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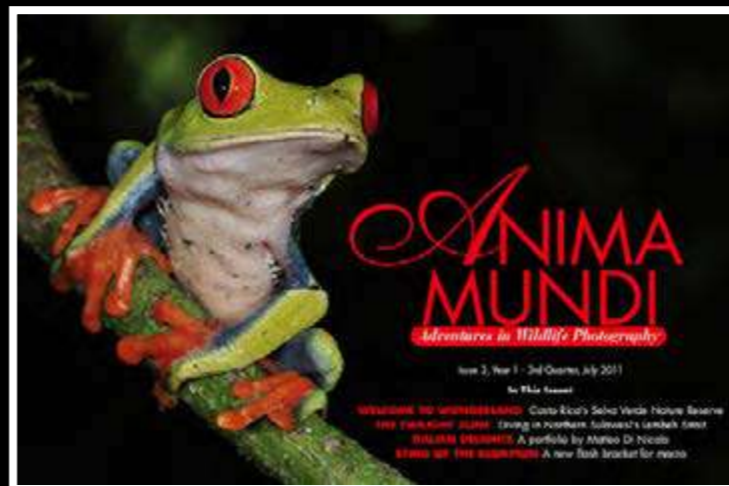
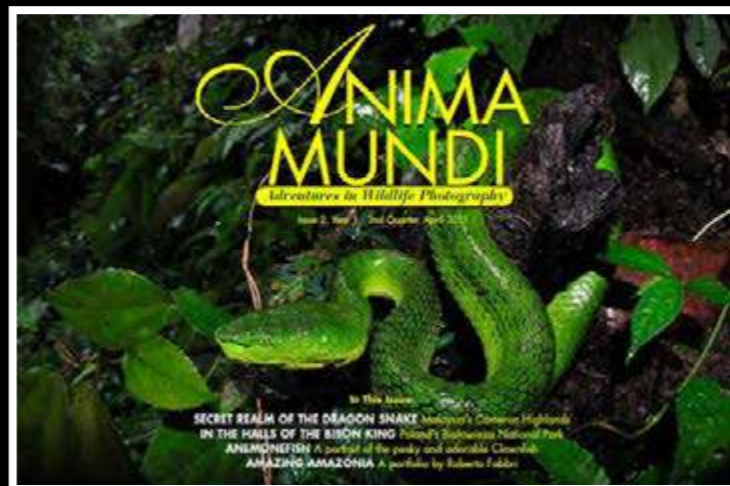
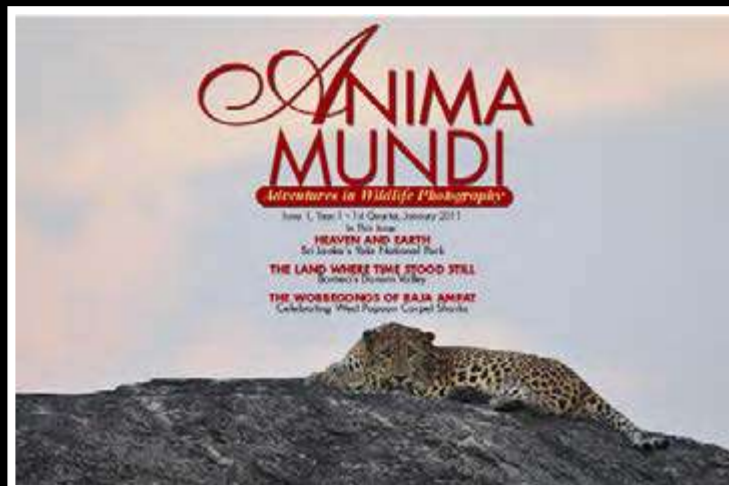
*Adventures in Wildlife Photography*

Issue 31, Year 8 - July 2018

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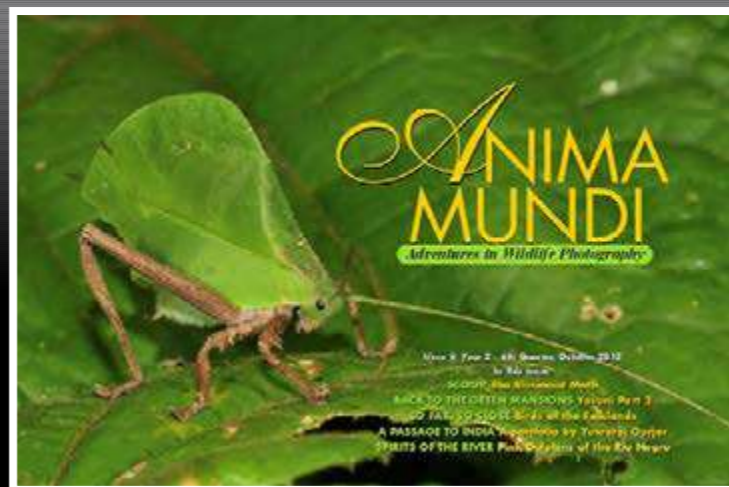
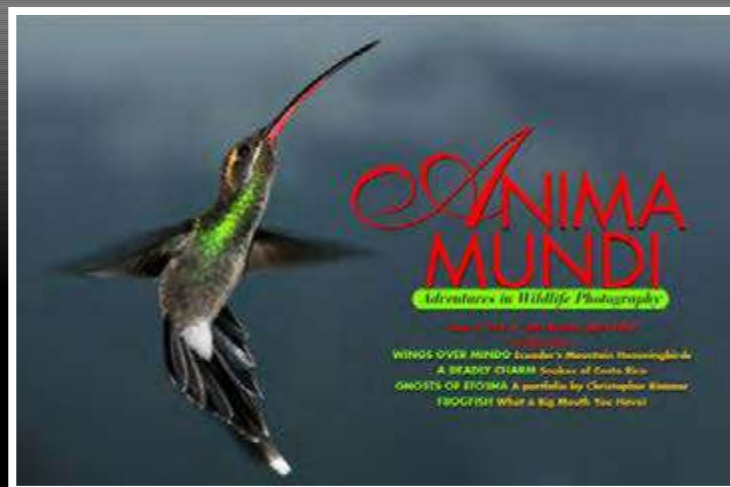


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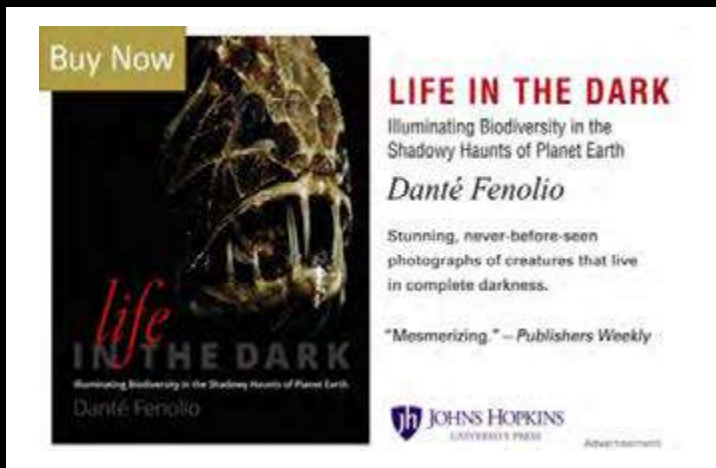
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*Dear Andrea & Antonella,*

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

Kevin & Cherie Deacon  
Dive 2000  
Sydney, Australia.  
[www.dive2000.com.au](http://www.dive2000.com.au)

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Contact us for details at [editor@animamundimag.com](mailto:editor@animamundimag.com)



■ An alarmed African elephant *Loxodonta africana*, Chobe river, Chobe National Park, Botswana - see our trip report from page 14.



# ANIMA MUNDI

*Adventures in Wildlife Photography*

## Lions, sharks and birds of prey!

Welcome to a great new issue of *Anima Mundi - Adventures in Wildlife Photography!* Once again, we have done our best to provide you with a selection of interesting destinations and subjects for your next trips - hopefully you will find something inspiring in the next pages.

We begin on page 4 with a Scoop on the bird-hunting Black-backed jackals of the Kalahari desert - a fascinating insight of behavior being actually learned and passed on we witnessed while in the desert-like Kgalagadi Transfrontier National Park in South Africa.

From page 14 and on we take you instead to a favorite destination of ours - Botswana's Chobe National Park, one of those once-in-a-lifetime destinations the passionate wildlife photographer cannot overlook. The wildlife one can see while peacefully cruising along the mighty Chobe river is nothing short of sensational - we'll have to go back.

From page 68 and following you will then find Costa Rica-based wildlife and nature photographer Greg Basco's Personal Portfolio - a truly stunning gallery of mostly rainforest images of the highest quality. Greg is really and sincerely passionate about his work, and it shows.

Coming up from page 88 and following we have our mostly visual tribute to a very remote National Park and its attendant waterbird sanctuary we have had the privilege of visiting while in North-Eastern India's Assam - little-known Dibru-Saikhowa NP and nearby Maguri Bheel are a birdwatcher's dream come alive and a peaceful, tranquil location where days peacefully go by. We loved it!



We then end our current issue from page 109 and following with a very interesting trip report by our new contributor Silvano Paiola from Slovenia's Kocevje primeval forest, one of the very few (if not the last remaining one) redoubts of the endangered and heavily persecuted European

Brown bear *Ursus arctos*. Silvano's article offers some interesting reading and lovely images of this legendary plantigrade. And we finally wrap our issue up with a spectacular image of wolves on page 123 by our contributor Luca Giordano.

And that is all for now - until October with a new issue. In the meantime...

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



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

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■ *Black heron or Black egret*  
*Egretta ardesiaca, Chobe river,*  
*Chobe National Park, Botswana*  
- see page 14.

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### THE PARTING SHOT





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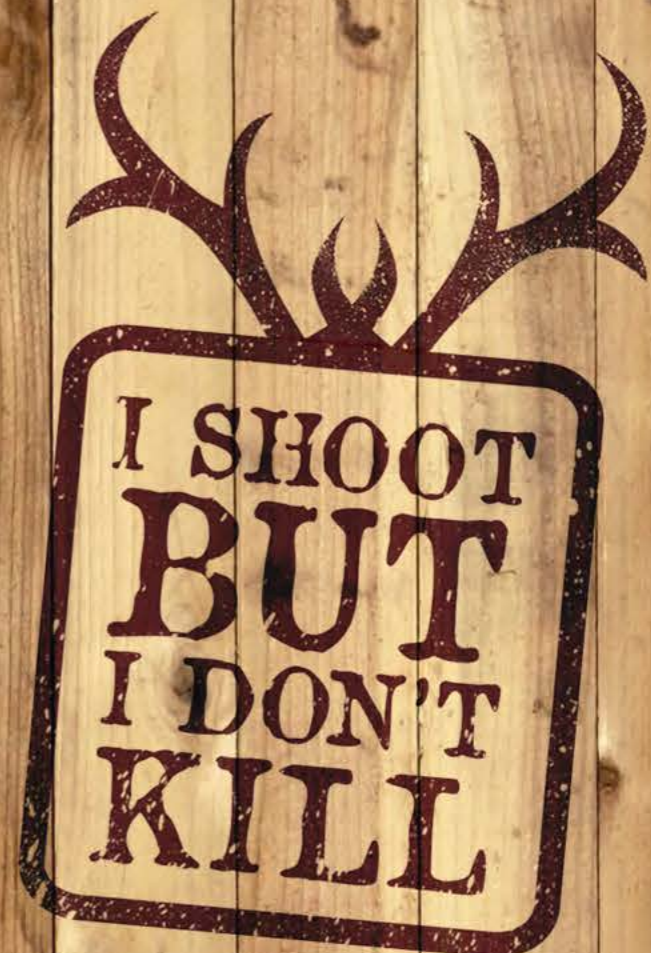
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**SCOOP!**

4

Bird-hunting jackals  
of the Kgalagadi

## **AMBUSH IN NOSSOB**

EVOLUTION AT WORK AT THE WATERHOLES  
OF A REMOTE SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL PARK

Several Black-backed  
jackals *Canis mesomelas*  
have learned to ambush birds  
coming to drink at the  
waterholes of Nossob camp,  
in the Kgalagadi National Park.



A female jackal jumps unsuccessfully at her intended prey. Despite appearances, the jackals always target a specific bird and do not strike at random.



TEXT BY ANDREA FERRARI  
PHOTOS BY ANDREA & ANTONELLA FERRARI

Nossob is one of the most important visitors' camps of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier (ex-Kalahari Gemsbok) National Park of South Africa, up far in the north and sharing a long straight western border with Namibia. The Park itself is not well known outside South Africa, and Nossob camp is just a hub of bungalows with a supposedly lion-proof fence around it built in the middle of nowhere. But something very special has been going on here, for quite some time. Water is desperately scarce in the Kgalagadi, and the Park features lots of man-made

waterholes - little concrete pools which get filled with drinking water pumped from underground by a solar-powered pump (until a lion cub doesn't break it to pieces - we saw this happening twice in a week). As it is to be expected, wildlife stays in the area all year-round just because of the water provided by these, and waterholes have become a dependable sighting spot - so much, in fact, that at some camps spacious hides are often built overlooking one, and some are even floodlit at night to allow viewing of nocturnal animals. At a couple of

waterholes of Nossob, several Black-backed jackals *Canis mesomelas* have learned to ambush the hundreds of Cape doves and sandgrouse which flock daily to the pool for a much needed morning or evening drink - waiting patiently for the birds to land and start drinking, creeping stealthily and intensely focused towards one in particular (despite appearances, the jackals do not strike randomly, but unfailingly target a single individual in the flock) and then finally bolting at full speed in the middle of the milling birds, all taking off simultaneously in panic. The success rate is

continued on page 9 >





Strike! A Cape turtle dove *Streptopilia capicola* is caught in mid-air and hurriedly carried a few meters away to be immediately consumed.





Attack runs last a few meters only and usually end in a jump. About one ambush in four meets success.





The act of successfully snatching a flying bird in mid-air lasts a fraction of a second and is not easily caught on camera. Focusing is also difficult given the number of birds taking off in all directions.





Approaching very stealthily, jackals will also occasionally catch a drinking Cape dove by surprise, from behind. Most attacks are however launched to the birds taking off en masse, when they hinder each other.

incredibly high - we've calculated that about one strike in four ends in a kill. The bird is gulped down frantically and basically whole, often on the run - less experienced in the fine art of dove-catching, other jackals close in quickly on the successful hunter to steal its prey. The whole spectacle is always fast and dramatic (some would say entertaining), but what makes it really fascinating is that we are watching what we might call a *culture* evolving at Nossob's waterholes. The older, most experienced and most successful (one could say most intelligent) jackals have obviously learned from direct observation and experience that waterholes are a dependable source of food, that flocks of birds come daily, that while busy drinking they are at their most vulnerable - and these proficient hunters are passing on this *stored information* to the younger generations and even to other unrelated jackals, which watch intently and finally learn. The hunters always follow the same routine, depending on the individual - some crash in from the right, others from the left. They will even occasionally feint disinterest and pretend to sleep to avoid alarming the birds too much. There's a lot of intelligence and craftiness being shown by these clever, fascinating animals here - in conclusion, what one sees at Nossob camp is basically an evolutionary lab, and that makes the place rather unique in our experience.







Most attacks from behind are unsuccessful, and jackals have learned to utilize other ambush techniques.





Two separate attacks. A jump will occasionally also end with a mouthful of feathers - usually a tail - torn off with the Cape dove flying away to live another day.



A very focused jackal ■ bolts on its intended prey, a Cape dove busy drinking from the Nossob waterhole. Despite the bird actually being on the verge of taking off, this attack was successful (see page 9).

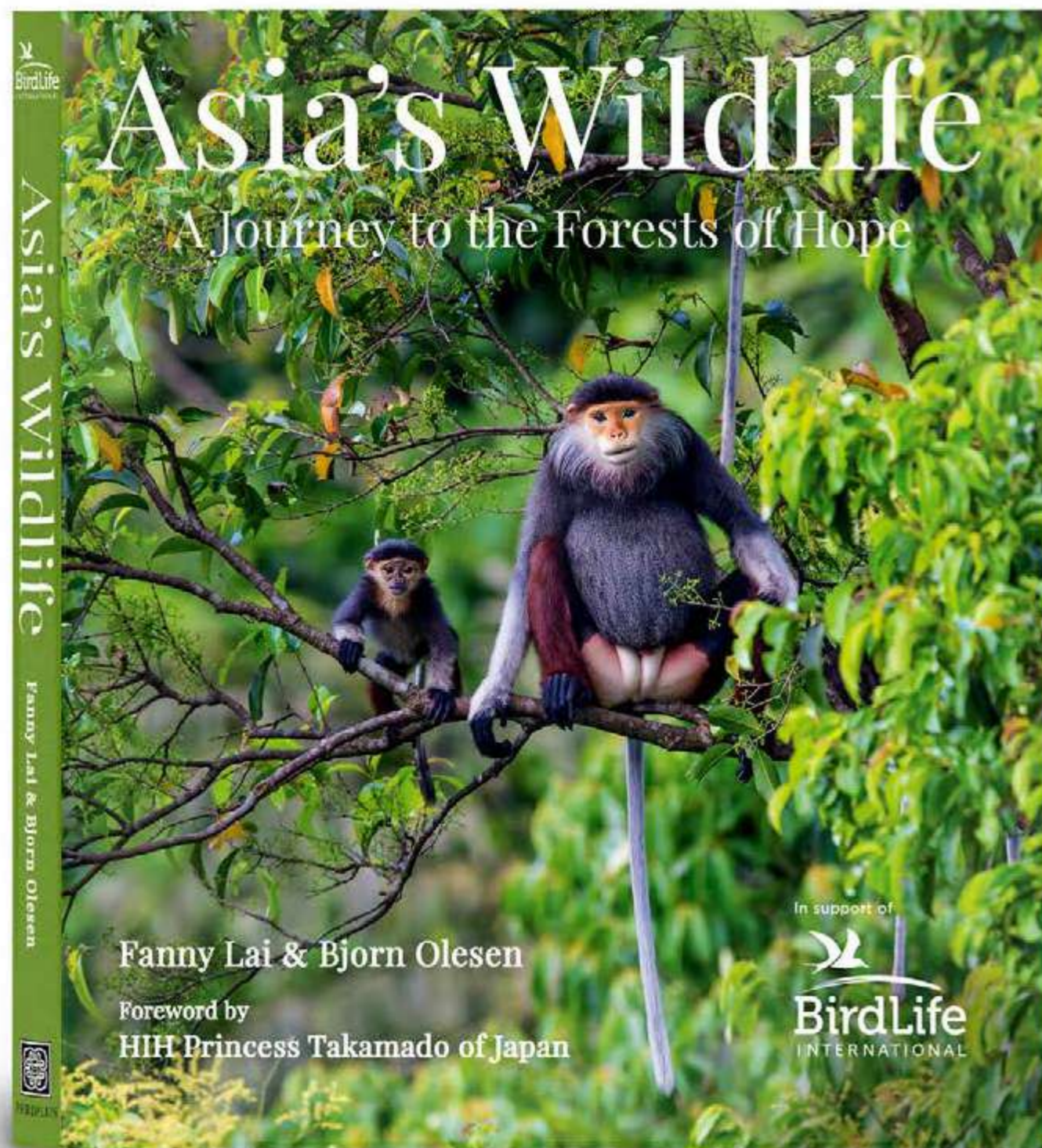




■ Watch and learn -  
this female has become  
a very experienced and  
proficient hunter. Others -  
possibly its own offspring  
- will follow suit and learn  
to do the same.







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Dr. Nigel Collar, Leventis Fellow in Conservation Biology, BirdLife International.

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Prof. Paul R. Ehrlich, President, Center for Conservation Biology, Stanford University.

*Wildlife of Asia's Forests of Hope has been produced to raise funds in support of BirdLife International, and to increase awareness of nature conservation and their Forests of Hope programme in Asia. The authors have contributed their time and resources on a pro bono basis for the production, research and travelling for this one-of-a-kind publication.*

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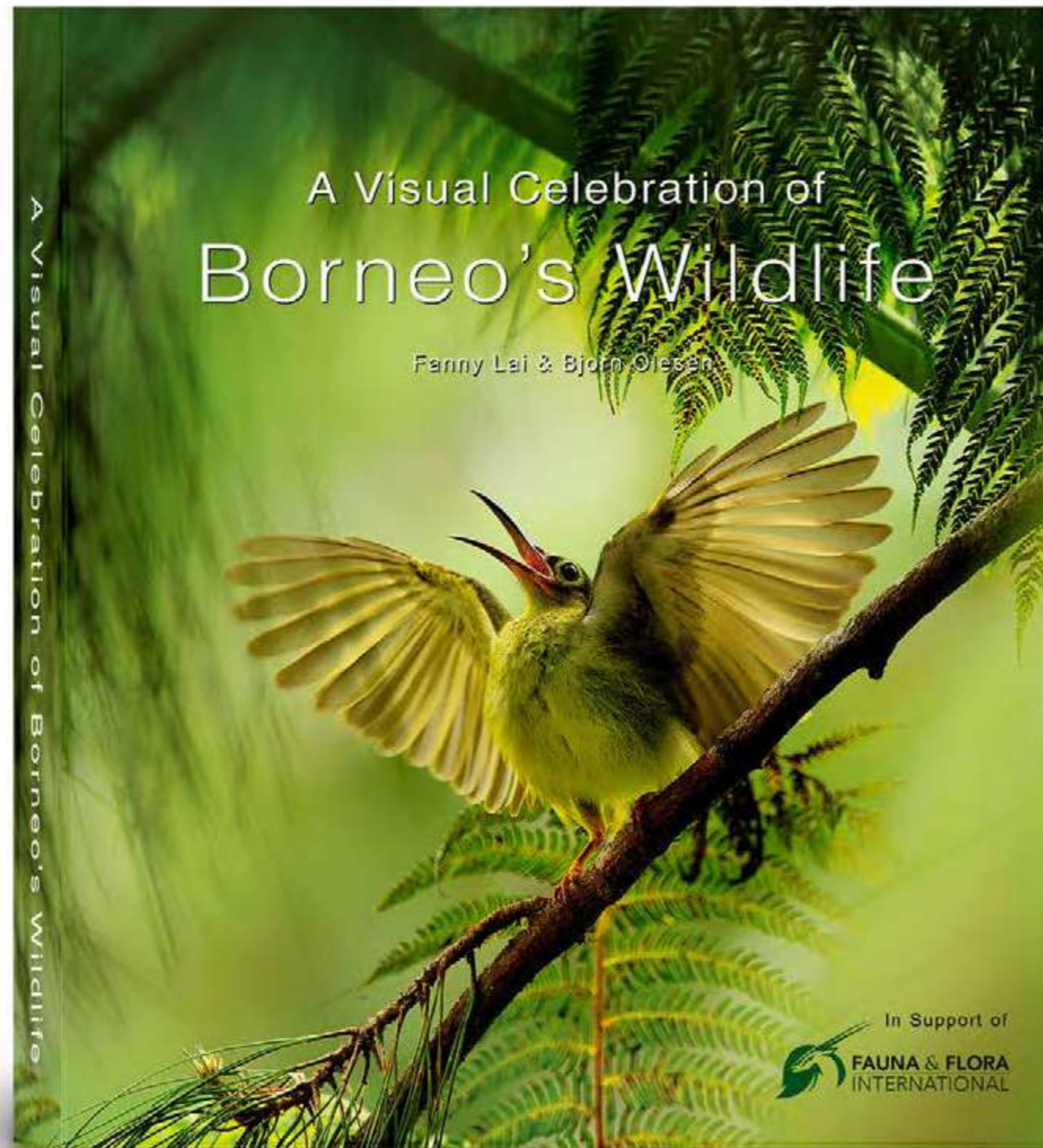
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*The Chobe Princess, the liveaboard we choose for our trip. We had the water-level cabin facing forward, easily seen in the image with its sliding doors opening in front - highly recommended!*



TEXT BY ANDREA FERRARI  
PHOTOS BY ANDREA & ANTONELLA FERRARI

*B*otswana's Chobe National Park is legendary among African safari enthusiasts. It's one of those must-do destinations of a lifetime, in the same league of Namibia's Etosha or Tanzania's Ngorongoro, and it has been there for a long time. Botswana also enjoys a very good reputation among wildlife photographers and serious conservationists, and that was one more good reason to be interested in visiting Chobe (or at least a part of it), so when the subject came up with

our friend Phillip Conradie of **African Wildlife Photo Safaris** during a trip to Namibia the decision was quickly made. We'd go to Etosha first - during the rainy season, a first for all of us - and then we'd basically drive north-east from there, crossing hundreds of deserted bush first to Moremi Reserve and finally to Kasane, a little wild town at the border between Namibia and Botswana which would serve as our port of entry to the mighty Chobe river. I use the word "port" on purpose, as

*continued on page 18* ➤



*Malachite kingfisher Alcedo cristata with spider prey - a common sight along the tree-lined shores of the Chobe.*



■ African buffalo or  
Cape buffalo  
*Syncerus caffer* with  
African elephants  
*Loxodonta africana*  
in the distance.





we had decided to do things on a grand style and enjoy the Chobe in the best and most luxurious way - by liveaboard, taking a river cruise aboard the beautiful Chobe Princess (see our Travel Guide further on for the details). But what's so special about the Chobe to justify the admittedly rather horrendous expenditure of time and money needed to visit it?

**BOTSWANA'S EDEN FOR WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHERS**

Chobe National Park is Botswana's first National Park, and also the most biologically diverse. Located in the north of the country, it is Botswana's third largest park, after Central Kalahari Game Reserve and Gemsbok National Park, and has one of the greatest concentrations of game in all of Africa. The Park is widely known for its spectacular elephant population: it

*continued on page 20* ➔

*African elephant **Loxodonta africana** taking a dust bath. This image - like the previous one - was taken from the top deck of the Chobe Princess as we slowly motored along the river.*







■ *Giant kingfisher*  
*Megaceryle maxima* with crab prey.



A very displeased young male African lion *Panthera leo* has just been displaced by a herd of elephants going to the river for their evening drink.

contains an estimated 50,000 elephants, perhaps the highest elephant concentration of Africa, and part of the largest continuous surviving elephant population. The elephant population seems to have solidly built up since 1990, from a few thousand. Elephants living here are Kalahari elephants, the largest in size of all known elephant populations. They are characterized by rather brittle ivory and short tusks, perhaps due to calcium deficiency in the soils. Damage caused by the high numbers of elephants is rife in some areas. In fact, concentration is so high throughout Chobe that culls have been considered, but are too controversial and have thus far been rejected. At dry season, these elephants sojourn in Chobe River and the Linyanti River areas. At rain season, they make a 200-km migration to the southeast stretch of the Park. Their distribution zone however outreaches the park and *continued on page 24* ➤







Left, Little bee-eater *Merops pusillus*; top right, Hamerkop *Scopus umbretta*; bottom right, Spur-winged goose *Plectropterus gambensis*.







A large Nile crocodile *Crocodylus niloticus* basks on a river bank in the late afternoon - notice the elephants foraging in the background.



*African elephant  
Loxodonta africana  
enjoying a cool shower  
by the river side.*





spreads to northwestern Zimbabwe. The Park can be divided up to 4 areas, each corresponding to one distinct ecosystem: The Serondela area (or Chobe riverfront), situated in the extreme Northeast of the park, has as its main geographical features lush floodplains and dense woodland of mahogany, teak and other hardwoods now largely reduced by heavy elephant pressure. The Chobe River, which flows along the Northeast border of the park, is a major watering spot, especially in the dry season (May through October) for large breeding herds of elephants, as well as families of giraffe, sable and cape buffalo. The flood plains are the only place in Botswana where the puku antelope can be seen. Birding is also available. Large numbers of carmine bee eaters are spotted in season. When in flood spoonbills, ibis, various species of storks, ducks and other waterfowl flock to the area. This is likely Chobe's most visited section, in large part because of its proximity to the Victoria Falls. The town of Kasane, situated just downstream, is the most important town of the region and serves as the northern entrance to the park.

The Savuti Marsh area, 10,878 square km (4,200 sq mi) large, constitutes the western stretch of the park (50 km (31 mi) north of Mababe Gate). The Savuti Marsh is the relic of a large inland lake whose water supply was cut a long time ago by tectonic movements. Nowadays the marsh is fed by the erratic Savuti

*continued on page 34* ➤



*African jacana* ■  
*Actophilornis africanus*  
 with chicks.





■ *Left, Southern red bishop or Red bishop Euplectes orix, courting and building nest among riverine reed beds. Right, Greater Blue-eared Glossy starling Lamprotornis chalybaeus.*





■ Baby elephants are absolutely adorable - this one is obviously enjoying playing in the water!







Far left,  
Reed cormorant  
*Phalacrocorax  
africanus*.  
Left, male  
Sable antelope  
*Hippotragus  
niger*.





■ A herd of African elephants *Loxodonta africana* is moving towards the river - the babies are being shielded by the adult females.






■ Top left, Little Banded Goshawk or Shikra *Accipiter badius*; top right, Melba finch or Green-winged Pytilia *Pytilia melba*. Bottom left, Wood sandpiper *Tringa glareola*; bottom right, Water Dikkop or Thick-knee *Burhinus vermiculatus*.





A female African lion   
*Panthera leo* clearly shows her  
displeasure at being  
approached.



■ Squacco heron  
*Ardeola ralloides*.







■ Top left, African fish eagle *Haliaeetus vocifer*; top right, African sacred ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus*. Bottom left, Great egret *Egretta alba*; bottom right, Black heron or Black egret *Egretta ardesiaca*.



■ *Adult male African buffalo or Cape buffalo Syncerus caffer - old, experienced bulls like this one can be very cranky and usually are extremely dangerous.*





■ African elephant  
*Loxodonta africana*.  
Notice the typically  
short and broken  
tusks usually  
observed in the  
Chobe elephants.

Channel, which dries up for long periods then curiously flows again, a consequence of tectonic activity in the area. It is currently flowing again and in January 2010 reached Savuti Marsh for the first time since 1982. As a result of this variable flow, there are hundred of dead trees along the channel's bank. The region is also covered with extensive savannahs and rolling grasslands, which makes wildlife particularly dynamic in this section of the Park. At dry seasons, visitors on safari often encounter rhinoceros, warthog, kudu, impala, zebra, wildebeest and a herd of African bush elephants. At rain seasons, the rich birdlife of the Park (450 species) is well represented. Packs of lions, hyenas, zebras or more rarely Southern African cheetahs are visible as well. This region is reputed for its annual migration of zebras and predators.

The Linyanti Marsh, located at the Northwest corner of the Park and to the North of Savuti, is adjacent to the Linyanti River. To the west of this area lies Selinda Reserve and on the northern bank of Kwando River is Namibia's Nkasa Rupara National Park. Around these two rivers are riverine woodlands, open woodlands as well as lagoons, and the rest of the region mainly consists of flood plains. There are here large concentrations of the lion, leopard, African wild dog, roan antelope, sable antelope, a

*continued on page 42* ➤







Left, African Wattled plover or lapwing *Vanellus senegallus*; right, Coppery-tailed Coucal *Centropus cupreicaudus*.





The almost invisible outline of a Nile crocodile *Crocodylus niloticus* silently cruising the Chobe at sunset.








■ Left, Cape spurfowl or Cape francolin *Pternistis capensis*; right, Great egret *Egretta alba*.



A huge Nile  crocodile *Crocodylus niloticus* basking on a riverbank.







■ Top left, Emerald-spotted Wood dove *Turtur chalcospilos*; top right, African harrier-hawk, Harrier hawk or *Gymnogene Polyboroides typus*. Bottom left, Red-billed Oxpecker *Buphagus erythrorhynchus*; bottom right, Common sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*.







Female African elephant *Loxodonta africana* with her tiny baby suckling.





Common ■  
*hippopotamus*  
*Hippopotamus*  
*amphibius* - a common,  
fast and extremely  
dangerous species.





■ The small but exceedingly colorful African pygmy goose *Nettapus auritus* is a very shy and frustrating subject, which can be approached only with great caution and difficulty.



hippopotamus pod and enormous herds of elephants. The rarer red lechwe, sitatunga and a bask of crocodiles also occur in the area. Bird life is very rich here.

Between Linyanti and Savuti Marshes finally lies a hot and dry hinterland, mainly occupied by the Nogatsaa grass woodland. This section is little known and is a great place for spotting elands.

**A CHOICE OF DIFFERENT SOLUTIONS TO VISIT**

So much for an accurate description of the area - but is it worth the trouble and the cost? In a word - yes. The area we visited - the Chobe "riverfront" which spreads for a radius of about 50 km



Left, two Pied  
kingfisher *Ceryle  
rudis*; right, African  
openbill *Anastomus  
lamelligerus*.



around Kasane, both by river cruise and by car - is exceedingly rich in wildlife, and photo opportunities are countless, especially for birds when shooting from a speedboat on the river. Elephants, hippos and crocodiles are everywhere, and when in the small boats one can get really, really close to them, so that interesting behavior is often observed at ease. We were there during the wet season so the river was running high and water was plentiful everywhere, but we expect wildlife to be more concentrated along the Chobe itself during the dry season when water is less available inside the bush. River liveboards are admittedly very expensive, and most people can only afford a 3- or 4-day cruise, so we rounded that up opting to stay in Kasane (lots of nice, inexpensive bungalows in town) and taking speedboat day trips up and down the river for one more week. One has to choose the boatman wisely, but if the guy is good then good sightings and photos will soon follow. But let's admit it - regardless of costs, nothing beats enjoying an African sunset from the comfort and safety of a luxurious riverboat's deck, with a cold beer in your glass, millions of stars in the sky above and a lion roaring in the distance...so go for it!







■ Southern Ground hornbill *Bucorvus leadbeateri*. This male is possibly displaying a courtship behavior.





African fish eagle *Haliaeetus vocifer* feeding on a large catfish.





*Lesser or Allen's Gallinule* ■  
*Porphyrio alleni* - a very shy  
skulker which can only be  
approached with  
much difficulty.





■ Nile crocodiles *Crocodylus niloticus* are almost invisible when swimming on the surface. This is an extremely dangerous and very fast predator.





■ A pair of White-fronted bee-eater *Merops bullockoides* - the one on the right is feeding on a moth it has just caught. The tiny scales from the moth's wings are clearly visible as they are being shaken off.







■ Left, adult male Chacma baboon or Cape baboon *Papio ursinus*; right, male African buffalo or Cape buffalo *Syncerus caffer*.







*Nile monitor*  
*Varanus niloticus*  
*testing the air at*  
*the water's edge.*





■ Left, Malachite kingfisher *Alcedo cristata*; right, African fish eagle *Haliaeetus vocifer* feeding on fish prey.





The archetypal Chobe river landscape - reeds, tall grasses, thousands of lotus flowers in the clear water under a bright blue, endless African sky.





*African elephant*  
*Loxodonta africana*  
*at the river's edge.*







A typically beautiful  
Chobe river scene with a huge  
Nile crocodile *Crocodylus  
niloticus* basking on  
a grassy sandbank.



A Common hippopotamus  
*Hippopotamus amphibius*  
makes a convenient perch for  
an egret. Hippos are still  
plentiful in the Chobe.







■ Left, Long-toed plover or lapwing *Vanellus crassirostris*; right, Cape buffalo *Syncerus caffer* - this is a mature bull showing a splendid set of horns.







*Black heron or Black egret Egretta ardesiaca creating the typical "sun umbrella" with its wings to hunt the small fish it feeds on. The shaded area allows it to see better underwater and at the same time it attracts fish within striking range.*





■ Left, a rare sighting of the forest-dwelling Long-crested eagle *Lophaelus occipitalis*; right, Reed cormorant *Phalacrocorax africanus*.





*The Red lechwe* ■  
Kobus leche is a typical  
swamp-dwelling antelope  
which can be occasionally  
observed along the  
Chobe's grassy edges.

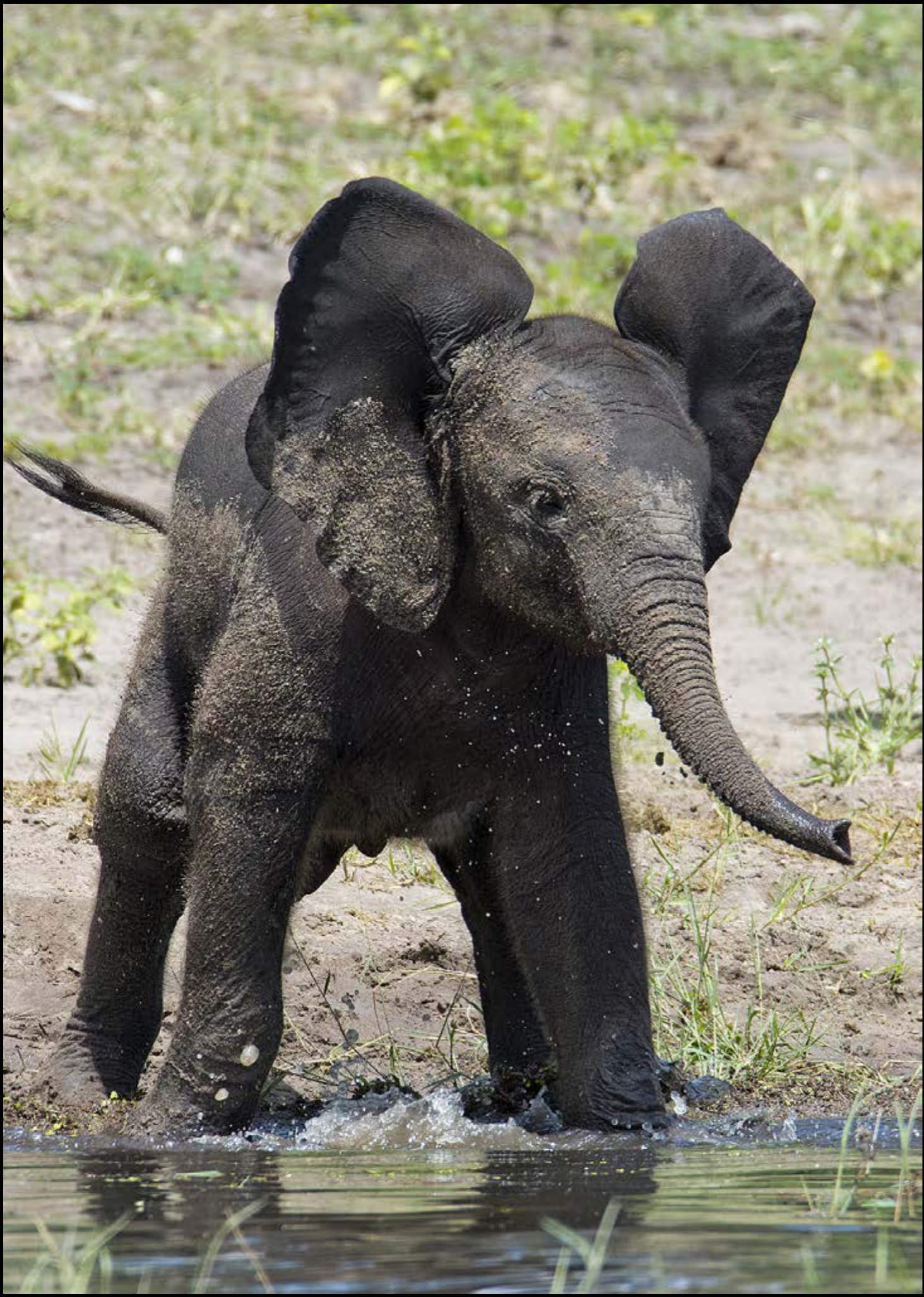




*Nile crocodile*  
*Crocodylus niloticus*  
*basking in the sun.*







■ Left, a baby African elephant *Loxodonta africana* is clearly quite enthusiastic about finally getting to the cool waters of the Chobe; right, portrait of a Malachite kingfisher *Alcedo cristata*, a truly stunning species.



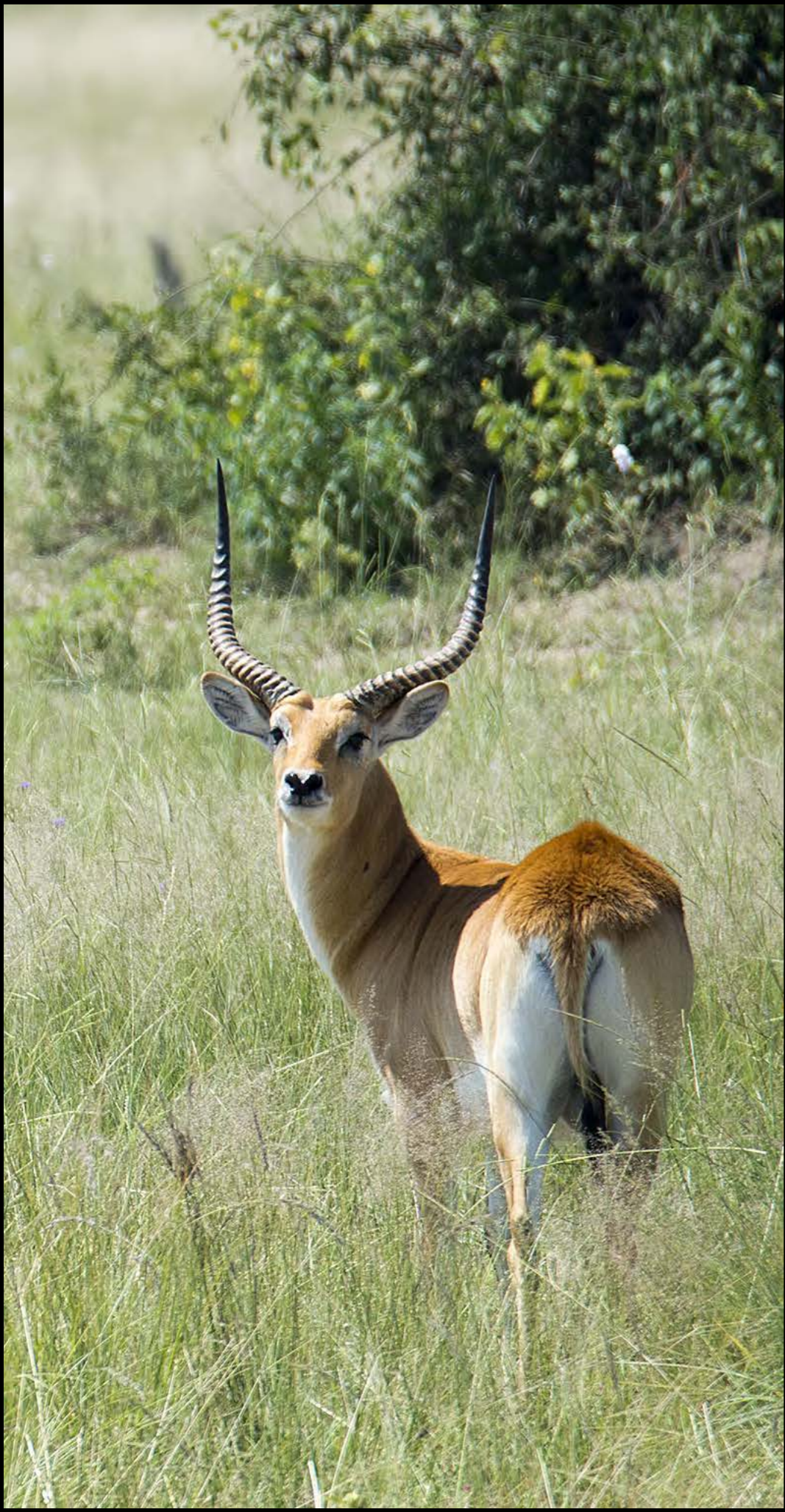


An angry Common  
hippopotamus *Hippopotamus*  
*amphibius* charges our  
speedboat. Hippos can be  
surprisingly fast in the water.





Left, Red ■  
lechwe Kobus leche;  
center, African lion  
Panthera leo; right,  
male Impala  
Aepyceros melampus.







**Red-billed hornbill**  
*Tockus erythrorhynchus*  
preying on a Leaf mantis  
it has just caught despite  
the insect's brilliant  
camouflage.





This is how most of the river photography along the Chobe is taken - liveaboards offer speedboat tenders for the daily excursions.



# At-a-glance travel guide



COUNTRY OF DESTINATION: **BOTSWANA**



## 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:** As can be expected, this is rather complicated. Your arrival/departure point is Kasane, which is a small town in Botswana, close to Africa's "Four Corners", where four countries almost meet: Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe. It is at the far north-eastern corner of Botswana where it serves as the administrative center of the Chobe District. Most people fly there from Maun or from Gaborone - the capital of Botswana - or from South Africa, but we elected instead to drive all the way from Etosha (in Namibia) to Kasane. The road trip is stunningly beautiful but quite adventurous and should only be attempted with a strong, reliable 4x4 vehicle and an experienced driver/guide.

**MEANS OF TRANSPORT:** Chobe can be explored by car or by speedboat. Both options are viable and satisfying, but we strongly suggest to go all the way and also experience a few days' river trip on a luxury liveaboard. These offer daily excursions along the river by tender speedboat, often equipped with swing arms with camera mountings. We are convinced that for productive wildlife photography it is highly advisable to employ a professional guide and we cannot recommend enough our personal friend Phillip Conradie of [African Wildlife Photo Safaris](http://www.africanwildlifephotosafaris.com) - a very reliable and experienced professional with a special knack for animals and a wonderful person to travel with.

**CURRENCY:** Botswana Pula (BWP) and South African Rand (ZAR), with US \$ being accepted in most upscale lodges. It is advisable to change a reasonable amount of currency upon arrival.

**ACCOMODATION:** Plenty of affordable cottages and bungalows by the riverside in Kasane (we can safely recommend <http://choberivercottages.com>). For the liveaboards check out the boats offered by <https://zqcollection.com>. We took a river cruise on the Chobe Princess (<https://www.chobe.com/chobe-princess.html>) and loved every minute of it! As an alternative you might also want to check another great boat at <http://www.pangolinvoyager.com>.



# *Surely one of Africa's most beautiful and richest National Parks*



**FOOD:** Food in Botswana is safe and tasty, especially meat. Don't expect five-star cuisine however and remember that in most tourist cottages and bungalows you'll have to buy your own groceries and cook your own meals. In Kasane we gladly recommend Pizza Plus Coffee & Curry on the main road, a little restaurant with great Indian food.

**LANGUAGE:** English is the official spoken and written language of Botswana, while Setswana is only used for oral communication.

**WORRIES:** None as long as you follow the lodges and National Parks rules. Botswana is a very safe, visitor-friendly nation, but always remember that wild animals are exactly that - wild, and often dangerous.

**HEALTH:** A very safe destination, with reasonably high medical standards. Some risk of malaria.

**CLIMATE:** Botswana's climate is semi-arid. Though it is hot and dry for much of the year, there is a rainy season, which runs through the summer months. Rainfall tends to be erratic, unpredictable and highly regional. Often a heavy downpour may occur in one area while 10 or 15 kilometres away there is no rain at all. Showers are often followed by strong sunshine so that a good deal of the rainfall does not penetrate the ground but is lost to evaporation and transpiration. The summer season begins in November and ends in March. It usually brings very high temperatures. However, summer is also the rainy season, and cloud coverage and rain can cool things down considerably, although only usually for a short period of time. Summer days are hot, especially in the weeks that precede the coming of the cooling rains, and shade temperatures rise to the 38°C mark and higher, reaching a blistering 44°C on rare occasions. The winter season begins in May

and ends in August. This is also the dry season when virtually no rainfall occurs. Winter days are invariably sunny and cool to warm; however, evening and night temperatures can drop below freezing point in some areas, especially in the southwest. Winters are clear-skied and bone-dry, the air warm during the daylight hours but, because there is no cloud cover, cold at night and in the early mornings. The in-between periods - April/early May and September/October - still tend to be dry, but the days are cooler than in summer and the nights are warmer than in winter. All this means that Chobe National Park can be visited all year-round.

**BESIDES:** Other exceptionally beautiful protected areas worth a visit are the Okavango Delta and Moremi Reserve and the Makgadikgadi and Nxai Pan. Given the high accomodation costs, most people however visit only one destination at a time. ●



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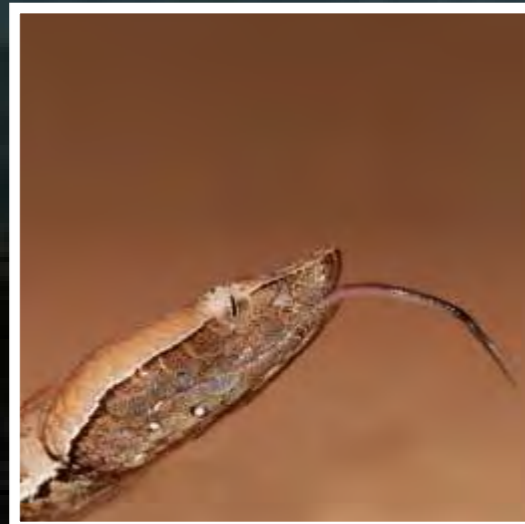


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# Rainforest views

Stunning images from an author, tour leader and conservationist who has chosen long ago to leave his native home in the USA to live in Costa Rica out of his deep love for the neotropical wildlife and landscapes

## *Greg Basco: A Wildlife Photographer in his own words*

I've always been interested in nature, and it's this passion that led me to pursue a career as a professional nature photographer; but not right away. After graduating college in the US, I spent 2 years in Costa Rica in the Peace Corps and fell in love with the country and one person in particular, my wife who is a Costa Rican native! We returned to the US for a few years where I did my graduate work in political science and tropical ecology. We then returned again to Costa Rica so I could do my field research for my doctoral dissertation on ecotourism. At the same time, I worked for a few years in conservation in Costa Rica. But during that period, I was really getting into nature photography. I sold a few pictures and bought more gear. I sold a few more pictures and bought more gear again. And in 2006, I decided to move to nature photography full-time, selling my own images for books and magazines and co-founding Foto Verde Tours, Costa Rica's first travel company specializing in photographic tours. I'm busy now with the instructional workshops I lead, continuing to grow Foto Verde Tours throughout Latin America, and producing my own coffee table and e-books. I recently completed a coffee table book called National Parks of Costa Rica, and I'm co-author of the popular e-books *Guide to Tropical Nature Photography* and *Lightroom for the Nature Photographer*. I always look for different light and compositions rather than taking the more standard stock-type photos, and I enjoy shooting wildlife, birds, macro, and landscape equally. Here's what in my bag

for most shoots: Canon 5DsR and 7DII, the Canon 300 mm f/2.8 L IS, the Sigma 150-600 mm C zoom, the Canon 70-300 mm L IS zoom, the Sigma 150 mm f/2.8 macro, the Canon 16-35 mm f/4 L IS zoom, the Rokinon 24 mm f/1.4 lens, and the Sigma 15 mm f/2.8 fisheye lens, various ND and grad filters. I use flash a lot in my photography, whether I'm shooting in the middle of a Costa Rican rainforest or in the Atacama Desert of Chile. As such, I always have at least two flashes with radio transmitter/receivers in my bag. Induro tripods and heads are my choice for camera support. My latest and most exciting initiative is a new non-profit organization dedicated to promoting conservation through photography. I'm founding this in conjunction with my good friends and fellow photographers Nick Hawkins and Lucas Bustamante, along with an expanded team of great nature photographers, multimedia folks, and journalism and PR people. We call this new venture the New World Conservation Photography Group, and our aim is to produce high-quality nature photos and multimedia content that help governments, local communities, scientists, and non-profit groups to protect and preserve ecosystems throughout Latin America. My journey to nature photography is perhaps a non-traditional one, but it is finally coming full-circle. I'm now in a position where I can use my photography more and more to help give back to the ecosystems that have allowed me to make a living for my family and me.



<http://www.deepgreenphotography.com/>





**Keel-billed  
Toucan**

*Ramphastos  
sulfuratus*

A fast shutter speed helped me capture the exact moment when a Keel-billed toucan *Ramphastos sulfuratus* shook off the drops after a heavy rainstorm in Costa Rica.

Canon EOS 5DS,  
1/1600,  
f/6,3, no flash,  
ISO 2500,  
Canon 150-  
600mm F5-6.3 DG  
OS HSM.



**Baird's Tapir***Tapirus bairdii*

Costa Rica's Rio Celeste is an amazing place on its own – while photographing a landscape, I suddenly saw a Baird's tapir crash through the underbrush and begin to swim downstream. I sprinted to a spot I had noticed earlier and hoped against hope that the tapir would cross there.

Canon EOS 5D Mark III,  
1/320,  
f/5.6,  
no flash,  
ISO 640,  
Rokinon 24 mm.





**Collared Aracari** *Pteroglossus torquatus*

Directional sunlight filtering through the trees on the outskirts of a rainforest in northern Costa Rica allowed me to capture this dramatic image of a Collared Aracari.

Canon EOS-1D X, 1/2500, f6,3, with flash, ISO 1000, Canon 150-600mm F5-6.3 DG OS HSM.

**Green Iguana***Iguana iguana*

When I saw one Green iguana begin to become active, I quickly shot at a wide open aperture with a telephoto lens for shallow depth of field as the "iguana king" surveyed his little domain.

Canon EOS 5D, 1/200, f/2,8, with flash, ISO 320,  
Canon EF300mm f/2.8L IS USM.





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**Andean  
Flamingo**

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*Phoenicoparrus  
andinus*

A lone  
Andean  
Flamingo was  
foraging right  
next to us in the  
Atacama desert  
of Northern  
Chile.

Canon 5DsR,  
1/50, f/22,  
with flash,  
ISO 500,  
Canon 16-35  
mm f/4 L IS  
zoom.







**Mantled Howler Monkey** *Alouatta palliata*

I love sidelight, and when I saw this Mantled Howler Monkey in a tree at the Selva Verde Lodge in Costa Rica's northern lowlands I couldn't believe my luck. Canon EOS 60D, 1/200, f/7.1, with flash, ISO 500, Canon EF70-300mm f/4-5.6L IS USM.

**Long-billed Hermit**

*Phaethornis longirostris*

Long-billed hermits love these "Sexy Pink" *Heliconia* flowers in northern Costa Rica. I liked this photo because it shows how the birds have to contort themselves to get their nectar reward.

Canon EOS 5D Mark II, 1/200, f/11, four flashes, ISO 250  
Canon EF70-300mm f/4-5.6L IS USM.







---

**Emerald  
Tree Boa**

*Corallus caninus*

A rarely seen juvenile Emerald Tree Boa in the rainforest in the Amazon region of Peru is the Holy Grail for the herpetologist as they are exceedingly hard to find.

I balanced flash with natural light for this wide angle portrait.

Canon 5DsR,  
1/200,  
f/10, with flash,  
ISO 250,  
Canon 16-35 mm  
zoom, polarizer.



**Parlor palm** *Chamaedorea elegans*

Steam from a natural volcanic vent in the forest of the Rincon de la Vieja National Park in Costa Rica separated the palms from the chaotic vegetation normally visible.

Canon EOS-1D Mark IV, 1/50, f/18, no flash, ISO 2500,  
Canon EF17-40mm f/4L USM.



**Pallas' Long-tongued bat** *Glossophaga soricina*

A Pallas' Long-tongued Bat visits a banana flower, Costa Rica.

Canon EOS 5D Mark IV, 3,2 sec, f/11, ISO 400,  
Sigma 150-600mm F5-6.3 DG OS HSM.



**Margay***Lepardus wiedii*

Camera traps rely on an infrared beam to trigger a camera. When I learned that an endangered Margay was spotted at my favorite ecolodge in Costa Rica, Bosque de Paz, I spent nine nights setting everything up and putting out a little tuna and sardines to help attract the cat to where I had my camera pointed. The cat came for a total of thirteen minutes, and my camera took five photos.

Canon EOS-1D Mark IV, 1/60, f8, with flash, ISO 1000, Canon EF17-40mm f/4L USM.



**Amazonian Motmot***Momotus momota*

An Amazonian Motmot speeds through the cloud forest in front of my house in Costa Rica. This image is an in-camera blur combined with flash; the effect is not a product of Photoshop.  
Canon EOS 5D, 1/30, f/5.0, with flash, ISO 50,  
Canon EF300mm f/2.8L IS USM +1.4x.

**Emerald Glass frog***Centrolene prosoblepon*

I took this image of this amazing nocturnal frog at night in a cloud forests on the outskirts of the Juan Castro Blanco National Park in Costa Rica's Central Volcanic Mountain Range.

NIKON D700, 1/8, f11, with several flashes, ISO 800,  
Nikon 105.0 mm f/2.8.





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**Puma**

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*Felis concolor*

Puma feasting on a guanaco *Lama guanicoe* carcass on the outskirts of the Torres del Paine National Park in Chile.

Photo taken with a wide angle lens and a remote shutter release.

Canon 5DsR, 1/200, f/11, remote wireless shutter release, Phottix Odin flash transmitter, two flashes, ISO 400, Canon 16-35 mm f/4 zoom.



**Red-webbed Tree frog**

*Hypsiboas rufitelus*

Red-webbed tree frog in lowland rainforest, Costa Rica.

Canon 5DsR, 1/200, f/11, two flashes, ISO 200,  
Sigma 150 mm macro.



**King Vulture** *Sarcoramphus papa*

A King vulture takes a break from eating as the afternoon sun glints off the wing of one of the numerous black vultures sharing a carcass in Costa Rica.

Canon EOS 5DS R, 1/5000, f/2,8, no flash, ISO 400,  
Canon EF300mm f/2.8L IS USM.



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**San Rafael  
waterfall**

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Ecuador

The waterfall is situated in about as dramatic a setting as I've ever seen. Deep in the eastern foothills of the Andes, its water will eventually contribute to the flow of the mighty Amazon River.

Canon 5DsR,  
12 mins,  
f/16,  
no flash,  
polarizer, 10 stop  
neutral density  
filter, ISO 50,  
Canon 16-35 mm.





**Helmeted Iguana**

*Corytophanes  
cristatus*

Helmeted iguana  
on the banks of a  
lowland rainforest  
stream, Costa Rica.

I'm always on the  
lookout for strong  
compositions and  
dramatic natural  
light. I was  
absolutely thrilled to  
be able to capture  
this image under a  
lightly cloudy sky  
that gave  
a chiaroscuro look  
to the scene.

Canon EOS 5DS R,  
3,2 sec, f/8,  
no flash,  
ISO 100,  
Canon EF16-35mm  
f/4L IS USM.







### Atlantic Coast

Costa Rica

I found that low tide sunrise would be about an hour after low tide. This was perfect as that meant just enough water to swirl around the large tidal reef outcrop but not so much that I wouldn't be able to wade out into the surf to shoot. I hiked into the refuge at about 4 in the morning by flashlight, set up, and waited.

Canon EOS 5D Mark II, 2,0 sec, f/16, no flash, ISO 100, Canon EF17-40mm f/4L USM.



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**Red-eyed  
Tree frog**

---

*Agalychnis callidryas*  
A nocturnal red-eyed tree frog is bathed in the rainforest starlight in northern Costa Rica during an hourlong exposure.

Canon EOS 5D  
Mark II, 1 h,  
f/10, with flash,  
ISO 400,  
20mm.







### Pacific Coast

Costa Rica

I used a 10 stop neutral density filter (kind of like welder's glass) for a very long exposure at sunset at my favorite beach on Costa Rica's Pacific Coast. The resulting three minute exposure gave an ethereal look to the image just after the sun had set.

Canon EOS 5DS R,  
150 seconds  
f/16, no flash,  
ISO 100,  
Canon EF16-35mm  
f/4L IS USM.



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**Red-eyed  
Tree frog**

---

---

*Agalychnis callidryas*

A wild Red-eyed Tree frog leaps through the forest in the lowlands of Costa Rica. It took a setup with multiple flashes, a bit of creativity, and plenty of patience to capture this action!

Canon 5DsR,  
1/200,  
f/16, two flashes,  
ISO 640,  
Sigma 150 mm  
macro, tripod.







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**Juan Castro Blanco National Park** Costa Rica

At the end of a rainy day at the Toro Waterfall in Costa Rica's Juan Castro Blanco National Park, the sun suddenly broke through the clouds lighting up the overlapping misty mountain valleys while the rain kept pouring down. I quickly grabbed the camera and lens I had just packed away and fired off 6 vertical shots, which I would later stitch together for this panoramic image. The sun went back behind the clouds right after, and that was it. What a way to end the day!

Canon EOS 5D Mark II, 1/160, f/5,6, no flash, ISO 500, Canon EF70-300mm f/4-5.6L IS USM.





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**Quito Whorltail  
Iguana**

*Stenocercus  
guentheri*

A Whorltail

Iguana surveys its domain at nearly 15,000 feet near the base of Ecuador's Cotopaxi Volcano. Canon EOS 5DS R, 1/60, f/16, with flash, ISO 100, Canon EF16-35mm f/4L IS USM.



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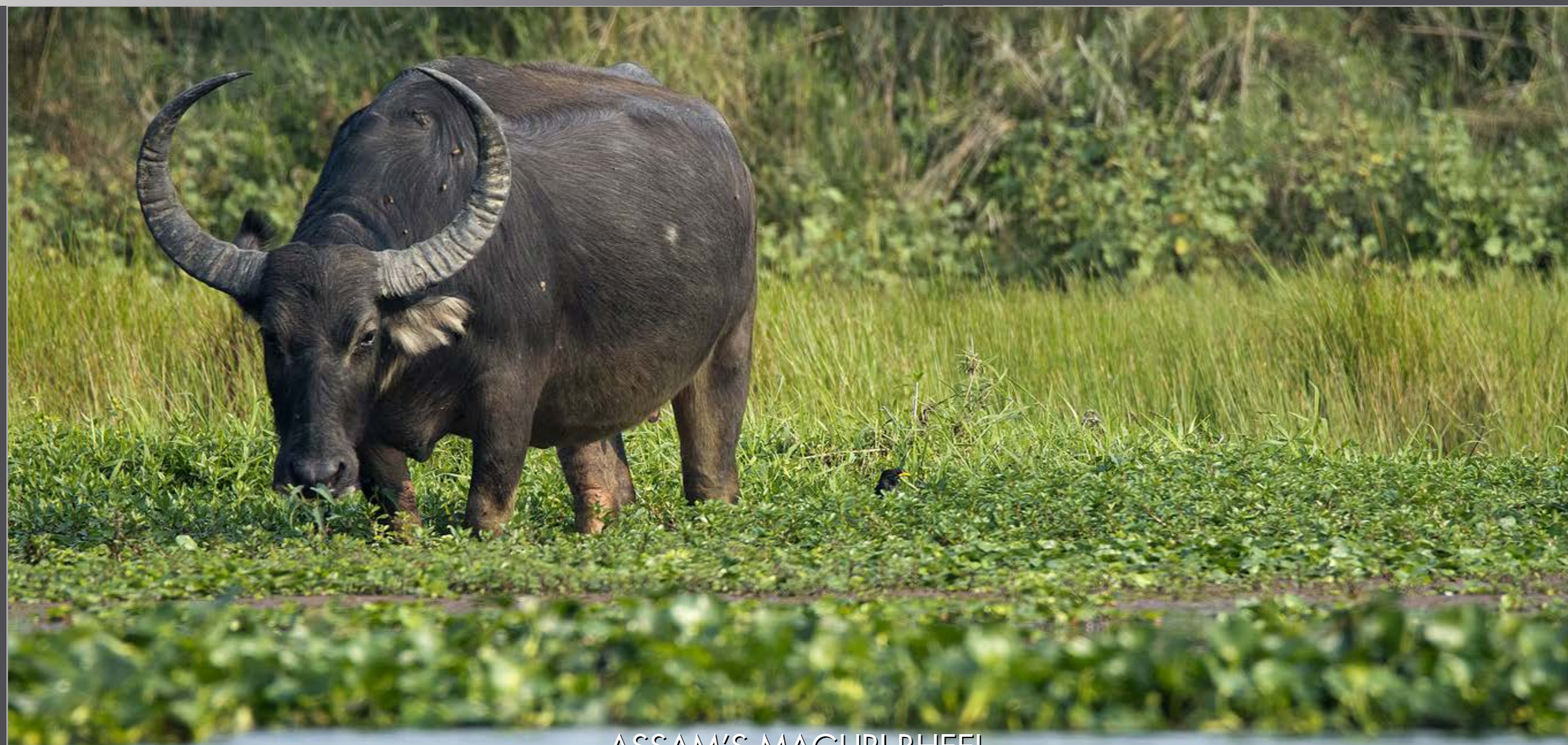
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# WorldWideWonders



ASSAM'S MAGURI BHEEL

# WATERBIRDS PARADISE

A beautiful man-made lake in a remote corner of North-Eastern India is the perfect destination for spectacular birdwatching and peaceful canoeing





**Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea***

The spectacular Ruddy Shelduck is one of the species which can be most commonly observed and photographed at Maguri Bheel. On the previous page, a pure-strain Wild water buffalo *Bubalus arnee* - sadly this huge and occasionally aggressive species is getting more and more often interbred with the domestic water buffalo.





### Fisherman at dawn

Boat trips for bird photography are taken with these low-slung wooden canoes, expertly maneuvered among the water channels by the local fishermen.

TEXT BY ANDREA FERRARI  
PHOTOS BY ANDREA & ANTONELLA FERRARI

The state of Assam, in North-Eastern India, is well known among travellers and wildlife photographers for its spectacular National Parks and Natural Reserves, most notably Kaziranga. Less known, but well worth a visit by the discerning nature lover and demanding birdwatcher, is the little visited and rather remote Dibru-Saikhowa National Park, and most specifically the nearby Maguri Bheel (a *bheel* is a water reservoir or a man-made lake). Dibru-Saikhowa itself is located in the Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts, and was designated a Biosphere Reserve in July 1997 with an area of 765 sqkm (295 sq mi), including a core area of 340 sqkm (130 sq mi) and a buffer zone of 425 sqkm (164 sq mi). It is located at about 12 km (7.5 mi) north of Tinsukia town. The protected area is bounded by the Brahmaputra and Lohit rivers in the north and Dibru river in the south. It mainly consists of moist mixed semi-evergreen forests, moist mixed deciduous forests, canebrakes and grasslands. It is the largest salix swamp forest in north-eastern India, with a tropical monsoon climate with a hot and wet summer and cool and usually dry winter. Annual rainfall ranges from 2300 mm to 3800 mm. It is a haven for many endangered species and rich in fish diversity. Originally created to help conserve the habitat of the rare white-winged wood duck, the National Park is also home to other rare creatures such as pure-strain water buffalo, black-breasted

parrotbill, tiger and capped langur, while the more accessible and more easily visited Maguri Bheel is famous for its waterbirds, water buffaloes and feral horses. Here the best option is to stay - as we did - at Kohuwa Eco Camp, a very basic but quite pleasant lakeside lodge from which daily canoe trips around the still, clean waters of the lake can be taken. The local boatmen are experts at their trade, and understand the need of bird photographers well. A huge number of species can be observed at Maguri Bheel - some migratory, some resident - including rare ducks such as the goldeneye, Baer's pochard and the eastern spot billed duck. Waders are common, and endemic riverine grassland species include striated grassbird, sand lark, chestnut-capped babbler, yellow-breasted prinia and ruddy-breasted crake, a secretive but stunningly dark red colored hen-like skulker of the river edges. Another rare species which can be seen at Maguri is Jerdon's babbler. But above all the feeling at Maguri Bheel is one of utmost serenity and natural balance. Gliding slowly and silently on its clean waters without a worry in the world - albeit momentarily - and watching immense flocks of ducks taking off against the sunset or groups of wild water buffaloes quietly bathing by the lake's edge truly rejuvenates one's soul, and the weary traveller can rest and relax for a few days in peace and calm, soaking in the bucolic atmosphere of a still unspoilt natural environment. ●





**Lesser adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus***

Adjutant storks are mostly scavengers and can be often observed in Assam, often near garbage dumps and abattoirs. These are very large, broad-winged, majestic birds - quite ungainly (and possibly even rather ugly) on the ground but always supremely elegant when soaring.





**Wild water buffalo *Bubalus arnee***

Wild water buffaloes are present in good numbers near Maguri Bheel, and will occasionally be encountered as they bathe in its cool waters or feed by the lake's edge. This is a huge and rather irritable species which can however be observed at close range and in reasonable safety when exploring the *bheel's* channels by canoe.





**Baillon's crane *Porzana pusilla***  
A beautiful but rather wary waterbird species commonly encountered at Maguri Bheel.



**Grey-headed swamphen *Porphyrio poliocephalus***  
Swamphens are easily identified by their iridescent blue plumage.





**Feral horse *Equus caballus***

The stunningly beautiful and rarely observed feral horses which can be occasionally seen along the shores of Maguri Bheel are the free-roaming and truly wild descendants of the horses left behind by the Allies after the end of WWII. We were lucky - this is a mare with her day-old colt.





**Pied Harrier *Circus melanoleucos***  
 This is one of the most beautiful and colorful raptors which can be seen at Maguri Bheel, often hovering above the reed beds by the lakeside while looking for prey - mice, frogs, water snakes, chicks.



**Osprey *Pandion haliaetus***  
 An immature individual of this impressive, much-loved and much-photographed fish-hunting raptor species.





**Asian openbill stork *Anastomus oscitans***

This is a largish, elegant and very common species all across Asia - its peculiarly nut-cracker shaped beak betrays its specialized diet consisting of water snails. At Maguri Bheel fishermen and waterbirds coexist peacefully in seemingly perfect harmony, with net-entangled birds being often saved by the villagers themselves.



**Mixed flock**

At Maguri Bheel huge numbers of ducks occasionally take off simultaneously, offering wonderful photographic opportunities and an unforgettable spectacle. This mixed-species group includes several specimens of Eurasian wigeon *Anas penelope*, Northern shoveler *Anas clypeata* and Gadwall *Anas strepera*.





**Lesser Whistling-duck or Lesser Whistling-teal *Dendrocygna javanica***

The Lesser Whistling-duck or Lesser Whistling-teal *Dendrocygna javanica* is very commonly observed all across India and Asia in general.





**Spot-billed duck *Anas poecilorhyncha***  
A beautiful species and a photographer's favorite due to its brilliant colors and very elegant flight.



**Common kingfisher *Alcedo atthis***  
Very common but always stunningly beautiful!





**Wild water buffalo *Bubalus arnee***

Pure-strain wild water buffaloes are not commonly observed in India, and usually only in the North-East - prime locations to watch and photograph them are Kaziranga National Park, Manas National Park and Dibru-Saikhowa National Park, all sited in Assam. Notice the incredible span of the huge, sickle-shaped horns.





**Slender-billed vulture *Gyps tenuirostris***

Not in Dibru-Saikhowa itself, but nearby - this is currently a severely threatened species.



**Asian openbill stork *Anastomus oscitans***

Shown feeding on a water snail with its highly specialized beak.





**Asian openbill stork *Anastomus oscitans***

Boat trips at Maguri Bheel offer unbeatable opportunities to photograph waterbirds in both their elements - in the water and in the air. The use of specialized equipment here however is a must - long-range binoculars and a stabilized telephoto lenses (at the very minimum 600mm focal length) will offer good chances of success.





### Mixed flock

A mixed-species group including Ferruginous duck or ferruginous pochard *Aythya nyroca*, Eurasian wigeon *Anas penelope* and Gadwall *Anas strepera*.



### Eastern water rail *Rallus indicus*

One of the rarest and most difficult to photograph species at Maguri Bheel...



### Wood sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

...And one of the more easily observed and photographed ones.





**Common Coot *Fulica atra***

This very wary species can be immediately identified by its uniform dark grey or blackish plumage and its bright white beak and forehead.



**Gadwall *Anas strepera***

An archetypal but still very elegant duck species which can be seen in large numbers at Maduri Bheel.





**Bronze-winged jacana *Metopidius indicus***

A somber-colored but rather elegant species. Like all jacanas, *Metopidius indicus* utilizes its highly specialized, long-fingered feet to lightly but surely tread on broad-leaved floating plants like water hyacinths without sinking. Adults will carry the chicks under their wings, with only the feet protruding.





**Red-crested pochard *Netta rufina***

A stunningly beautiful and very colorful species - alas, it is also very easily alarmed and not easily approached by canoe.



**Lesser Whistling-duck or Lesser Whistling-teal *Dendrocygna javanica***

The rather somber but warmly toned plumage helps in identifying this very common species in flight, even at a distance.





**Lesser adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus***  
An opportunistic feeder, here looking for frogs or water snakes.



**White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis***  
Ubiquitous and easily approached, but always splendidly colored.





**Osprey *Pandion haliaetus***

We observed several juveniles of this fish-hunting species while at Maduri Bheel - the site is clearly being used as a breeding area by many pairs.



**Spot-billed duck *Anas poecilorhyncha***

Our favorite! Very few other duck species can compete with this one regarding elegance and colors.





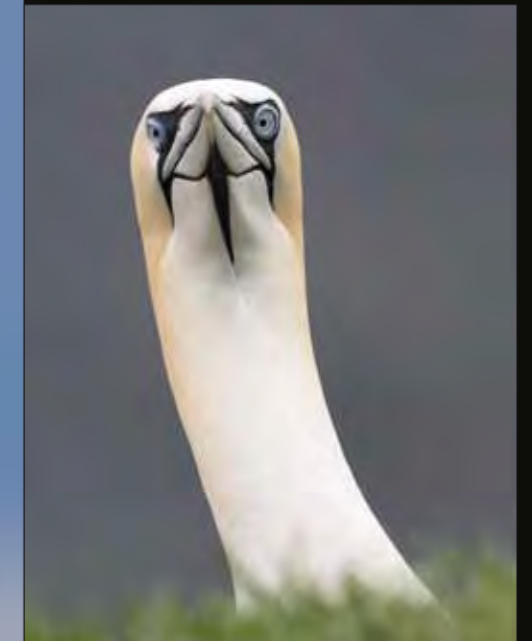
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*David Hemmings - President, Nature's Photo Adventures*



"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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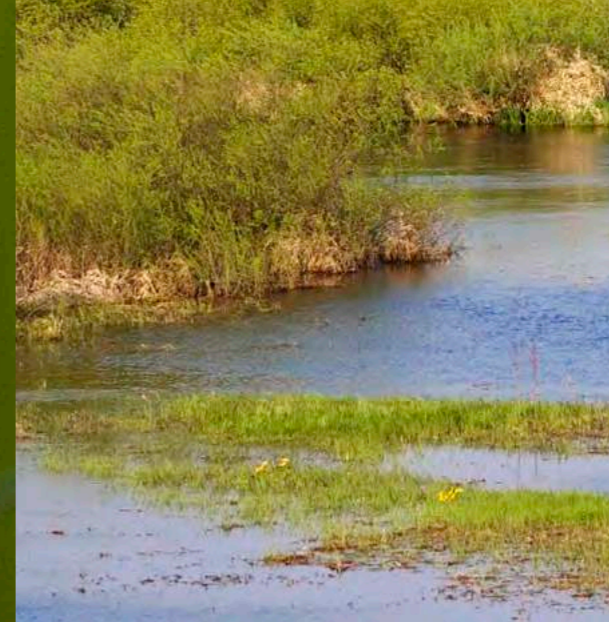


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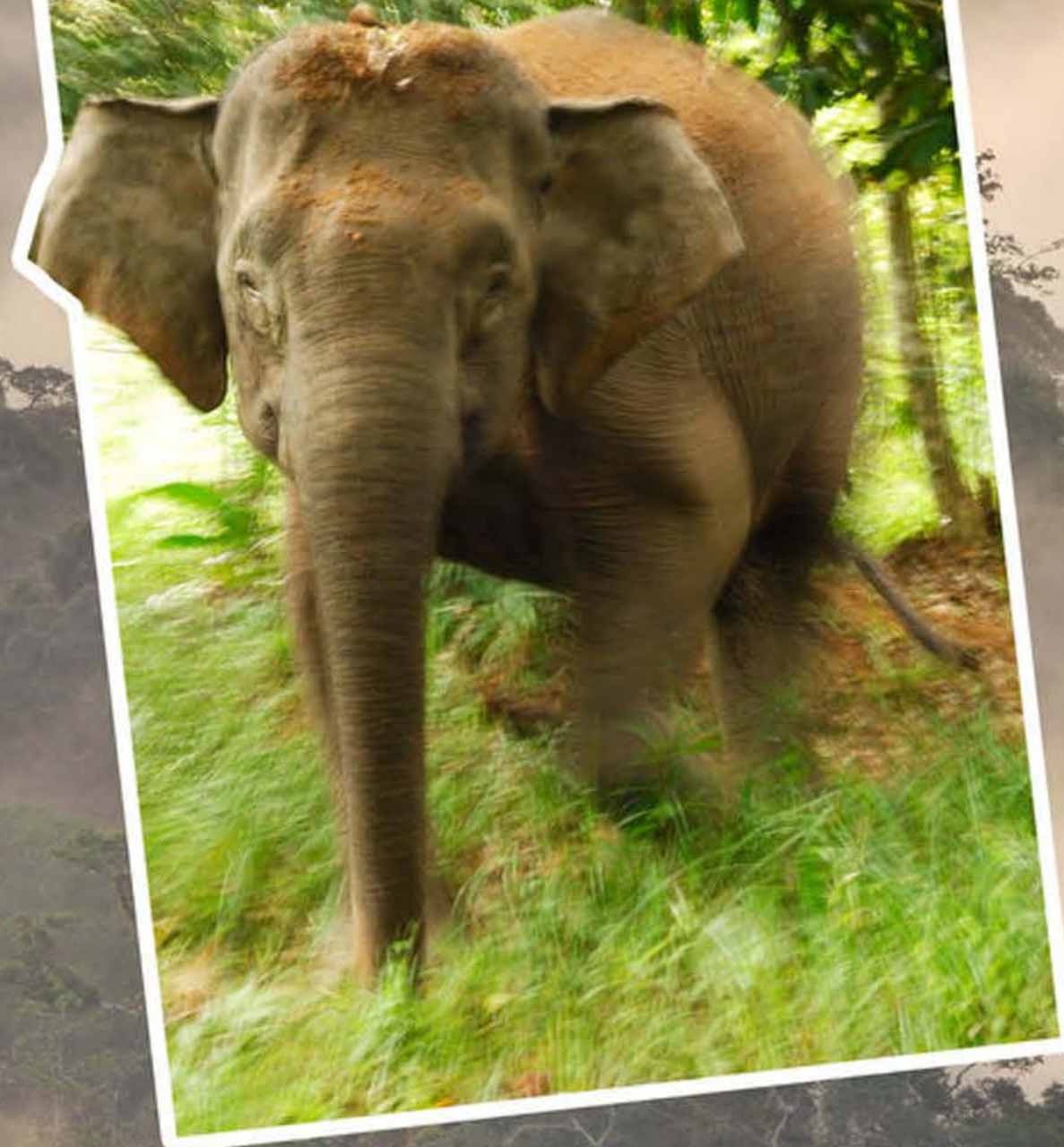


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*Spotlight*

LAST EUROPEAN REDOUBT OF *URSUS ARCTOS*

# THE BEARS OF KOCEVJE



A visit to Slovenia's remote primeval forest to observe and photograph one of the last viable populations of the heavily persecuted plantigrade



On this page and the preceding one, two beautiful *Ursus arctos* mature individuals. This European species has been heavily persecuted for ages.

TEXT AND PHOTOS  
BY SILVANO PAIOLA  
[www.silvanopaiola.com](http://www.silvanopaiola.com)

The Twentieth century marked the beginning of a slow and inexorable decline of the Brown Bear *Ursus arctos* in Trentino, the last region in which it was still present in the Italian Alps. Massive deforestation and reduction in size of their natural territory were the obvious cause of the dramatic fall in their numbers.

At the end of the Nineties the field research carried out for the realization of the Life Ursus Project confirmed the biological extinction of the bear, whose population was reduced to three old specimens which no longer able to breed. The ambitious and complicated Life Ursus Project was then born from the desire to preserve the presence of the Brown Bear in the Adamello-Brenta Natural Park (PNAB), its last redoubt in Italy. It was accepted by the European Commission in 1996. May 26th, 1999 is a very important date: on that day Masun, the first bear involved in the Life Ursus Project, was released in Val di Tovel, the wonderful, fairy tale-like valley in the Dolomites where the last three

*continued on page 112* ➤



A female  
with her cub.  
In Kocevje  
hides are  
utilized  
to observe  
and  
photograph  
the bears.







specimens of the Italian bear still survived. As a follow-up, nine more individuals would be released until May 2002 - Kirka, Daniza (later killed), Joze, Irma, Jurka, Vida, Gasper, Brenta and Maja (which took the place of Irma, a female unfortunately killed by an avalanche). Thanks to the introduction of these specimens taken from the Slovenian forests, the *Ursus arctos* estimated population at the end of 2016 now ranges from 40 to 50 specimens. Having followed step by step the situation of this magnificent animal on the eastern Italian Alps, for a couple of years I had really wanted to visit some of the original forests Daniza and the other ten animals had been taken from. I then decided to spend a few days

exploring Kocevje forest, one of the two provenance areas of the Slovenian bears.

This region, located in the south-east of Slovenia, has 36 forest reserves and 4 old-growth forest areas with immense and most beautiful trees which only answer to nature and which can reach an age of 500 years. The most common trees are beech, white fir and spruce, but there are also oaks, maples, ash trees and lime trees. The wooden cover is two or three times thicker than in nearby forests.

Unfortunately, the very strong frost which hit the country at the beginning of February 2014 has caused serious damage to the forests. Many historical

*continued on page 114* ➤



■ Left, Kocevje forest landscape. On this page, an adult European Brown bear *Ursus arctos*.





■ A portrait of a curious cub - its mother is in the immediate vicinity and can be very protective of her young.





An adult  
Brown bear  
*Ursus arctos*  
and - right - a  
typical image  
of the Kocevje  
woodland.



trees have broken due to the weight of the ice build-up. A phenomenon like this had never been seen before. Teams of woodmen worked to clean up the forest from the extensive damage suffered. Almost 40% of the forests have been destroyed or severely damaged. People think it will take at least eight months to cut and recover all the collapsed, broken and damaged trees, and experts estimate it will take at last another thirty years for the forests to complete their recovery. Almost 500,000 hectares of forest (more than the entire surface of Molise, an Italian region), almost half of all the Slovenian forest heritage, have been involved, with many millions of cubic meters of lost vegetation. Thousands of birds, small

mammals such as squirrels and dormice, and then deer, roe deer and large predators that have lost their habitat. In order to spot Brown Bears - which are animals with a very keen sense of hearing and smell - I took advantage of a couple of hides placed inside the forest, so that my presence could be as discreet as possible. The approach to the hides was made first by driving through dirt roads getting into this wonderful world and then, once near the hides, by walking through the wildest heart of the forest. The forest path which leads from the parking site of the vehicle to the hide is quite impervious, sometimes even slightly challenging. It winds among large stones and immense trees, with big

*continued on page 116* ➤





■ A striking and potentially dangerous encounter in near darkness makes for a very atmospheric image.





The long silent wait in the hides - hoping in the arrival of the bears - also allows observations of other shy fauna, including martens, foxes and roe deer.

clumps of mosses and lichens clinging to the rocks and huge fallen trunks on the ground. As we walked we could see the wonderful firs "wounded" by the frost and the beeches marked by the real lumberjack of the forests, the Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*. With its dagger-like beak and thanks to its very powerful neck, this species pierces the trunks in search of larvae to feed, to create its breeding nest or as a sign of territorial dominance in the area of its range, sometimes transforming the wood into a real work of art. Once at the hide, the long wait begins. I love those moments of absolute silence when one is totally immersed inside nature, a timeless suspension interrupted only by the singing of some bird, the distant

drumming of the Black Woodpecker on some ancient tree, the rain that suddenly comes and which just as suddenly goes away, letting some magical moments of light to show up. Once inside the hide I constantly look around, hoping to spot a bear coming. Then there she is, without even a little sound she arrives, and I'm suddenly transported into a magical dimension. A female with a cub from the previous year appears, in absolute silence. It is really surprising how such a massive animal can move so silently. I did not even hear them coming. The only faint sounds we hear are those of the rocks being overturned, and then repositioned, while the female is looking for food or the tender calls of the cub as it approaches its mother.






■ *Ursus arctos* is a very massive animal which can however move in surprising silence.



The Kocevje forest does not reflect the typical environments in which we are normally used to see Brown Bears photographed in, such as the cleanly landscaped Finnish forests, or while they are fishing along the rivers of Alaska. Here the environment is very wild and "messy", a confusing mixture of fallen trunks and very light rocks which greatly contrast to the dark green-brown of the trees trunks and their foliage. I liked the idea of representing animals showing their habitat - not only bears, but also a very nice fawn, a very suspicious fox, some jay and some roe deer, which I took photos of. In short, to highlight also the surrounding nature characterized, sometimes, by ancient trees and in the background the mountain in shades of blue, dominated by the lighter blue of the sky.

After some time spent in the company of the plantigrades, our day nears its end. Twilight is falling and the time to leave the hide has finally arrived. Once we leave it we have a stretch of forest to cross to reach the car. The light is now very faint. I take a fairly sturdy branch and start beating it here and there, now on the trunks of majestic trees, now on some other fallen trunk lying on the ground, almost immersed in it. I try to make myself conspicuous by making some noise in order to alert of my presence any bear in the area, trying to avoid surprising them. Usually bears do



A brown bear is standing on a rocky, moss-covered hillside in a forest. The bear is facing left, looking towards the viewer. The forest is dense with tall, thin trees and green foliage. The ground is covered with rocks, moss, and fallen leaves. The lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day.

■ A typical sighting of *Ursus arctos* from one of Kocevje's well-camouflaged hides.





Another image of a Brown bear juvenile. The Kocevje region, in the south-east of Slovenia, has 36 forest reserves and 4 old-growth forest areas where trees are sometimes 500 years old.





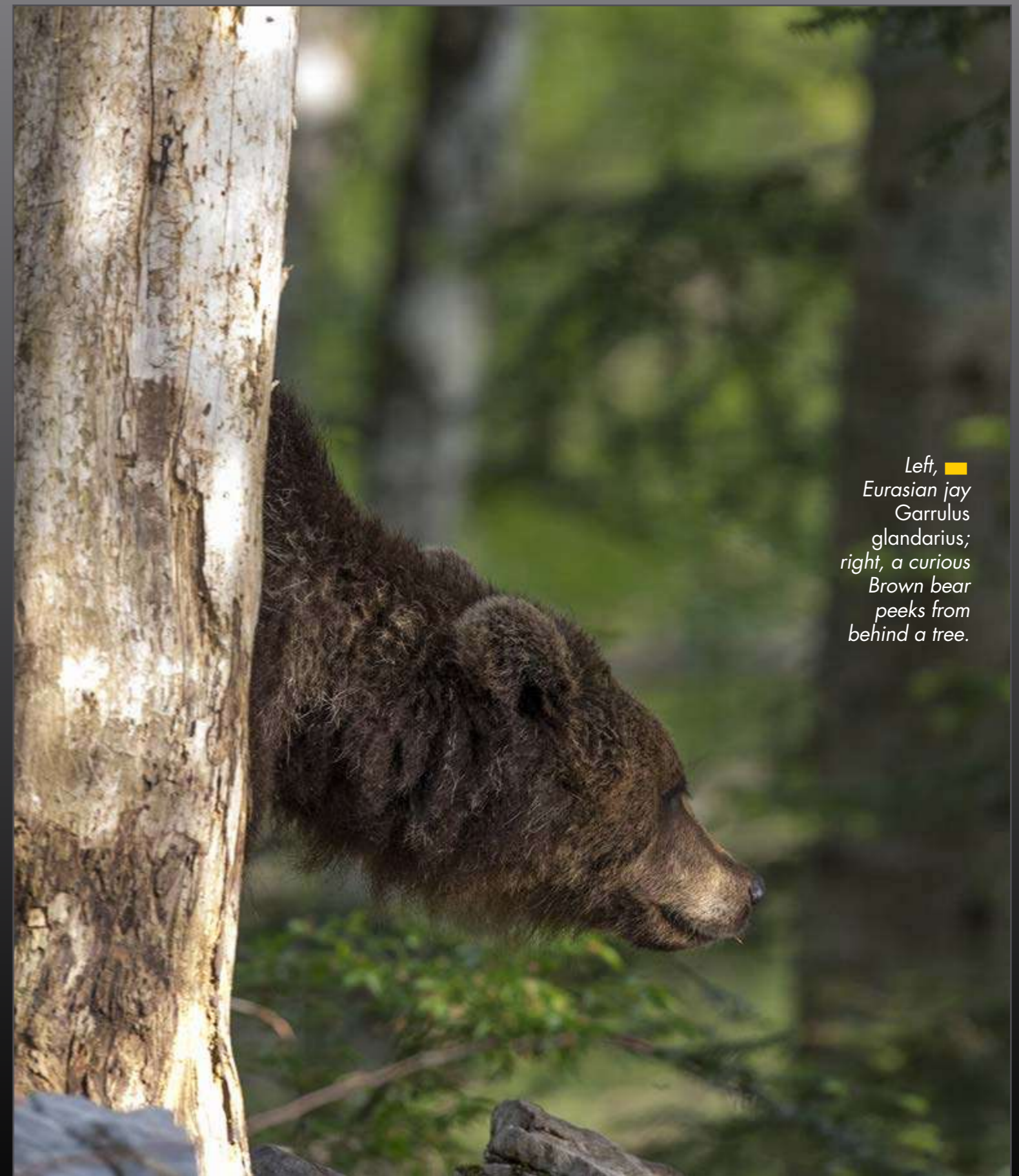
■ Where they still occur in Europe, Brown bears *Ursus arctos* are barely tolerated and in fact often actively persecuted by humans - despite their protected status.





not show aggressive behavior to humans in this area; they just move away, instead. But it is always better to warn them of our presence by speaking in a loud voice or producing some alerting sound in order to be heard from a distance. Females with cubs could perceive the presence of human beings as a danger for the little ones, for example, especially if faced suddenly. Even simply getting around in this wild environment in the low remaining light requires some attention. There are obstacles everywhere - slippery rocks, branches coming out from the ground, cracks between stones in which one risks getting stuck with one foot and possibly even breaking an ankle. Once at the car I send my last goodbye to those

wonderful animals that have kept me company during the time spent in the hide, then I start driving back to the room which, for few more days, will be my home. Even outside the forest there is an unbelievable peace, as I slowly drive through small villages where time seems to have stopped. Everywhere you breath calm and tranquility. The local inhabitants are very hospitable and willing to tell about their places. Slovenia is certainly a land to take as an example of the good coexistence between the "feared" bears and human beings. Here the density of the plantigrades is quite high, but this does not bother the people I met during my time spent in Kocevje; instead, they speak about brown bears with love and tenderness. ●



Left, ■  
Eurasian jay  
*Garrulus  
glandarius*;  
right, a curious  
Brown bear  
peeks from  
behind a tree.



Another ■ image of a Brown bear juvenile. Kocevje forest represents a good and much-needed example of how humans and bears can peacefully coexist.





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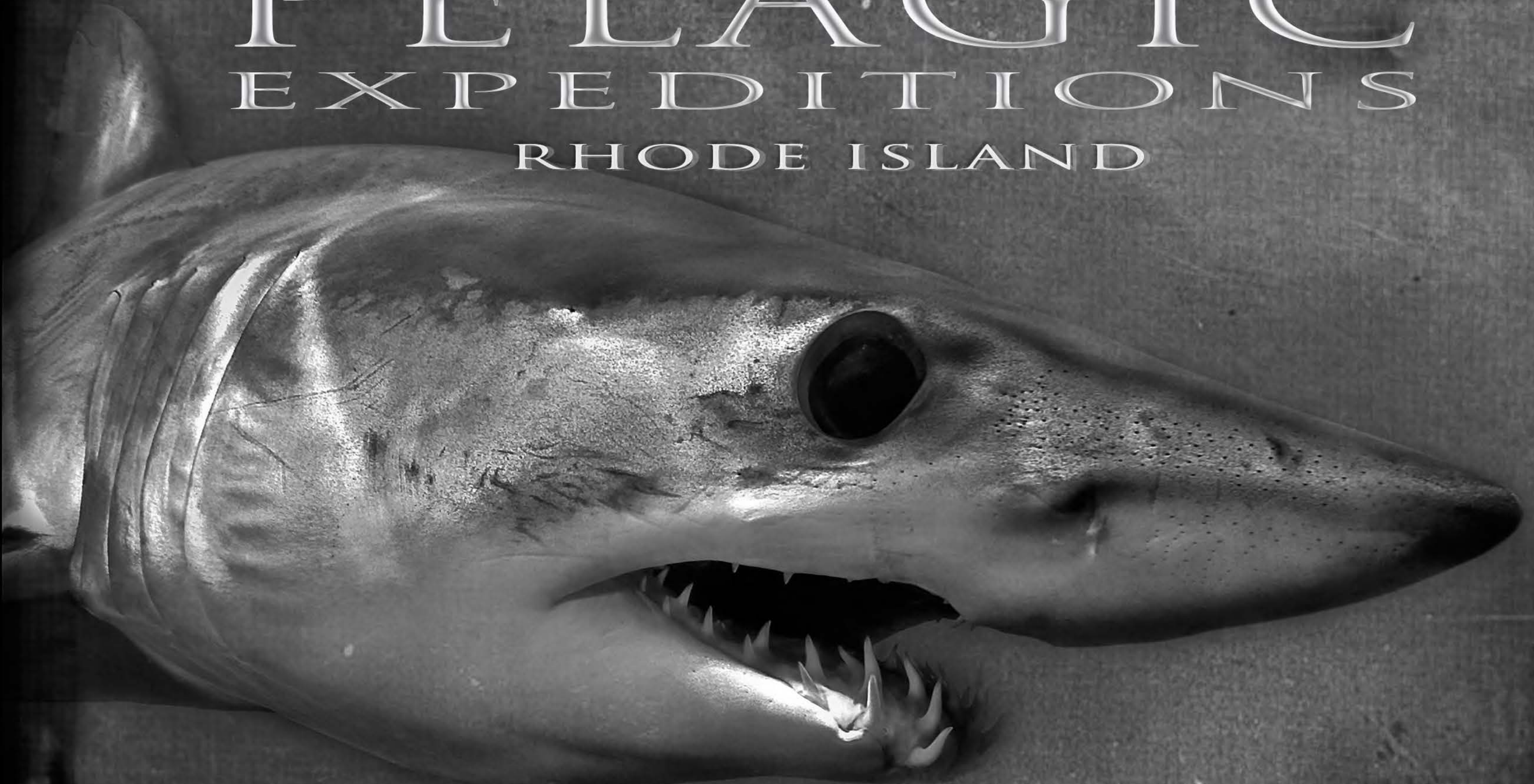
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## The Parting Shot

Italian wildlife photographer and *Anima Mundi - Adventures in Wildlife Photography* contributor Luca Giordano writes with sincere, deeply touching emotion about a truly unique encounter with wolves in Val Chisone, Piedmont (Northern Italy): "Dawn is still far away when I start my climb. The path climbs steeply and crosses a large clearing. The faint light of the moon guides me across the meadow, while I try not to stumble during my walk. Having reached the edge of the forest, I take a break to calm my heavy breathing, then I go into the thick. A maze of bushes, brambles and gnarled

roots makes my progress difficult. Clumps of fur entangled among the branches and small piles of excrement indicate that I am following the right track. Finally I reach the location where I will spend the next few hours, waiting for nature to be revealed once again. For almost an hour I observe a light, off-white fog touching the slope in front of me, changing its shape and dancing on the tops of the pines. All around me, the typical astonishing silence of the mountain: only a crisp noise of broken branches, occasionally coming out from the thick of the bush, reveals the existence of animal life in this

apparently uninhabited environment. Suddenly, without any kind of warning, the ghosts emerge from the woods. Not one, not two, not three. Four young wolves are staring at me, from almost 300 meters away. I hold my breath. I think of the people I shared days and nights with, on the trail of the most elusive predators, I think about the fatigue and the beauty of this long search, and above all I think about my childhood dreams, soaked with nature and wild gazes. A dream comes true before my eyes, in the form of a gray and proud spirit, in an instant impossible to forget". ●



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**MARVELOUS MINDO**

In the cloud forest realm  
of the Pinocchio anole



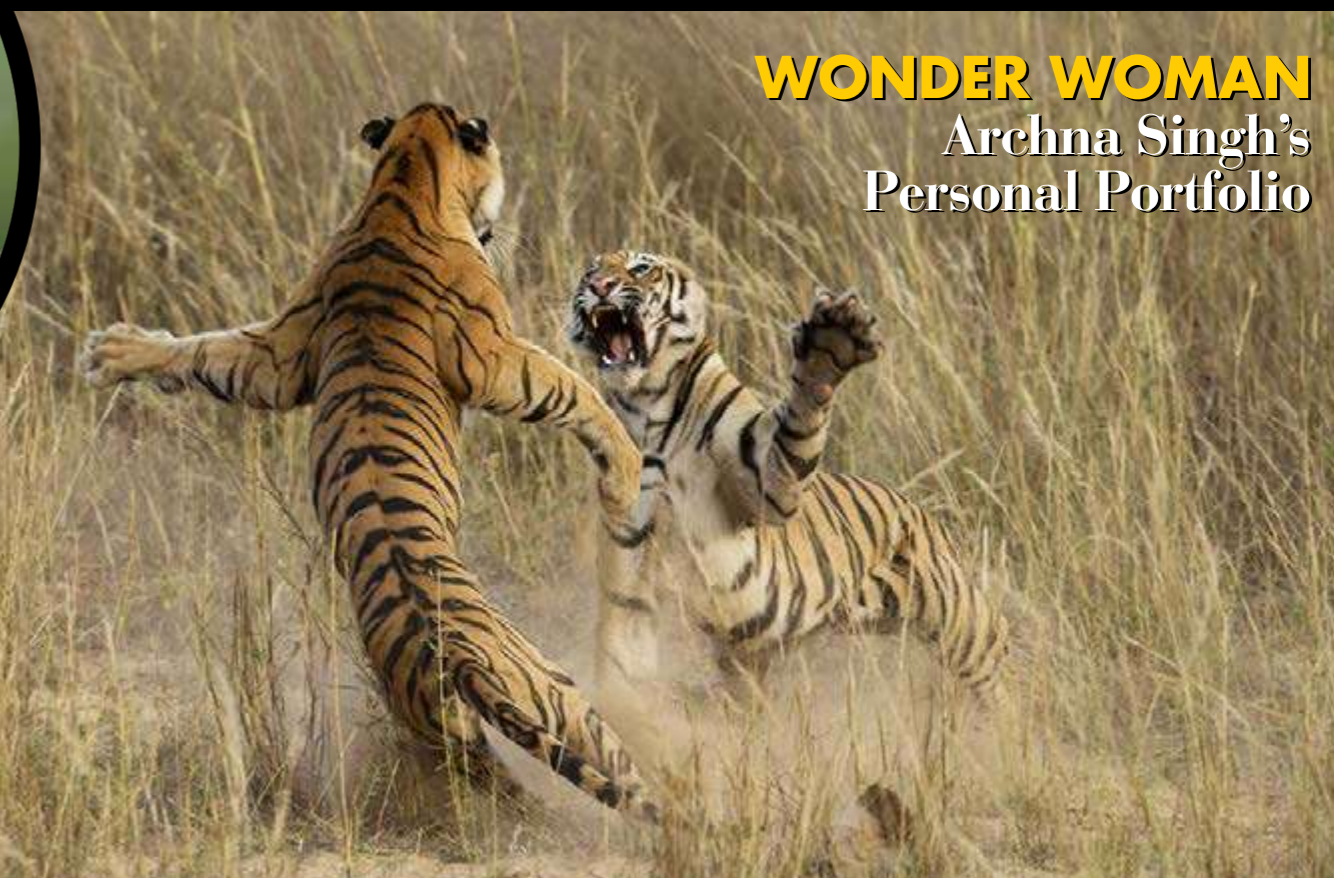
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QUEEN**

Meet the  
Martial  
Eagle



**A TRIP TO  
PATAGONIA**

Pumas, guanacos and  
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**WONDER WOMAN**

Archna Singh's  
Personal Portfolio

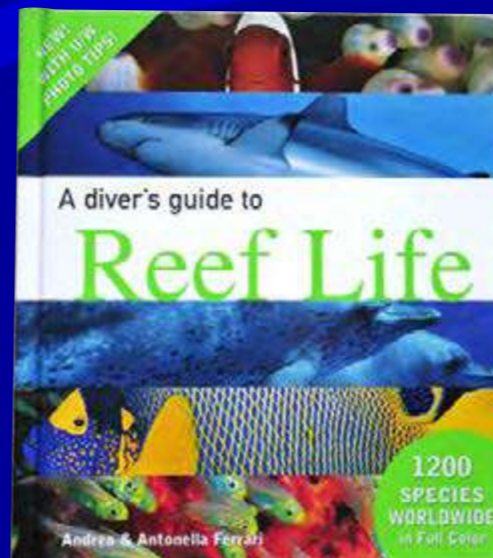


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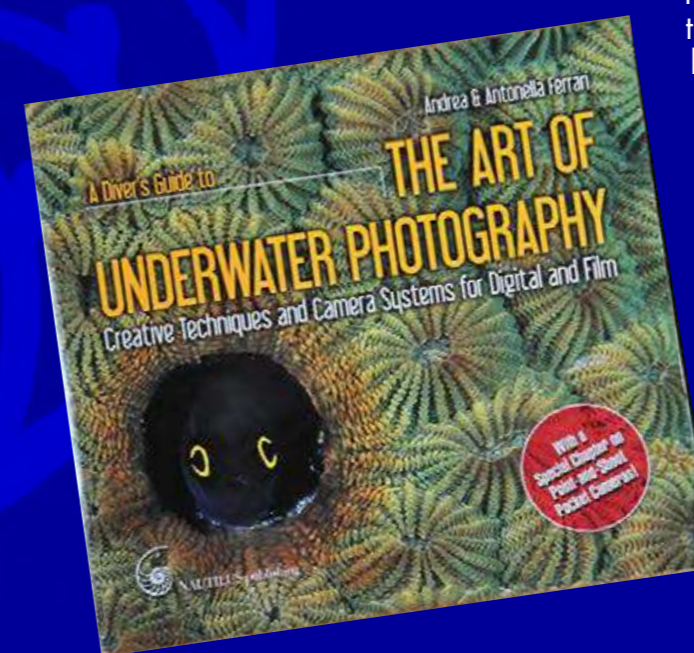
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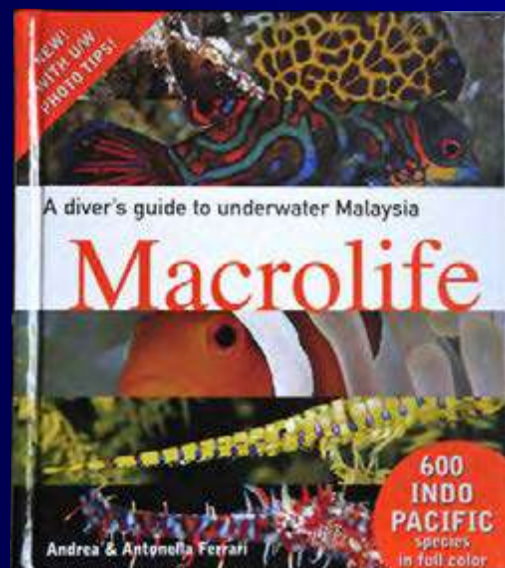
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