit macrophotography field work, occasionally adding a third, hand-held Nikon SB600 for backlighting effects. Whenever a third strobe

(technically a fourth - we are not counting the camera pop-up flash here) is not present, one can easily and rapidly detach one of the SB-R200 units from its mount - thanks to its quick-latch system - and use it for backlighting effects, since it's remotely controlled by the camera. The whole contraption, partially or completely dismantled, can easily be taken on-board when flying with one's carry-on luggage, together with cameras and lenses. However, while the Scorpion bracket offers a highly practical solution to multiple strobe positioning by the field photographer alone -



Above, shooting a wide-macro close-up of a venomous Eyelash Pit Viper *Bothriechis schlegelii* while using our rubberized cardboard home-made shield. Left, using the shield in conjunction with the Scorpion strobe bracket and a wide-macro lens set-up to shoot a venomous Cameron Highlands Pit Viper *Trimeresurus nebularis*.

ANIMA MUNDI ON YouTube

STING OF THE SCORPION 1



STING OF THE SCORPION 2



effectively doing away with assistants - its use alone obviously does not solve the safety problems inherent with small dangerous subjects. To deal with this we have come up with a ridiculously simple gadget - a semi-foldable (or rather, semi-rigid) heavily rubberized cardboard shield with a hole in its middle. The shield fits in our LowePro backpack's external pocket but once mounted on the camera/bracket combo is large enough to (barely) protect the photographer's exposed fingers and knuckles (the most exposed parts), while the macro or wide-macro lens fits

neatly in the central opening, protruding ever so slightly beyond. The face of the photographer is effectively protected/hidden by the camera body. After having been rubberized (using a tube of sealing silicone), the cardboard shield has been then painted in a mildly disruptive camouflage pattern on the side facing the subject, hiding the complex, cumbersome array approaching it. It works! Concealed behind this admittedly amateurish and cheap contraption we have been able to approach within inches several snake species which would have otherwise reacted with

quick aggression and potentially dangerous bites. Obviously this is not something we would trust when getting really close to much larger species - to deal with those we have come up with our own home-made polecam, which will be described in a future issue - but our little contraption works like a charm with the great majority of dangerous species, as you can see watching our little videos. Having successfully tested the design of the shield on several occasions, we have then developed a better, sturdier version designed as two interlocking plastic plates, which should protect a

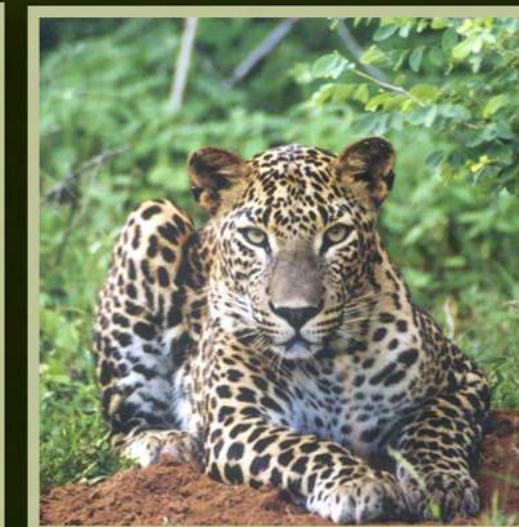
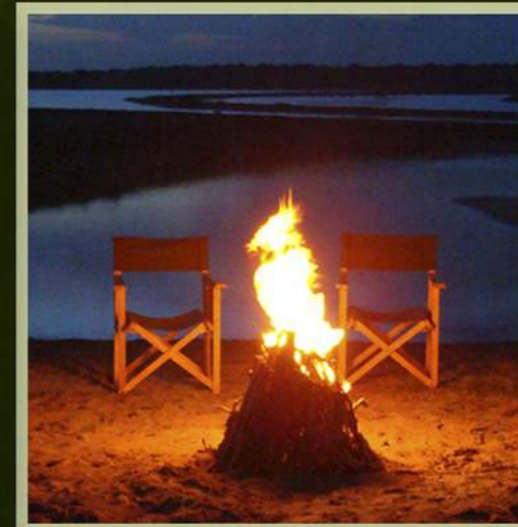
broader area and withstand the strike of larger species. But we have to confess we are too lazy to proceed with the new version, and so we'll keep on using the same old wrinkly cardboard one...at least until it won't finally give up under one of those torrential tropical downpours!

Disclaimer: Do not try this if you are not seriously experienced in dealing with venomous and/or dangerous animals! The authors of the article and the publishers of ANIMA MUNDI - *Adventures in Wildlife Photography* cannot accept responsibility for any accidents which might occur to those trying to imitate the techniques described above.

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The Parting Shot

The Orangutan Rehabilitation Center of the Sepilok-Kabili Forest Reserve - sited at the outskirts of the bustling town of Sandakan, in Malaysian Borneo - offers visitors the chance of seeing its young simian guests twice daily, as the semi-domesticated orphaned young apes, once stolen from their habitat and now saved but still unable to fend for themselves, emerge from the rainforest to feed on a diet of milk and bananas. As they grow and mature, they will hopefully learn to find their own food in the wild, and will gradually disperse in the surrounding forest to live a free life. It is a spectacle which evokes mixed feelings in the detached observer - the beautiful, vine-draped gigantic trees, the small

birds singing up in the canopy, the dozen or so young Orangutans punctually swinging down on lianas - as on cue - to sit around the Park Ranger bringing their daily fare...but also the noisy crowd of gaudily-dressed tourists elbowing and pushing each other on the wooden observation platform, pocket cameras frantically clicking, mobile phones relentlessly filming, the rubbery clapping of flip-flops, the incongruous loud laughs, the silly jokes. Granted, most of these people would never see an Orangutan in the wild, and the feeding show offers a precious if somewhat artificial surrogate - but are they really interested in knowing more? Rainforests are being felled round the clock, all crea-

tures large and small are being killed, stolen, displaced everywhere - is there still room on this Earth for them? On one occasion, as I was watching the noisy, out-of-place tourist crowd, I suddenly noticed this young female Orangutan sitting quietly aside by herself on the wooden walkway, away from the others, silently, her soft brown eyes gazing dreamily somewhere in the distance and showing an unspeakable melancholy. Did she feel the sadness of her condition, the loneliness of her being torn between two worlds? Was she dreaming of her long-lost forest home? What was she thinking? I don't know - but in her eyes I saw a soul, and I felt ashamed of being a human. ●

IN ANIMA MUNDI'S NEXT ISSUE

No.4, Fourth Quarter, October 2011



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Part 2 of our extensive coverage of Costa Rica's Selva Verde Nature Reserve and its wildlife



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MANTIS SHRIMP
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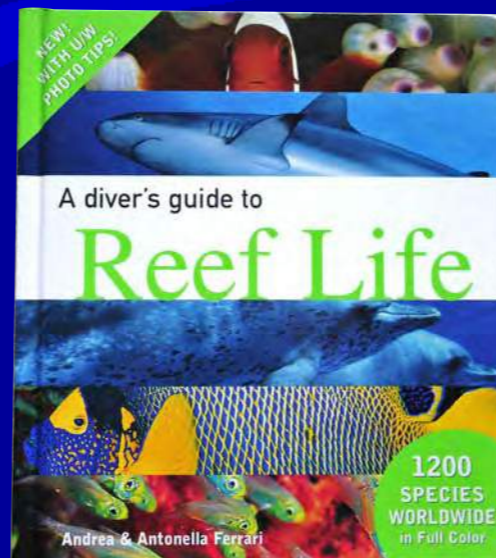
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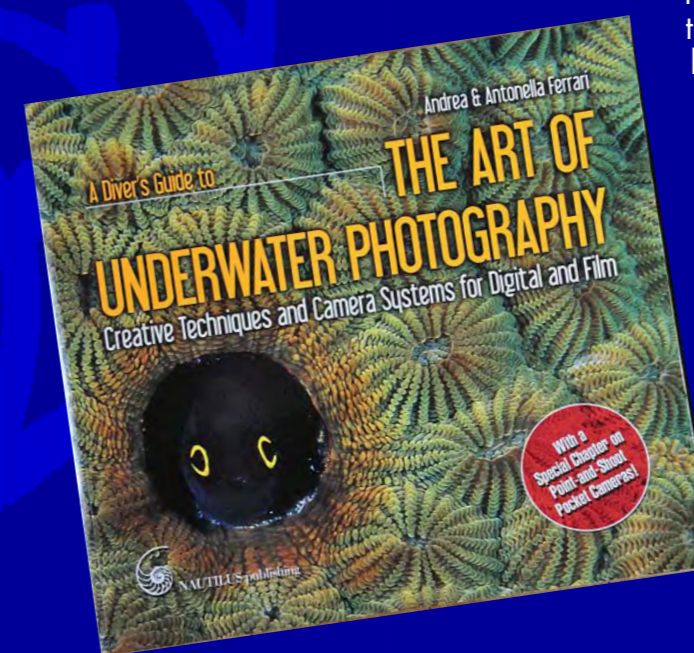
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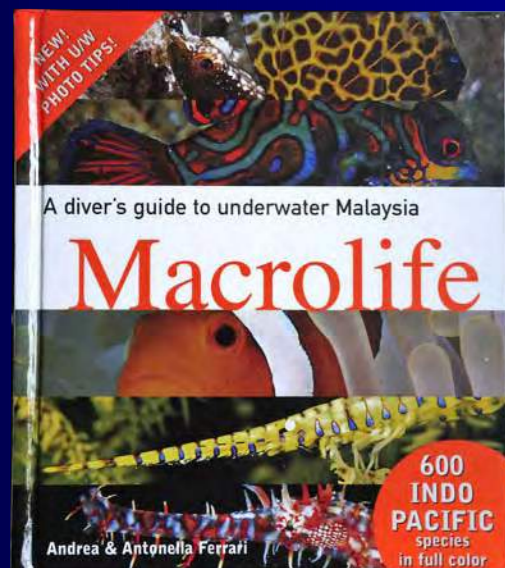
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