



ANIMA MUNDI

Adventures in Wildlife Photography

Issue 8, Year 2 - 4th Quarter, October 2012

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■ Jaguar Tree Frog
Dendropsophus bifurcus
resting inside a curled leaf -
from our Yasuni National Park
feature starting on page 8.



ANIMA MUNDI

Adventures in Wildlife Photography

A passion without frontiers

Welcome to a new photo-packed, information-laden issue of ANIMA MUNDI - *Adventures in Wildlife Photography*! As the number of our magazine's readers keeps growing - we now get more than 15.000 downloads worldwide per issue - so does the quality of its contents, while the scope of the magazine's articles, stories and photographic features keeps broadening thanks to the hard work of several new, enthusiastic and above all highly professional contributors. ANIMA MUNDI is growing fast thanks to their hard work, and it really feels incredibly good having so many people from all over the world working with us, sharing our common passion for wildlife, conservation and nature photography and freely providing visuals of extremely high quality. Just look at this issue's contents - and be amazed!

We start with our Scoop - this time we are bringing you a totally amazing moth from the Amazon which will literally make your head spin. We dubbed it "the Illusionist Moth" before finding out its scientific name, as it looks like some optical trick out of the Fourth Dimension. Sounds crazy? It does - but just go to page 4 and look for yourself!

We then remain in the Amazon and continue on page 8 with our trademark On the Trail feature - in this issue we bring you the second part of our extensive trip report on Ecuador's hotly contested Yasuni National Park, and we suspect you'll like it even more than the previous one. The quality of the photographs is pretty amazing and the amount of strange or new species featured in it is really, really stunning. Not surprising really since Yasuni is one of the world's biodiversity hotspots.

It's a big jump after that, as from the steaming rainforests of the Amazon we take you straight to the freezing wastes of the Falklands - courtesy of our fantastic contributor David Hemmings, bird

photographer *extraordinaire*. His Beauty of the Beast feature of this issue - starting on page 57 - consists in a dazzling gallery of Southern Atlantic bird fauna portraits - something one doesn't see every day. Thank you, David, for finding the time to contribute to ANIMA MUNDI!

It's another big leap after that, as from the cold, wind-swept shores of the Falklands we travel to the dusty, scorching hot plains of India on page 74 to be dazzled by Yuwaraj Gurjar's Personal Portfolio. His truly beautiful, highly personal portraits of his own Country's micro- and macrofauna will amaze you, and we can't wait to get more features from him. Welcome aboard Yuwi, and *dhanyawad* to you too!

But it's not over yet, of course - from the arid plains and the moist monsoon forests of the Indian subcontinent we then take you in a flash to the flowing waters of the Rio Negro in Brazil. Dive with the mysterious Pink dolphins from page 98 on, courtesy of Israeli contributors Michel Braunstein and Dafna Ben Nun, who offered to the electronic pages of ANIMA MUNDI their unique images of the Boto, portrayed both underwater and above it. *Toda*, Michel and Dafna!

These are the contents of our present issue, but the ever-growing list of our contributors, all hailing from the four corners of the world, does not end here. In the next one (Issue 9, January 2013) we'll have some more fantastic stuff thanks to Glenn Bartley (another bird photographer *supremo* from Canada, like David Hemmings), Olivier Esnault (French writer and nature photographer based at La Reunion) and Bjorn Olesen (fantastic Danish photographer now residing in Singapore). In the meantime...

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

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

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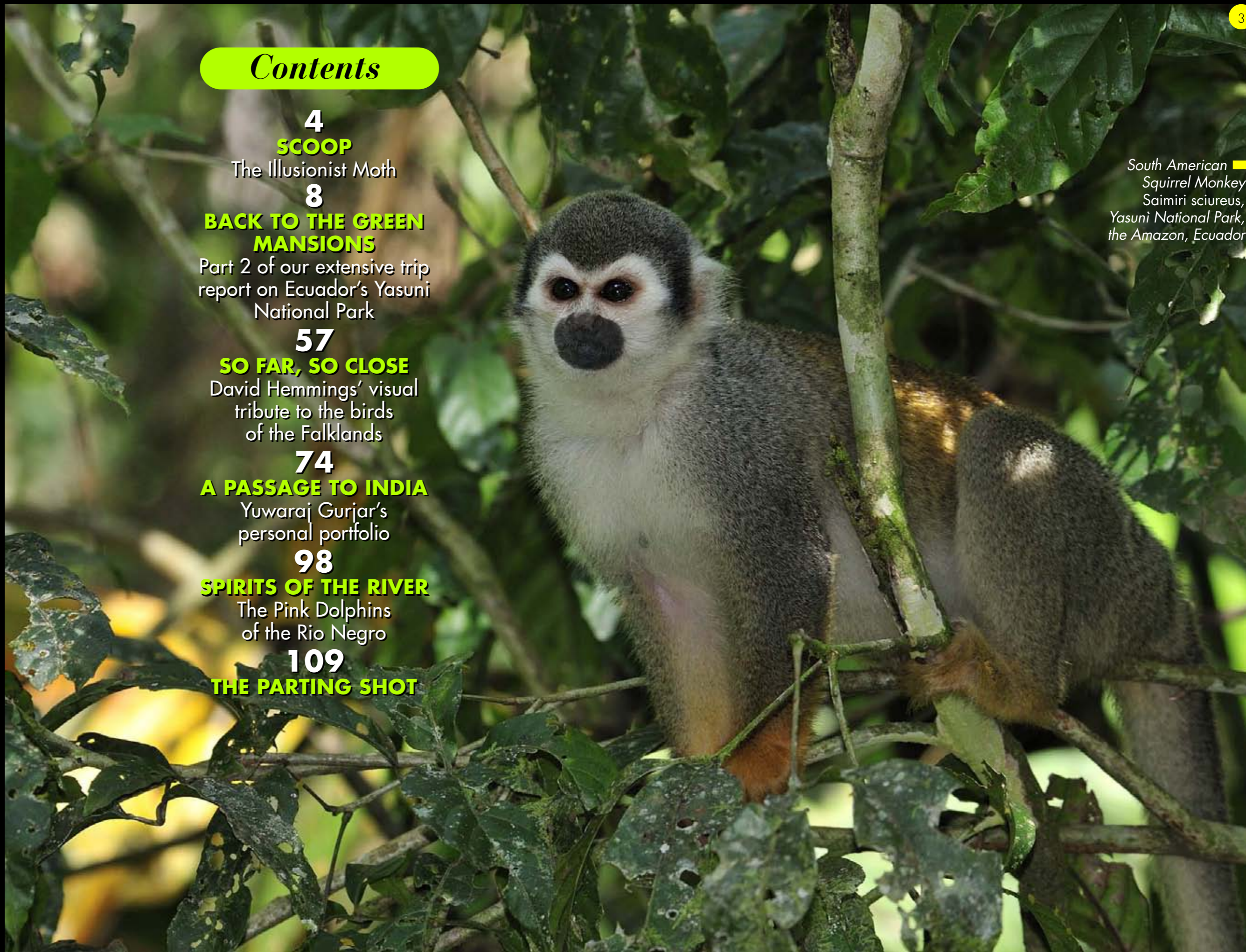
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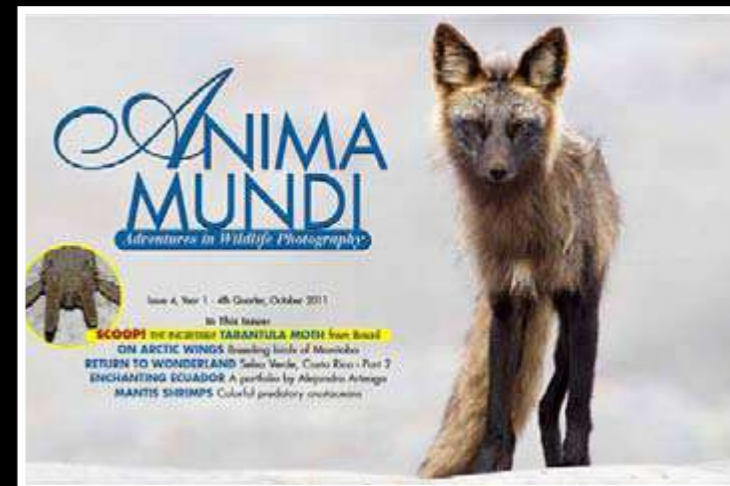
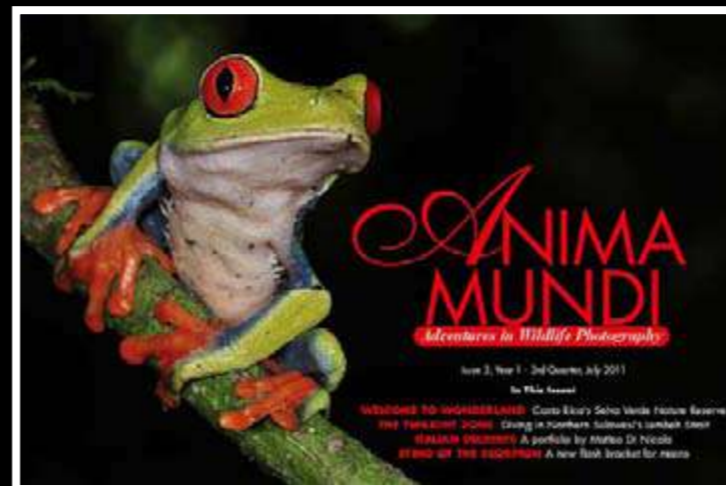
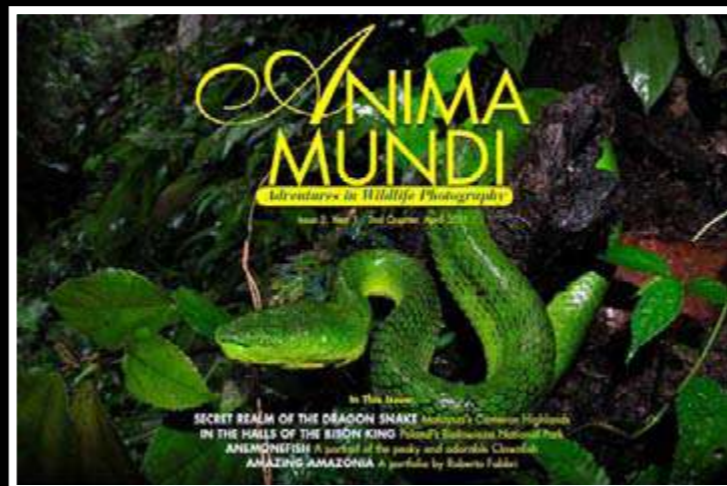
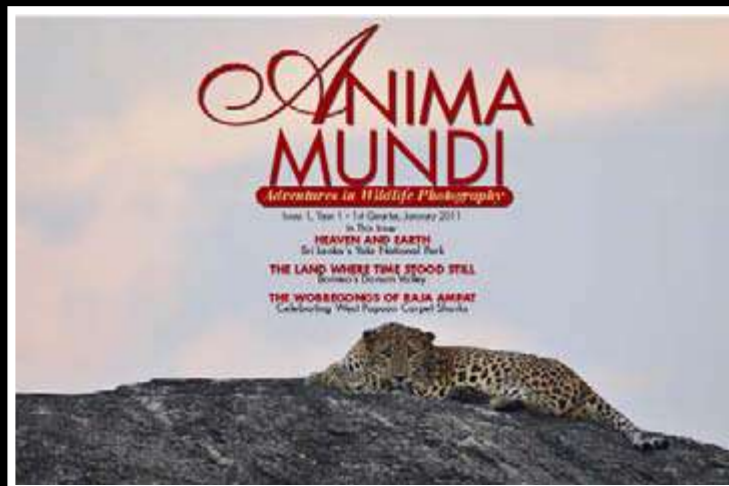
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THE PARTING SHOT

South American
Squirrel Monkey
Saimiri sciureus,
Yasuni National Park,
the Amazon, Ecuador



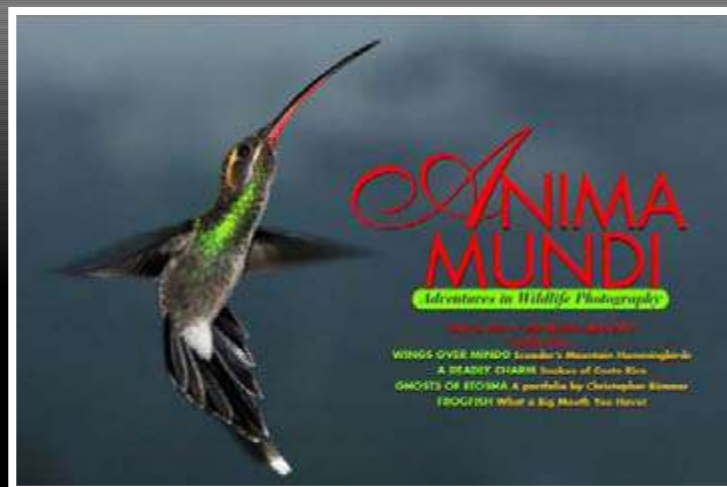
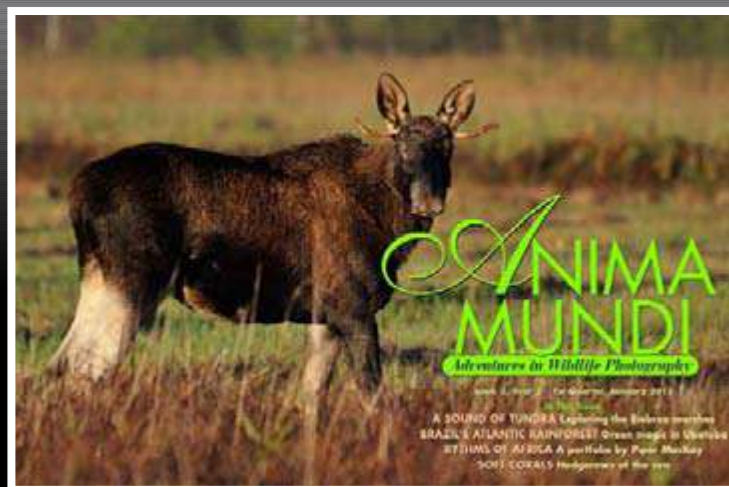


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A RARE FIND IN THE AMAZON **THE ILLUSIONIST MOTH**

WE DISCOVER AND PHOTOGRAPH
AN **EXTRAORDINARY**
NOTODONTID SPECIES
DURING A NIGHT WALK
IN EASTERN ECUADOR'S
LOWLAND RAINFOREST



■ A profile portrait of the stunning Notodontid moth - encountered in proximity of the rio Tiputini, in the Ecuadorian Amazon rainforest - shows to advantage its concave-looking folded wings. The resulting optical illusion is extraordinarily realistic and quite mystifying.



Another profile shot of the moth, later identified as *Crinodes bellatrix* thanks to Dr. Alexander Schintlmeister. The optical illusion of the wings being concave has to be seen in the field to be believed - the effect is absolutely dazzling to the viewer.

TEXT BY ANDREA FERRARI
PHOTOS BY ANDREA & ANTONELLA FERRARI

As our headlamps' cones of light shine on a concave-looking, strangely shell-like object resting on a large leaf, we immediately realize we have stumbled upon a truly mysterious creature of the Ecuadorian Amazon's rainforest. What sort of strange creature is this - if it is alive at all? Antonella - together with our friends Lucas Bustamante-Enriquez and Alejandro Arteaga - keeps it brightly illuminated in the pitch black night as I observe it carefully through my 105mm macro lens. It appears to be

a large, finger-long moth of some sort, resting with its wings folded against its sides. But how can it be concave? Its wings look like the inside of a conch - light appears to enter a cavity, and then gradually disappear inside! The Escher-like optical effect is absolutely dizzying, and after a while we need to literally (and very delicately) touch the creature to convince ourselves its wings are truly flat after all, and not leading to some other mysterious fourth dimension. Identifying this unique, heavy-bodied moth appears to be

a daunting task - it takes the help of world-famous entomologists such as Dr. Piotr Naskrecki, Dr. Kenji Nishida, Dr. Ulf Eitschberger and Dr. Wolfgang A. Nässig to put us on the right trail, but final identification is due to the competence and kindness of Dr. Alexander Schintlmeister, who finally identifies our elusive Notodontid "illusionist moth" as *Crinodes bellatrix* (Stoll, 1780). So its identity is confirmed - but the dazzling optical illusion it offers still remains mystifying to whoever encounters it. ●



■ A dorsal view of *Crinodes bellatrix* (left) reveals the optical illusion offered by the ornamentation of its wings - which of course in reality are perfectly flat, as they should be! A frontal portrait of this curious Notodontid moth (above) shows its anterodorsal knob-like rostrum and a somewhat intimidating appearance.

■ A three-quarter frontal view of *Crinodes bellatrix* accentuates the truly perplexing optical illusion offered by its extraordinarily patterned wings. It is literally impossible not being completely fooled by the illusion of concavity offered by the moth - an optical trick which furthermore works to perfection from several angles.



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.”

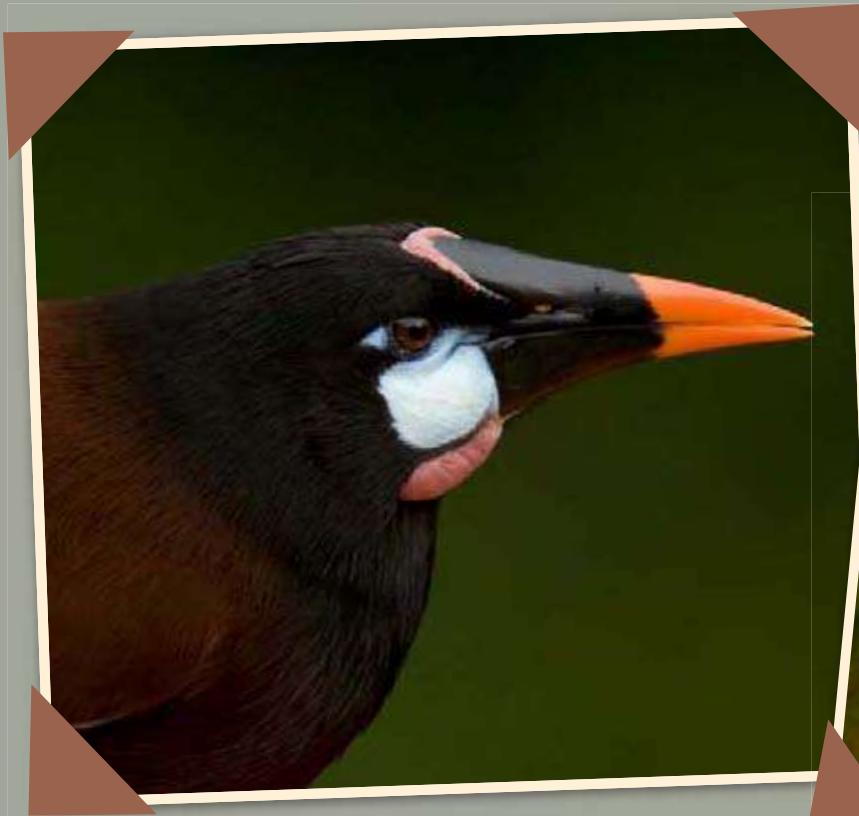
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ECUADOR'S YASUNI
NATIONAL PARK

BACK TO THE GREEN MANSIONS

Part Two of our extensive
trip report on one
of the world's most beautiful
and threatened
biodiversity hotspots

■ An adult male Humboldt's Woolly Monkey *Lagothrix lagotricha* - one of the few large mammal species which can be reliably observed in Yasuni.

■ A tiny *Typophyllum* sp. Dead leaf-mimic katydid (Tettigoniidae). Many species found in the Amazon show amazingly cryptic colorations, patterns and body shapes to avoid predation - or to be successful predators.

Living leaves slowly moving on the rainforest floor

TEXT BY ANDREA FERRARI
PHOTOS BY ANDREA & ANTONELLA FERRARI

*F*or those who missed it, let us briefly recap here what we have already written of Ecuador's Yasuni National Park in the first half of our extensive, two-part feature on this amazing South American destination, published in the previous issue of *ANIMA MUNDI - Adventures in Wildlife Photography* (no. 7, July 2012) - the numbers are so staggering, they're very well worth repeating. Established in 1979 and declared a Biosphere

Reserve in 1989, the Yasuni National Park covers an area of 962,000 hectares in the basin of the upper Napo River in the western Amazon region. There are at least 2,274 species of trees and shrubs, and in a single hectare have been found up to 655 species - this is more than the total number of tree species in the United States, Canada and Mexico combined. There are 593 species of birds, 80 species of bats, 150 species

of amphibians, 120 species of reptiles, and more than 4,000 species of vascular plants. Researchers have estimated that the insect population could be as high as 100,000 species. The Yasuni National Park is likely the most biologically diverse spot on the planet - an extraordinary travel destination for wildlife and nature photographers. The Park is also known for its indigenous population. The Amazonian Quichua or Napurunas

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The banks of the rio Tiputini are shrouded in thick vegetation, often heavily damaged and torn down by sudden, powerful floods. This is a constantly shifting habitat.

*A floating log lies
in ambush, dragonflies
laying eggs on it*

Large, bright orange dragonflies hover above a perfectly camouflaged Spectacled Caiman *Caiman crocodilus*.



Left, an adult Saddle-back Tamarin *Saguinus fuscicollis* - this is a very active, fast-moving, shy species which is not easily approached. Above, two mating Fungus beetles (*Erotylidae*).

people, the Waorani people, and two groups in voluntary isolation, the Tagaeri and Taromenane all reside here. The Waorani people occupy most of its area - their reputation as fierce warriors is widely known. To sum up the obvious, the Park is essential to the protection of all the cultures and species that dwell within. Yet, the Yasuni National Park faces many threats to its preservation. The impact

of oil wells within the Park, the opening of roads for oil exploration, and the installation of oil wells have been damaging. Other threats to its very existence include illegal timber extraction, overexploitation of wildlife by indigenous tribes and climate change. An exceptionally detailed and highly specialized scientific analysis of Yasuni National Park, its environment, its fauna and its enormous ecological

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■ A Giant Broad-headed Treefrog *Osteocephalus taurinus*, one of Yasuni's most impressive and easily observed amphibians. This species can be easily identified in the field by its bright green, beautifully patterned eyes.





■ Above, a South American Tapir *Tapirus terrestris*. Right, a tabanid horsefly (top) and a large tick (bottom) photographed on its hide as they feed on it. Incidence of parasitism in Yasuni's equatorial, moist environment is evident everywhere.

importance can be found [here](#), but for most of our readers what we have related above will probably be more than enough. From a more practical, visit-related point of view, many readers will probably find of some interest reading instead about the many difficulties encountered when photographing wildlife in this demanding, hostile environment - the equipment we use, the problems we

have occasionally faced, the solutions we have adopted.

TRAVEL LIGHT TO ENSURE SUCCESS

Hot, humid lowland rainforests such as this one are usually quite impenetrable to casual visitors, and can only be explored on foot, making good use of the extensive

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■ A South American Common Toad *Rhinella margaritifera* perches on a fallen tree trunk by the banks of the rio Tiputini. This is a very cryptic but commonly observed species.

Sitting undetected by the slow-flowing river





An enormous number of Leafhoppers (all belonging to the Family Cicadellidae) inhabit Yasuni's rainforest. Most are very small but all are exceptionally colorful and usually very brightly patterned.



network of well-marked trails opened and maintained by the Estacion Cientifica Yasuni. The gravel road leading to the Research Station can also be occasionally used for some night driving in the hope of sighting some nocturnal reptiles or mammals, but this is not normally done. So walking - for hours, by day or by night, under a scorching sun or in a pouring rain and on muddy, slippery rainforest trails - is basically the only feasible option. This naturally poses the first and possibly most important of many questions - what lenses should one carry? Experience has taught us that carrying heavily laden backpacks is not really advisable (or even feasible) in such extreme climates, so we limit ourselves to a macro lens (Nikon 105mm), a medium tele zoom (Nikon 18-200mm) and a longer zoom (Nikon 80-400mm). The macro lens is

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A very colorful Acridiidae grasshopper, possibly *Nautia* sp. Identification of rainforest species can be often very complex.



The sinuous curves of a harmless, pencil-thin Blunthead Tree Snake *Imantodes cenchoa* (left) seem to echo the stiffer ones shown by a *Bauhinia* ladder liana (right). Notice the flies on the former and the wasp nests on the latter.



Walking in Yasuni presents one with the very real risk of stepping on a Lancehead pit-viper *Bothrops atrox*, Latin America's most dangerous snake and certainly one of the most cryptic ones.





■ Yasuni's beetles are legion - countless, usually very colorful and coming in all shapes and sizes. Above, a Tortoise Beetle belonging to the family Chrysomelidae; left, two Erotylidae Fungus beetles.

obviously an absolute must - most are small and quite light, and the absolute majority of the subjects one can encounter in the rainforest belong to the macro universe. The medium zoom could actually be dispensed with (but it's good to have a spare) while the longer zoom is a much-debated and not always successful compromise between focal length, weight and usefulness. The venerable Nikon 80-

400mm sports an agonizingly slow autofocus and needs a lot of light to give good results, but it's of a very high optical quality, it can be easily carried for long distances and it offers an unbeatable flexibility with its wide-ranging focal lengths. A longer and faster lens (such as our Sigma 500mm) would clearly be preferable, but carrying one in this environment is inviting disaster, and the occasions to

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■ If done properly - ie without noise and with subdued lights - night walks in the rainforest occasionally offer the opportunity to closely approach sleeping birds. This is a stunning Blue-crowned Manakin *Lepidothrix coronata*.



use it are few and far between, as monkeys and birds are usually too shy or too far up in the canopy to be photographed while on the walk. Longer and heavier lenses - such as a 500mm or a 600mm - are better kept aside to be used from fixed positions nearby the lodge or by the river. A set of flash units is mandatory, as light levels in the lower storeys of the rainforest are usually quite low; others might want to shoot in natural light, but carrying a heavy, strong tripod for six hours in a row is another recipe for trouble, and most small macro subjects won't stay still long enough to make its use reasonable, anyway. Static, slow-moving or very dangerous macro subjects are best photographed *in situ* (easier said than done, as most often they'll be found hiding in more or less

inaccessible places!) while harmless but active species such as small, non-venomous snakes or amphibians can be occasionally collected to be photographed later on in more manageable conditions (it goes without saying that each and every one will be returned unharmed to its original place immediately after). Most rainforest photographers, in fact, will readily build a simple tabletop natural-looking set-up at their base camp which will be used to shoot macro subjects in relative comfort - to learn about the set-up used by Piotr Naskrecki, celebrated entomologist, book author and recognized Grand Master of insect macrophotography, we suggest you to click [here](#). We have occasionally done the same, but we are too lazy and disorganized to do it on a consistent

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Sleeping in fear, always ready to flee at the slightest sign of danger

*Colorful codes
and signals speaking
an unknown language*



Yasuni hosts a great number of beautiful amphibian species. This is a Painted Antnest Frog *Leptodactylus lineatus*.



Successful camouflage is the key to survival for many predators of the Amazon rainforest. Left, a beautiful adult Lancehead pit-viper *Bothrops atrox* sits in ambush by a forest trail; right, the mind-boggling impersonation of a dead leaf displayed by the Dead leaf-mimic Praying Mantis *Acanthops royi* - we owe the identification of the latter to Dr. Piotr Naskrecki of Harvard University.





Top left, a Leafhopper (Cicadellidae);
top right, a Ghost Assassin Bug (Reduviidae);
bottom right, an unidentified golden fly (Diptera);
bottom left, an unidentified ant showing bright, eye-like aposematic markings on its abdomen, which make it look like a spider when seen from behind.

■ The brightly marked Reticulated Poison Frog *Ranitomeya ventrimaculata* is one of Yasuni's most colorful and conspicuous amphibians. This tiny, poisonous species is active during the day.





Well █ camouflaged and barely visible, the slit pupils of the Two-striped forest pitviper or Amazonian palm viper *Bothriopsis bilineata* (left) betray its nocturnal habits and an ambushing style of predation, while the big round eyes of the Brown Sipo *Chironius fuscus* (right) indicate diurnal habits and an active mode of hunting.



A pair of **Saddle-back Tamarin** *Saguinus fuscicollis*. This is a very uncommon encounter due to human disturbance and predation.

Playful, restless goblins of the rainforest canopy



basis - sometimes a couple of sticks or a few dead leaves will suffice (provided one is very careful with the background when composing the image). In any case, a good macro lens with its attendant strobes is the single most important piece of equipment one should take on a rainforest walk - never leave it behind! When the presence of larger subjects within reach is well-known and almost guaranteed (a visiting troop of monkeys, for example, or a large nesting bird) a long tele (such as our Sigma 500mm) is worth carrying - but be extremely careful, as slipping, falling and getting badly scratched/wounded by thorns or splinters can be extraordinarily, embarrassingly and disconcertingly easy when carrying a big expensive lens along a muddy, slippery and occasionally steep rainforest trail. In these cases we suggest to carry the long lens in a small, lightweight backpack and mount it on the camera

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Showing a distinct sexual dimorphism, these are *Oreophoetes topoense* Stick Insects (Phasmidae), mating at night.



*Ancient water-dwelling
reptiles of the
mysterious Amazon*

A group of
Yellow-spotted river
turtle *Podocnemis
unifilis* is basking
on a half-
submerged log.
This species
is severely
threatened by
hunting.





■ Top right, Sarayacu Tree Frog *Dendropsophus parviceps*; top left, *Rana granosa* *Hypsiboas cinerascens*; bottom left, Crump Tree Frog *Dendropsophus brevifrons*.

body only when ready. We are very happy with our LowePros - strong, truly waterproof and quite comfortable camera backpacks which have saved our equipment (and at least once ourselves too) from severe physical damage. Let us repeat once more that Yasuni National Park is pure undiluted heaven for macro photographers - so, to state the obvious again, a good set of LED headlamps for nocturnal

explorations and a pair of lightweight gloves for the capture/manipulation of small subjects of dubious nature and even more dubious temperament are mandatory. In the end, of course, it's the photographer's eyes and personal vision which make the difference - and in this respect the environment of Yasuni, with its stunning wealth of subjects, can be ideal for those willing to stretch their creativity. ●



■ The arboreal habits of the *Rana granosa* *Hypsiboas cinerascens* allow free reins to a photographer's creativity.





Left, adult male Humboldt's Woolly Monkey *Lagothrix lagotricha*, a very vocal, rather large and quite unmistakable species. Right, adult Saddle-back Tamarin *Saguinus fuscicollis*. Both species are sadly heavily persecuted and hunted for food by Waorani natives and are becoming very difficult to see.



Right, an adult South American Squirrel Monkey *Saimiri sciureus*. Far right, top, a Yellow-rumped Cacique *Cacicus cela* perching by its hanging nest; far right, bottom, a Taira *Eira barbara*. All three species can be occasionally observed in the vicinity of the most important tourist lodges of Yasuni.





Two more
extraordinary
examples of the
successful
camouflage
strategies adopted
by several species
of the Amazon.
Left, a Two-striped
forest-pitviper or
Amazonian palm
viper *Bothriopsis
bilineata*; right, a
Leaf katydid
*Pterachroza
ocellata*.





More stunningly
cryptic species from
the Amazon
rainforest.
Left, a bright green
Leaf mimic katydid
Typophyllum
mortuifolium;
right, another
fascinating image
of the Dead leaf-
mimic Mantis
Acanthops royi,
one of our trip's
most enchanting
and surprising
encounters.





Neatly coiled and immobile on the forest soil among rotting wood and dead leaves, a juvenile Lancehead pit-viper *Bothrops atrox* is almost invisible to the casual observer. The cryptic livery, powerful venom and uncertain temper of this species make it a very real danger in the South American rainforest.

*Patiently waiting
in the night
of the Amazon*



■ A close-up of the head of a Two-striped forest-pitviper or Amazonian palm viper *Bothriopsis bilineata* shows very clearly the heat-sensing pits of this arboreal, highly cryptic Crotalid species.



Yasuni is a frog lover's dream come true! Left, a Tiger-striped Leaf Frog *Phyllomedusa tomopterna*; right, a *Rana granosa* or Tree Frog *Hypsiboas cinerascens*. Both species can make wonderful camera subjects.





Top left, Ecuadorian Poison Frog *Ameerega bilinguis*;
top right, Amazon Green Frog *Lithobates palmipes*.
Bottom right, Tiger-striped Leaf Frog *Phyllomedusa tomopterna*;
bottom left, Dendrobatid Poison Arrow Frog *Ameerega hahneli*.



■ *Rana granosa* or Tree Frog *Hypsiboas cinerascens*. With its popped-out eyes and wide grin, this is possibly one of Yasuni's most lovable tree frog species.





Another of Yasuni's most photogenic and endearing tree frog species is the White-lined leaf frog *Phyllomedusa vaillantii*. This is a very colorful, arboreal, nocturnal and relatively common species.





A silent statement of power and grace



Far left, top, a Tree Frog *Hypsiboas cinerascens* emerging from a bromeliad; far left, bottom, a Peter's Dwarf Frog *Engystomops petersi*. Left, the structural unfurling of a young fern leaf in the damp rainforest understory makes for a strong visual statement.



The majority of caterpillars encountered in Yasuni's rainforest feature bright, aposematic colorations and fearsome arrays of spikes and/or severely urticating bristles. Inadvertently brushing against one can lead to a severe allergic reaction - a good reason to wear long-sleeved shirts when walking in the forest.



More caterpillars from Yasuni - identification of most is difficult for the layman as several species are quite esoteric, and highly specialized field researchers themselves are often left stumped. All should be strictly left alone, however - those bristles and spikes can be severely urticating if touched.





Correct identification of Yasuni's katydids can be frustratingly difficult for the uninitiated. Top and bottom, left, two different Acridiidae grasshoppers; top and bottom, right, two different Leaf-mimic katydids (Tettigoniidae), with *Parableta* sp above and *Pycnopalpa* sp. below.





Predator and prey play a daily (or rather nightly) and deadly game of hide and seek in Yasuni's rainforest. A large Wandering Spider (Ctenidae), left, has been successful and is feeding on its already half-dismantled/half-liquified beetle prey; the colorful Crayola katydid *Vestria* sp. (right) will live another day.





As we have
already written
elsewhere, Yasuni
is incredibly rich in
spider and allied
species.
Left, the dazzling
colors and patterns
shown by a huge
Harvestman or
Opilionid,
Santinezia sp.,
(Cranidae).
Right, the
contrasting
coloration of a
Wandering Spider
(Ctenidae) found
at night on
the forest floor.





Top left, the ground-dwelling, red-bodied spider *Aglaoctenus castaneus* is unmistakable. Bottom left, an unidentified but striking moth; left, a colony of treehopper nymphs is being carefully tended by their ant "farmers".



Top right, a Riadiniidae butterfly (possibly *Lasaia* sp.) feeding on soil minerals; top right, a birdwing butterfly (Papilionidae) doing the same. Bottom right, a Paradise Skipper, *Phocides belus* (Pyrginae); bottom left, a *Parides* sp. butterfly, also feeding on soil minerals.





Macro detail of the wing of a Giant moth *Ascalapha odorata* (Noctuidae).



Top left, an unidentified Skipper butterfly (Hesperiidae); top right, a group of *Itabalia* butterflies (Pieridae) feeding on soil minerals. Bottom right, an unidentified forest species; bottom left, *Julia* Butterflies *Dryas julia* also feeding on soil minerals.





*Perched on a twig like
a miniature Quasimodo*

■ The gargoyle-like stance of a Longhorn beetle (Cerambycidae) belies its diminutive size.



Survival in the rainforest is not easy and certainly not granted. Left top, a cricket; right top, a Curculionid beetle; left bottom, an ant - all three have been infected, colonized and finally killed by the Cordyceps parasitic fungus, which can now be seen sprouting from their body joints. Right bottom, a Geometrid caterpillar has been instead parasitized by wasp larvae, which are now pupating.



■ The end - and the beginning:
a dead leaf rots away and is
transformed in nutrients, which
will be used by the new growth
of the Yasuni rainforest.



*The intricate tapestry
of an endless
transformation*

At-a-glance travel guide

COUNTRY OF DESTINATION: **ECUADOR**



USEFUL TIPS FOR YOUR EXPEDITION

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

ROUTE: Your international flight will land at Mariscal Sucre International Airport, smack in the middle of Ecuador's high-altitude capital Quito. From there it's a day-long drive to the town of Coca. The following morning you'll drive to the crossing of the Rio Napo, and after that you'll have to go through the strict entrance procedures set by the oil companies before driving through the forest all the way to the **Estacion Cientifica Yasuni**. Getting to the lodges may require slightly different itineraries.

MEANS OF TRANSPORT: Visiting Yasuni without local help is quite problematic. For a well-organized and successful trip we can heartily recommend the

services of our friends Lucas Bustamante-Enriquez and Alejandro Arteaga of **Tropical Herping** - two young, enthusiastic Quito biologists with a keen interest in nature, wildlife and photography.

CURRENCY: Since the year 2000 Ecuador has opted not to have a national currency of its own - all transactions are done in US dollars.

ACCOMODATION: Yasuni offers several beautiful and well-appointed tourist lodges, usually set in strategic locations and offering reliable wildlife sightings in their own private reserves inside the Park. The best-known ones include **Sani Lodge**,

Sacha Lodge and the **Napo Wildlife Center**, but they are usually very expensive and are best chosen for a 2-3 days luxurious stay - perfect for the casual visitor but hardly ideal for the serious wildlife photographer in need of a longer visit. Several Waorani communities in the area are now also offering basic, relatively inexpensive accomodation.

FOOD: Simple but basically healthy and filling. Ecuadorians love soups (try the delicious *Locro de Queso* - potatoes, cheese and avocado), meats and fish, and are blessed all-year round with fantastic vegetables and fruit. The type of food you'll be having in Yasuni really depends however on the type

The perfect chance to explore at will the real Amazon rainforest



of accomodation you have chosen - that of the Yasuni Research Station is abundant, healthy and - most importantly in this kind of environment - perfectly sanitized. No health worries there!

LANGUAGE: Ecuadorian Spanish and English.

WORRIES: Ecuador used to have a pretty bad (and rather well-deserved) reputation regarding street muggings and tourist-related crimes. Things are much better now, but - like in so many other big cities worldwide - it's always better to be accompanied by local friends when visiting Quito's beautiful historical areas. When in Yasuni - as in any other truly wild equatorial/tropical rainforest environment - you'll have to be really careful with venomous snakes and stinging insects such as wasps and ants. Ticks and mites can also be very bothersome. In any case, never wander alone in the forest, especially at night.

HEALTH: This is a sticky subject, as Yasuni - like the rest of the Amazon Basin - is a hotbed of tropical diseases and dangerous parasitic ailments. You never know what you can catch in the Amazon as some diseases haven't even been named yet, but to enter the Park you'll need a Yellow Fever certificate, and the danger of catching Leishmaniosis (a very serious, disfiguring disease transmitted by phlebotomine sandflies) is quite real, especially in waterlogged areas. Never forget to use insect repellent and remember to wear long-legged trousers and long-sleeved shirts, always! Landing in Quito (2.800 meters, 9000 feet) upon one's arrival might also cause altitude sickness to the unaccustomed, so it's advisable to plan spending a couple of days there to better acclimatize. Food is generally quite safe, but when touring the Country avoid street-stalls snacks and always make sure your drinks have been concocted with bottled water.

CLIMATE: Ecuador - especially at altitude - is blessed with an eternal spring, and they say one can experience the four seasons in a single day in Quito. Climate in Yasuni however is very hot and humid, with frequent torrential downpours and strong sunlight.

BESIDES: Don't forget to visit the historical center of the capital Quito, which has been extensively and lovingly restored and features some spectacular examples of colonial architecture from the Spanish domination. Ecuador is a rather small but exceptionally diverse Country, and it's almost impossible summarizing it in a few lines - a few hours's travelling across it will have one passing through high-altitude plateaus and valleys, stunning Andean landscapes and elfin cloud forests - descending to the dry Pacific coast (and the Galapagos Islands) if going West and to the Amazon rainforest - including Yasuni - if going East. ●



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Beauty of the Beast

BIRDS OF THE FALKLANDS

SO FAR, SO CLOSE



Celebrated bird photographer David Hemmings takes us to the remote South Atlantic outpost - a lonely place where avian subjects show no fear of humans



Thalassarche melanophrys

Close-up portrait of a Black-browed Albatross or Black-browed Mollymawk, *Thalassarche melanophrys*, also seen in flight on the title spread. This species is listed as Endangered on the basis of current rates of decline at the large breeding colonies in the South-West Atlantic. These declines have been attributed to the impact of incidental mortality in longline and trawl fisheries.

TEXTS AND PHOTOS BY DAVID HEMMINGS



Pygoscelis papua

A Gentoo penguin *Pygoscelis papua* strides into the surf. This species is easily recognized by the wide white stripe extending like a bonnet across the top of its head and its bright orange-red bill. They have pale whitish-pink webbed feet and a fairly long tail - the most prominent tail of all penguins.

If you have never been to the Falkland Islands to photograph penguins and other species such as Elephant seals and Sea Lions, it is difficult to explain in words what a natural wonderland the Falklands are. You really have to experience it to believe it.

Most of the wildlife, notably with the exception of Black-necked Swans, is unafraid of human presence and will often sit right down beside you out of curiosity. While at Volunteer Point on East Stanley we sat amongst King Penguins and their chicks as they went about their business, seemingly oblivious to our presence. I had one young King lay down two feet from me and fall asleep!

It was a similar experience with the three other common species of penguins on the Falklands, Gentoos, Rockhoppers and Magellanics. While sitting outside their colonies they would go about their life, coming and going from the ocean and switching nesting duties with their partners while fending off intrusive neighbors and feeding their young. At one point I was surrounded by a dozen Rockhopper penguins while they picked at my boots and slept in the surrounding grasses.

One of the best experiences for me was watching the Gentoo penguins swimming into shore in small groups and springing out of the water onto the beach to begin their walk back to the colony along one of the many "penguin highways", as they are cal-

led by locals. You could watch them porpoising in from sea about 100 yards out right until they reach the breaking surf, looks like they are having fun but it just could be that they are in a hurry. Either way it was so cool to witness this behavior.

Then there are the colonies of Elephant seals on the beaches at Sea Lion Island. There you can see and photograph up close three-week old calves and young males practicing their fighting skills to prepare for when it is time to find mates. The noises these seals make are loud and impressive as they voice their opinions to the other individuals in the colony.

Then there are the Striated Caracaras. These beautiful falcons, which nest and breed in the outlying islands, are very photographable, sometimes up close. Then there is the majestic Black-browed Albatross. There are a few colonies that are accessible to humans and the photo opportunities are unbelievable. To watch these beautiful seabirds coming and going from their nests and doing greeting displays is something that you really need to see once in your life. Sometimes I just watched in amazement and forgot that I was there to take pictures!

Throw into the mix an abundance of other species such as Snowy Sheathbills, Upland Geese, Kelp Geese, Cobb's Wren, Long tailed Meadowlark, Crested Ducks and Silvery Grebes, and you have a place with so much to offer to the bird and nature photographer.



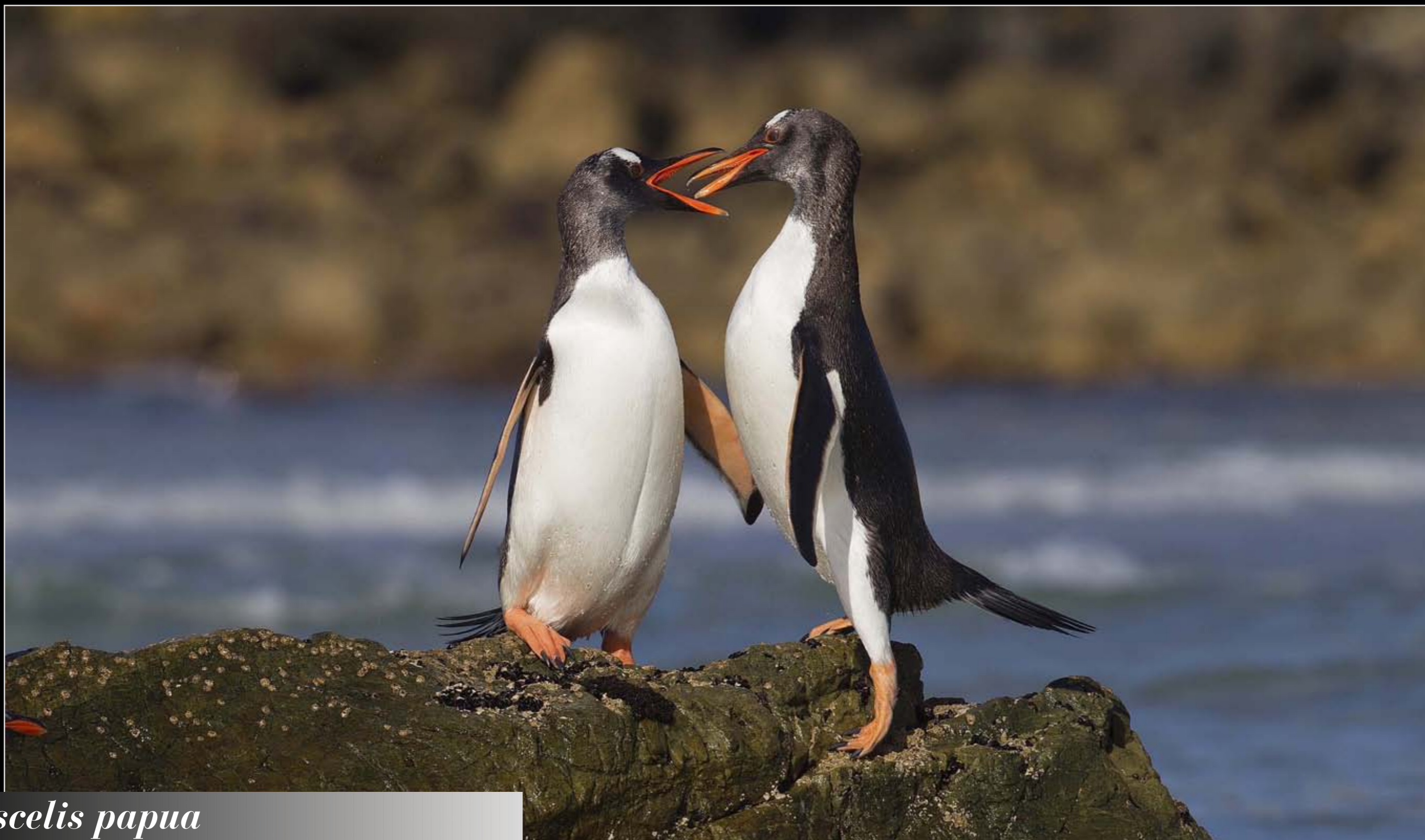
Spheniscus magellanicus

A trio of Magellanic penguins *Spheniscus magellanicus* braves a gale. These are medium-sized penguins which grow to be 61–76 cm (24–30 in) tall and weigh between 2.7 kg and 6.5 kg (5.9–14.3 lbs). Millions of these penguins live on the coasts of Argentina and Chile, but the species is classified as "threatened", due to the vulnerability of colonies to oil spills, which kill 20,000 adults and 22,000 juveniles every year off the coast of Argentina.



Pygoscelis papua

A portrait of a Gentoo penguin *Pygoscelis papua*. Adult Gentoos reach a height of 51 to 90 cm (20–36 in), being the third largest species of penguin after the two giant species, the Emperor Penguin and the King Penguin. Males weigh about 8.5 kg (19 lb), and for females the maximum weight is 8.2 kg (18 lb). They are the fastest underwater swimming penguins, reaching speeds of 36 km/h.



Pygoscelis papua

A discussion between two Gentoo penguins. The total breeding population of this species is estimated to be over 300,000 pairs. Nests are made from a circular pile of stones and can be 20 cm high and 25 cm in diameter. They are jealously guarded and their ownership can be the subject of noisy disputes.



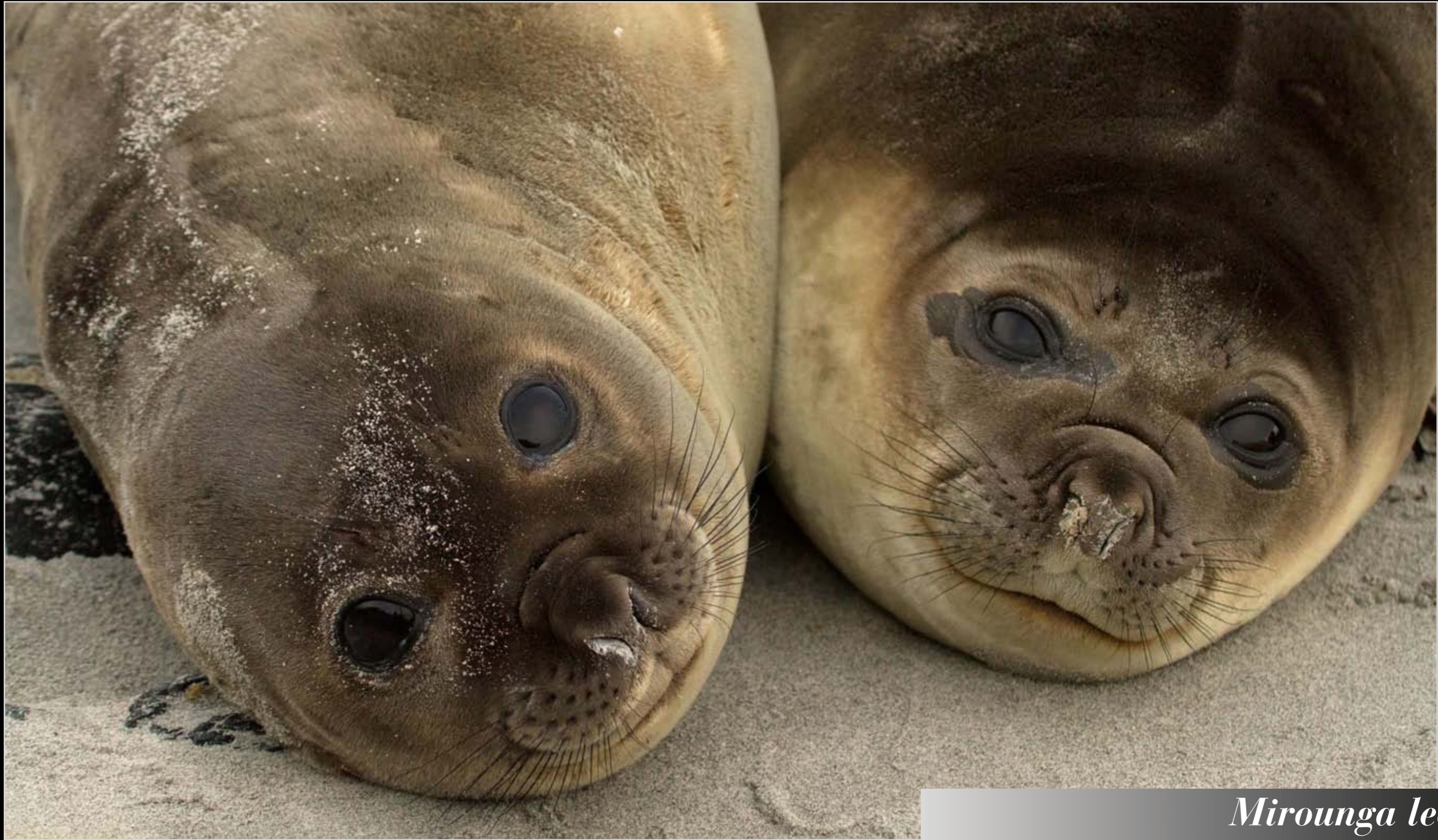
Aptenodytes patagonicus

The King Penguin *Aptenodytes patagonicus* is the second largest species of penguin at about 90 cm (3.0 ft) tall and weighing 11 to 16 kg (24 to 35 lb), second only to the Emperor Penguin. Like all penguin species, it has a streamlined body to minimise drag while swimming, webbed feet to propel more force when swimming, and wings that have become stiff, flat flippers.



Chloephaga hybrida

The Kelp Goose *Chloephaga hybrida malvinarum* is found around the Falkland Islands throughout the year. This species mainly inhabits rocky coasts, where it feeds on green seaweed of the genus *Ulva*. The male has completely white plumage, making him prominent as he holds territory and stands guard over the incubating female or chicks.



Mirounga leonina

A portrait of two adorable baby Southern Elephants seals *Mirounga leonina*. Southern Elephant seal bulls reach a length of 16 feet (4.9 m) and a weight of 6,600 pounds (3,000 kg), and are much larger than the cows, which measure about 10 feet (3.0 m) and 2,000 pounds (910 kg). Elephant seals spend upwards of 80% of their lives in the ocean.

Thalassarche melanophrys



Mirounga leonina

Young Elephant seal *Mirounga leonina*. Elephant seals can hold their breath for more than 100 minutes, longer than any other noncetacean mammal, and can dive to 1550 meters beneath the ocean's surface. The average depth of their dives is about 300 to 600 meters (2,000 ft), around 20 minutes for females and 60 minutes for males, as they search for rays, squid, octopuses, eels, small sharks, and large fish.



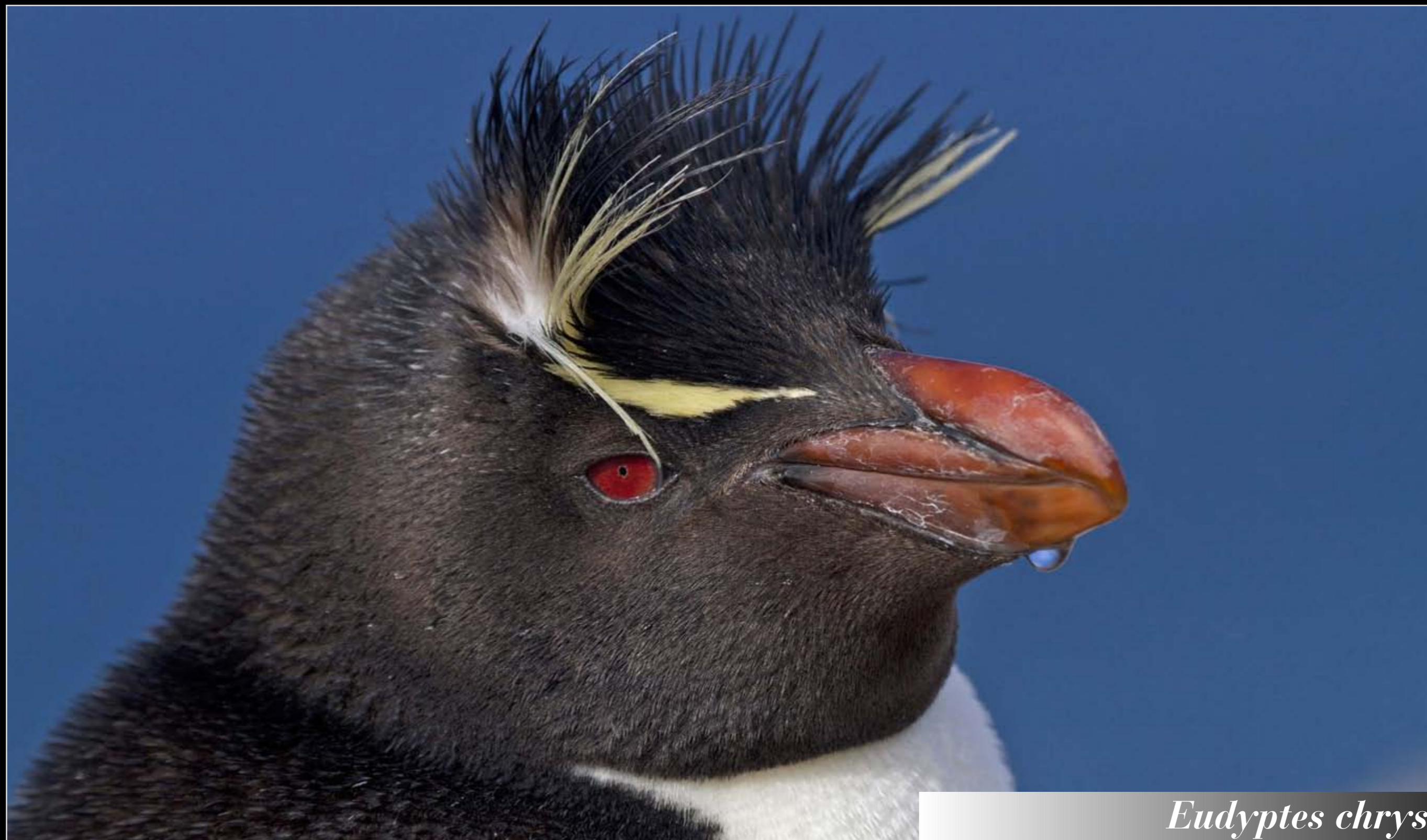
Haematopus leucopodus

The Magellanic Oystercatcher *Haematopus leucopodus* is a species of wader in the *Haematopodidae* family. It is found in Argentina, Chile and the Falkland Islands. Its natural habitats are freshwater lakes and sandy shores.



Haematopus ater

The Blackish Oystercatcher *Haematopus ater* is yet another species of wader belonging to the *Haematopodidae* family which is found in Argentina, Chile, the Falkland Islands and Peru, being also a vagrant to Uruguay. The entire population is estimated at 22,000–120,000.



Eudyptes chrysocome

The Southern Rockhopper penguin *Eudyptes chrysocome* is the smallest yellow-crested, black-and-white penguin in its genus. It reaches a length of 45–58 cm (18–23 in) and weighs 2–3.4 kg (4.4–7.5 lb). It has slate-grey upper parts and a straight, bright yellow eyebrow ending in long yellowish plumes projecting sideways behind a red eye.

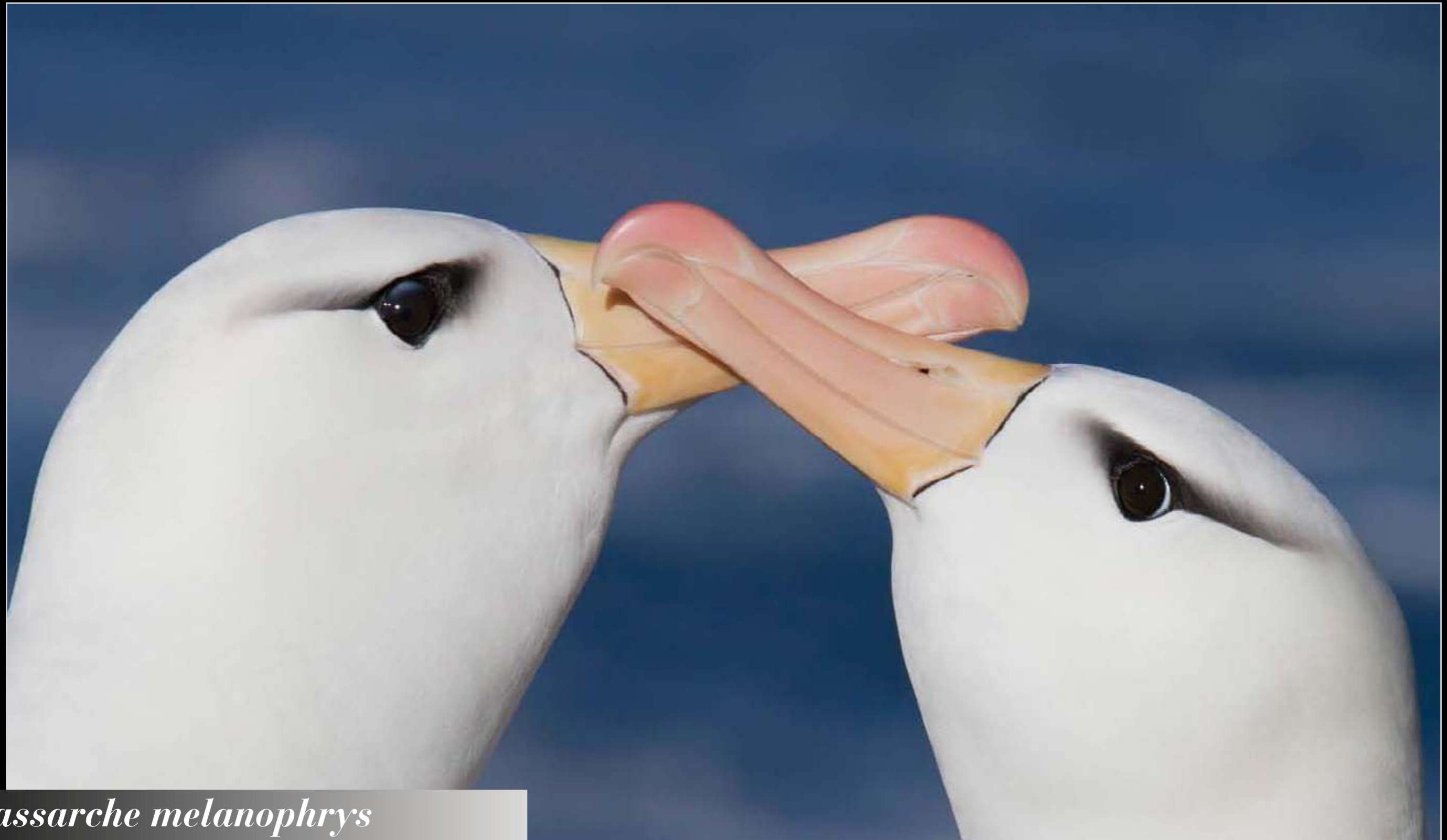


Birdwatching trips and bird photography workshops in the Falklands - as those conducted by the author of this article, David Hemmings, via his company Nature's Photo Adventures - can offer to the discriminating traveller unsurpassed opportunities for close observation and interaction with the local avian fauna.



Phalcoboenus australis

A Striated Caracara *Phalcoboenus australis* with its chick. Nests are built on the ground or on a cliff ledge, where the female lays up to 4 eggs. Their hatching is timed to coincide with the nesting season of seabirds, providing a constant food supply for the chicks. Once these have fledged, they gather into flocks and roam through the islands, often close to human settlements.



Thalassarche melanophrys

The Black-browed Albatross *Thalassarche melanophrys* is a medium-sized albatross, 80–95 cm (31–37 in) long with a 200–240 cm (79–94 in) wingspan and a weight of 2.9–4.7 kg (6.4–10 lb). It can live for more than 70 years. It has a dark grey saddle and upperwings that contrast with the white rump and underparts. The underwing is with broad black margins. It has a dark eyebrow and a yellow-orange bill with a darker pink-orange tip.



Aptenodytes patagonicus

King Penguin *Aptenodytes patagonicus* have adapted to their extreme living conditions in the subantarctic: to keep warm, they have four layers of feathering. King Penguins have 70 feathers per every square inch. The outer layer of feathers are oiled and waterproof. The inner three layers are down feathers, very effective insulation. A chick is born without the oily outer layer, and therefore cannot fish until maturity.



Chloephaga picta

The Upland Goose or Magellan Goose *Chloephaga picta* is a South American member of the family *Anatidae*. Males have a white head and breast, while females are brown with black-striped wings and yellow feet. These birds are found in open grasslands, are 60–72.5 centimetres (24–28.5 in) long and weigh 2.7–3.2 kilograms (6.0–7.1 lb).



Eudyptes chrysocome

The Southern Rockhopper Penguin group has a global population of roughly 1 million pairs. About two-thirds of the global population belong to *E. c. chrysocome* which breeds on the Falkland Islands and on islands off Argentina and southern Chile. These include Isla de los Estados, the Ildefonso Islands, the Diego Ramírez Islands and Isla Noir.



Larus maculipennis

Brown-hooded Gull *Larus maculipennis*, a beautiful and very elegant species which can be commonly observed in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, the Falkland Islands, Paraguay, and Uruguay. Its natural habitats are swamps, freshwater lakes, intertidal marshes, and pastureland.



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David Hemmings - President, Nature’s Photo Adventures



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

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

Kevin McCarthy, USA

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

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

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

Rosemary Harris, Canada

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

Eric Grossman, USA



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A Passage to India

Yuwaraj Gurjar – a Wildlife Photographer in His Own Words

The glorious wildlife of the Indian subcontinent is celebrated by a passionate photographer - who shares a deep love not only for iconic species such as tigers but for small, unsung creatures too

As I live in Thane - which is on the outskirts of Mumbai's Sanjay Gandhi National Park, spreading across 104 sq. km and home to many small, wonderful creatures and even leopard - I have been visiting this Park almost every weekend for the last 25 years, and still find new things in my each visit. Though the initial focus was on birds, slowly I started admiring the lesser fauna which is very unusual, fascinating and goes unnoticed all the time. I started observing and photographing butterflies, ants, bugs, beetles, dragonflies, other small insects and wild flowers. Though I work with Raymond Limited, which is a renowned textile manufacturing company, my love towards nature always attracts me to go wandering in the wild. India boasts a number of hugely diversified habitats, and I have traveled across the Country for my nature observations and photography.

I have visited many of India's National Parks, including Kanha, Bandhavgarh, Pench (in Madhya Pradesh), Tadoba, Melghat, Sanjay Gandhi (in Maharashtra), Velavadaar and Gir (in Gujarath), Bharatpur and Ranthambhore (in Rajashthan), Namdapha National Park

(in Arunachal Pradesh), Kaziranga National Park (in Assam), Bandipur and Dandeli (in Karnataka) and Jim Corbett National Park (in Uttarakhand). I have used Nikon camera bodies (D70s and D90) and Tamron lenses (180 macro, 200-500 zoom and 18-270 VC) for my photography.

My photos have won several national/international awards and have been exhibited across the world. Some have been included in field guides, educational websites and magazines. Observing and photographing nature and wildlife is not my only aim, as I love to spread awareness & knowledge about nature and wildlife. I have written and published more than 1000 photo articles in various newspapers, magazines and blogs. I have published and distributed audio video CDs for school children about "Nature Education and Awareness". I have conducted slide talks/workshop on nature, wildlife and photography. For the same reason I accompany students, groups and families and help them to see the hidden natural world and India's rich bio-diversity across the Country.





Blackbuck Male - *Antilope cervicapra*

Velavadar National Park, Gujarath, India.

Nikon D90, Tamron 200-500, 1/2500, f6.3, ISO 400

Blackbucks are grassland mammals and often seen chasing females or running after rival males. When they sense some danger they leap into the air and run with great speed.



Crab spider pair with kill

Yeoor Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Thane, India.

Nikon D70s, Tamron 180 macro, 1/60, f13, ISO 200

A male Crab spider attempts to copulate with a female that has injected its prey, a honey bee, with its deadly poison. On the now dead bee we can still see several smaller bees and fruit flies that had come to steal food from the pollen baskets of the larger bee.

Apefly - *Spalgis epius*

Maharashtra Nature Park, Mumbai, India.

Nikon D90, Tamron 180 macro 1/60, f25, ISO 200

Usually butterflies are framed sideways.

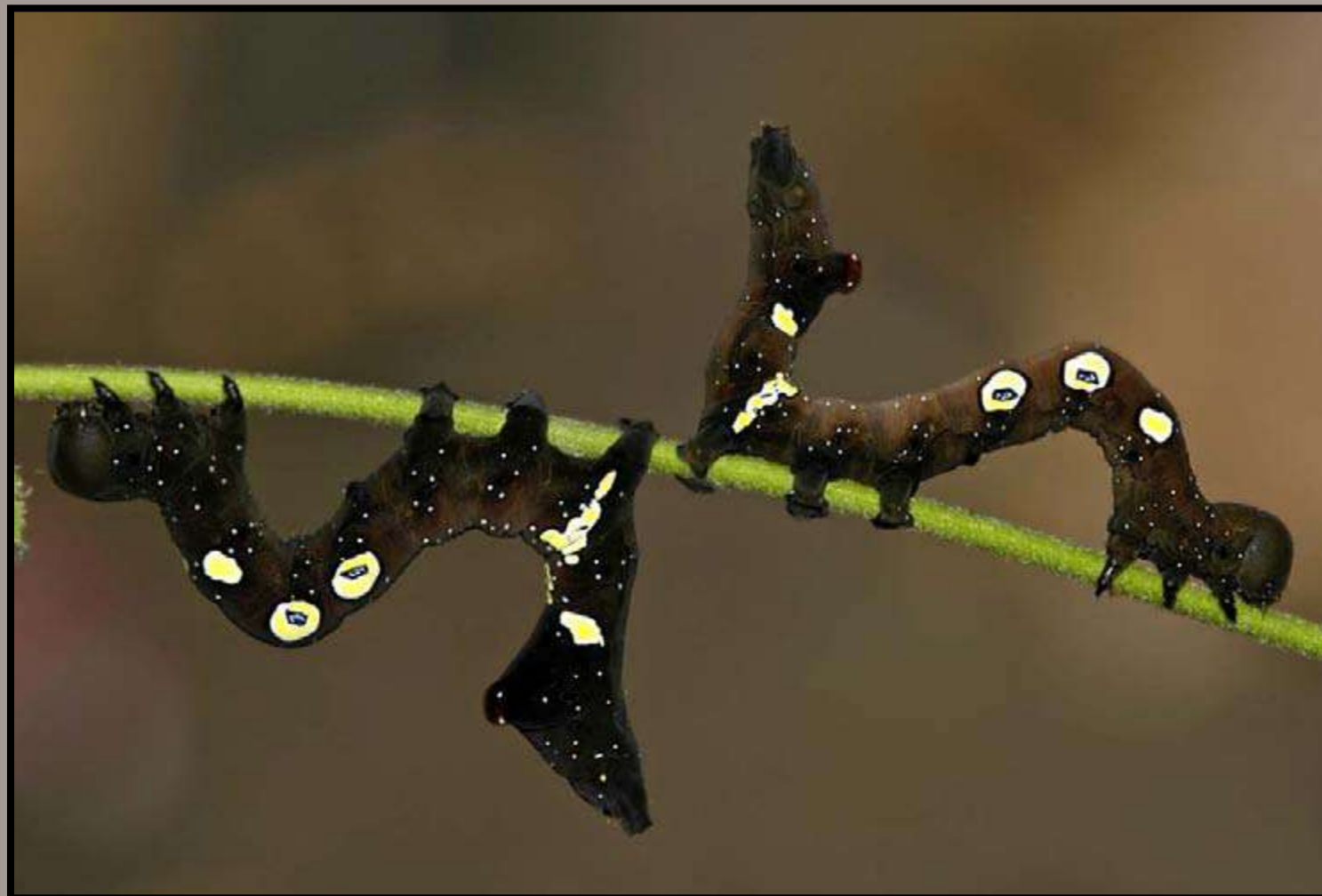
But I purposely captured this butterfly from the front, from a low angle and with the sky as a background.



Damselfly laying eggs in water

*Nampong, Arunachal Pradesh, India.
Nikon D70s, Tamron 180 macro,
1/60, f11, ISO 200*

Damselflies do not have a specialized ovipositor. Generally they simply dip the tip of their abdomen into water and release their eggs. Some species lay their eggs in a gelatinous mass which sticks to rocks or vegetation, while others have long filamentous strands attached to their eggs that are used to wrap around aquatic plants.



Synchronised Caterpillars of Fruit Piercing Moth

Yeoor, Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Thane, India. Nikon D70s, Tamron 180 macro, 1/60, f13, ISO 200

These moth caterpillars were alarmed by my looming macro lens and all of a sudden positioned themselves just like dancers.



**Checked Keelback -
*Xenochrophis piscator***

*Tadoba National Park,
Chandrapur, India.*

*Nikon D90, Tamron 180
macro, 1/60, f18, ISO 200*

Keelbacks are very common
freshwater snakes. They strike
with great determination,
holding on tenaciously.

Reptiles smell using the tip
of their tongue, and a forked
tongue allows them to sense
where a smell is coming from.



Camouflaged Bark Gecko

Yeoor, Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Thane, India.

Nikon D70s, Tamron 180 macro 1/60, f8, ISO 200

The Bark Geckos are perfectly camouflaged on large tree trunks. It is extremely difficult spotting one.

Indian Ornamental Spider - *Poecilotheria regalis*

Matheran, India.

Nikon D90, Tamron 180 macro, 1/60, f13, ISO 400

Poecilotheria regalis is one of the most popular arboreal tarantulas. Its legspan sometimes exceeds 7 inches. In the wild these large spiders live in holes of tall trees, where they make asymmetric funnel webs.

Their primary prey consists of various flying insects, which they seize in mid-flight and paralyze with their venom.





Butterfly with dew drops

Yoor, Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Thane, India.

Nikon D70s, Tamron 180 macro, 1/60, f14, ISO 200

Butterflies are often seen studded with dew drops on early winter mornings. This is a very tiny butterfly, just 18/20 mm size, with lots of dew drops shining like jewels.

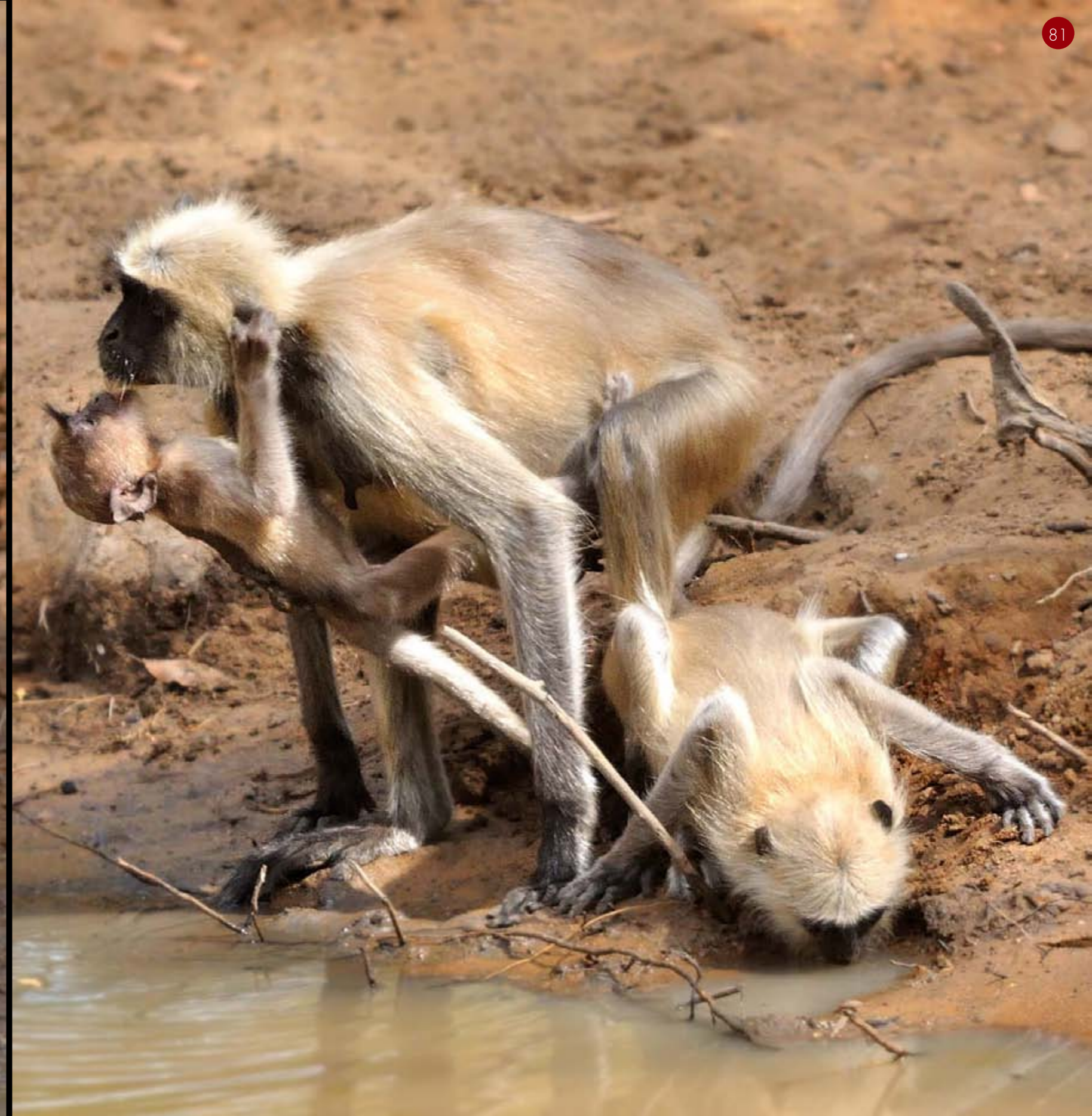


Changeable Hawk Eagle - *Nisaetus cirrhatus*

Tadoba National Park, Chandrapur, India.

Nikon D90, Tamron 200-500, 1/200, f6.3, ISO 400

This majestic bird of prey had landed near a waterhole to drink water.



Hanuman Langur with baby - *Semnopithecus dussumieri*

Tadoba National Park, Chandrapur, India.

Nikon D90, Tamron 200-500, 1/640, f6, ISO 800

The baby was not able to drink the water, so it was sucking the droplets from its mother's mouth.



Sapan Mori

Bharatpur National Park, Rajasthan, India.

Nikon D70s, Tamron 200-400, 1/160, f8, ISO 200

A very famous area where one can see
and photograph thousands of birds.

Also one of the World Heritage Sites from India.



Saw Scaled Viper - *Echis carinatus*

Yoor, Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Thane, India.

Nikon D70s, Tamron 180 macro, 1/60, f22, ISO 200

This is one of the most common and venomous snakes of India. It is very small in size and perfectly camouflaged among the dry leaf litter.

Red naped Falcon *Falco peregrinus* with Lapwing Kill

Serengeti National Park, Tanzania.

Nikon D90, Tamron 200-500, 1/1600, f6.3, ISO 400

This bird of prey had killed a Lapwing and was relishing it on the ground. Somehow our jeep roared there at that spot and at the same time the Falcon leaped in the air with the kill in its talons.

Scorpion babies with mother

Yoor, Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Thane, India.

Nikon D70s, Tamron 180 macro, 1/60, f20, ISO 200

I was looking for butterflies when somehow I sensed movement and saw this female scorpion mother carrying her tiny babies on her back.



Spider in rain

Yeoor, Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Thane, India.
Nikon D90, Tamron 180 macro, 1/60, f10, ISO 400
This spider was waiting for its prey in thundering rain.
It was very difficult to capture this image under the downpour.



Slime Mould

Yeoor, Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Thane, India.
Nikon D90, Tamron 180 macro, 1/60, f18, ISO 200
Slime molds were formerly classified as fungi, but are no longer considered part of this kingdom. Their common name refers to part of some of these organisms' life cycles where they can appear as gelatinous "slime". This brightly colored slime mould was growing on a dead Teak leaf which was rotting on the forest floor.

Giant Squirrel - *Ratufa indica*

Bondla Sanctuary, Goa, India.

Nikon D90, Tamron 180 macro, 1/125, f5, ISO 400

The Indian giant squirrel is an upper-canopy dwelling species, which rarely leaves the trees, and requires tall, profusely branched trees for the construction of nests. The Giant Squirrel is mostly active in the early hours of the morning and in the evening, resting at midday. It is a shy, wary animal and not easy to discover but this particular animal was so bold that I managed to capture it with my "macro" lens.



Striped Hyena cub - *Hyaena hyaena*

Velavadar National Park, Gujarath, India.

Nikon D90, Tamron 200-500, 1/100, f6, ISO 400

This is one of three Hyena cubs - he was quite bolder in comparison to his brothers, who vanished in the den. He was so curious that he stayed on to look at us as we were filming him.

Tiny grasshopper on flower

Yeoor, Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Thane, India. Nikon D70s, Tamron 180 macro, 1/125, f8, ISO 200

The first nymph to hatch out of the egg pod leaves a tunnel from the pod to the soil surface, making emergence easier for the nymphs which follow. They look like adult grasshoppers, but are smaller and have no wings. Nymphs molt every eight to ten days as they grow. They molt five or six times before becoming adults with wings.



Preying Mantis laying eggs in ootheca

*Yoor, Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Thane, India.
Nikon D90, Tamron 180 macro, 1/60, f9, ISO 200*

During the summer monsoon, females lay their eggs in a large egg case (the ootheca) made from a frothy, gummy substance glued to tree twigs, plant stems and other objects. Tiny nymphs emerge from the egg mass in winter.



Spider approaching planthopper

*Yoor, Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Thane, India.
Nikon D90, Tamron 180 macro, 1/60, f25, ISO 200*

This funny looking Planthopper (*Derbidae*) was sitting idle on leaf. Its extra-long wings were kept in a very unusual way and reflecting the light. The approaching spider was about to jump and catch it.



**Coral**

Sawantwadi, India. Nikon D70s, Tamron 180 macro, 1/60, f16, ISO 200

These corals were clicked on the seashore near Goa. Though the creatures were underwater, the photograph was taken with a normal camera from above the surface, avoiding reflections.

Crab spider

Phansad Sactuary, India. Nikon D90, Tamron 180 macro, 1/60, f14, ISO 400

The crab spider doesn't need to built a web to catch a prey. This species had adopted a camouflage which offers it the ability to take the color of the environment in which it lives. So, the crab spider disguises itself inside flowers and simply waits for the prey to land on the flower for nectar feeding.





Vine snake - *Ahaetulla nasuta*

Matheran, Maharashtra, India.

*Nikon D70s, Tamron 180 macro,
1/60, f29, ISO 200*

Vine snakes are the only snakes in India with horizontally elliptical eyes and a bright golden iris. The eyes are large and positioned frontally, providing stereoscopic vision. This common snake is rarely seen because of its excellent camouflage. Greatly feared, this harmless, beautiful snake is always killed by villagers when seen. It is foolishly believed that it will dart at a person's eyes and peck them out or it will jump on the head and break the skull.



Saffron faced Damselfly

Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Mumbai, India.

Nikon D70s, Tamron 180 macro, 1/320, f9, ISO 200

Damselfly perched on violet water lily. The flower was prominent, but the main focus in the composition was assigned to the damselfly.



Clear wing Forest Glory - *Vestalis gracilis*

Phansad Sanctuary, India. Nikon D90, Tamron 180 macro, 1/60, f20, ISO 200

This damselfly is very shy and always runs away from the camera lens. But somehow I managed to capture this individual, along with the dripping dew drops on the grass blade.

Water Strider

Yoor, Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Thane, India.

Nikon D90, Tamron 180 macro, 1/320, f3.5, ISO 400

Water striders use the high surface tension of water and long, hydrophobic legs to help them stay above water. I was able to capture the ripples made by this one - the bright green background in the photograph was due to the water algae.



**Olive Ridley Turtle babies -
*Lepidochelys olivacea***

Velas, Konkan, India.

*Nikon D70s, Nikon 28 mm,
1/250, f9, ISO 200*

Females of Olive Ridley turtle return to the same beach of their birth to lay their eggs for the next generation. Although a female may lay hundreds of eggs in one season, only a few of the hatchlings will survive to reach maturity. These hatchlings started their way to sea at sunset. Today over 40 species of turtles including most sea turtles and many types of tortoises are severely endangered.





***Ceropegia
vincaefolia***

Kas, Satara, India. Nikon D90, Tamron 180 macro, 1/200, f6.3, ISO 200

The genus *Ceropegia* can be found in Africa, Madagascar, the Canary Islands, Asia and in the tropical forests of New Guinea. There are about 235 species.

Tigress - *Panthera tigris*

Tadoba National Park, Chandrapur, India. Nikon D90, Tamron 200-500, 1/640, f6.3, ISO 800

We were sitting in our jeep, waiting for this tigress on the main road of the Tadoba Park. Our vehicle was facing the opposite way and we were checking for the alarm calls from the deers and monkeys. Casually, I just glanced back and saw the female which was approaching us.





**Tiger male -
*Panthera tigris***

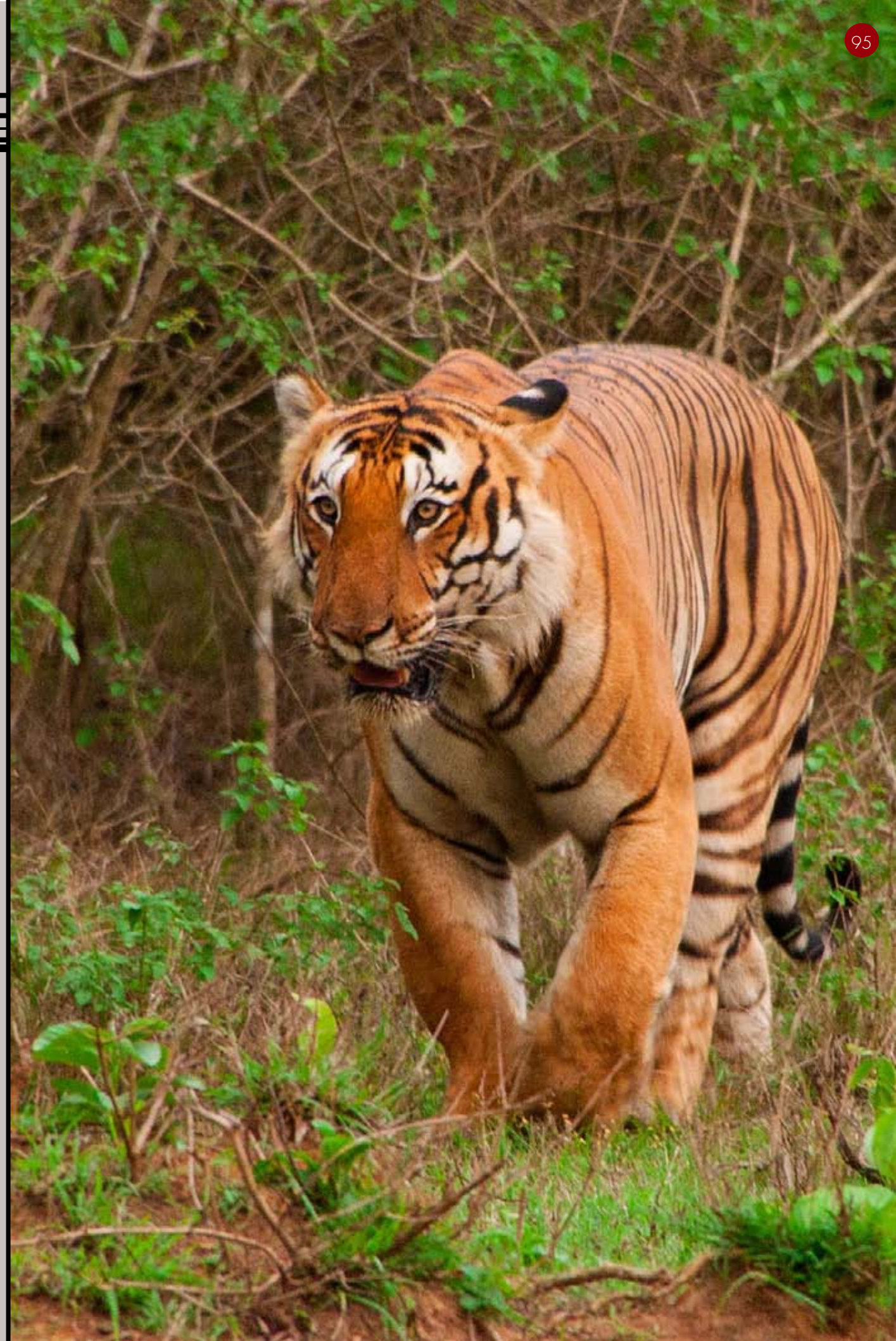
*Bandipur National
Park, Karnataka,
India. Nikon D90,
Tamron 18-270
VC, 1/80, f6.3,
ISO 1250*

All the vehicles
were waiting for
this male as they
had spotted him
on the other side
of the road.
Somehow he
approached just in
front of my vehicle.

**Tiger young
male -**

Panthera tigris
*Bandhavgarh
National Park,
Madhya Pradesh,
India. Nikon D90,
Tamron 18-270
VC, 1/60, f6.3,
ISO 800*

A small boy from
my jeep spotted it -
sitting just next to
road nearby, just
20 meters away
from the vehicle.





**Tiger male -
*Panthera tigris***

*Bandhavgarh National
Park, Madhya Pradesh,
India. Nikon D90,
Tamron 200-500, 1/60,
f6.3, ISO 3200*

This is "Kallu" from
Bandhavgarh. I have
been following this tiger
since its birth - however
he has been missing
since October 2010 and
might have actually
been killed by poachers.



Sunset

Bhigwan lake, Baramati, India.

Nikon D90, Tamron 200-500, 1/4000, f13, ISO 200

A few species of heron were sitting on mud flats at Bhigwan lake, as the sun was setting in the background. Fishermen use the same lake for their activities, and birds are now quite used to the boatmen.

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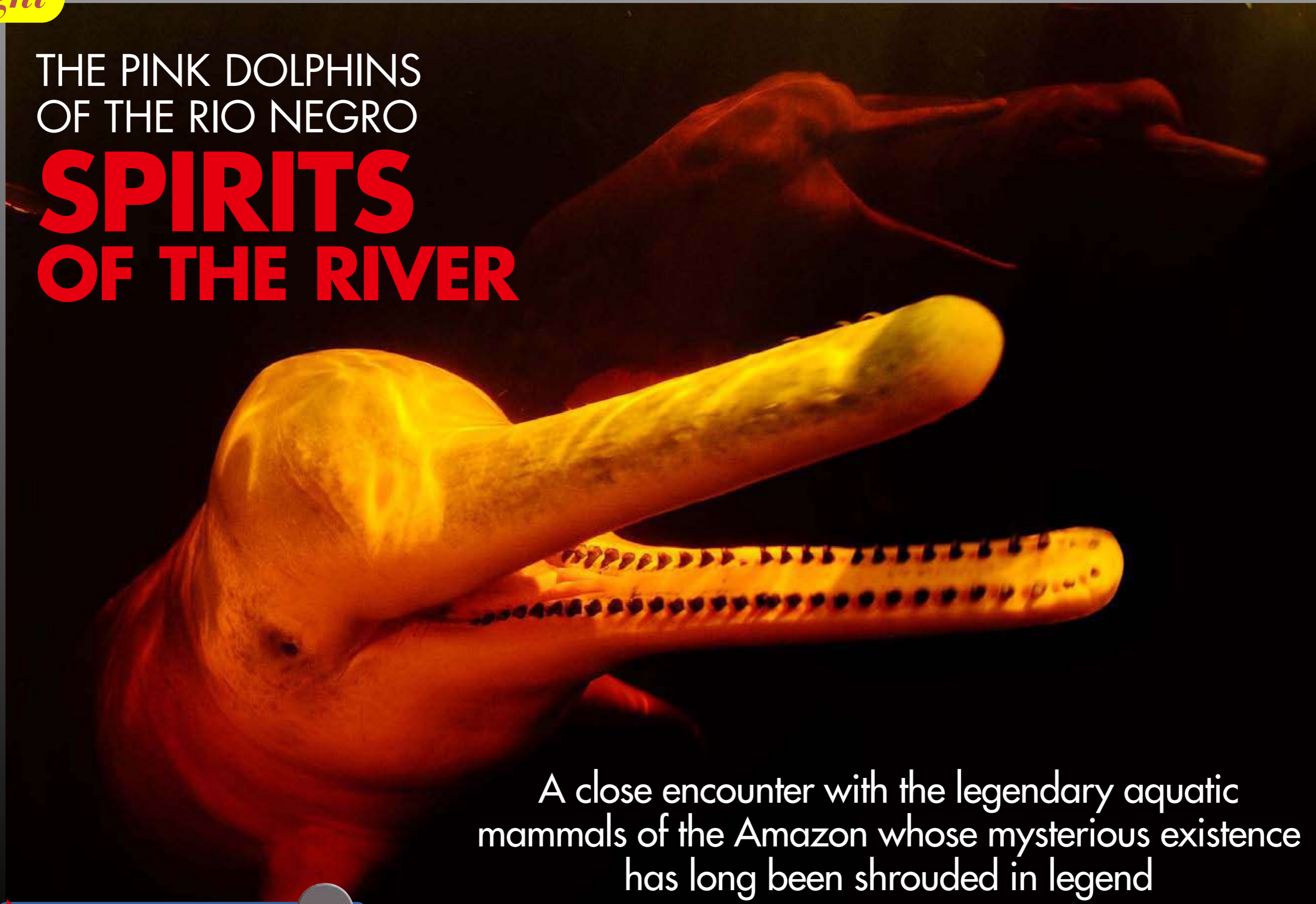
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Spotlight

THE PINK DOLPHINS
OF THE RIO NEGRO
**SPIRITS
OF THE RIVER**

The long snout and the toothy grin of the Boto or Pink dolphin *Inia geoffrensis* emerge from the tea-colored waters of the Rio Negro.



A close encounter with the legendary aquatic mammals of the Amazon whose mysterious existence has long been shrouded in legend



River waters of the Amazon basin are often tea- (or even Coca Cola-) colored due to the high amount of tannic acids originated by rotting vegetation, even when perfectly clear. This is the preferred habitat of the Pink dolphin or Boto *Inia geoffrensis*.

TEXT BY MICHEL BRAUNSTEIN
PHOTOS BY MICHEL BRAUNSTEIN AND DAFNA BEN NUN

The Rio Negro is born in Colombia, continuing its journey to Brazil, through the rich Amazonian forest. Here it converges with the Rio Solimões to form the Amazon. From afar, the Rio Negro appears to be black but from a closer look, it is actually dark brown. This dark color is due to the humic acids which form due to the incomplete decomposition of the phenol contained in the vegetation of the sandy clearings. Both rivers, the Rio Negro and the Solimões, meet south of Manaus, the capital of the Amazon. The Solimões is born in Peru. Its waters are clearer (tan

in color), and it is rich with sediment. The meeting point of the two rivers is a most impressive sight, as they do not blend together - they continue to run alongside one another for approximately 40 kilometers (25 miles) before finally mixing. This can be compared to a glass filled partially with water and partially with oil. They simply do not blend. More surprising is that the fish species living in the respective rivers do not cross over onto the other side; they stop at the border. This phenomenon, whereby the waters do not mix is due to several factors.

The Rio Solimões is basic, whereas the Rio Negro is acidic in nature. Large temperature differences, ranging from 28° to 35°C (82-95°F) in the Rio Negro River and a much cooler Rio Solimões with temperatures ranging from 20 to 22°C (68-72°F). The last significant difference is in the speed with which the rivers run. The Amazon is flowing at a speed of 8 km/hr (5 miles/hour) and the Rio Negro at 3 km/hr (1.9 mile/hour). *Inia geoffrensis* - more commonly known as the pink dolphin, nicknamed locally as "Boto" - reside in the waters of the Rio Negro. Although still poorly

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*The ghostly, dancing shape
of the Pink dolphin
materializes from the darkness*

Inia geoffrensis, commonly known as the Amazon river dolphin, is a freshwater river dolphin endemic to the Orinoco, Amazon and Araguaia/Tocantins River systems of Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia and Venezuela. It is listed as Endangered by the IUCN due to pollution, overfishing, excessive boat traffic and habitat loss.



Photo Dafna Ben Nun



Inia geoffrensis have unfused neck vertebrae, enabling them to turn their heads 180 degrees. This exceptional flexibility is very useful in navigating through the flooded forests. They possess long beaks which contain 24 to 34 conical and molar-type teeth on each side of the jaws.

known, this species is considered the most intelligent of the five species of freshwater dolphin. This dolphin has a melon shaped head, a thick and elongated back, a crest in place of its dorsal fin and large pectoral fins and tail, all of which make it less streamlined than the common dolphin. Yet, when you see its agility and wild grace, it makes you think of the legendary Amazons. The origin of its color is not clear; it could be caused by the capillaries under its skin. Some Botos can also be pale blue and even albino. The pink dolphin's flexibility is unique; its spine allows it to perform impossible contortions compared to other dolphins. Thanks to its flexible neck, it

can turn its head at 180°. The dolphin's sight is quite keen, despite its small eyes. Its very sharp high-frequency communication system allows it to move into the Rio Negro's dark waters and detect its prey. As with all dolphins, sound waves are emitted through air bags under the respiratory openings, although the pink dolphin's sound waves are amplified by the mass of fatty tissue found in its voluminous melon-shaped head. If some of the sounds it makes can be heard by humans, most are inaudible due to their high frequency. During an expedition to the Amazon in 1992, the Cousteau Society studied this species - unable to isolate the animal in a pool,

they had difficulty in analyzing its behavior. The pink dolphin lives peacefully alongside another species, *Sotalia fluviatilis*, or Gray dolphin, entering the Amazon River from the ocean. Pink dolphins have no natural predators, except man, and it is a dreaded hunter. It feeds on catfish, various crustaceans, and other fish. The Pink dolphin lives in the Amazon basin. It can be found all the way up to Ecuador and Peru, where it is called "Bufe colorado" (colored dolphin). It can also be found in the Orinoco basin. It is often seen in areas where there is a great concentration of fish or where the rivers converge. I was fortunate to see the dolphins in the Rio

continued on page 106 ➤



The Amazon river dolphin is the largest cetacean to spend most of its life in freshwater; it can grow larger than a human.



The Amazon river dolphin is abundant in lowland rivers with extensive floodplains. During the rainy season, these rivers flood large areas of forests along their banks. The Amazon river dolphin specializes in hunting in these habitats, taking advantage of its unusually flexible neck and spinal cord to maneuver among the underwater tree trunks, and using its long snout to extract prey fish from hollow logs and thickets of submerged vegetation.



Photo Dafna Ben Nun



■ Pink dolphins feed on crustaceans, crabs, small turtles, catfish, piranha, shrimp, and other fish.



Photo Dafna Ben Nun



Photo Dafna Ben Nun

The relationship between man and the boto is a complex one, as the species is often feared and persecuted despite its near-mythical status. Amazonian folklore includes tales of shape-shifting beings called encantados. Their natural form is the boto, but at night they are able to transform into beautiful men and women who often show up at parties, seduce people, and produce illegitimate children with humans.

■ The Amazon river dolphin is listed on appendix II of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS). It has an unfavorable conservation status and it would greatly benefit from international co-operation.




Negro, near the Arou lodge, 60km from Manaus. There is a place which they frequently visit and where they can be observed. With some luck, one can even get close and swim with them. This is a unique experience. It is impressive to see these 2.5 meter long animals suddenly emerge from the dark waters and move with amazing agility, especially when hunting. They can be very fast, and photographing them underwater is quite difficult. The Pink dolphin is well represented in the local mythology; some

Indian tribes of the Amazon worship it, while others think of it as an evil spirit and hunt it. The Gray dolphin is usually considered as sacred. A traditional myth of the Amazon tells that the Pink dolphins emerge out of the water come nightfall and transform into handsome young men to seduce girls. They then resume their original shape and return to the River early in the morning. A mere 20 years ago, the species was not threatened by extinction. However, its population is decreasing significantly due to intensive fishing,

deforestation, forest fires, destruction of the habitat (dams, agriculture, construction), persecution by fishermen because of destroyed fishing nets, river pollution due to raised mercury levels, fishing methods using explosives and overpopulation. No one knows exactly how many specimens still exist, but the dolphins of the Amazon are definitely important for the regional ecosystem. It is mandatory that we look after them because of their vital position at the heart of our planet's lungs.



Body length of the Amazon river dolphin can range from 1.53 to 2.4 m (5.0 to 7.9 ft), depending on subspecies. Females are usually larger than males. The largest female Amazon river dolphins can range up to 2.5 m (8.2 ft) in length and weigh 98.5 kg (217 lb), while the largest male dolphins can range up to 2.0 m (6.6 ft) in length and weigh 94 kg (210 lb).



Most calves are born between July and September after a gestation period of 9 to 12 months; they are about 80cms (32 inches) long at birth and weigh about 15 pounds. Babies follow their parents closely for a few months, and often two adults can be seen swimming with two or more small juveniles.

The pale ghost of the Rio Negro is still dancing in the dark

An aerial photograph of the Raja Ampat archipelago in Indonesia. The image shows numerous small, forested islands of varying shapes and sizes, scattered across a vast expanse of clear, turquoise water. The water's color transitions from a deep blue in the open ocean to a vibrant green near the shorelines, indicating shallow reefs and sandy bottoms. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds, and the overall scene is one of a pristine, tropical paradise.

Raja Ampat ...

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A d v e r t i s e m e n t

The Parting Shot




The five White rhinos *Ceratotherium simum* grouped together at the edge of the waterhole form an impregnable and yet curiously delicate phalanx, bathed as they are in the soft hues of the South African bush in winter. Painted in light greys on a background of burnt orange and tan, they shuffle uneasily, squinting miopically towards us, their ears reared up in alertness. Despite their monstrous size and fearsome horns they seem so incredibly defenseless - big, childish brutes, gently nuzzling each other, half-blind, easily approached - even on foot.

There is a picture of serene tranquility, of primeval quiet and affection. We have been in Kruger for less than two days and we have already seen eleven - ten very much alive and a poached one. Little was left of it after the hyenas and vultures were finished, but the huge head - separated from the carcass and bereft of its horns - still told a gruesome story. Kruger National Park seemed immune from such poaching, but since the Chinese and Vietnamese started operating in the surrounding areas, their insatiable, demented obsession with rhino horn has

actively fueled the poachers' greed. By April more than 150 rhinos had already been illegally killed in the area since the beginning of 2012 - an average of two rhinos a day, without counting the calves left to die after their mother has been slaughtered. This is a massacre without justification, rooted by ignorance and superstition and fired up by enormous financial interests (the current value of rhino horn on the black market is 65.000 USD per kg). We know everything about it all - why, who, where, how. But we are not doing enough to stop the killing. ●




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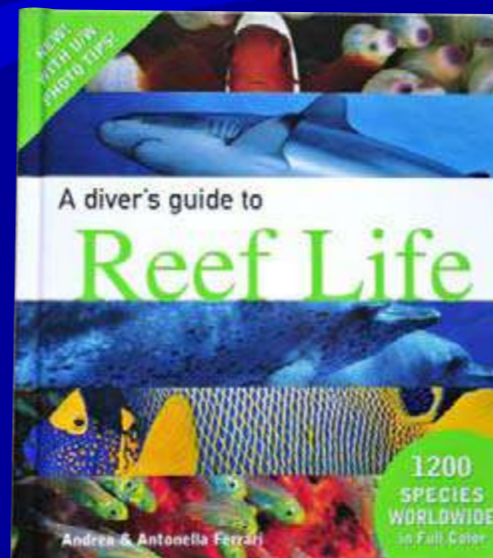
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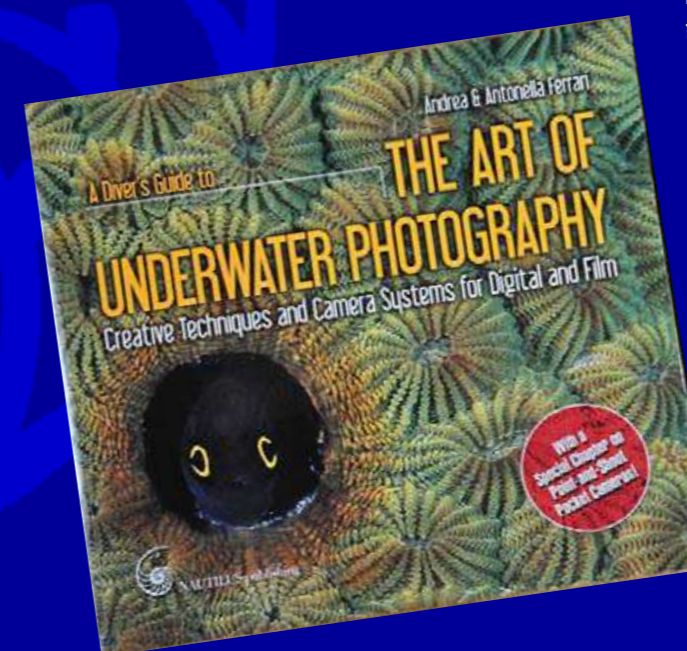
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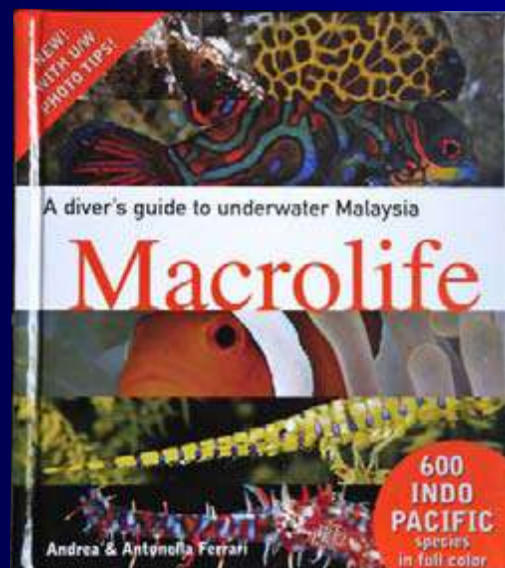
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