

A photograph of two cheetahs resting on a grassy bank near a body of water. One cheetah is lying down in the foreground, and another is sitting up behind it. The background is a blurred expanse of water.

# ANIMA MUNDI

*Adventures in Wildlife Photography*

Issue 33, Year 9 - January 2019

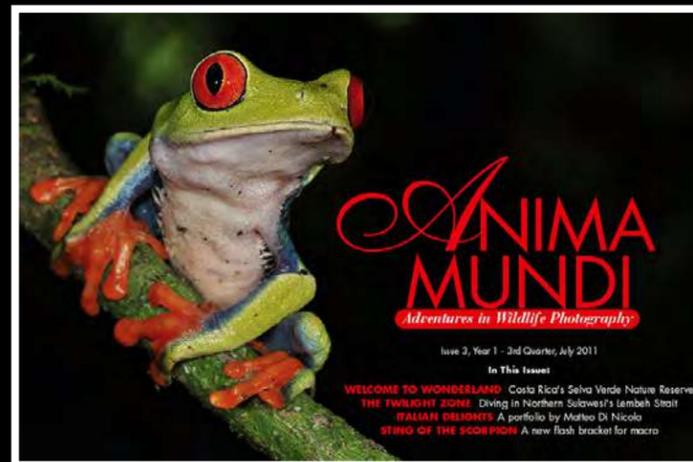
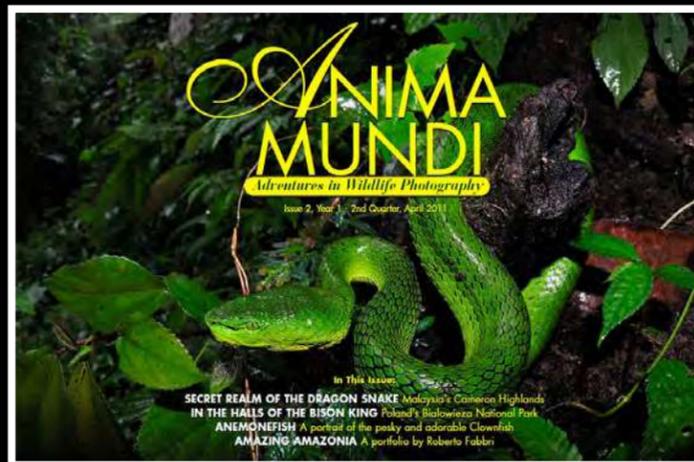
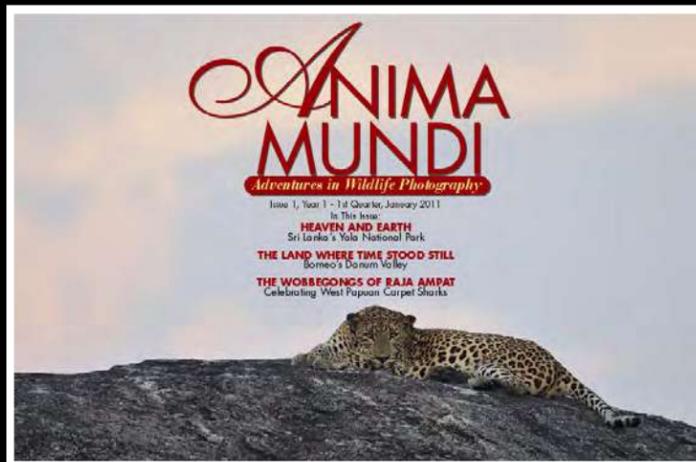
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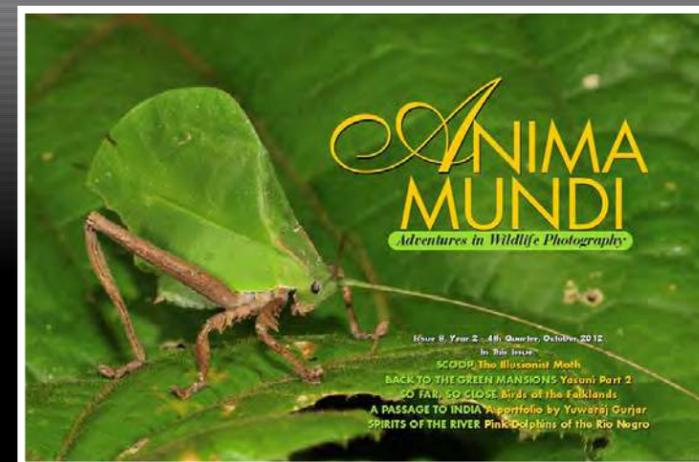
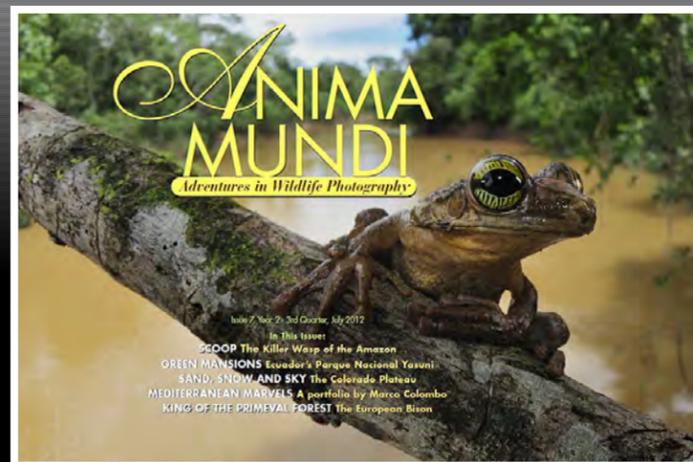


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Dear Andrea & Antonella,

*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)

■ Somewhere over the rainbow, where springbok and zebra lie - see our story on Etosha in the rainy season from page 9.

# ANIMA MUNDI

*Adventures in Wildlife Photography*

## An uncertain future

As I write this editorial, my mind cannot escape the worrying notion that the last few years and 2018 in particular saw the rise and final entrenchment in power of three very influential figures in today's world - Donald Trump in the USA, Narendra Modi in India and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. All these Presidents have taken a brash anti-conservationist stance, and the natural environment in their respective countries is already suffering, with the worst apparently yet to come. Is the rest of the world going to follow in their footsteps, as it seems? Are decades of hard conservationist work by dedicated scientists, field researchers and activists going to be annihilated by these political figures? A recent and very successful trip we took to legendary Masai Mara National



Park in Kenya is giving us a little ray of hope - endless, untouched plains where free-ranging wildlife and the indigenous Masai population peacefully live side by side, with a thriving local economy derivating from a constant flow of expertly managed and regulated international tourism. But the signals coming from the rest of the globe are deeply worrying for all of us - what's left of the natural world we once knew is under the final siege. Sadly, the only thing we can do in these troubled times is offering a glimpse of nature as it should be on these pages, so here's our new issue... We start on page 4 with a short feature on Sri Lanka's little-known, enig-

matic, fascinating and endangered Pygmy lizard; a big, heavily illustrated story on how very surprising Etosha National Park in traditionally bone-dry Namibia can be during the rainy season follows up on page 9. More wetness comes on page 63 with our following article, a photographic tribute to the little-visited flooded amazonian forest or *varzea* environment of Cuyabeno nature reserve in Ecuador; we then

present a photographic homage to hornbills, a greatly varied and truly fascinating tribe of birds - the Bucerotids - which never ceases to fascinate us, and we finally wrap our current issue up with an exclusive field report from little-known and basically unexplored Morningside, a site located in Sri Lanka's eastern Sinharaja nature reserve, by herpeto-

logist Peter Janzen. Finally, let us remind you once more that our Parting Shot column is now open for publication to reader's photos. So if you would like to be featured in our coming Parting Shots and think you have clicked an interesting wildlife image worthy of publication, just send an email to [editor@animamundimag.com](mailto:editor@animamundimag.com) and we'll gladly take a look at it!

In the meantime...

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

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- constructive criticism, useful  
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Black rhino *Diceros bicornis* - a  
severely threatened species from  
Etosha. See our story on page 9.

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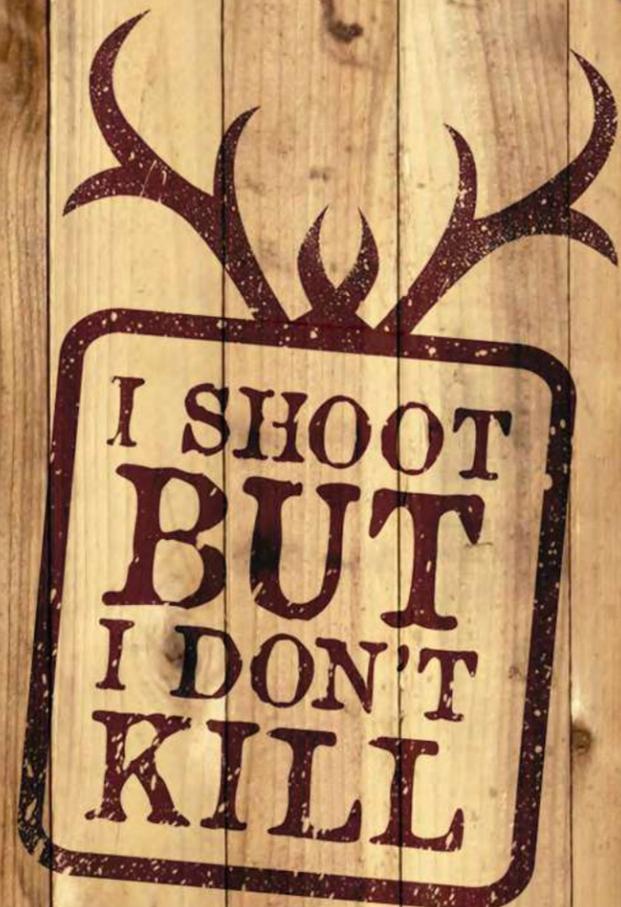
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■ The aptly-named and rarely encountered Pygmy lizard *Cophotis ceylanica* is one of 14 agamid species endemic to Sri Lanka.

## SRI LANKA'S PYGMY LIZARD **MIDGET DRAGON**

A RARE AND SEVERELY ENDANGERED  
ENDEMIC AGAMID FULLY ADAPTED  
TO SURVIVE IN THE COOL HIGHLANDS



Cophotis ceylanica can be easily identified by the irregular-shaped body scales and its unique, curled, prehensile tail.

TEXT BY ANDREA FERRARI  
PHOTOS BY ANDREA & ANTONELLA FERRARI

The Pygmy lizard *Cophotis ceylanica* - which we were lucky enough to observe during our trip to the Horton Plains with our friend Mevan Piyasena - is one of 14 agamid species endemic to Sri Lanka: it can be easily identified by the irregular-shaped body scales and its unique, curled, prehensile tail. Adults are dark brown, and males bare a distinctive white stripe from their snout to their shoulder, with white rings around their tail. This surprisingly slow-moving lizard is usually found on moss-covered tree trunks in montane regions of Sri Lanka, with its range

restricted to Horton Plains, Hakgala and the Knuckles Mountain range. Many experts suspect however that the Knuckles population is distinct from the populations found elsewhere in the country and may qualify as separate subspecies. Few studies of the pygmy lizard have taken place and little is therefore known of its biology, but more general information does exist on agamids as a family. Agamids are diurnal and visually-orientated, with their crests and other ornamentation thought to serve as important signals in establishing and maintaining territories

or in courtship: social interactions in this species are known to include head-bobbing in response to threat as well as aggressive encounters between males. Unlike the vast majority of agamids, the pygmy lizard does not lay eggs, but rather gives birth to live young after the eggs hatch within its body, a process known as ovoviviparity. This is thought to be an adaptation to the cold montane climate, where eggs may be exposed to chilling overnight. 4-5 live young are produced at a time, measuring 47-50mm, between May to August. Pygmy lizard populations suffered

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*This slow-moving lizard is usually found on moss-covered tree trunks in montane regions of Sri Lanka, with its range restricted to Horton Plains (image at bottom right), Hakgala and the Knuckles Mountain range.*



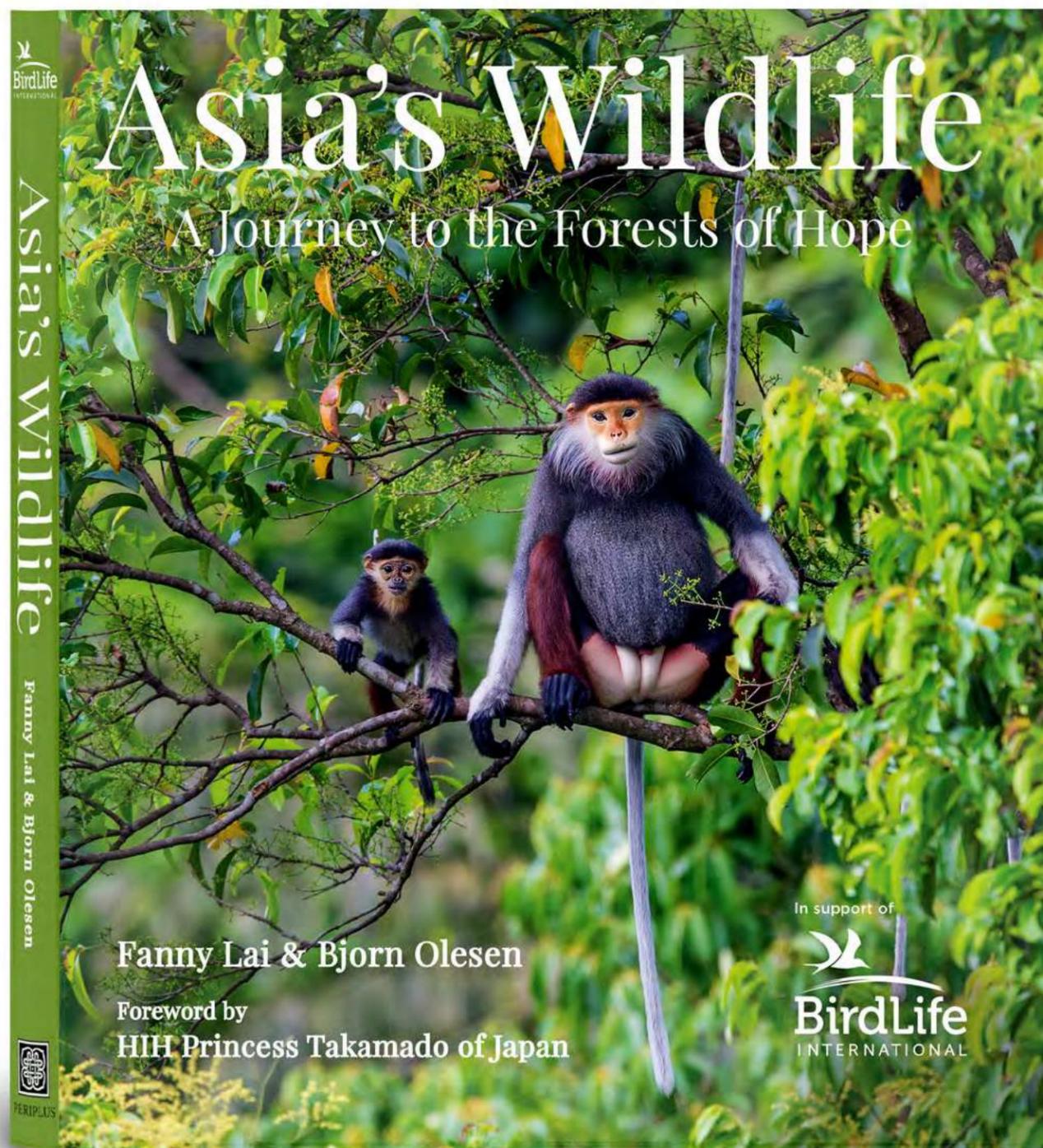
Detecting *Cophotis*  
*ceylanica*  
in the wild is not easy  
due to the species'  
highly effective  
camouflage and its  
habit of standing still.



A close-up photograph of a brown lizard with white stripes, identified as Cophotis ceylanica, perched on a tree branch. The lizard's body is covered in small, overlapping scales, and its head is turned to the right. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green, suggesting a forest environment. The branch it is on is thick and has a rough, textured bark with some moss or lichen growth.

mass mortality during the mid-1990s in the Nuwara Eliya and Hakgala areas, where hundreds of specimens died daily, plummeting the previously high populations into virtual extinction. The population at the Knuckles Mountains is thought to have endured a similar drastic population crash, and there were even fears that the population was extinct, until a handful of individuals were located in the 2004/5 research expeditions known as Project Knuckles. The precise causes are unknown, although these deaths are believed to be a result of climatic changes. Sri Lanka's montane forest have also experienced severe habitat fragmentation and loss during the last two centuries as a result of clearance for cinchona, coffee, tea, cardamom and rubber plantations, for grazing livestock, by logging companies, illegal logging and removal of timber by peripheral villagers. In addition, further threats facing other Sri Lankan agamids include rainwater acidification causing forest die-back, and the widespread use of pesticides potentially causing a dangerous bioaccumulation. ●

The current habitat of **Cophotis ceylanica** is under threat and this little-studied, enigmatic species has experienced a dramatic plunge in numbers.



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Robert Stuebing, The Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago.

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

*This book features some of the world's least known species like Vietnam's Saola and the Sumatran Tiger in their natural environment. It weaves high quality photography of these species and inspiring conservation stories from forest sites across Asia together through the lenses of lead photographer, Bjorn Olesen. I recommend it highly to anyone interested in saving Earth's biodiversity.'*

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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ETOSHA NATIONAL PARK

# WET SEASON BONANZA

Namibia's premiere wildlife destination reveals its hidden unexpected wonders under shining rainbows and stormy skies



Once in twenty years, abundant rains turn the arid landscapes of Etosha NP into a lush, verdant environment carpeted with millions of Devil's thorn *Tribulus terrestris* flowers, and the desert-like panoramas change dramatically as new life blooms unexpectedly everywhere. Namibian or Angolan giraffe *Giraffa camelopardalis angolensis*; on the previous spread, South-western Black rhinoceros *Diceros bicornis sub.occidentalis*.

TEXT BY ANDREA FERRARI  
PHOTOS BY ANDREA & ANTONELLA FERRARI

A commonly and oft-repeated truism recites that photographing wildlife in Africa during the rainy season is, generally speaking, more difficult than in the dry one - as large amounts of greenery, foliage and tall grass will hide the subjects most of the times, even if there are larger numbers of them when it rains; and that finding game during the dry season is much easier because animals - especially larger ones - tend to congregate around waterholes and

water bodies in general, as they have to drink at least twice a day. And herbivores coming at a waterhole means having predators sitting and waiting for them right by the water's edge. Sounds reasonable enough - especially where the bush is thicker and woody; but there is just something about photographing African wildlife under stormy, thunderous skies, with dramatic cloudscapes and the smell of moist soil at dawn. We already had greatly

*continued on page 13* ➤

A huge herd of  Springbok *Antidorcas marsupialis* under a stormy sky.



■ Plains, Common  
or Burchell's zebra  
*Equus quagga*,  
formerly *Equus*  
*burchellii*.



enjoyed our first visit to Etosha National Park, Namibia's crown jewel (see our [trip report here](#)) with our friend Phillip Conradie of [African Wildlife Photo Safaris](#) at the peak of the dry season, when the Park possibly offers its best and most iconic panoramas, so the three of us decided to give it another try, this time however at the peak of its usually scarce, meager and often non-existent rainy season, in the hope that its endless flat plains, its mostly featureless landscapes and its already sparse and anemic vegetation would offer good chances to photograph the local wildlife in a supposedly and hopefully unusual setting. Very few people in any case seem interested in visiting Etosha during a (possibly) wet time of the year and accomodation inside the Park is usually both easier to book and heavily discounted, so we expected something different, seriously taking in consideration even

*continued on page 15* ➤



*Male Springbok*   
*Antidorcas marsupialis.*



■ Blue crane  
*Anthropoides  
paradisea*  
feeding in  
Etosha's  
unusually  
verdant rain-  
soaked fields.

a possible disappointment. After all, who wants to track and photograph a wet lion sitting miserably under the rain in a dreary, gloomy, grey light under an overcast sky?

**NAMIBIA'S EDEN FOR WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHERS**

We should not have worried. In fact, amazingly, our second trip to Etosha exceeded our wildest hopes. We were lucky: the amount of rain which had recently fallen in the area occurs once in twenty years or so, and Etosha had magically transformed from its iconic ghost-white, bleached desert image into an absurdly colorful palette of pastel colors, with cloudy, dark, stormy skies giving way to blinding azure ones in a matter of minutes and with rolling, endless lawn-like green pastures literally carpeted in millions of bright yellow Devil's thorn (step on one and

*continued on page 19* >

*Cheetah Acinonyx jubatus by a once-in-a-lifetime muddy pan.*





Left, Shaft-tailed whydah *Vidua regia*; top right, Swallow-tailed bee-eater *Merops hirundineus*; bottom right, Paradise-whydah or Eastern whydah *Vidua paradisaea*.



*Red hartebeest* ■  
*Alcelaphus buselaphus.*



■ *Namibian or  
Angolan giraffe*  
*Giraffa camelopardalis*  
*sub. angolensis.*



you'll understand!) tiny flowers. Our fears of possibly having difficulties in locating wildlife - given the abundance of water animals do not need to visit waterholes, which is where visitors look for them most of the times in Etosha) soon appeared to be completely unfounded: in fact, wildlife numbers seemed to have skyrocketed, with frequent stunning sightings of cheetahs and lions and almost daily encounters with Black rhinos (I believe our record was six in a single day!). Bird life was also exceptionally abundant - with many species in flamboyant mating plumage - and most herbivores such as zebras and springbok had just dropped their babies, providing excellent hunting opportunities to lurking predators. The climate was pleasantly cool during most of our stay, and the occasional shower or fully-fledged but brief thunderstorm provided dramatic skies, magical rainbows and great sunsets. Even our guide Phillip - a veteran of many a visit to Etosha - was greatly impressed.

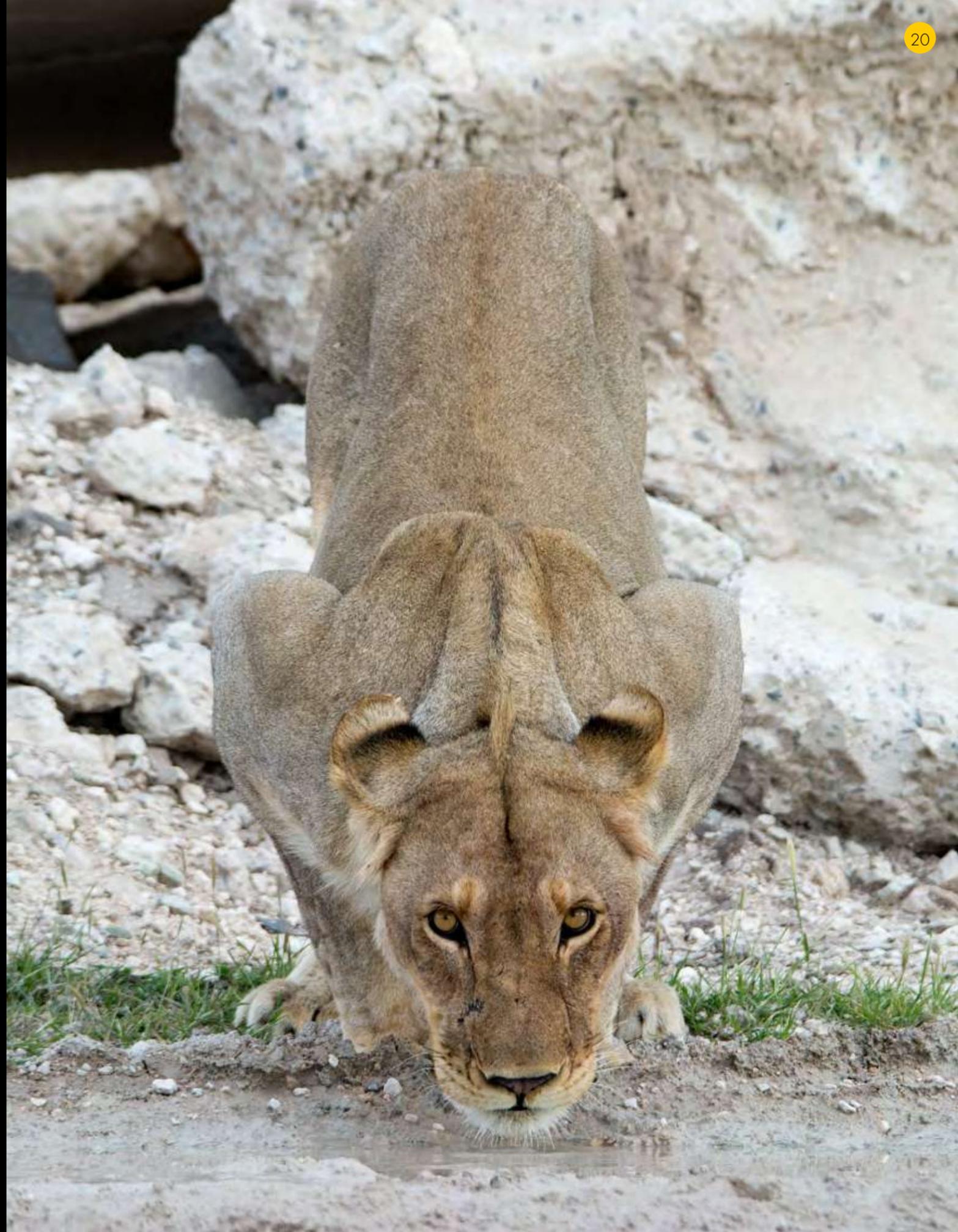
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*Plains, Common  
or Burchell's zebra Equus  
quagga, formerly named  
Equus burchellii.*



■ *Left, a rainbow over a herd of Springbok Antidorcas marsupialis. Right, female African lion Panthera leo drinking at a roadside puddle.*



■ *Martial eagle*  
*Polemaetus*  
*bellicosus.*





Far left, a pair of Southern masked weaver or African masked weaver *Ploceus velatus*, on their nest. Left, Rufous-naped lark *Mirafra africana*.

■ South-western Black rhinoceros  
*Diceros bicornis sub.occidentalis.*





Top left, Greater kestrel  Falco rupicoloides;  
top right, Eastern Red-footed or Amur falcon Falco amurensis.  
Bottom left, Red-necked falcon Falco chicquera; bottom right, Rock kestrel Falco rupicolis.

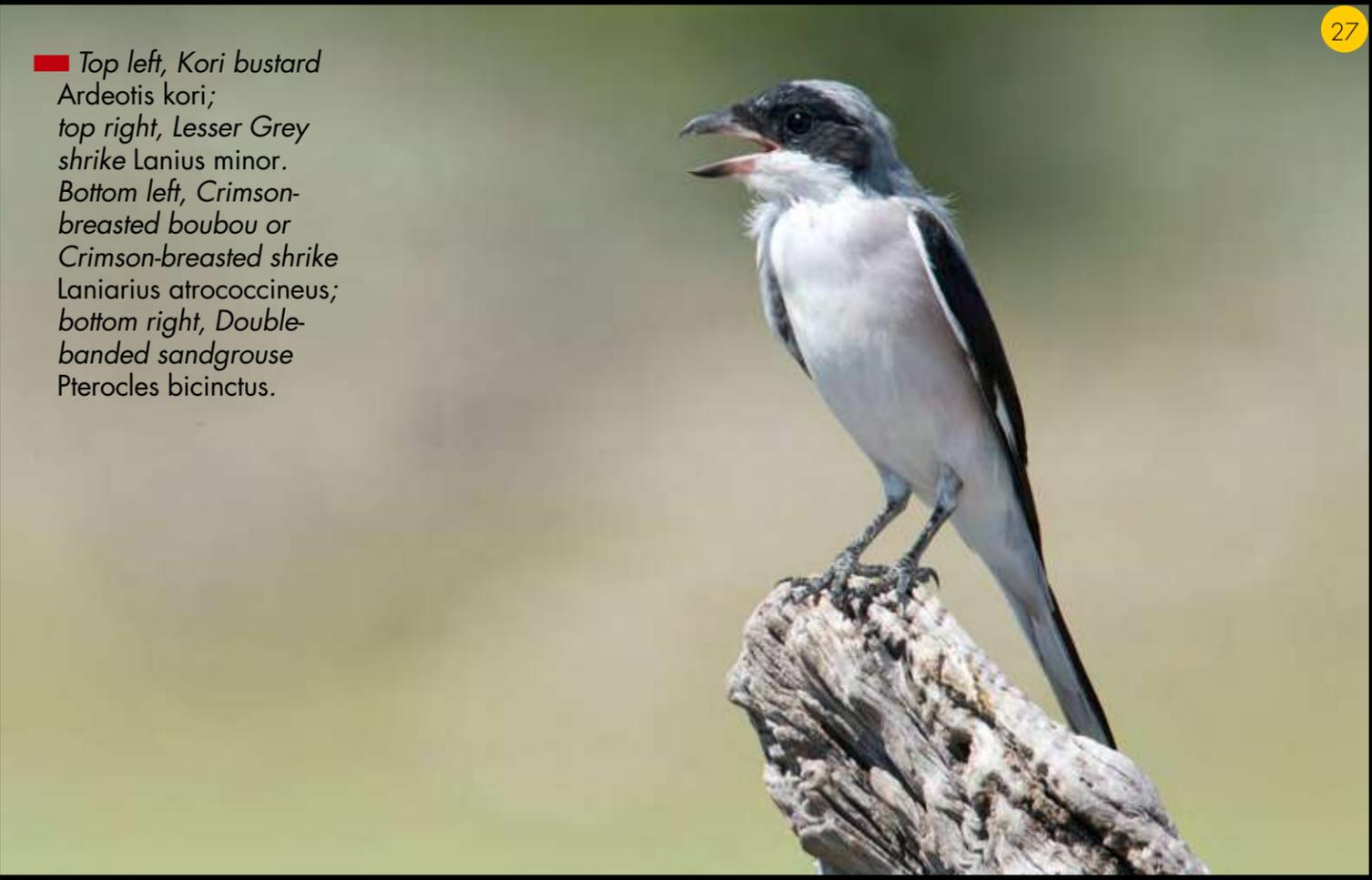




Gembok Oryx gazella. ■  
The very unusual greenish cast  
of the pan is due to a rain-  
triggered algal bloom.

African lion ■  
Panthera leo.





■ Top left, Kori bustard *Ardeotis kori*; top right, Lesser Grey shrike *Lanius minor*. Bottom left, Crimson-breasted boubou or Crimson-breasted shrike *Laniarius atrococcineus*; bottom right, Double-banded sandgrouse *Pterocles bicinctus*.



African lion *Panthera leo* lurking in the grass.



### A CHOICE OF DIFFERENT SOLUTIONS TO VISIT

Etosha National Park offers several excellent and well-known camps to the visitor such as Halali and Okaukuejo, but we are very partial to the colonial outpost atmosphere offered by the old Imperial German fort at Namutoni, and spent most of our time there. One key aspect for a successful visit to Etosha is being always ready to move to a different area in case good sightings are being experienced there, and obviously having a guide who is good at getting the "pulse" of the current situation. This may also mean having to cover considerable distances on occasion, but of course this offers the added bonus of lucky chance encounters along the way. One thing is absolutely certain - be it dry or wet season, Etosha always delivers and never disappoints. Some species may be easier to be encountered during the dry season (African elephants tend to congregate near water, Greater kudus do not stick to thick bush), but during our rainy season visit we never went back to camp empty-handed or disappointed, and in fact we believe that a wet season

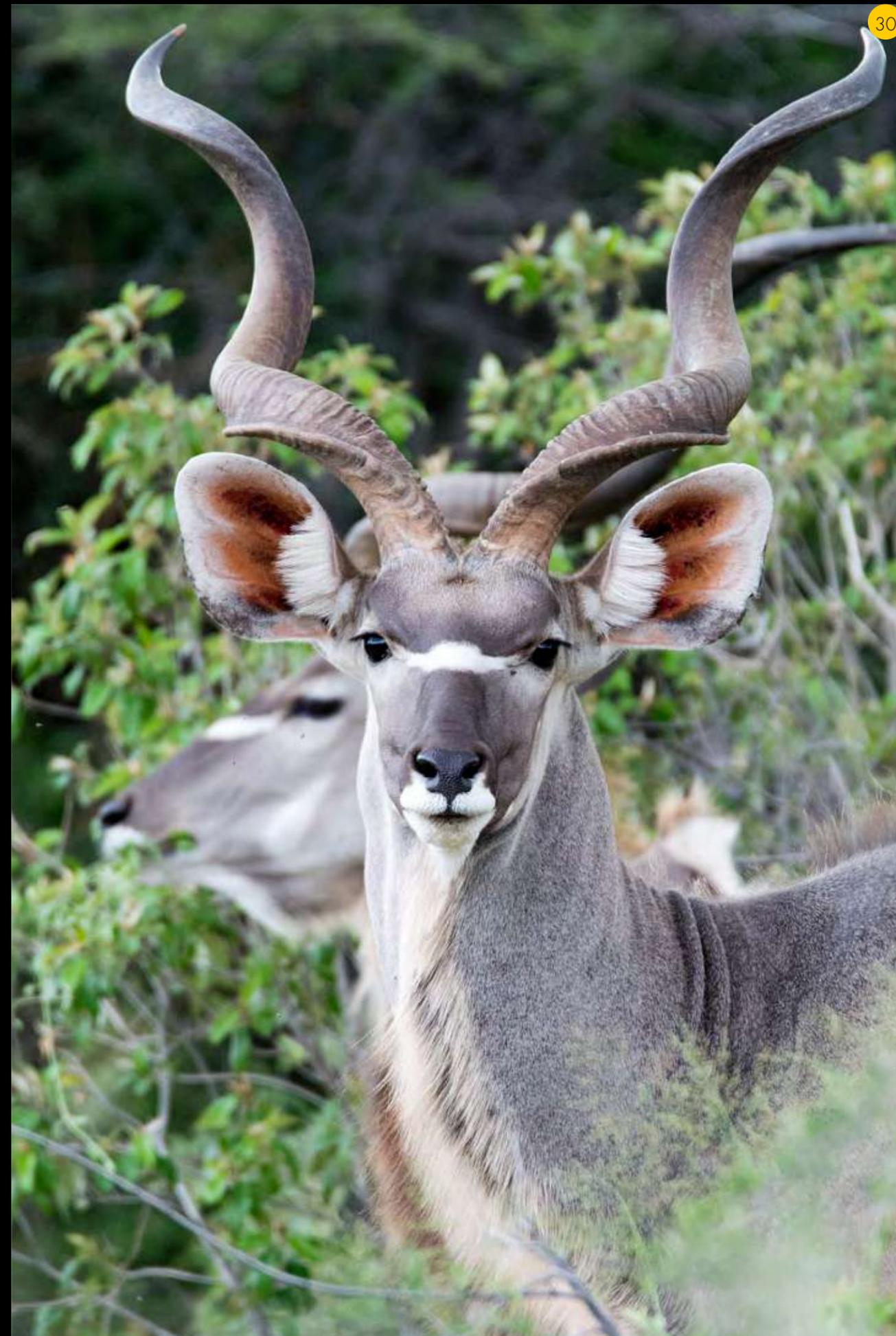
■ African elephant  
*Loxodonta africana*.  
Notice the typically short and broken tusks usually observed in the elephants of Etosha.



*continued on page 37* >



■ *Left, rain squall in the distance over Etosha's usually parched plains; right, adult male Greater kudu *Tragelaphus strepsiceros*.*





The stormy skies of the wet season give Etosha a unique photographic quality.

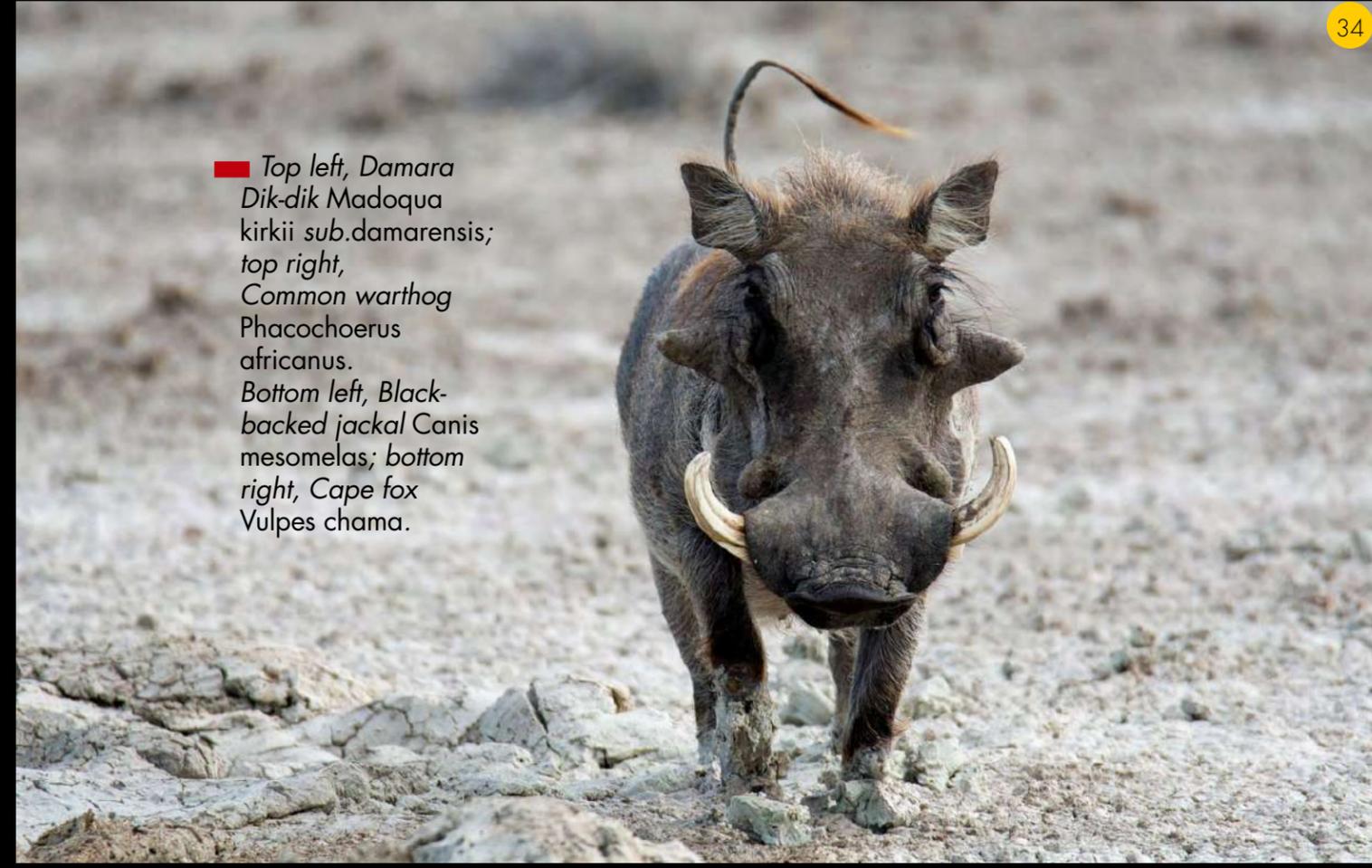


Left, Purple roller   
Coracias naevius;  
right, Lilac-breasted  
roller Coracias  
caudatus.





Adult male ■  
African lion  
*Panthera leo*.

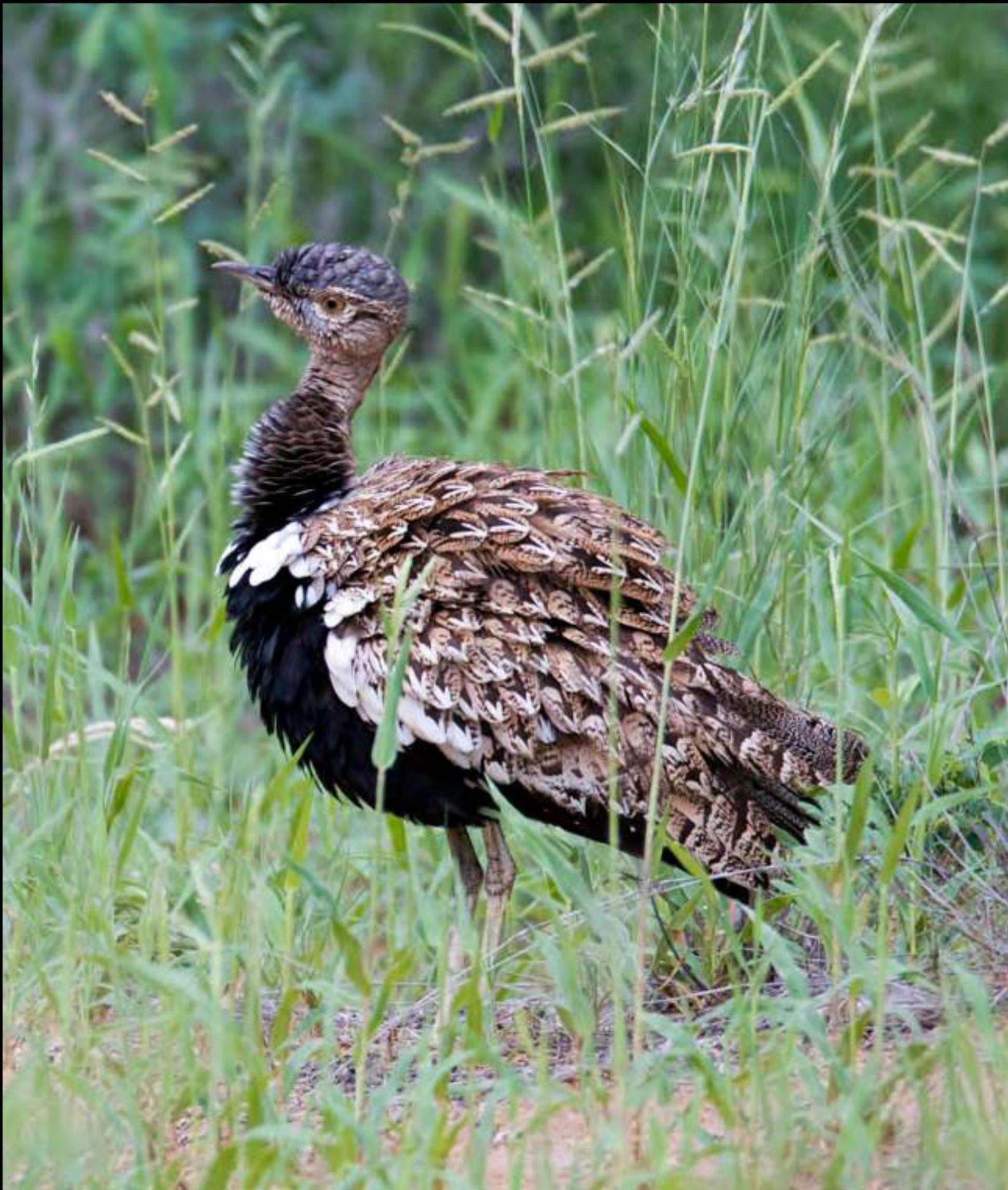


■ Top left, Damara Dik-dik *Madoqua kirkii sub.damarensis*; top right, Common warthog *Phacochoerus africanus*. Bottom left, Black-backed jackal *Canis mesomelas*; bottom right, Cape fox *Vulpes chama*.



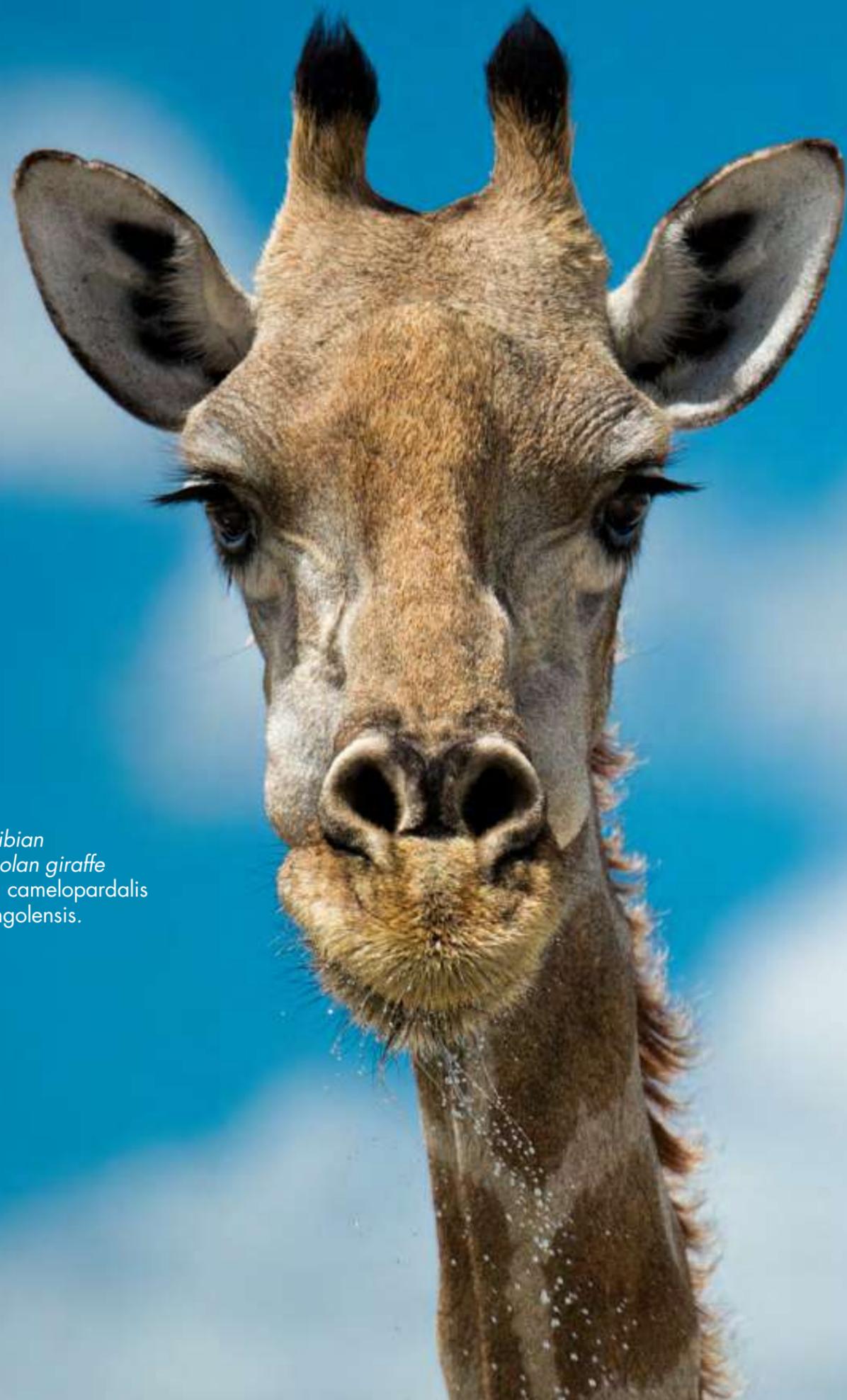


*Cheetah*  
*Acinonyx jubatus.*



Left, Red-crested ■  
korhaan or Red-  
crested bustard  
*Lophotis ruficrista*;  
right, Tawny eagle  
*Aquila rapax* .





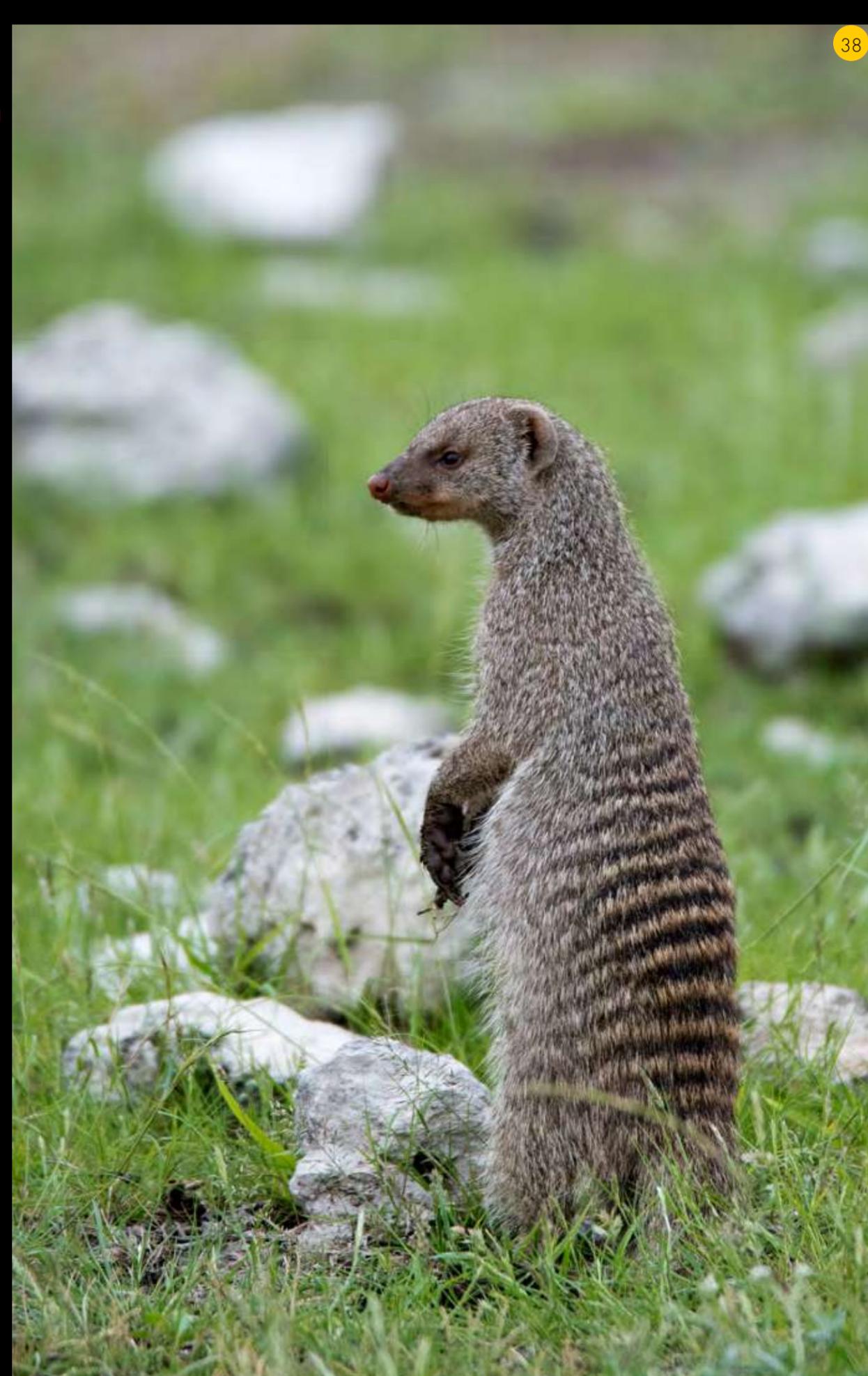
■ Namibian  
or Angolan giraffe  
*Giraffa camelopardalis*  
*sub. angolensis*.

trip offers all-round much, much better opportunities for sightings and photography than a more "classical" one at the peak of the dry one. The numbers and the variety of animals in Etosha during the rainy season are simply staggering, the sparse vegetation offers no obstacles at all to successful camerawork and the stunning flower beds stretching forever make for a great and welcome change in scenery. Yes, maybe this is not one's "typical" Etosha, and from what we have been told such abundant rains - resulting in such a uniquely verdant, luscious environment - take place only once in twenty years or so, usually being little more than brief, occasional showers with little or no effect on Etosha's barren, desert-like habitat most of the other years. Without such an abundance of water as we have experienced, one must admit that most of times Etosha would not change much



Left, Gemsbok  
Oryx gazella;  
right, Banded  
mongoose  
Mungos mungo.

during its wet season - animals would disperse all the same without having to visit the waterholes, but the landscape wouldn't be much to talk about. Also, the overcast, leaden skies often present during the brief wet season can be very good for most images as they produce smoothly diffused lighting, but create havoc with bird portraits, producing brightly lit, burnt-out whitish backgrounds (dry season skies are on the opposite invariably blue). Yet, one can strike gold once in a while - and the glorious spectacle of literally hundreds of giraffes or a lonely Black rhino peacefully foraging in apparently endless meadows covered in bright yellow, pink and purple tiny flowers is too much of a temptation - if you love nature as much as we do - to be passed over without tempting luck. Next time you plan to visit Etosha do give it a try and consider going there during the wet season from December to March - we can guarantee you won't be disappointed. ●



■ Plains, Common or Burchell's zebra  
*Equus quagga*,  
formerly named  
*Equus burchellii*.  
The foal is just  
a few hours old.



Blue or ■  
Common wildebeest  
*Connochaetes taurinus*.



■ African lions *Panthera leo*  
resting among the  
flowering grasses - a very  
unusual sight in Etosha.





■ Top, Rock or white throated monitor *Varanus albigularis*; bottom, Lesser flamingo *Phoeniconaias minor* - a very unusual - or rather unique - sight in Etosha.





**■** African hoopoe  
*Upupa africana*.



■ Left, Grey lourie or Grey go-away-bird *Corythaixoides concolor*; right, close-up of a Plains, Common or Burchell's zebra *Equus quagga*.



South-western  
Black rhinoceros *Diceros  
bicornis sub. occidentalis*.  
This photo was taken right  
in front of Namutoni camp.





■ Left, African lion *Panthera leo*, female; right, Southern black korhaan *Eupodotis afra* vocalizing.



*Red hartebeest* ■  
*Alcelaphus buselaphus* -  
*an apparently ungainly*  
*but very speedy antelope.*



South-western Black rhinoceros  
*Diceros bicornis sub. occidentalis*.  
This prehistoric-looking individual is  
an old battle-scarred veteran of  
many a fight, missing its tail, both  
its ears and even one of its horns.



A typically beautiful rainy season landscape in Etosha with a herd of giraffes in an apparently endless field of Devil's thorn *Tribulus terrestris* in bloom.



Cheetah   
Acinonyx jubatus.





■ Left, male and female Ostrich *Struthio camelus*; right, Southern African Ground squirrel *Xerus inauris*.





A juvenile Southern Pale Chanting goshawk *Melierax canorus* swoops down on a fleeing Slender mongoose *Galerella sanguinea*.

Left, African elephant ■  
*Loxodonta africana*,  
mother with baby;  
right, adult male  
Black rhino  
*Diceros bicornis*.

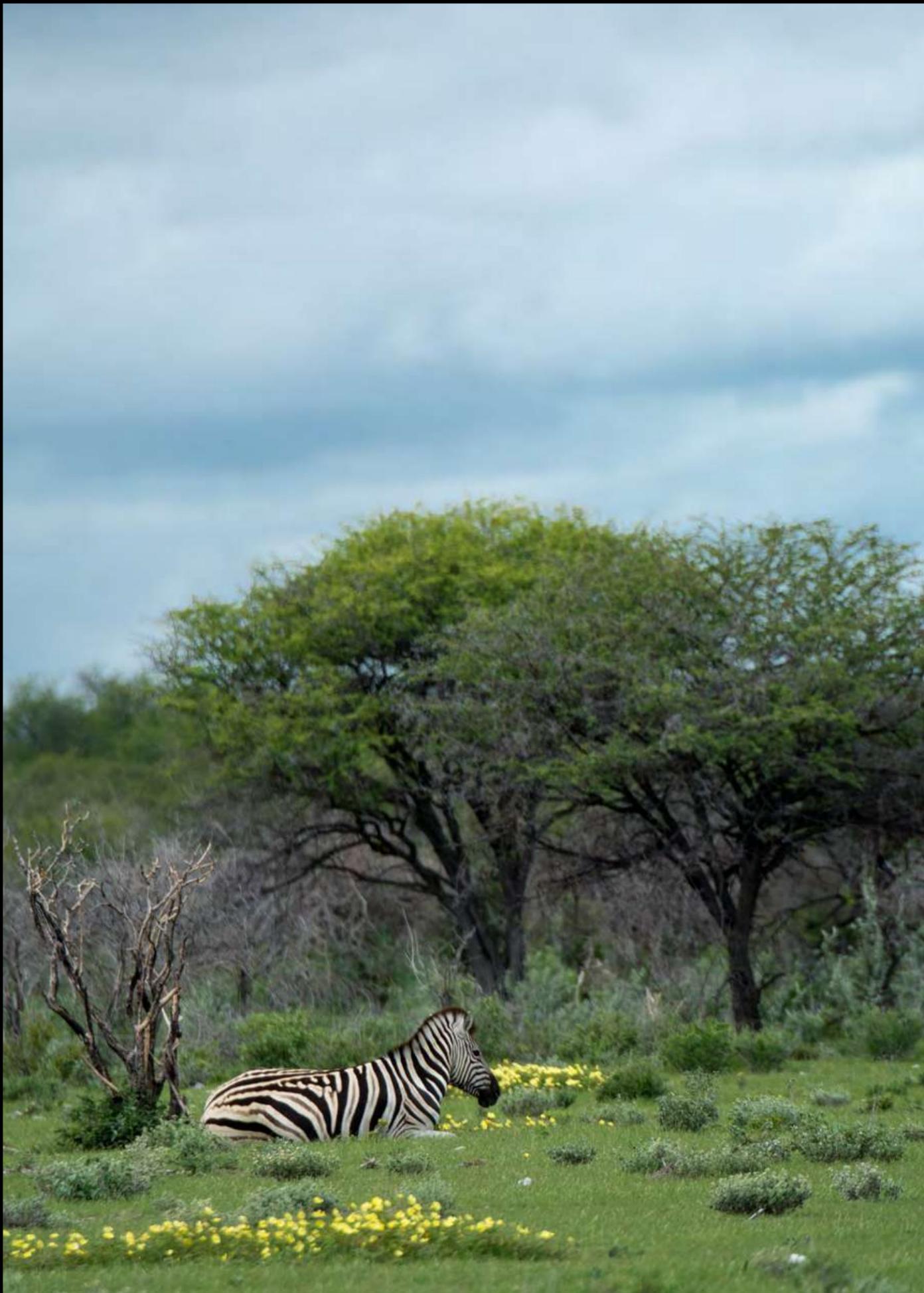


■ Namibian or  
Angolan giraffe  
*Giraffa  
camelopardalis  
angolensis.*



Burchell's zebra ■  
Equus quagga  
socializing.





■ Left, Burchell's zebra *Equus quagga*; right, portrait of a Woolly-necked stork *Ciconia episcopus*.



A herd of Gemsbok ■  
Oryx gazella feeding by the  
endless Etosha pan.



*Black Rhino* ■  
*Diceros bicornis* feeding  
in a veritable sea of  
Devil's thorn *Tribulus*  
*terrestris* flowers.



The Banded mongoose ■  
Mungos mungo  
is an extremely active,  
inquisitive and very  
social animal.



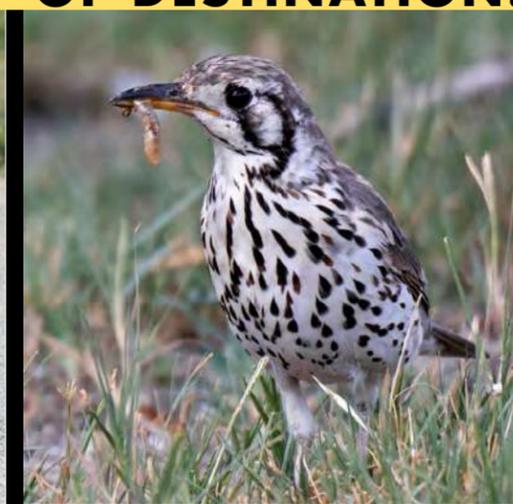
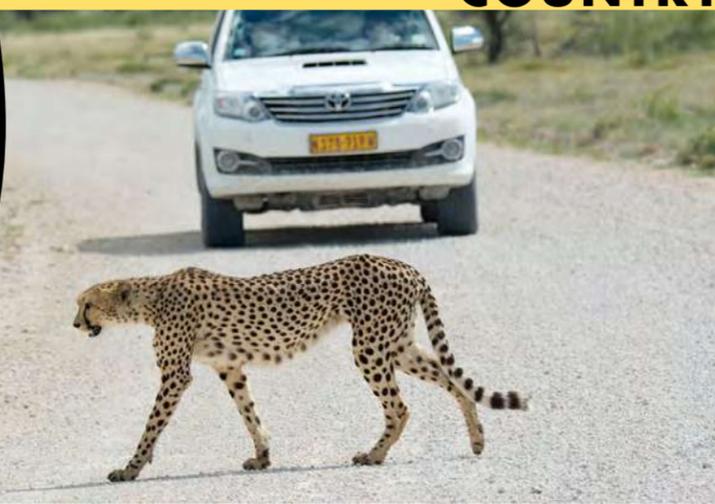
Flamingos in the ■ desert - one of the many unexpected sights of Etosha during one of its rare fully-fledged wet seasons.



# At-a-glance travel guide



COUNTRY OF DESTINATION: **NAMIBIA**



## USEFUL TIPS FOR YOUR EXPEDITION

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

**ROUTE:** Your international flight will land in Windhoek Hosea Kutako International Airport, 45 kms from the capital itself. Namibia can be reached by direct flight with a few airlines or via South Africa. The airport is small, clean and very efficient.

**MEANS OF TRANSPORT:** Etosha can be easily reached in one long day's driving from Windhoek. Namibia has a good network of tarmac highways and can be easily visited self-driving a rented vehicle, but this solution however has its drawbacks - enormous distances, tyre-damaging coarse gravel stretches and above all the need to be absolutely self-sufficient. We are convinced that for productive

wildlife photography it is much better to employ a professional guide and we cannot recommend enough our personal friend **Phillip Conradie of Africa Windows Safaris** - a very reliable and experienced professional with a special knack for animals and a wonderful person to travel with.

**CURRENCY:** Namibian dollar (NAD) and South African Rand (ZAR), with Euros being accepted in most upscale lodges. It is advisable to change a reasonable amount of currency upon arrival.

**ACCOMODATION:** Etosha NP offers a wide choice of accomodation, from budget to luxurious,

usually very clean and very efficiently managed. We can safely recommend staying at **Halali, Okaukuejo** and **Namutoni**, which is where we usually stay. These are beautiful camps, with very pleasant cottages, good-to-excellent food being served in the attached restaurants and fantastic opportunities for wildlife sightings right on the lodge grounds.

**FOOD:** Namibia is no place for vegetarians, even if it is the only African country where we feel absolutely safe having fresh raw vegetables and salads. An abundance of exotic meats and free-ranging game provides mouth-watering charcoal-grilled steaks of zebra, springbok, kudu and eland,

## *By any standards surely one of Africa's most spectacular Parks*



which are really to be tasted - even by those usually avoiding red meat (like us). Given the blistering heat, you'll love having a Rock Shandy, a refreshing drink of ½ a bottle of lemonade, ½ a bottle of soda water and a few drops of Angostura bitters.

**LANGUAGE:** English and German are widely spoken everywhere. Don't even hope of speaking or understanding Khoisan, the Bushmen's unique tongue-clicking language...

**WORRIES:** None as long as you follow the lodges and National Parks rules. Namibia 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 high medical standards - one of the very few places where we drink tap water without worries.

**CLIMATE:** When to go? Not an easy question to answer! Partially covered by the Namib Desert, one of the world's driest deserts, Namibia's climate is generally very dry and pleasant – it's fine to visit all year round. Between about December to March some days will be humid and rain may follow, often in localised, afternoon thunderstorms. These are more common in the centre and east of the country, and more unusual in the desert. April and especially May are often lovely months in Namibia. Increasingly dry, with a real freshness in the air, and much greenery in the landscape; at this time the air is clear and largely free from dust. From June to August Namibia cools down and dries out more; nights can become cold, dropping below freezing in some desert areas. As the landscape dries so the game in the north of the country gravitates more to waterholes, and is more easily seen by visitors. By September and October it warms up again; game-

viewing in most areas is at its best, although there's often a lot of dust around and the vegetation has lost its vibrancy. November is a highly variable month. Sometimes the hot, dry weather will continue, at other times the sky will fill with clouds and threaten to rain – but if you're lucky enough to witness the first rains of the season, you'll never forget the drama.

**BESIDES:** Local tribes and indigenous culture provide much interest, even after the terrible suffering inflicted in the past (1904 -1910) by Kaiser Wilhelm's Imperial Germany. The country's largest ethnic group is the Ovambo (around half the population), with the Kavango, Herero, Damara, and Caprivian peoples all having significant populations. Some of the country's smaller groups of peoples – like the San (or Bushmen) in the east and the very distinctive, red-tinted Himba in the north – still keep to their age-old nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyles. ●

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# WorldWideWonders



ECUADOR'S CUYABENO WILDLIFE RESERVE

## FLOODED FOREST

A little-known but relatively accessible and periodically inundated rainforest is one of northern South America's best kept secrets



**Amazon Tree boa *Corallus hortulanus***

The iconic and always-ready-to-bite Amazon Tree boa *Corallus hortulanus* is one of the species which can be most commonly observed and photographed at Cuyabeno. On the previous page, Monk saki monkey *Pithecia monachus*, a typical inhabitant of the flooded rainforest or varzea in the Wildlife Reserve.



**Rufescent tiger heron *Tigrisoma lineatum***

A striking and conspicuous species commonly observed among the foliage and branches overhanging the slow-moving brooks and rivers of Cuyabeno.

TEXT BY ANDREA FERRARI  
PHOTOS BY ANDREA & ANTONELLA FERRARI

The Cuyabeno Wildlife Reserve or Reserva de Producción Faunística Cuyabeno is the second largest reserve of the 45 national parks and protected areas in Ecuador, covering an area of 603,380 ha (1,490,000 acres) with an elevation sloping from east to west from about 300 meters to slightly under 200 m above sea level. It is located in the Putumayo Canton in the Sucumbíos Province and in the Aguarico Canton in the Orellana Province and it was decreed on 26 July 1979. The Cuyabeno Wildlife Reserve is an important nature reserve in Amazonia with rather unusual ecological characteristics as the area encompasses a poorly drained plain with a network of periodically inundated forests, lakes and creeks. Such conditions are rare close to the Andes, where the drainage in the foothills prevents the development of swamps and lakes. As all protected areas in the Amazon region, the area has a high biodiversity, like the neighbouring Yasuni National Park, which is considered the most diverse Park in the world. All large Amazon mammals are present: the lowland tapirs, two species of deer, all Amazon cats including jaguars and pumas, capibaras, two species of dolphins, manatees, giant and neotropical otter. Monkeys are represented by 10 species, while rodents and bats are represented by dozens of species. The current number of registered bird species is under debate, some claiming 530 species

while others suggest that more than 580. At the peak of the wet season, thousands of hectares of forest become inundated, with an estimated 350 fish species, two species of caiman, boa constrictors and anacondas, countless frogs and toads and dolphins swimming deep in the flooded forest. The largest network of lakes is in the eastern part of the Park, and can be easily reached from Lago Agrio over an asphalt road. The other lake network is located at the border with Peru, and requires some extensive travel. The river system covers the Aguarico, San Miguel and Cuyabeno along with their tributaries. The so-called "dry" season runs from mid-December to the end of the middle of March and the climate corresponds to a wet tropical forest, with precipitation of about 3000 mm or 180 inches per year, and humidity ranging from 85% to 95%. The annual temperature oscillates around 25 °C or 77 °F. The Sionas live in the area of the upper Cuyabeno lakes network and along the Tarapuy river, while the Cofans, and the Secoyas live on the banks of the two major bordering rivers, the Aguarico and the Putumayo River, both affluents of the Amazon. Until the 1980s, these communities have mainly lived of fishing, farming and hunting. Since then, the life of the indigenous communities in the Wildlife Reserve has changed due to improved access with roads built for oil exploitation and earnings from ecotourism. ●



**Flooded forest or varzea**

The typical landscape of the flooded rainforest or varzea found in Cuyabeno, which can only be explored by canoe. We were able to visit this fascinating and complex environment thanks to our friends of [Tropical Herping](#), a specialized and highly professional wildlife photography/tourism company based in Quito, Ecuador.



**Humboldt's woolly monkey or Chorongo *Lagothrix lagothricha***

Another typical monkey species inhabiting the rainforest canopy of Cuyabeno, which is rarely observed elsewhere. Chorongos are very shy and can usually be approached only with difficulty.



**Amazon Tree boa *Corallus hortulanus***  
 A beautiful orange-phase juvenile specimen of this common species. Amazon Tree boas are ready to bite if provoked, striking fast and far.



**Pinktoe Tarantula *Avicularia avicularia***  
 A large South American rainforest species, commonly found at night and usually above the ground.



**Yellow-handed titi monkey *Callicebus lucifer***

Another monkey species which is quite rare elsewhere but which can be - with some luck - encountered and photographed in the flooded forest environment of Cuyabeno is the strikingly patterned, tree-dwelling Yellow-handed titi monkey *Callicebus lucifer*.



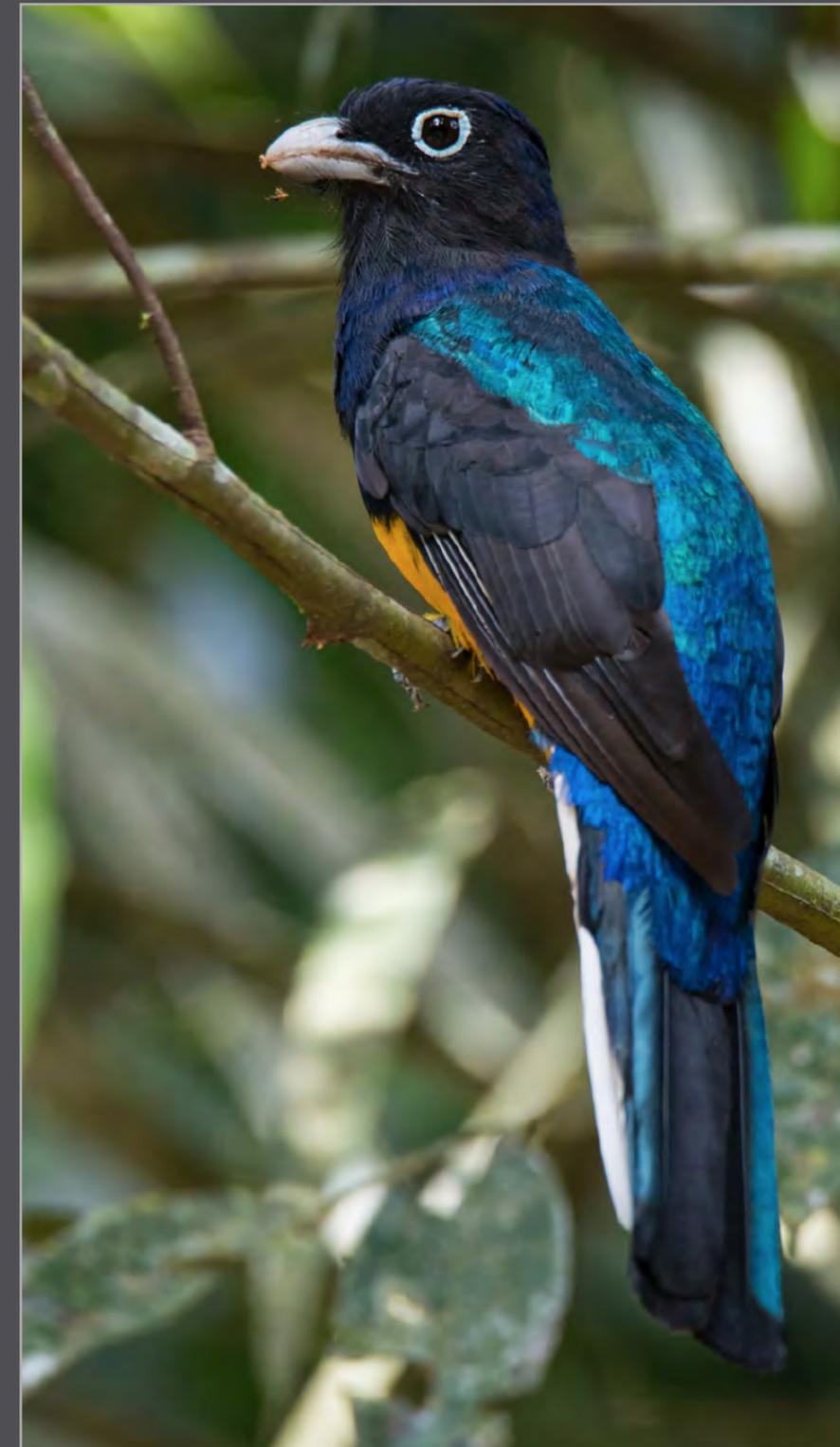
**Amazon kingfisher *Chloroceryle amazona***

Possibly the most common of the Amazonian kingfishers, usually observed perching on horizontal fallen tree trunks overhanging the slow-flowing waters below, or flying at speed across the watercourse.



**Yellow-rumped cacique *Cacicus cela***

A mating pair of this common but strikingly colorful species and their social nest built by the river's edge.



**White-tailed trogon *Trogon chionurus* and Blue-and-yellow macaw *Ara ararauna***

The White-tailed trogon (female on the left, male on the right) is usually observed as it perches on low branches, allowing a relatively close approach. On the contrary, the huge and raucous Blue-and-yellow macaw (center) is only occasionally and briefly spotted perching on tall palm trees or flying above the canopy in noisy flocks.

**Lake at sunset**

During the rainy season the huge lakes of Cuyabeno are filled with clear, cool water - and are a favourite site for a refreshing early evening dip (if one is not worried of the caimans). These same sites will become a flat pan of glutinous - and later on deeply cracked - mud during the dry season.



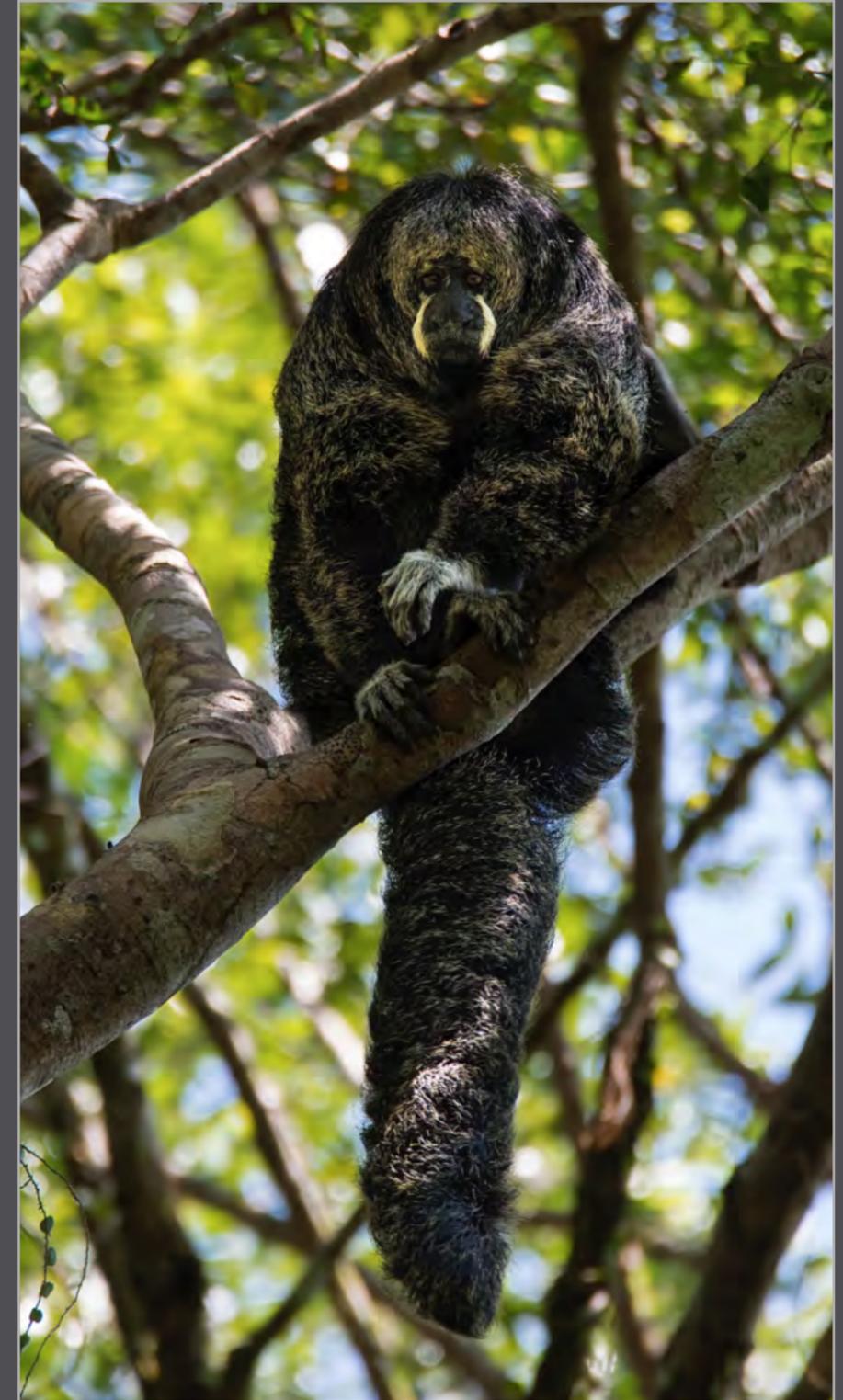
**Rufescent tiger heron *Tigrisoma lineatum*, Common Potoo *Nyctibius griseus* and Proboscis bat *Rhynchonycteris naso***

Three relatively common species of the Cuyabeno habitat - Tiger herons (left) and Proboscis bats (right) are often and easily sighted along the reserve's watercourses, but spotting a Common potoo (center) can be a very demanding exercise due to the bird's extraordinary camouflage, which really makes it look like a broken tree stump.



**Many-banded Aracari *Pteroglossus pluricinctus***

Occasionally observed in noisy, small groups raiding other birds' nesting sites and preying on the chicks.



**Monk saki monkey *Pithecia monachus***

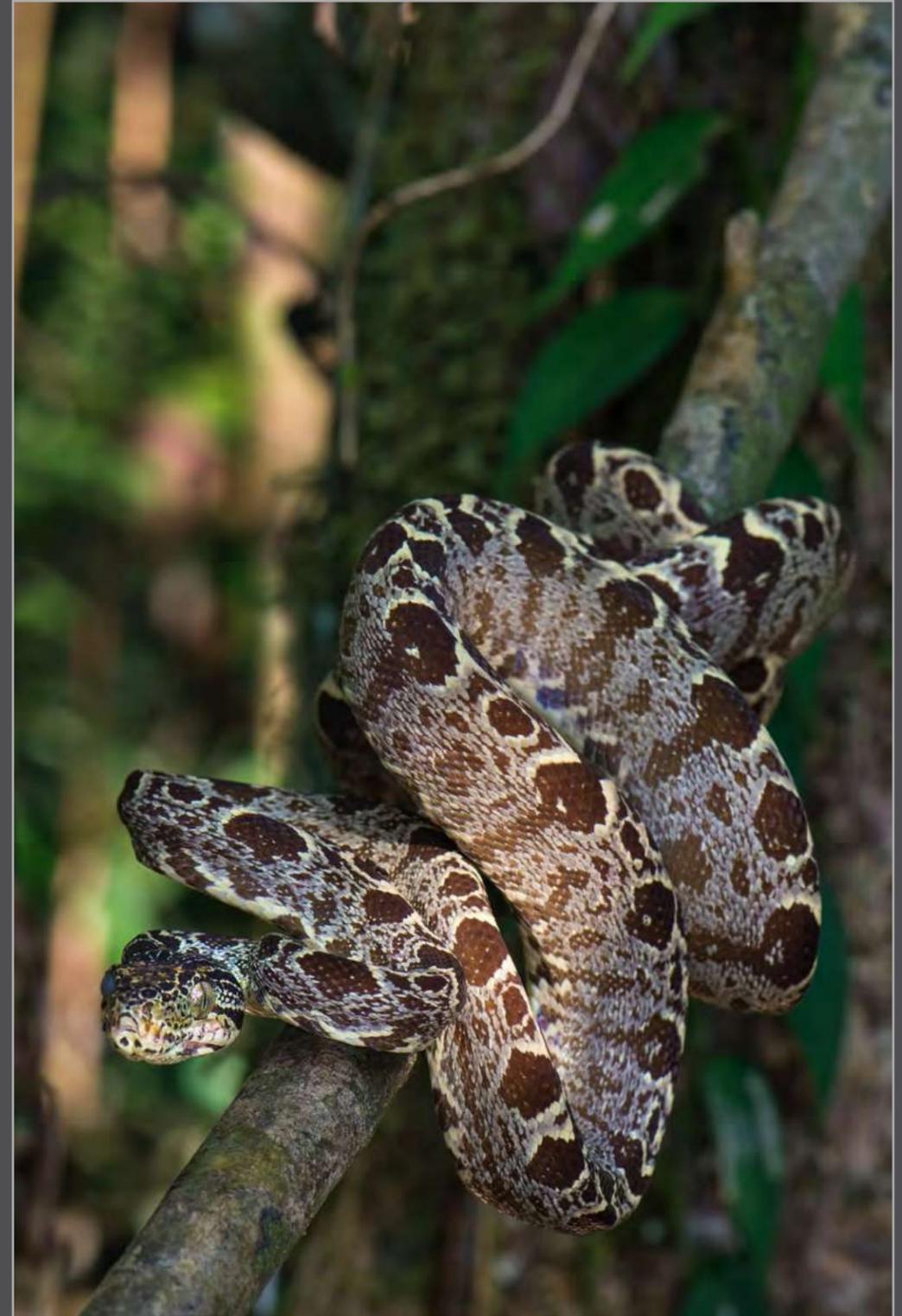
An extraordinarily strange-looking monkey!

**Flooded forest or varzea**

The periodically inundated environment of Cuyabeno can only be explored by canoe when flooded. It is not uncommon to see caimans, anacondas and even freshwater dolphins briefly surfacing and blowing in these still (or very slow-flowing) black waters.



**Ecuadorian capuchin *Cebus albifrons aequatorialis***  
Clever, very active, highly social and ruthless - a frequently observed monkey species.



**Amazon Tree boa *Corallus hortulanus***  
This is the typical or "garden" color phase of this iconic species.



**Greater yellow-headed vulture *Cathartes melambrotus***

Birds of prey and winged scavengers can occasionally be observed as they soar by in the stretches of blue sky among the broken forest canopy, but Cuyabeno's flooded and thickly forested environment is not ideal for such observations.



**Amazon River dolphin *Inia geoffrensis***

Despite our stubborn and repeated efforts, this is the best we could get of of this species! This is in fact what most visitors will be able to glimpse of the elusive river dolphin.



**Black-tailed trogon *Trogon melanurus***

Trogons of many colorful species are found in tropical rainforests worldwide.



**Little blue heron *Egretta caerulea***

A typical inhabitant of the flooded forest or varzea inundated habitat.



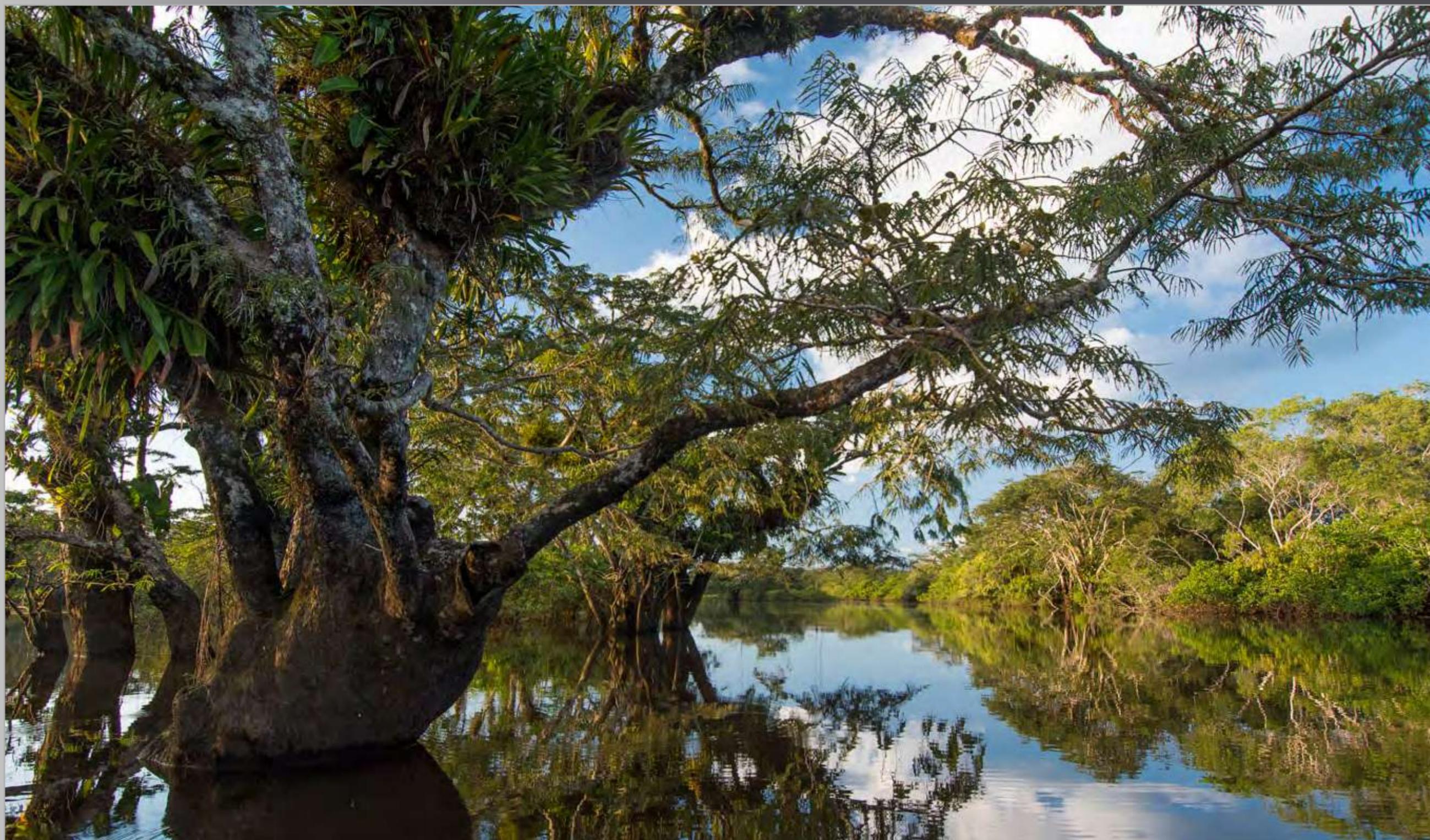
**Striated heron *Butorides striata***

Due to obvious reasons the flooded forest of Cuyabeno is a true paradise for waterbirds .

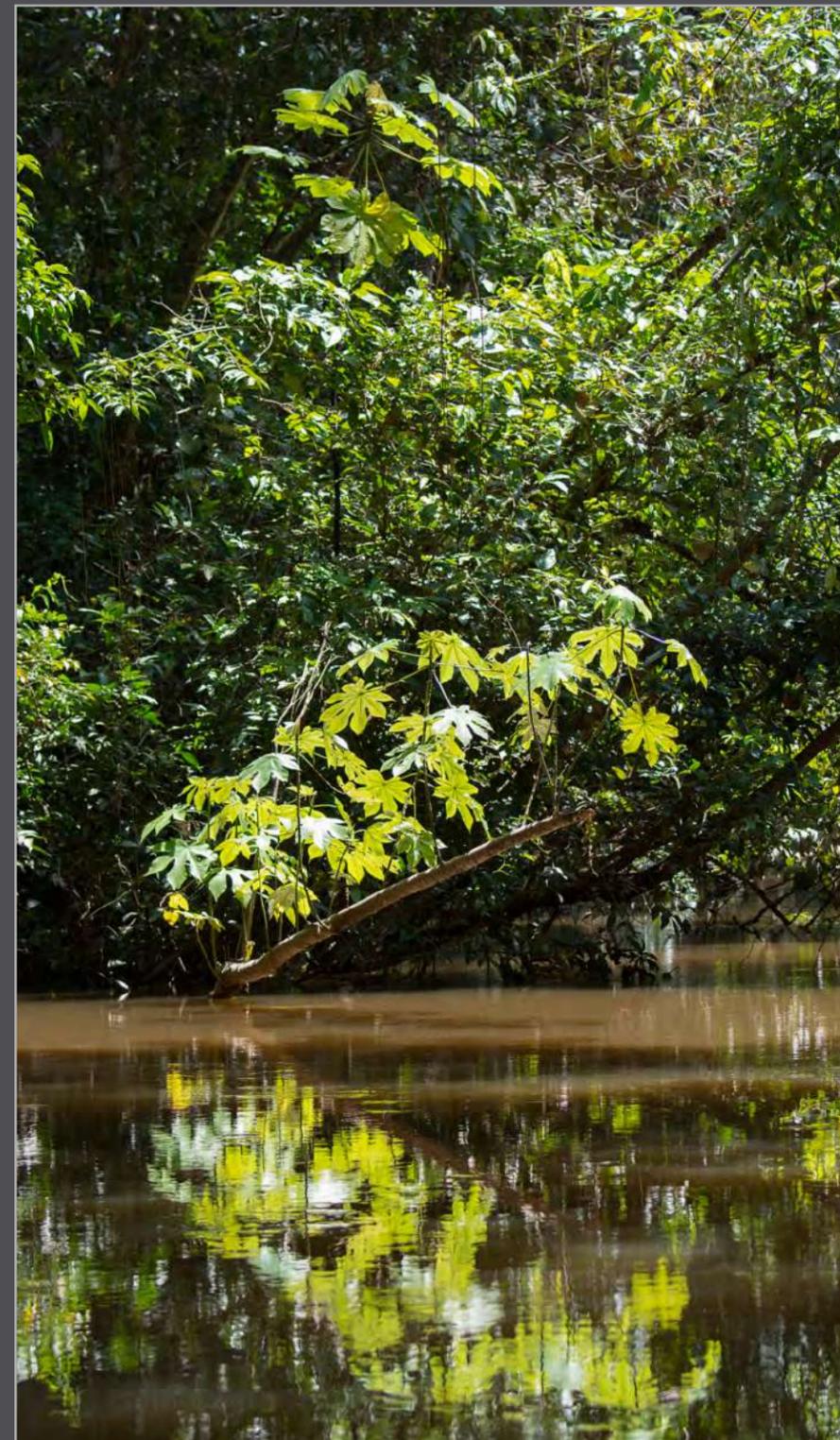
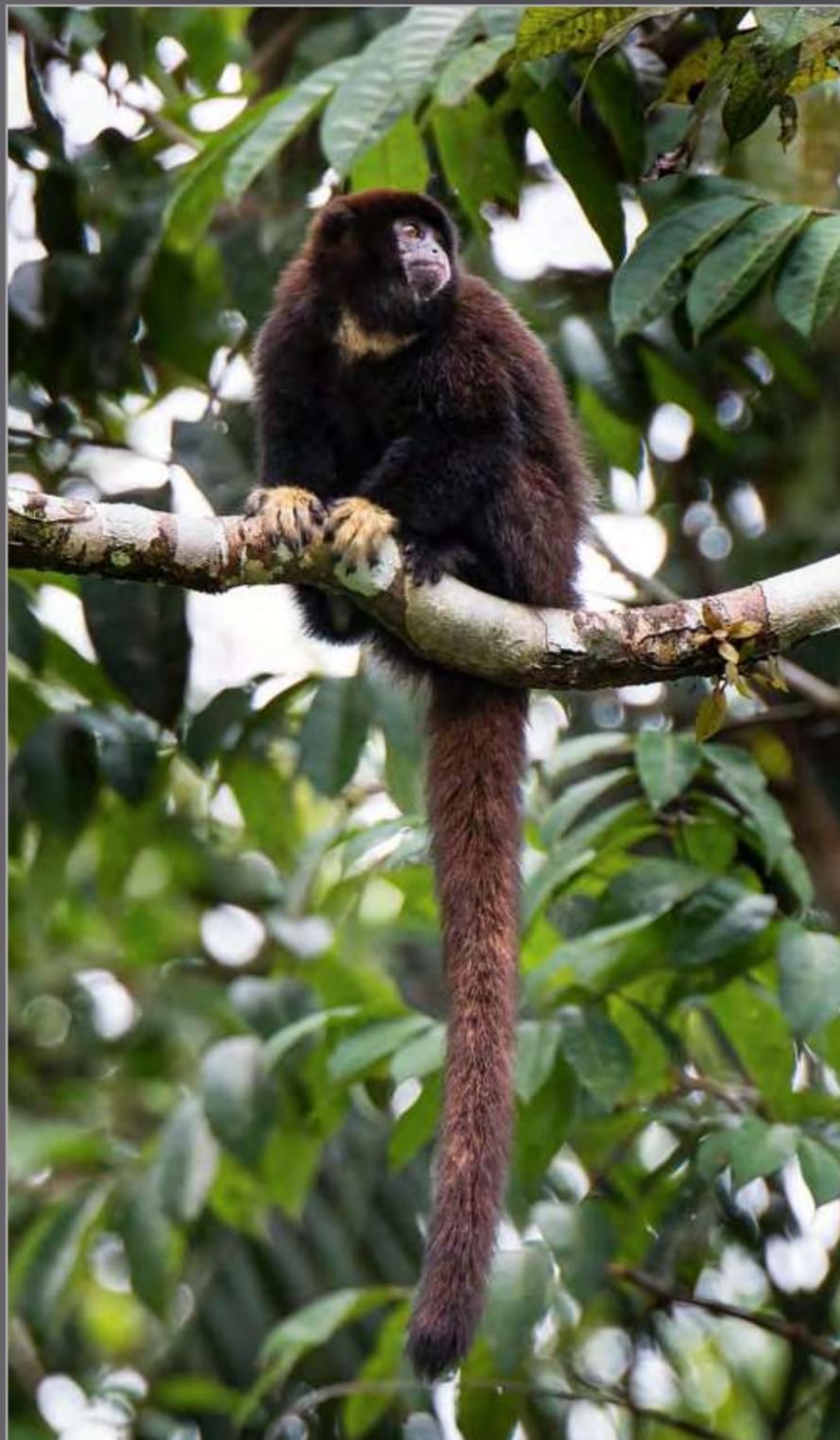


**Bridled Forest Gecko *Gonatodes humeralis***

For the same obvious reasons - walking is difficult here - observations of land-based microfauna can usually only be made in the immediate vicinity of the lodges.

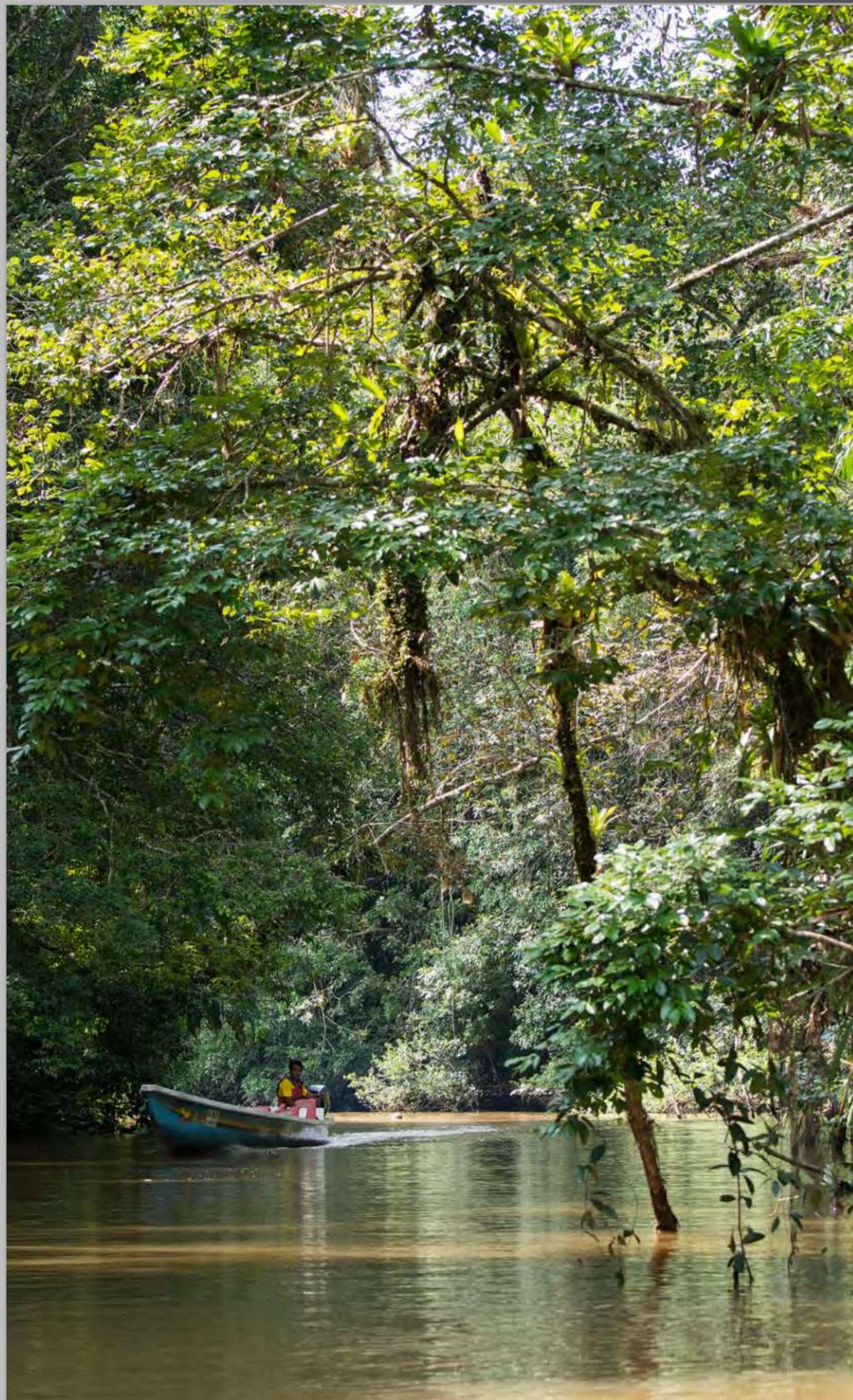
**Flooded forest or varzea**

Cuyabeno can also be visited during the dry season, when a great part of the area can be explored on foot. However, from a scenic point of view, the Reserve gives its absolute best when fully inundated.

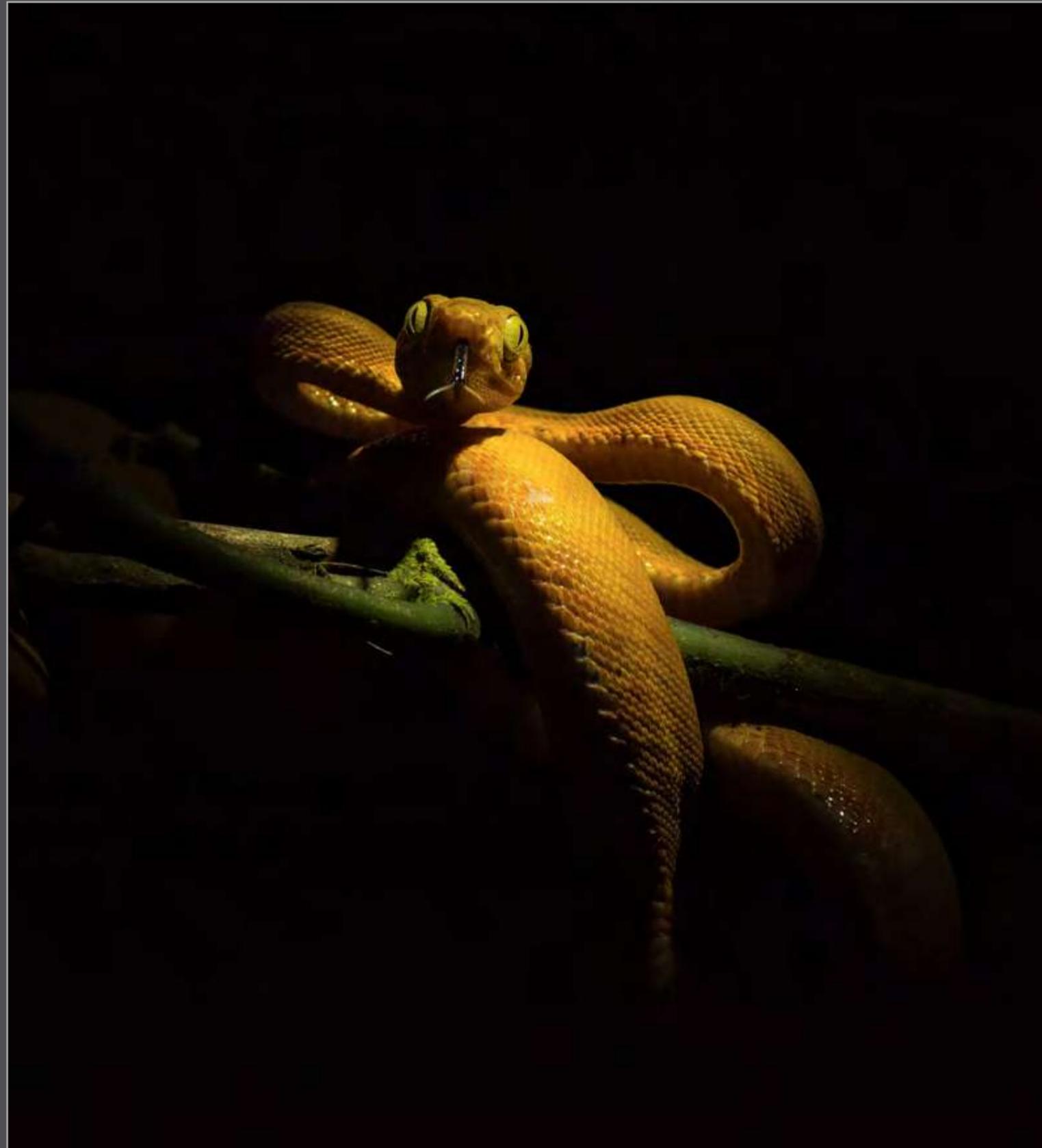


**Yellow-handed titi monkey *Callicebus lucifer***

The thickly forested, tree-fringed waterways of Cuyabeno Reserve make wildlife observation (not to mention photography) rather difficult at times, but as everywhere else luck plays its part in the game, and the natural environment is always exquisite.



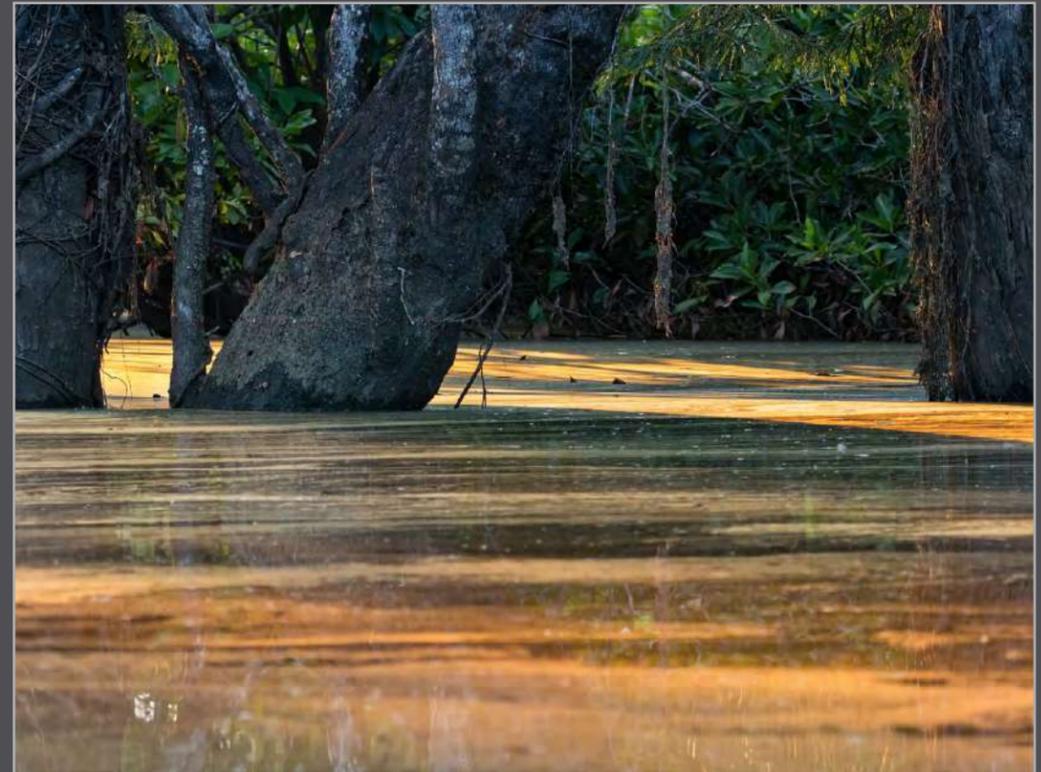
**Flooded forest or varzea**  
 Canoes and small motorboats are the only means of exploring the winding waterways of Cuyabeno Reserve.



**Amazon Tree boa *Corallus hortulanus***  
 This striking (in all senses!) species is most easily observed at night, slowly cruising by canoe and using a torchlight to search the shrubbery overhanging the waterways.



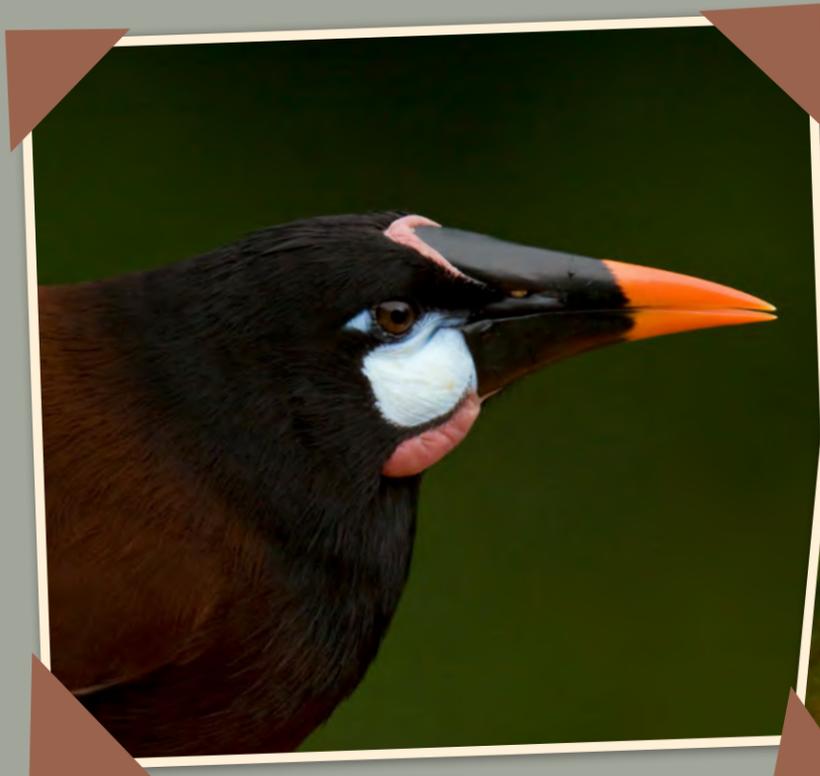
**Monk saki monkey *Pithecia monachus***  
With its strange features and thick tail this species makes a wonderful photo subject.



**Flooded forest or varzea**  
Algal blooms occasionally color gold the overflowing streams.

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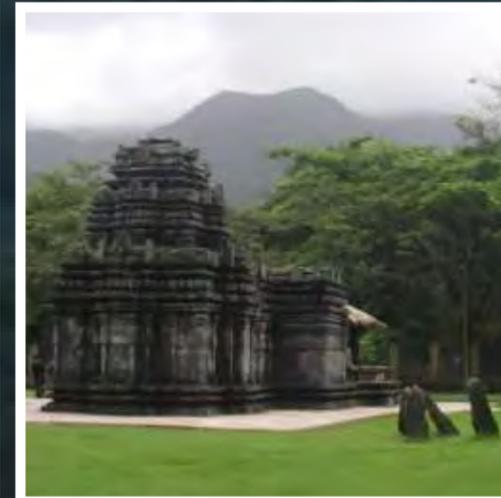
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# Beauty of the Beast



A TRIBUTE TO BUCEROTIDS

# THOSE AMAZING HORNIBILLS

Big, boisterous and beautiful, Bucerotids from Asia and Africa are some of the world's showiest birds - and sadly some of the most severely endangered



*Bucorvus leadbeateri*

Southern Ground Hornbill *Bucorvus leadbeateri*, a large-sized South African ground-dwelling species. This is a male in breeding livery, possibly offering a piece of wood as a gift to a female nearby. On the opening spread, the most easily observed and photographed among Asian species - the beautiful Malabar Pied hornbill *Anthracoceros coronatus*.

TEXT BY ANDREA FERRARI

PHOTOS BY ANDREA & ANTONELLA FERRARI



### *Tockus erythrorhynchus*

Red-billed hornbill *Tockus erythrorhynchus* - an African species, here preying on an unfortunate Leaf mantis.

Noisy, usually conspicuous and often exceptionally colorful, rather clumsy when perching on a high tree branch or on ambling the ground but absolutely unmistakable in their flap-and-glide flight and often frustratingly difficult to photograph properly in their forest habitat, hornbills certainly are amongst the tropical birds we cherish most. For those who have been many times to Borneo as we have, the distinctive faraway honking call of a Rhinoceros hornbill echoing across the forest canopy at dawn is a sound one cannot ever forget!

The hornbills - belonging to the family *Bucerotidae* - are found in tropical and subtropical Africa, Asia and Melanesia with a total of about 55 living species. Their distribution includes Sub-Saharan Africa and the Indian Subcontinent to the Philippines and the Solomon Islands, but no genus is found in both Africa and Asia. Most are arboreal birds, but the large ground hornbills belonging to the genus *Bucorvus*, as their name implies, are terrestrial birds of open savanna. Of the 24 species found in Africa, 13 are birds of the more open woodlands and savanna, and some occur even in highly arid environments; the remaining species are found in dense forests. Hornbills are diurnal, generally travelling in pairs or small family groups. Larger flocks sometimes form outside the breeding season - the largest assemblies of

hornbills form at some roosting sites, where as many as 2400 individual birds may be found.

Hornbills are omnivorous birds, eating fruit, insects and small animals including chicks, bats and small mammals. They cannot swallow food caught at the tip of the beak as their tongues are too short to manipulate it, so they toss it back to the throat with a jerk of the head. Typically, they are characterized by a long, down-curved bill which is frequently brightly colored and sometimes has a casque on the upper mandible. Both the common and the scientific name of the family refer in fact to the shape of the bill, "*buceros*" being "cow horn" in Greek. This huge bill is supported by powerful neck muscles as well as by two fused vertebrae and it is used in fighting, preening, constructing the nest, and obviously catching prey. A feature unique to the hornbills is however the casque, a hollow structure that runs along the upper mandible. In some species it is barely perceptible and appears to serve no function beyond reinforcing the bill. In other species it is quite large, is reinforced with bone, and has openings between the hollow centre, allowing it to serve as a resonator for calls. In the Helmeted hornbill the casque is not hollow but is filled with hornbill "ivory" and it is used as a battering ram in dramatic aerial jousts. Aerial casque-butting has also been reported in the Great hornbill.



## *Anthracoceros malayanus*

Black Hornbill *Anthracoceros malayanus*, female (background photo) and male (inset). Notice the marked sexual dimorphism shown by this species from Borneo, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. It is the major seed disperser for *Durio graveolens*, a species of durian.

Hornbills generally form monogamous pairs, and their reproductive behavior is equally fascinating. The female lays up to six white eggs in existing holes or crevices, either in trees or rocks; the cavities are usually natural, but some species may nest in the abandoned nests of woodpeckers and barbets. Nesting sites may be used in consecutive breeding seasons by the same pair. Before incubation, the females of all *Bucerotinae* - sometimes assisted by the male - begin to close the entrance to the nest cavity with a thick concrete-like wall made of mud, droppings and fruit pulp. When the female is ready to lay her eggs, the entrance is just large enough for her to enter the nest, and after she has done so, the remaining opening is also all but sealed shut. There is only one narrow aperture, big enough for the male to transfer food to the mother and eventually the chicks. The function of this behaviour is apparently related to protecting the nesting site from rival hornbills and arboreal predators in general. The sealing can be done in just a few hours; at most it takes a few days. Having sealed the nest it takes a further five days for the first egg to be laid. When the chicks and the female are too big to fit in the nest, the mother breaks out the nest and both parents feed the chicks.

Sadly, a number of species of hornbill, mostly insular species with small ranges with some of those illustrated in these pages - are currently severely threatened with extinction because of forest logging and unrestricted hunting. ●



*Anthracoceros coronatus*

Malabar Pied hornbill *Anthracoceros coronatus* - a relatively common but very beautiful species easily observed and photographed in Southern India and Sri Lanka. Notice the seed in the bill - this species is omnivorous, taking fruits, small mammals, birds, small reptiles, insects etc. Prey is killed and swallowed whole. Figs are an important food, contributing 60% of their diet from May to February.



*Buceros rhinoceros*

*Rhyticeros undulatus*

Rhinoceros Hornbill *Buceros rhinoceros*, female (above) and male offering fruit (inset). Right, Wreathed Hornbill *Rhyticeros undulatus* (image courtesy Bjorn Olesen). Both species are found in South Asia and despite their iconic status are very difficult to approach and photograph in the wild. Like other hornbill species, these are gravely threatened by deforestation and land grabbing.



*Buceros bicornis*

Great Hornbill *Buceros bicornis* in mid-flight. The Great Hornbill, also known as the Great Indian Hornbill or Great pied Hornbill, is one of the larger members of the hornbill family. It is found in the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia. Its impressive size and colour have made it important in many tribal cultures and rituals. The great hornbill is long-lived, living for nearly 50 years.



*Rhinoplax vigil*



*Anthracoceros albirostris*

Left, a rare portrait of the impressive, severely threatened and very uncommonly observed Helmeted Hornbill *Rhinoplax vigil* found in the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra and Borneo (image courtesy Bjorn Olesen); right, Oriental Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros albirostris* from the Kinabatangan river, Borneo - the Indo-Malayan equivalent of the Malabar Pied Hornbill.



*Anthracoceros coronatus*

A beautiful Malabar Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros coronatus* preying on a cicada it has just caught. Sri Lanka's Yala National Park and the region of the Western Ghats in Central and Southern India are some of the world's best places to admire and photograph this fascinating species, particularly during their breeding and nesting seasons from March to April.



Left, a pair of the spectacular and very shy Wrinkled Hornbill *Rhyticeros corrugatus* from Borneo; above, another splendid and rare portrait of a Helmeted Hornbill *Rhinoplax vigil* in the wild (image courtesy Bjorn Olesen).



The Bushy-crested Hornbill *Anorrhinus galeritus* is a rather nondescript and highly social species from Borneo and South-East Asia.



*Rhyticeros corrugatus*

A spectacular portrait of a stunning male Wrinkled Hornbill *Rhyticeros corrugatus* in mid-flight above the Kinabatangan river in Borneo. Inset, the strange-looking White-crowned hornbill *Berenicornis comatus* (image courtesy Bjorn Olesen), again from Borneo. The Kinabatangan area is one of the world's best spots to see several different species of hornbills.



*Tockus leucomelas*



*Aceros nipalensis*

Left, Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill *Tockus leucomelas*, commonly known in Africa as the “flying banana” for obvious reasons. Right, the colorful Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis* (image courtesy [Ajit Kumar Hota](#)), a species found in the Himalayan foothills from Bhutan, north-east India, Myanmar, southern Yunnan and south-east Tibet. Notice the fruit in the bill.



## *Anthracoceros coronatus*

A pair of Malabar Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros coronatus* from Yala National Park, Sri Lanka - the male is on the left and it can be identified, as it often happens with hornbill species, by its dark red eye. Most hornbill species feature a very distinct sexual dimorphism, showing fascinating displays of affection for their partners and unique courting and nesting habits.



Left, Rhinoceros Hornbill *Buceros rhinoceros*, female; right, a rare portrait of the equally rare Sulawesi Dwarf Hornbill or Temminck's hornbill *Rhabdotorhinus exarhatus*, an Indonesian endemic (image courtesy Bjorn Olesen).



*Lophoceros nasutus*

A male African Grey Hornbill *Lophoceros nasutus* (right) offers a berry to his apparently uninterested female companion during a courtship and mating ritual, Masai Mara, Kenya. This is a widespread and common resident species in much of Sub-Saharan Africa, ranging into Arabia.



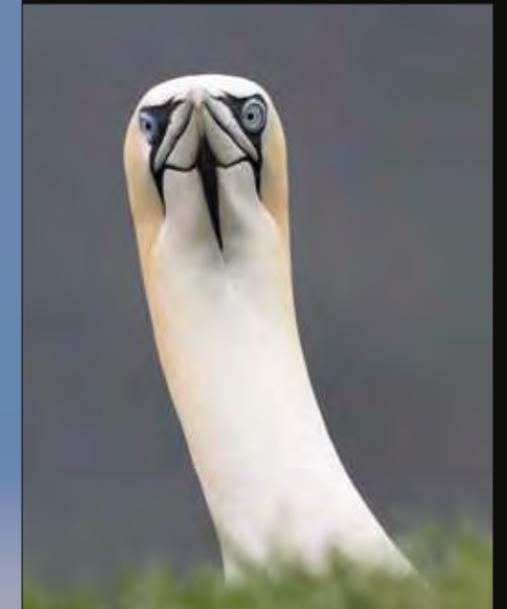
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*David Hemmings - President, Nature's Photo Adventures*



"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 spices 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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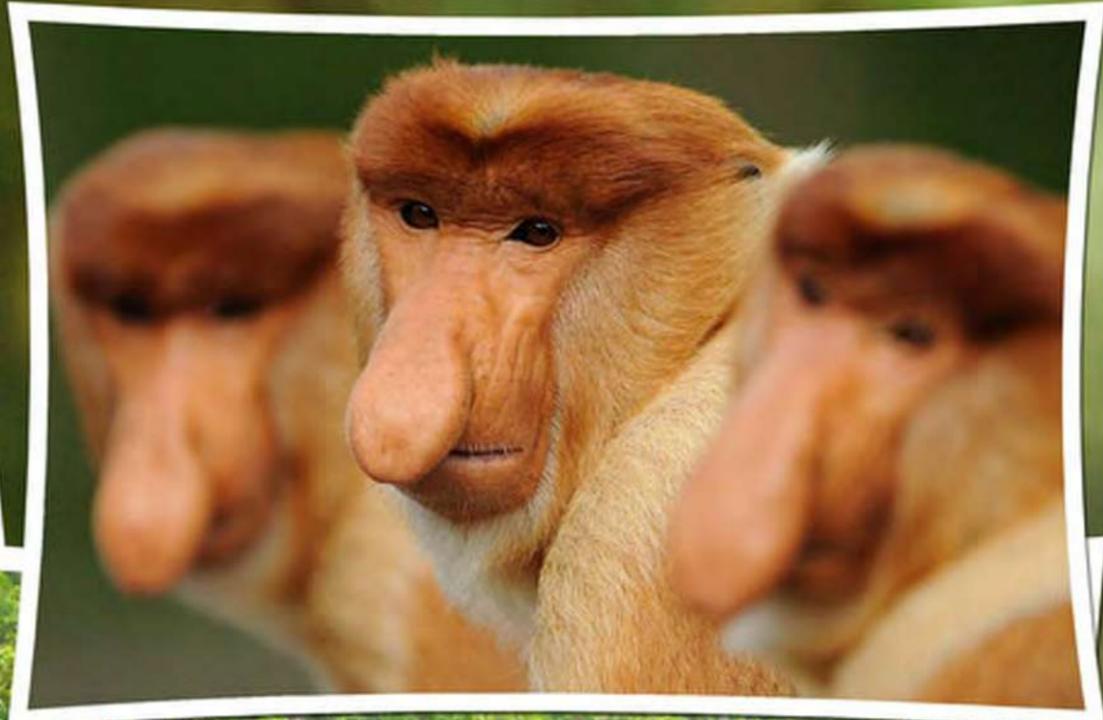


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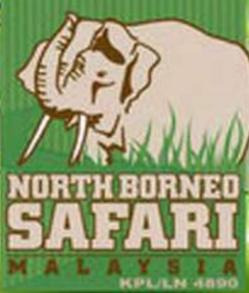
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## MYSTERIOUS MORNINGSIDE

Field researcher and passionate herpetologist Peter Janzen reports from a little-visited and critically threatened moist forest rich in endemics



A dazzling specimen of *Pseudophilautus poppiae*. On the opening spread, the endemic Sri Lankan Pit viper *Trimeresurus trigonocephalus*.



A portrait of the rarely observed *Ceratophora erdeleni*.

TEXT AND PHOTOS  
BY PETER JANZEN

The moist rainforests of Morningside are situated in the eastern part of the Sinharaja Forest Reserve, in Sri Lanka. Only some 10 km<sup>2</sup> forests are left. The other parts are converted into agriculture land, especially for tea. Morningside lies at a higher altitude than the western part of Sinharaja. The Eastern Sinharaja is geographically positioned between 6°22' to 6°26'N and 80°31' to 80°31' E and the altitude ranges from 900 to 1170 m asl. The temperature is slightly lower than the western Sinharaja and the humidity is mostly high. The name Morningside was created during colonisation, because misty and drizzling weather are quite normal. The floristic region is moist mountain cloud forest with a canopy being lower than that of the lowland parts of Sinharaja.

During the last 25 years several new species were discovered here, species only to be found in the Morningside area: seven species of anuran amphibians, three agamids, one species of gecko. All these species are point endemics and they are critically endangered. And they are confronted with different threats due to human disturbances: deforestation, habitat destruction, tea cultivation, land degradation, illegal gem mining, illicit timber felling, collecting medicinal plants and firewood, setting fire to the forest, excessive usage of pesticides in plantations. The abundances of the above mentioned endemic reptile and amphibian species is often significantly low. Therefore the population size of these species is low, too.



The forested landscape of Morningside, in Sri Lanka's Sinharaja Forest Reserve.



Belonging to the *Saturnidae* family, the Sri Lankan tussar silk moth *Antheraea cingalesa* is quite large - reaching a wingspan of 12 to 16 cm - and stunningly colorful.



*Calotes desilvai* is another little-studied and rarely observed species.



Juvenile Hump Snout Lizard or Lyre Head Lizard *Lyriocephalus scutatus*.



*Pseudophilautus folicola* calling at night.



A pair of *Polypedates cruciger* in amplexus.



*Rakwana Whipping Frog Taruga fastigo, a species in the family Rhacophoridae. It is endemic to Sri Lanka and only known from its type locality, Morningside.*



*Uperodon obscurus.*



*Pseudophilautus cavirostris*, male with a leech feeding off its back.



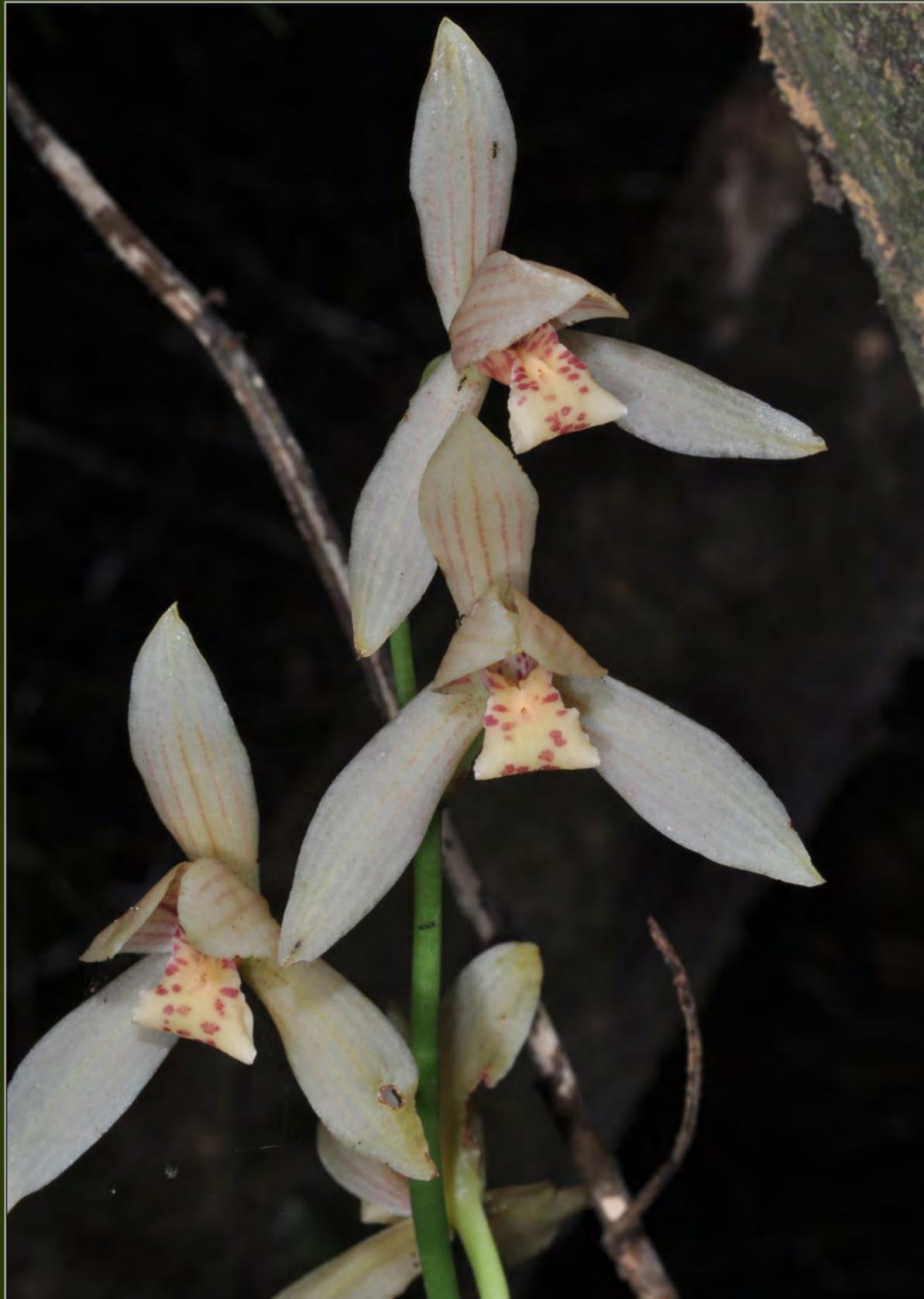
*Lankanectes corrugatus.*



*Pseudophilautus folicola.*



A mating pair of *Pseudophilautus procax* in amplexus.



The perennially moist forest floor of Morningside is rich with orchid species. Left, *Cymbidium ensifolium*; right, *Anoechochilus setaceus*.



*Hypnale nepa*, the Sri Lankan Hump-nosed viper, is a venomous pitviper species endemic to Sri Lanka where it is known as *mukalan thelissa* in Sinhala.



The Sinharaja Bent-toed Gecko *Cyrtodactylus subsolanus* is a species of gecko endemic to island of Sri Lanka.



Sri Lankan Pit viper *Trimeresurus trigonocephalus*.



Adult male Hump Snout Lizard or Lyre Head Lizard *Lyriocephalus scutatus*.



*Euphlyctis cyanophlytis.*



*Fejervarya kirtisinghei.*



*Pseudophilautus decoris.*



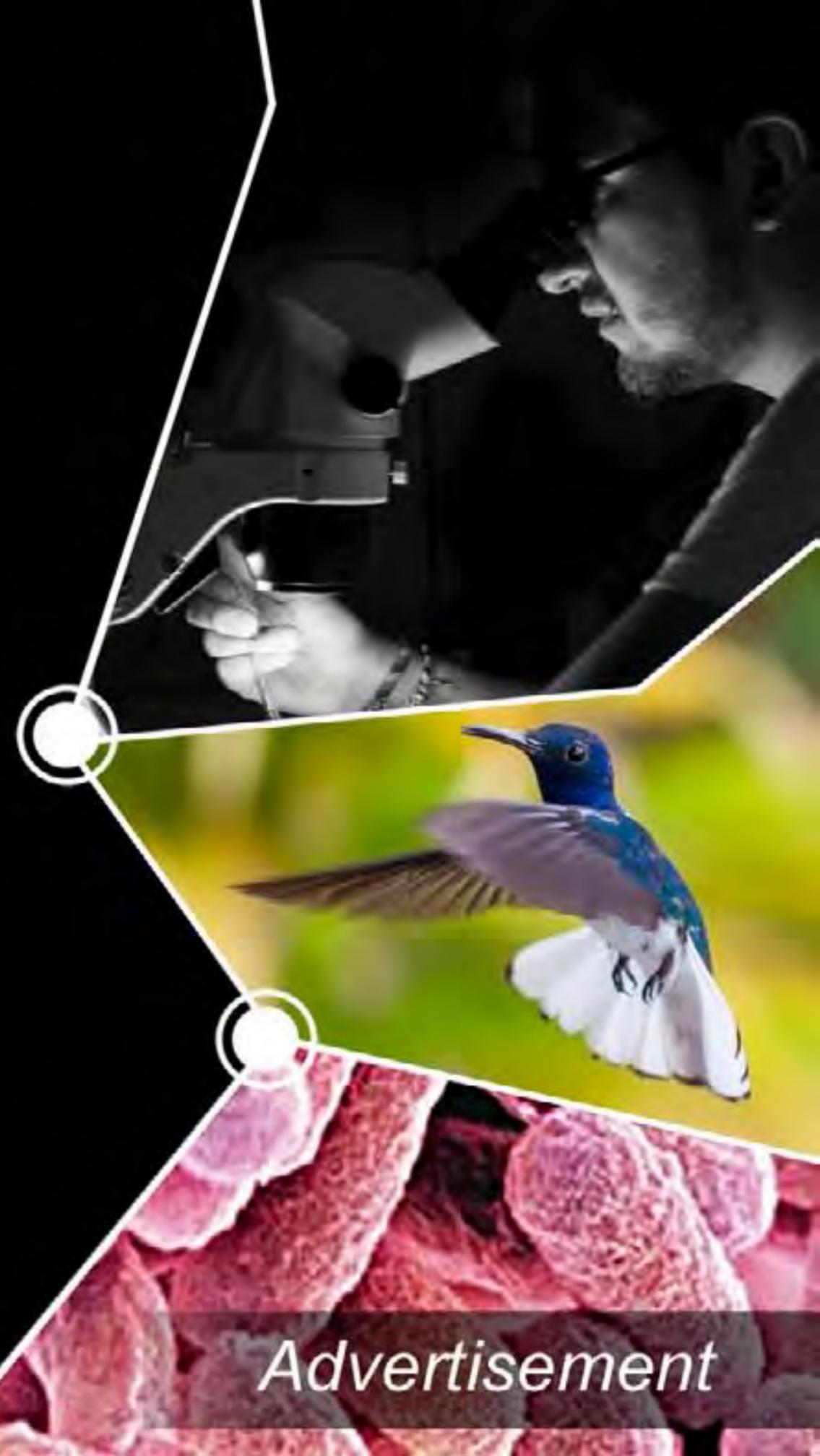
*Microhyla karunaratnei.*

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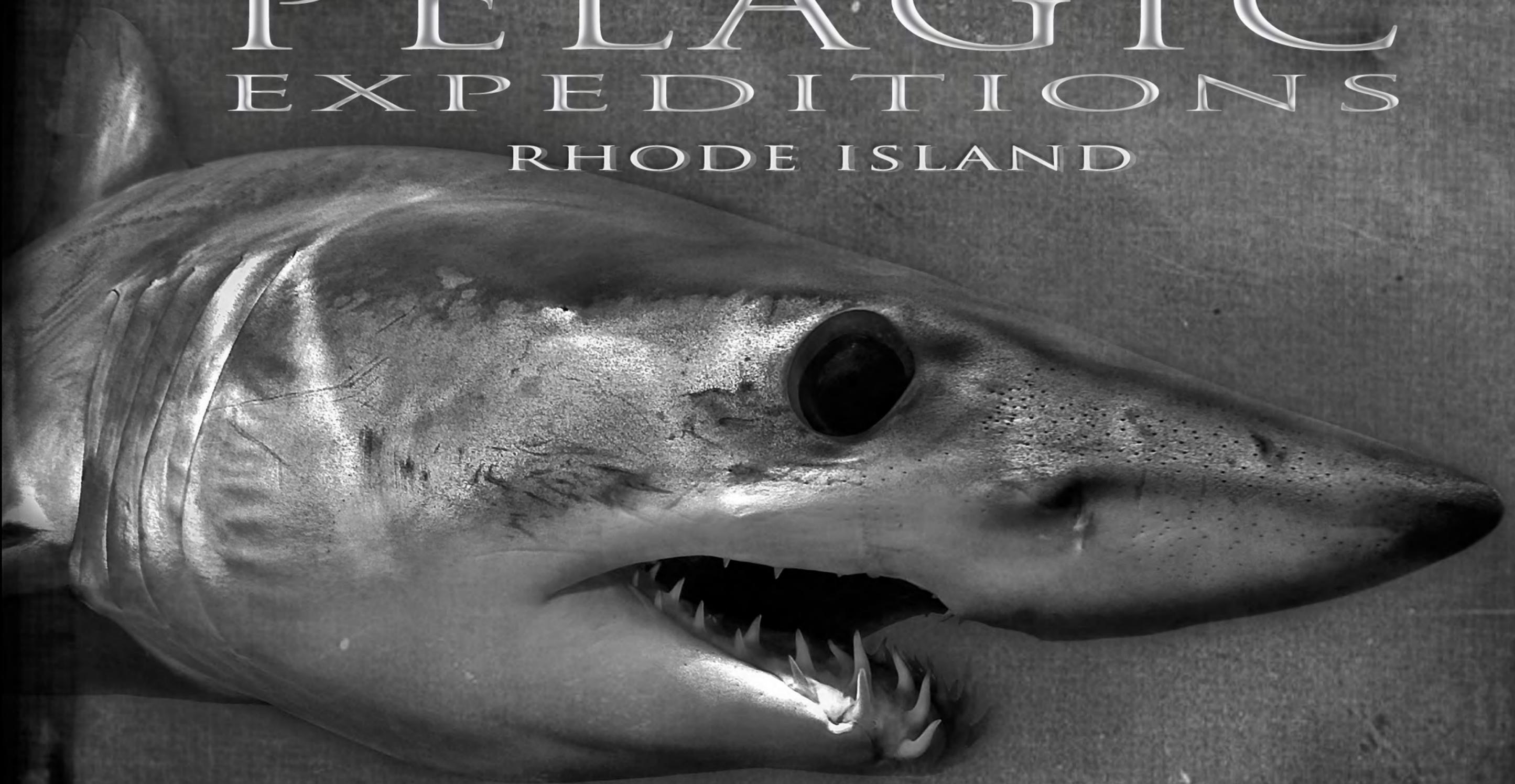
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## *The Parting Shot*

Underwater photographer from Argentina **Aldo Gustavo Galante** shares his exceptional encounter with us: "The Psychedelic frogfish *Histiophryne psychedelica* was recently described (2009) for the first time by Pietsch, Arnold, and Hall in the scientific journal *Copeia*, in which they described it as having "a remarkable pigment pattern of white swirling stripes", hence their use of the term psychedelic. The psychedelic frogfish has been known to reach a length of 15 centimetres (5.9 in) and the combination of camouflage and tight cavities in which it usually hides makes it virtually impossible to find one without overturning

rocks and coral. According to Andy Shorten, co-owner of the Maluku Divers diving facility where the fish was discovered, "Seeking out these fish is probably going to be like the Holy Grail of divers for a while." The psychedelic frogfish has so far been positively identified only at Ambon Island, Maluku province, Indonesia. It has been found in coral rubble, where it may be camouflaged from predators, though the location is primarily considered a "muck" dive with few corals in the area. The fish have so far been found in locations where the water is 5 to 7 metres (16 to 23 ft) deep, about 20 metres (66 ft) away from the shoreline. I

had the opportunity to observe it during a trip with some friends to the remote island of Ambon, also known as the Island of Spices, which was purposely organized to photograph this strange fish. It really is very difficult to see, it is endemic to the place and very few specimens that have been observed, so observations have been quite intermittent. We found it just in front of a villa, 10 meters from the beach and 3 meters deep, hidden in some rocks where it usually lives and camouflaged with its surroundings. Above our heads floated some small fishing boats and some garbage coming from the small village nearby". ●



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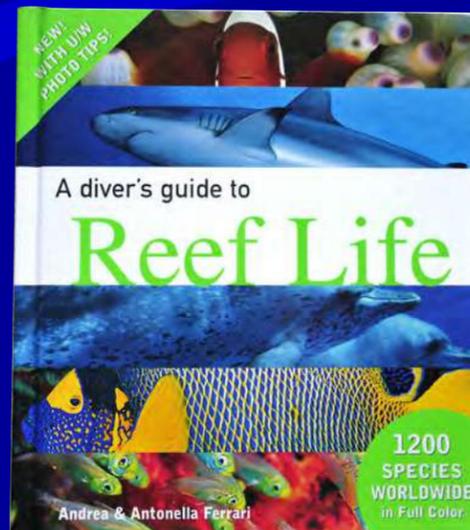
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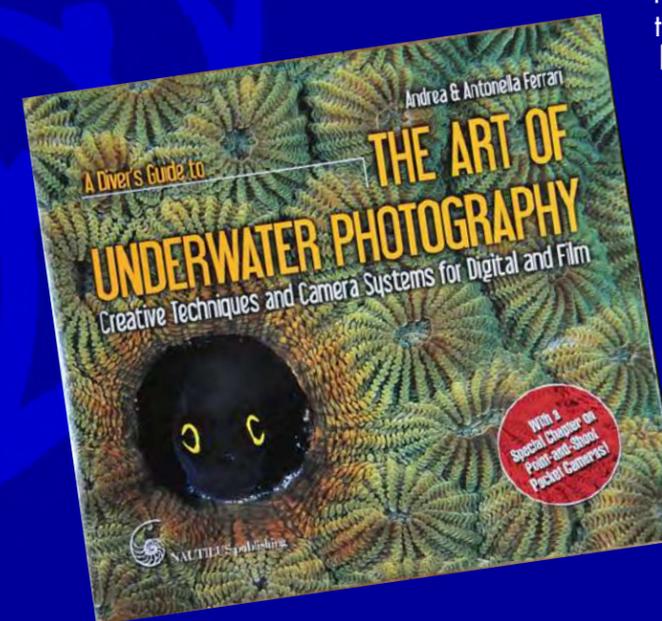
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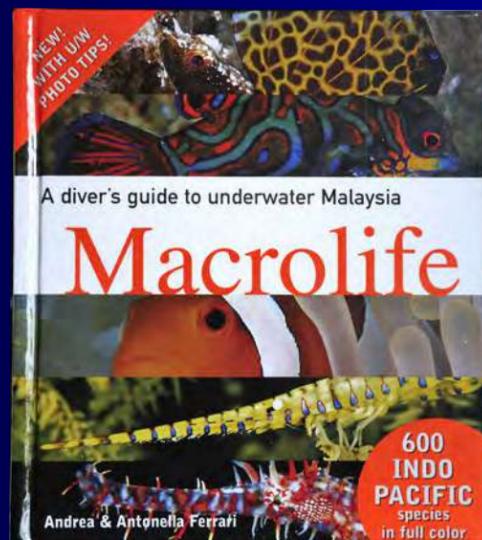
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