



# ANIMA MUNDI

*Adventures in Wildlife Photography*

Issue 34, Year 9 - April 2019

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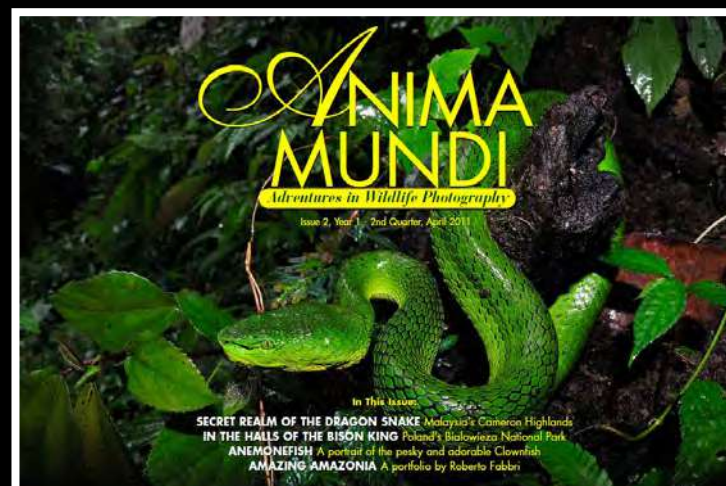
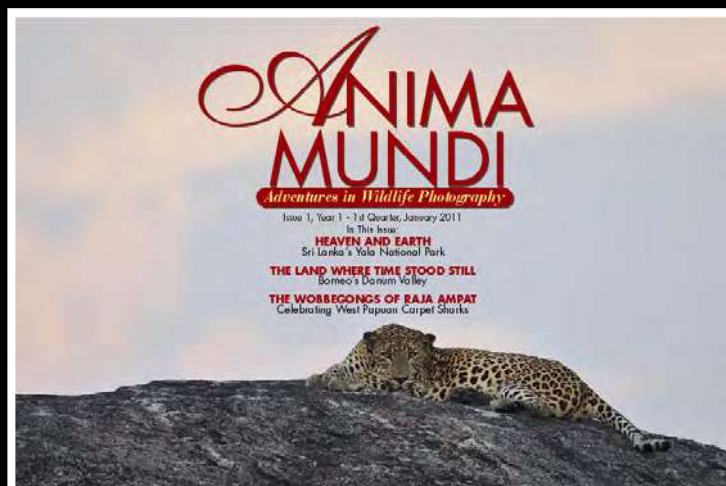
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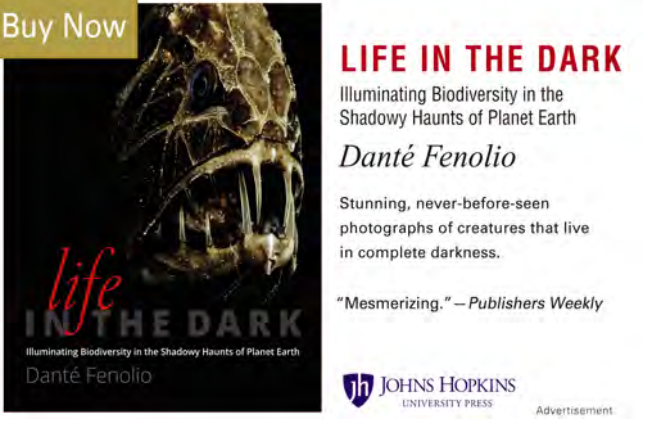
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Dear Andrea & Antonella,

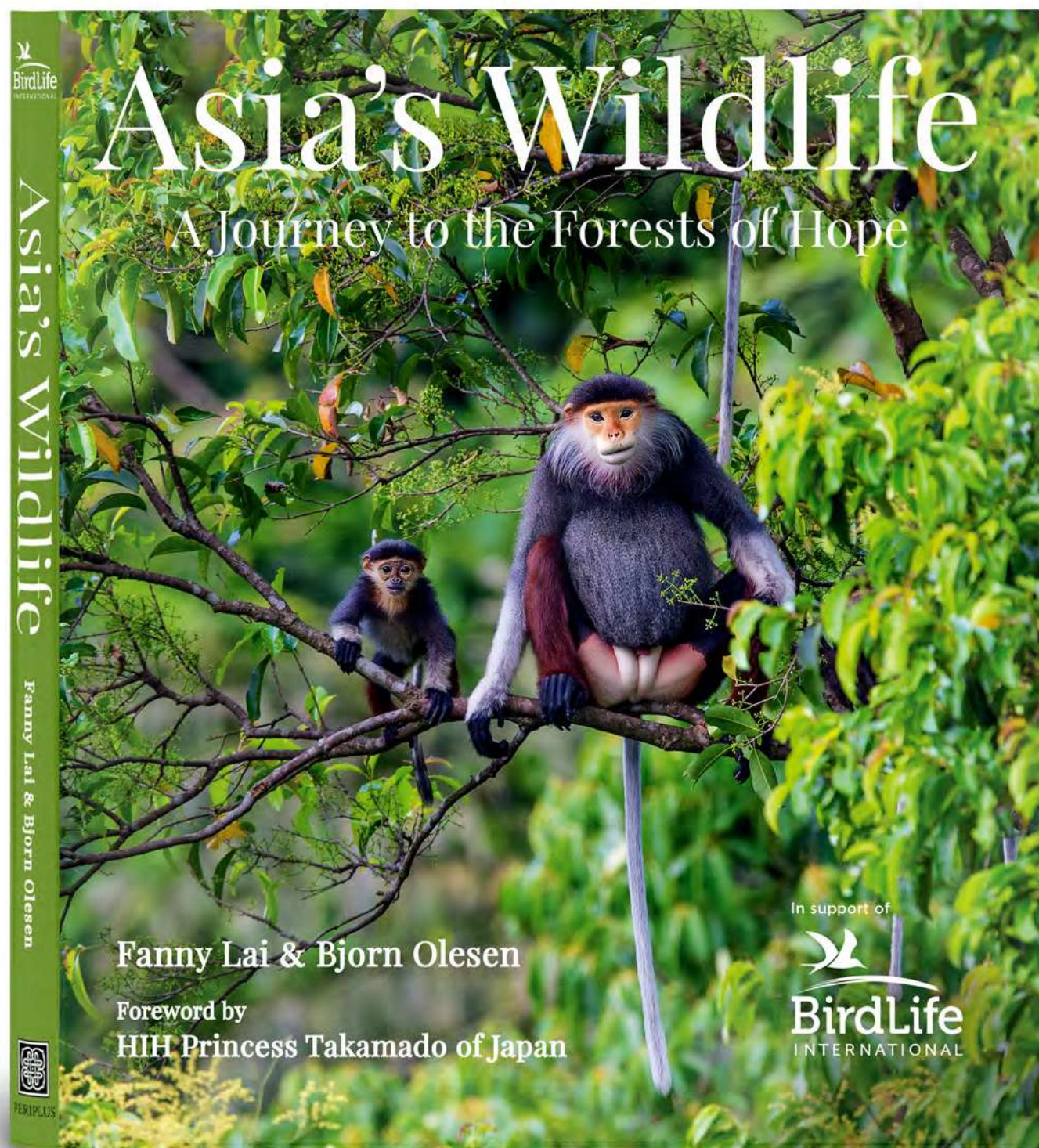
*I have just finished reading your latest edition of Anima Mundi and I was inspired to write and say how much I am enjoying your publication and following your adventures. My wife and dive/photo partner Cherie and I were so inspired by your feature on Yala National Park that we booked a Safari with Eco 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

Advertising on ANIMA MUNDI - Adventures in Wildlife Photography means reaching out and getting in personal contact with such people - passionate travellers, dedicated wildlife and nature photographers, world-famous field researchers. All sharing a common bond, all interested in serious, reliable information on wildlife and nature travelling and photographic workshops, trips and equipment. All waiting to hear from you!

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





## Asia's Wildlife: A Journey to the Forests of Hope

*'In these pages, we can read about eight forests in eight countries of Asia that we call forests of hope because of the love and commitment we have for them. The powerful photographs evoke feelings in me, and I suddenly realise that that is because Asia is my homeland. That we are blessed with such beautiful forests is a joy and a responsibility. But they are, of course, just examples of the miraculous riches that forests possess, and on this tiny planet we want all forests to be forests of hope.'*

*Hope is the life force we all share. Hope is the thing with feathers. It perches in our souls.'*

HHI Princess Takamado of Japan. Honorary President of BirdLife International.

*'The surprising range and breathtaking beauty of the animals so miraculously photographed in this excellent book are a powerful reminder of the need to protect these treasures before they are lost forever.'*

Dr. John van Wyhe, historian of science and one of the world's leading experts on Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace.

*'Close-up views of Endangered fauna in their natural habitats are difficult enough to obtain, but the breathtaking quality of the photography in this valuable documentation of Asia's forests makes this book highly recommended for both scientists and nature lovers alike.'*

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

*'These arresting portraits of living creatures from eight Asian forests remind us all that forests have value beyond our capacity to measure. Without forests we cannot dream. Without forests we cannot breathe. Without forests we cannot hope. Forests are forever, and their conservation is the human endeavour that represents the best hope of our own survival as a species. Forests of hope indeed!'*

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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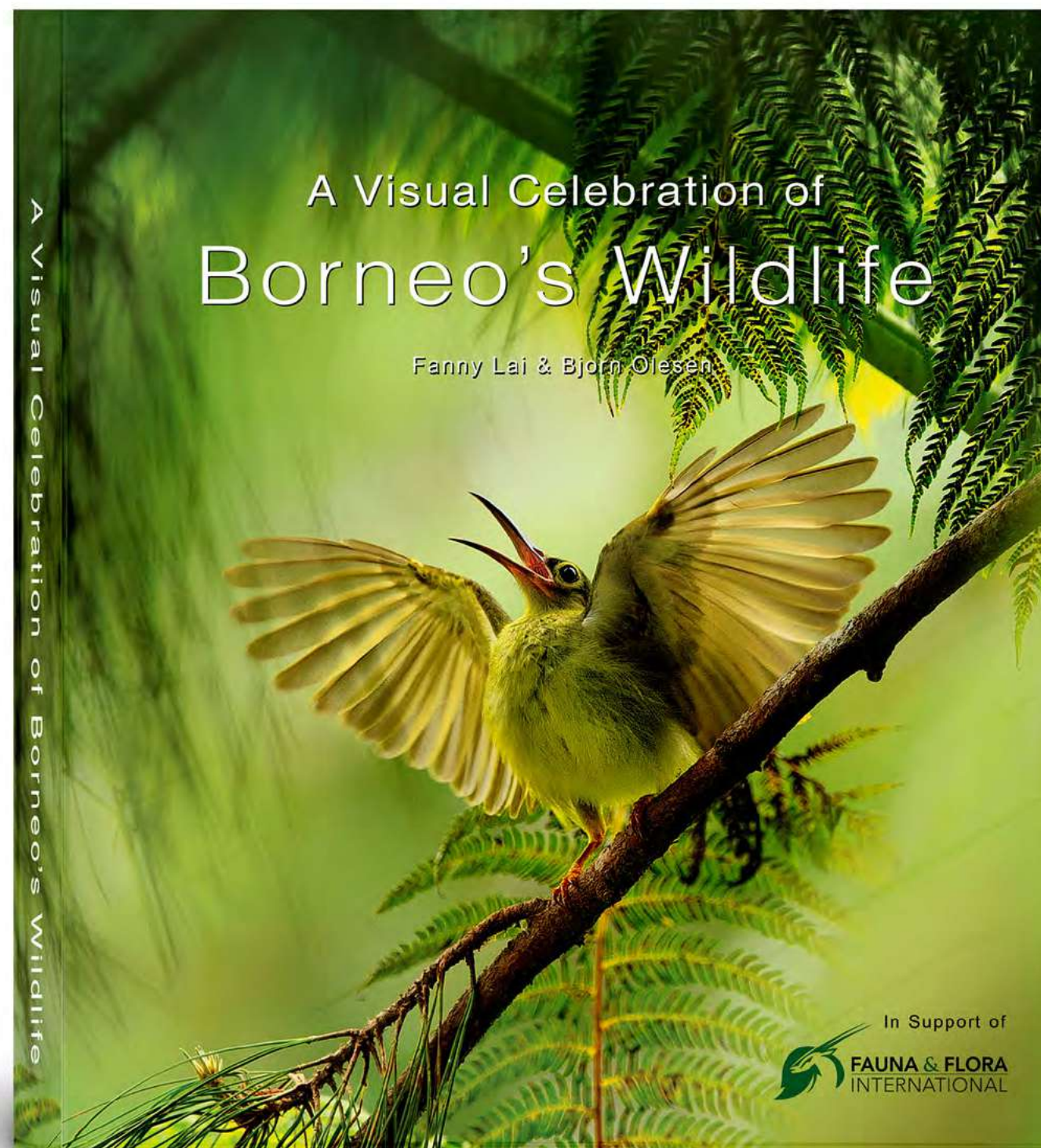
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*'If the great Victorian naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace could have seen this astonishingly beautiful book he would no doubt have declared it the next best thing to exploring Borneo oneself. I have never seen a book on Asian wildlife that so powerfully takes one's breath away with the turn of every page.'*

Dr. John van Wyhe, National University of Singapore, historian of science and leading expert on Alfred Wallace, author of *Dispelling the Darkness: Voyage in the Malay Archipelago and the Discovery of Evolution by Wallace and Darwin*.

All of the authors' royalties will be donated to [Fauna & Flora International](#)

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■ The majestic Alpine ibex *Capra ibex* is Gran Paradiso National Park's flag species - see our trip report from page 4.



# ANIMA MUNDI

*Adventures in Wildlife Photography*

## Mountain heights and ocean bottoms

Welcome to a 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 our own extensively illustrated trip report from Italy's Gran Paradiso National Park - a spectacular alpine protected area which we had the opportunity to visit several times during the course of the year thanks to our friend and guide **Luca Giordano** of **Wildlife Travels**. This is the mountain kingdom of the ibex and the chamois and a destination which should not be missed by any European wildlife photographer as it is perfectly safe, stunningly beautiful and very accessible.

From page 58 and on we present you instead with a photographic tribute to the birds to be encountered in the temperate humid forest of Ecuador's Guango, a little and absolutely lovely lodge nested in the cool foothills of the Andes. This is pure, unadulterated hummingbird heaven, offering unique opportunities to the serious bird photographer. We spent a few extraordina-

rily productive days there with our beloved friend and celebrated conservation photographer Lucas M. Bustamante of **Tropical Herping** - and we loved every minute of our stay!

On page 81 we then proudly feature **Alvaro Cubero**'s Personal Portfolio - this young but very determined and passionate wildlife photographer from Costa Rica offers some truly wonderful portraits conveying a very inspiring conservation message. Wish more young people were as passionate as you are, Alvaro!



We finally wrap our current issue from page 98 and following with a fascinating essay by our new contributor, underwater photographer **Aldo Galante** from Argentina, about the truly unique Sea dragons inhabiting the cold waters of Tasmania and South Australia - these are stunningly camouflaged and very interesting large relatives of the common seahorses.

And that is all for now - until July 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.  
Please drop us a line at  
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**ANIMA MUNDI**  
Adventures in Wildlife  
Photography  
is a Free Quarterly  
Online Magazine  
[www.animamundimag.com](http://www.animamundimag.com)

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■ The amazing Sword-billed  
hummingbird *Ensifera ensifera* is  
one of Guango's iconic species -  
see our article on page 58.





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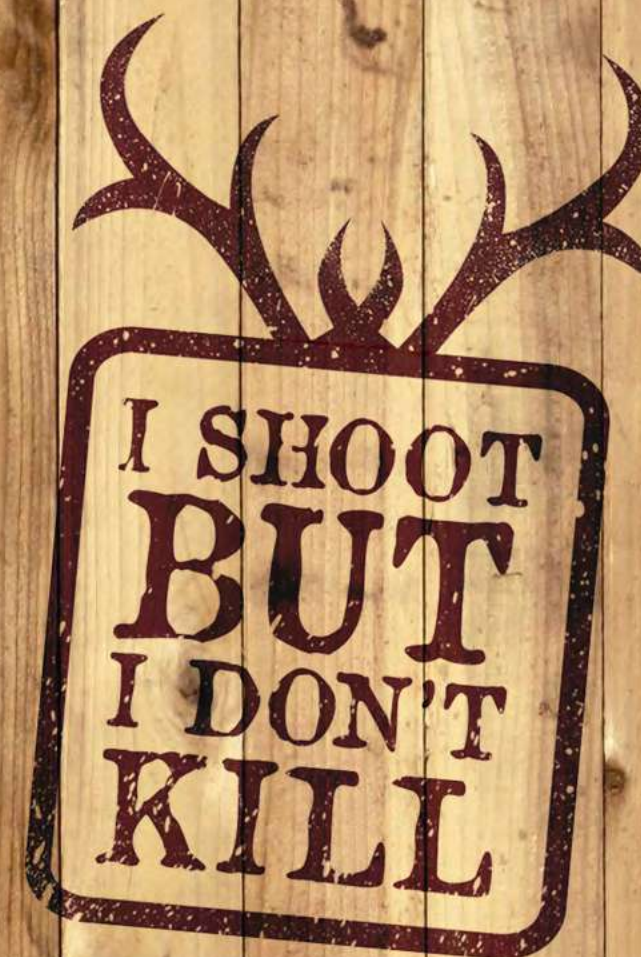
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GRAN PARADISO NATIONAL PARK

# FOUR SEASONS IN PARADISE

Italy's crown jewel among its protected areas  
is the stunning and yet accessible mountain  
kingdom of the ibex, alpine chamois  
and endangered bearded vulture



■ *Alpine ibex*  
*Capra ibex.*  
*On the opening*  
*spread a clump of*  
*Alpine anemone*  
*Anemone*  
*pulsatilla in bloom*  
*against the scenic*  
*background of the*  
*Lago del Serrù.*





TEXT BY ANDREA FERRARI and LUCA GIORDANO  
PHOTOS BY ANDREA & ANTONELLA FERRARI

*I*taly, the Country where we live, is rightly famous worldwide for many reasons such as art, history, food and culture - but sadly wildlife is not one of them. However, at the very least two of its National Parks deserve global recognition and world-class status: the Abruzzi and the Gran Paradiso, which is the subject of this issue's *On the Trail* story. This spectacular alpine area sited on the North-West precipitous mountain border between Italy and France is just a few hours' driving from our place, so this offered us the unique opportunity to visit it on several occasions at different times of the year

at a relatively low cost, enabling us to fully document its dazzling beauty during the coming and going of four seasons. From quiet, warm, sunny alpine meadows in summertime to icy, blizzard-blasted steep mountain slopes in winter, we were able to witness the National Park's spectacular landscapes and wonderful fauna in a variety of conditions. And the Gran Paradiso truly is a stunning destination - easily reached, comfortable to stay at, easily and safely trekked around, devoid of dangerous animals, seasonally greatly different and almost deserted of visitors at some times, and

*continued on page 8* ➤



■ *Alpine marmot*  
Marmota marmota  
keeping watch in  
a summer, flower-  
studded mountain  
meadow.



■ Alpine  
buttercups  
*Ranunculus  
montanus*  
in bloom on the  
slopes above  
Lago del Serrù,  
Ceresole Reale.





■ Soaring subadult  
bearded vulture  
or Lammergeyer  
*Gypaetus*  
*barbatus*.

last but not least easily photographed. Its wildlife is supremely confident due to its long - and lately peaceful - interaction with the human inhabitants of the mountain valleys, and if the number of species which can be sighted during the average visit is not exceedingly high, the ease of approaching most of the animals more than makes up for that. Add to the Park's assets exceedingly comfortable accommodation at every valley village, impeccably maintained and well mapped-out mountain trails and an abundance of mouth-watering food, and you'll see why the Gran Paradiso really deserves the legendary reputation it enjoys at home and why it really should get more visitors from abroad. Wildlife photographer and Gran Paradiso specialist Luca Giordano - who has been our guide during our visits to the Park - gives us more details: *"Turn after turn, the road climbs sinuous and steep. Warning signs on the sides of the road indicate the possible, sudden crossing of wild animals, inviting the driver to maintain a reduced cruising speed. Finally the little village of Cogne, with its charming wooden houses with characteristic slate roofs, is now in sight. We just reached the true heart of the Gran Paradiso National Park,*

*continued on page 10* ➤



■ Alpine marmot  
*Marmota marmota*  
basking by their  
burrow entrance  
on a mountain  
meadow.





established in 1922 as the oldest Italian National Park. However, the history of this incredible protected area, which covers five different valleys of Piedmont and Aosta Valley, began many years before, at the time of "The Hunter King". This nickname, that the inhabitants of the mountains gave to Italian king Vittorio Emanuele II, leaves no doubt about the activities that His Majesty enjoyed the most, when he came to visit these mountains. In fact, from the second half of the 1800s, in love with this wild corner of nature, the king visited the Royal Hunting Reserve that he established in this area several times, in order to collect trophies that he then used to decorate the opulent rooms of his fortresses. Even today, in the magnificent castle of Sarre, it is still possible to admire thousands of alpine ibex's horns hanging on the walls, lifeless memories of those ancient deeds.

### FROM HUNTING RESERVE TO PARK

Fortunately for the ibex, those difficult times are gone and the splendid ungulate, now protected by strict

*continued on page 13* ➤



Ermine or Stoat stoat ■  
Mustela erminea in  
summer livery (photo by  
Luca Giordano).





Left, Alpine ibex *Capra ibex*; right top, a rare migrant in mid-flight, the Griffon vulture *Gyps fulvus*; right bottom, Alpine chaffinch *Montifringilla nivalis*.





Alpine meadows in summer offer a dazzling flowerbeds display: here white Alpine anemone *Anemone pulsatilla* in the foreground, with yellow Alpine buttercup *Ranunculus montanus* and blue Gentian *Gentiana verna* in the background.





legislation, has become the undisputed symbol of the Gran Paradiso National Park. Nevertheless, it would be dangerous to lower the guard: in various circumstances over the centuries, in fact, ibexes have found themselves on the verge of extinction. The low genetic variability characterising the population and resulting from these continuous demographic collapses, obliges researchers to keep monitoring this unique species: the sudden and unexpected appearance of a contagious disease with a high mortality rate could in fact jeopardize the survival of the species. A census carried out in 2013 within the Gran Paradiso revealed the presence of 3,000 individuals. A considerable number, but if we compare the data to the one collected in 1993, when 5,000 ibexes were counted, we can't stop asking ourselves the reasons behind the thinning that occurred over the last two decades. There are many theories

*continued on page 17* ➤







■ Left, a subadult Alpine ibex *Capra ibex* demonstrates its unique prowess as a mountain climber; right, melting ice in summertime originating a scenic waterfall.





A bachelor group of  
Alpine ibex *Capra ibex*  
resting in the sun in  
summertime.







■ Far left,  
adult male  
Alpine ibex;  
*Capra ibex*;  
left, subadult  
Bearded vulture  
or Lammergeyer  
*Gypaetus*  
*barbatus*.



■ Red fox  
*Vulpes vulpes*  
in summertime  
(photo by Luca  
Giordano).



trying to provide an explanation for this umpteenth decline, but apparently the most accredited one is linked to climate change. A marked decrease in the winter survival rate of the cubs seems to be at the base of the problem. At the end of June, when the small ibexes are born, the grass they feed on has more and more often been exposed to the light of the sun for too many weeks, due to a lack of snow cover. The reduced quality of this scorched forage does not allow the baby ibexes to accumulate the energy they need to face the cold, freezing winter, which more and more often kills them before they reach their first year. The sexual dimorphism in alpine ibexes is very evident: while adult males can weigh up to 120 kilograms, females rarely exceed 40. Moreover, while the horns of female specimens appear thin and not particularly developed, those of males assume a pronounced curvature and can reach a meter in length. Like all goats, ibexes are endowed with hollow and perennial horns, which keep growing every year thanks to the production of new tissue at the base. This process is usually interrupted in September by the action of hormones, that cause the appearance of growth rings on the horns of the animals, revealing each individual's age.

continued on page 22 ➤



■ Alpine marmot  
*Marmota marmota*  
by the entrance  
of its burrow  
on a mountain  
meadow.





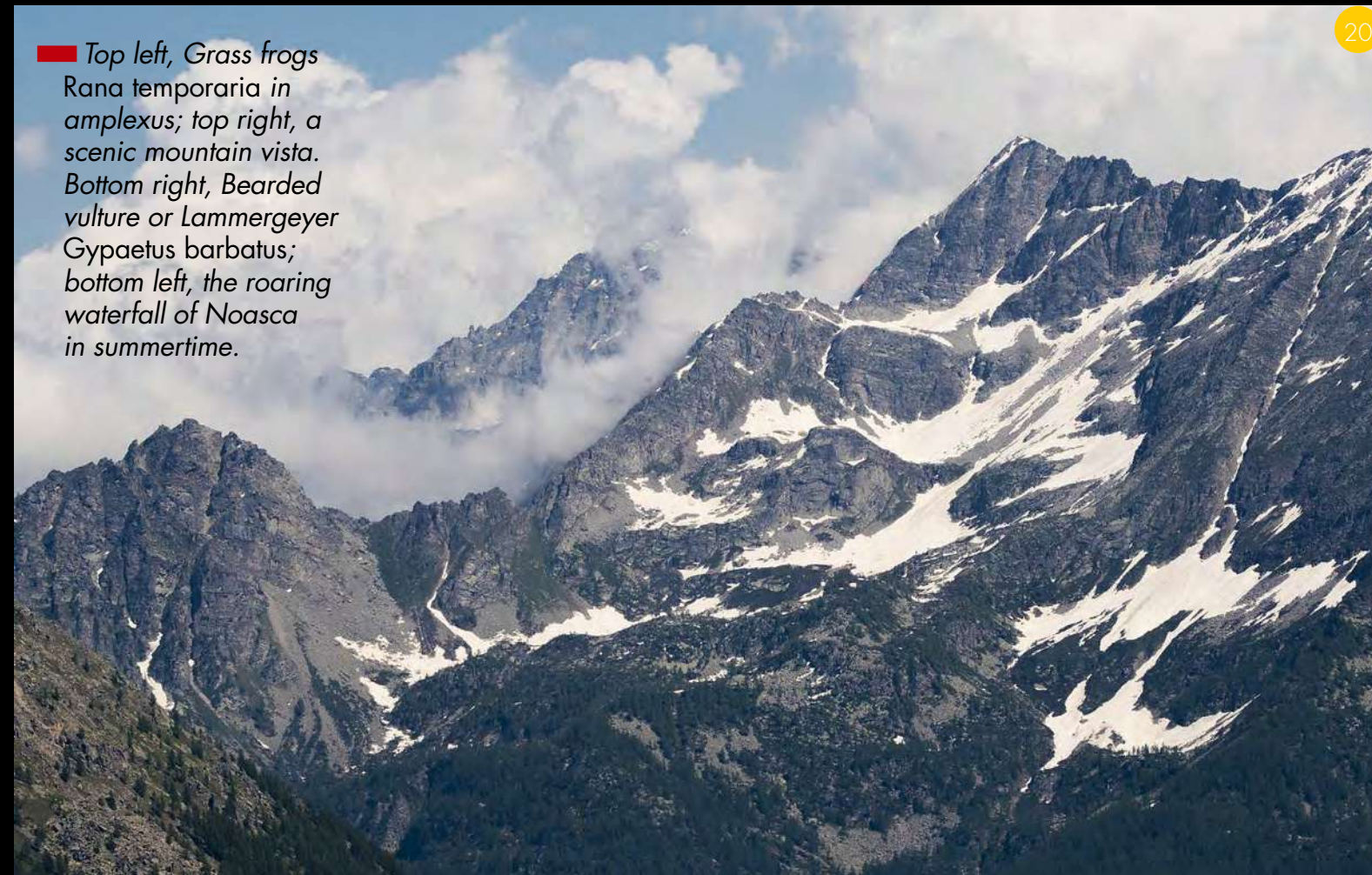


Spectacular alpine lakes come back to life during summer thaws with the melting of ice and snow at the Pian del Nivolet.





■ Top left, Grass frogs  
*Rana temporaria* in  
amplexus; top right, a  
scenic mountain vista.  
Bottom right, Bearded  
vulture or Lammergeyer  
*Gypaetus barbatus*;  
bottom left, the roaring  
waterfall of Noasca  
in summertime.






■ In summertime the alpine heights of the Gran Paradiso National Park offer spectacular panoramas.






Alpine chamois   
*Rupicapra rupicapra* in  
the first colors of autumn.

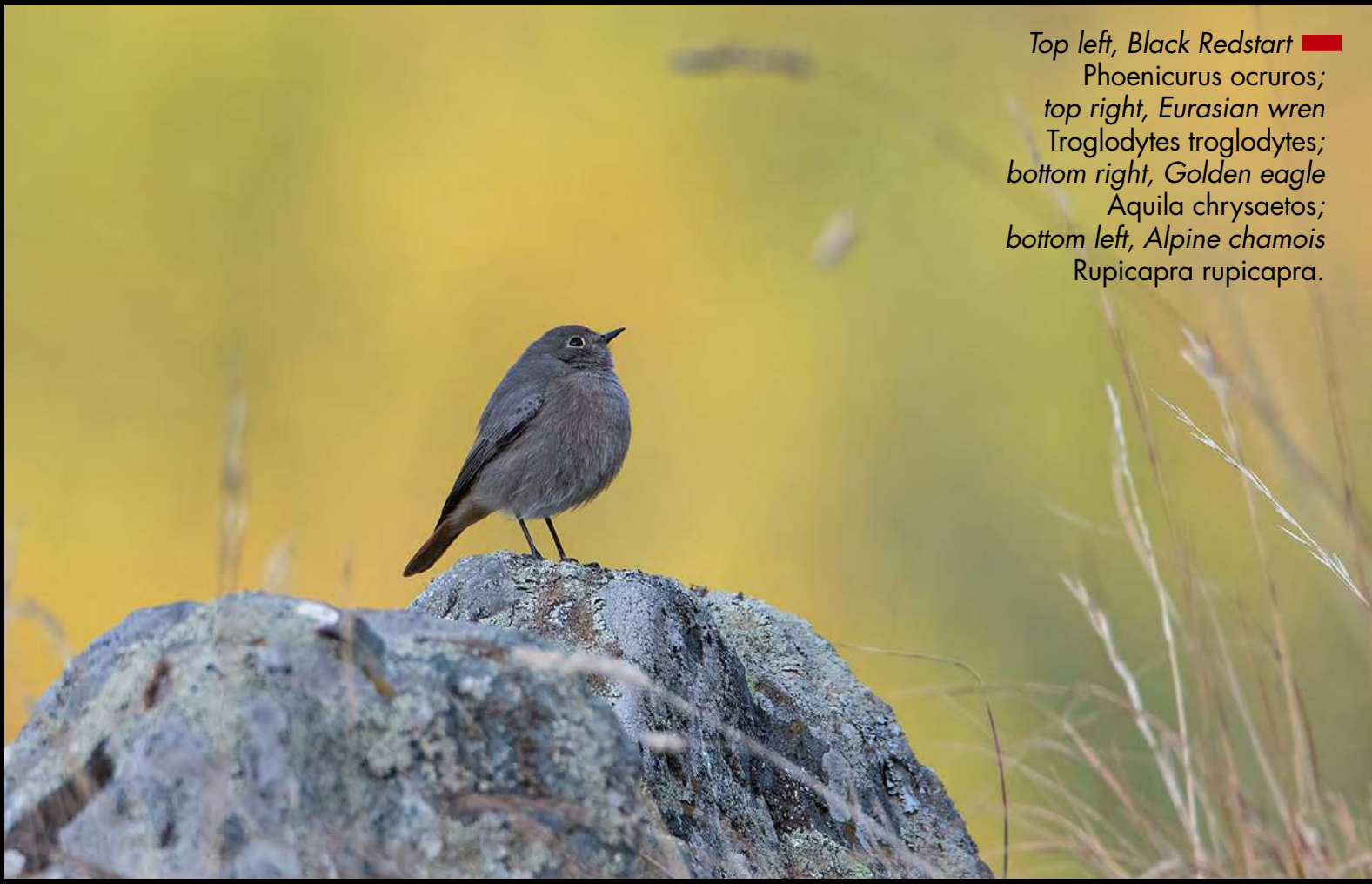
**KING OF THE  
ROCKY SLOPES**

Another fascinating ungulate shares ibex's habitat, contending for the rank of king of the crags. We are talking about the Alpine chamois, forged by millions of years of evolution to become the lord of the rocks, a perfect climbing machine. Each of its limbs is provided with two fingers covered with a hoof, an extraordinary climbing tool with an outer ridge and a fleshy pad that ensures perfect adherence to the ground. Two more fingers called spurs, now regressed, are also essential to make the chamois move confidently on vertical rock faces. The speed and the confidence with which this ungulate moves, however, is not only related to the peculiar characteristics of its paws. In fact, also the circulatory system plays a prominent role in this sense. The red blood cells of these animals, twice as numerous as those found in human blood, allow them to sustain sudden and incredible efforts even at high altitudes, where oxygen is scarce.

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Top left, Black Redstart   
Phoenicurus ocrurus;  
top right, Eurasian wren  
Troglodytes troglodytes;  
bottom right, Golden eagle  
Aquila chrysaetos;  
bottom left, Alpine chamois  
Rupicapra rupicapra.





## A VARIETY OF SPECIES

30 other species of mammals, as well as 101 species of birds, share with ibexes and chamois the daily struggle for life in the Gran Paradiso National Park, that becomes a particularly harsh habitat during the winter season. While ibexes and chamois contrast the low temperatures by changing their thin summer coat with a thicker and darker one which helps them retain the warmth of the sun, the Ermine stoat, the Mountain hare and the Rock ptarmigan, thanks to a surprising change of colour, become almost totally white, trying to better camouflage in the surrounding environment now dominated by a blinding coating of snow.

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In late summer and early autumn the Gran Paradiso mountain massif offers colorful, dramatic opportunities to the landscape photographer.





■ Alpine chamois  
*Rupicapra  
rubicapra*  
in a typically  
colorful autumn  
landscape.








Far left and left, dazzling autumnal colors and patterns; right, Red or Eurasian Red squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris*.



An aerial photograph of a vast, blue-tinged glacier flowing down a mountain slope. The glacier's surface is heavily crevassed and textured. In the upper right, a dark, rocky mountain ridge is visible. In the lower left, a small, dark mountain hut is visible on a rocky outcrop, providing a sense of scale for the immense size of the glacier.

Truly gigantic glaciers are found at altitude - compare to the size of the mountain hut at the lower left corner for reference.





■ Left, a fully mature and quite imposing male Alpine ibex *Capra ibex* in autumn; right, one of the many waterfalls cascading down the steep mountain slopes in late summer and early autumn.





## OF MOUNTAINS AND MARMOTS

The case of the Alpine marmot is different. During the coldest months this large rodent hibernates, gradually consuming the fat deposits stored in summer. Marmots are the largest Italian representatives of the Sciuridae family, which in Italy includes another native member only: the Red squirrel. Marmots live in family groups and never move too far away from their underground burrows, which represent a perfect escape from predators such as the Golden eagle. The hypogeum shelters used by marmots in summer are shallow and provided with many entrances, while the winter ones are characterized by a single long access tunnel that leads to a spacious room, where thick layers of hay act as a natural thermal insulator. During winter season marmots are able to decrease their body temperature from 35 to 5 degrees Celsius and to reduce their heart rhythm from 130 to 15 beats per minute. An extraordinary adaptation, which allows them to waste as little energy as possible and to wait for the arrival of spring without having to feed. Anyway, dangers for marmots do not arrive just from the sky. Another predator walks around the mountains in search for a inattentive marmot, but it has no curved bill or long claws. It has triangular ears, capable of picking up the most subdued of noises, a nose

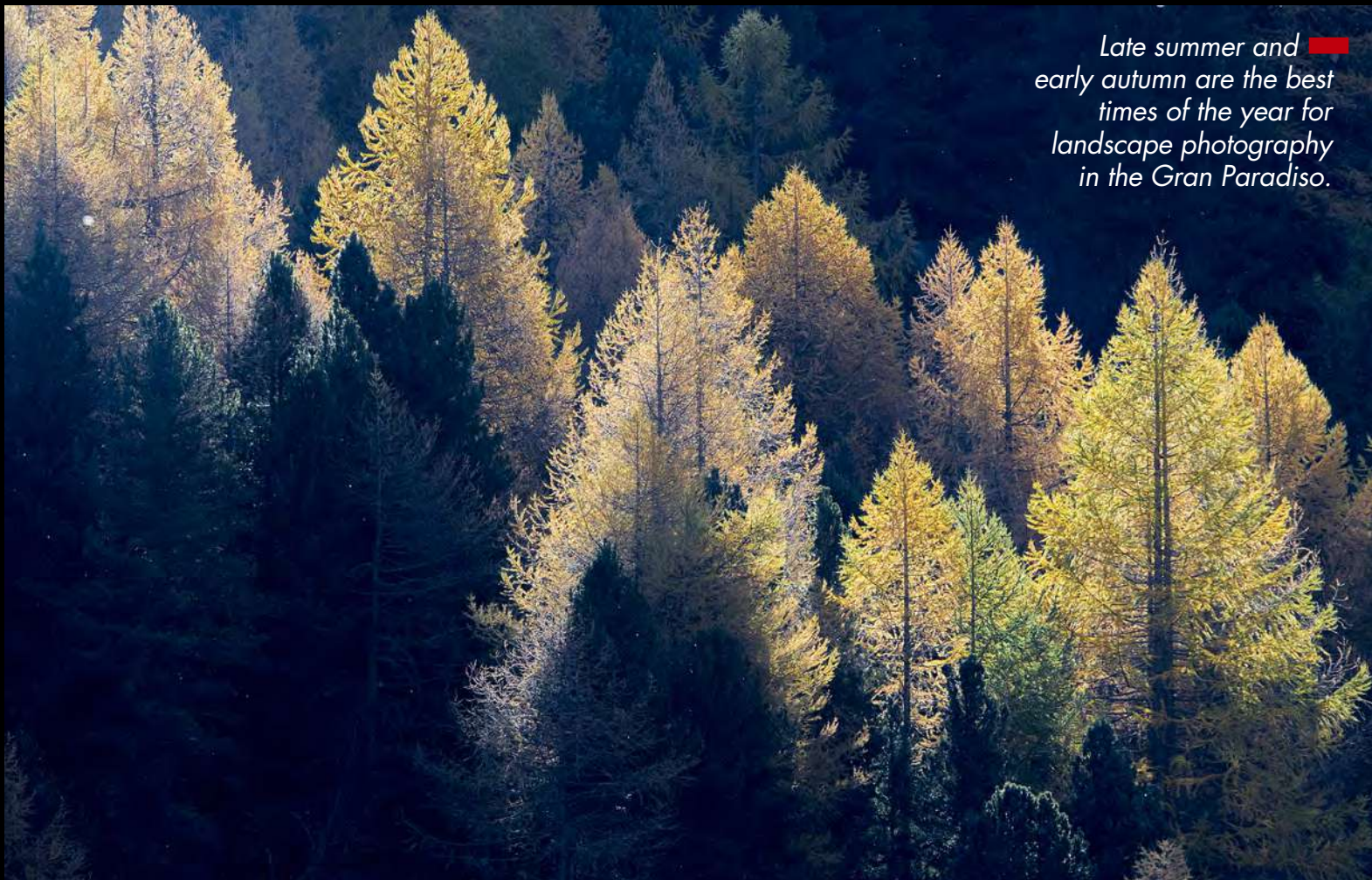
**continued on page 31** ➤

The Red or  
Eurasian red squirrel  
*Sciurus vulgaris* is a  
fast-moving, shy,  
very active and  
difficult subject to  
photograph.





Late summer and  
early autumn are the best  
times of the year for  
landscape photography  
in the Gran Paradiso.





with an extraordinary sense of smell and bright eyes capable of seeing in the thickest darkness, instead. We are talking about the Red fox, a small, agile and adaptable animal, that has all the necessary skills to survive on the Italian Alps, where urbanisation and both climate and geomorphological harsh conditions leave no much space for large specialized carnivores, such as the bear and the wolf. The fox's diet includes small mammals, birds, carrions, invertebrates and fruit: nevertheless, this omnivorous opportunist does not disdain to supplement its diet with anything it is able to find inside the trash bins or with the unhealthy food provided by unwary tourists.

continued on page 34 ➤



Alpine chamois  
*Rupicapra rupicapra*.





Alpine chamois   
*Rupicapra rupicapra*  
between two images of  
the stunning autumnal  
landscapes offered by  
the Gran Paradiso.





■ *The Devil in the Woods - a male Alpine ibex Capra ibex must have been an almost supernatural sight to mountain villagers in ancient times.*








■ Left, a beautiful late summer waterfall; right, an Alpine ibex *Capra ibex* shows its prowess as a mountain climber negotiating with ease an almost vertical slope.

## PEOPLE MAKING THE DIFFERENCE

Luckily for the foxes, there are actually people who spend their working days trying to help them not to get bad habits like these. Under dark green jacket, often slightly hunched by the weight of the backpack, the 58 guards of the Gran Paradiso National Park walk around 71,000 hectares of territory monitoring the animals and promoting useful public education. Felice Berthod was among the first who dedicated their lives to this delicate and important role. Once a poacher, he joined the team of guards under the management of the illuminated director Videsott, finding his own personal redemption and the inner peace that a youth of war and deprivation had not allowed him to discover before. Although the tools supplied to the modern guards are much more sophisticated than those of the past and despite the fact that long nights chasing hunters are not on the agenda any more, the passion of the former guards still lives in the new levers. They live out there on the field, regardless of the snow, the rain, the wind or the burning sun, protecting this natural jewel of the Alps in order to give us the opportunity to enjoy its colours and its unique biodiversity in all the four seasons". ●





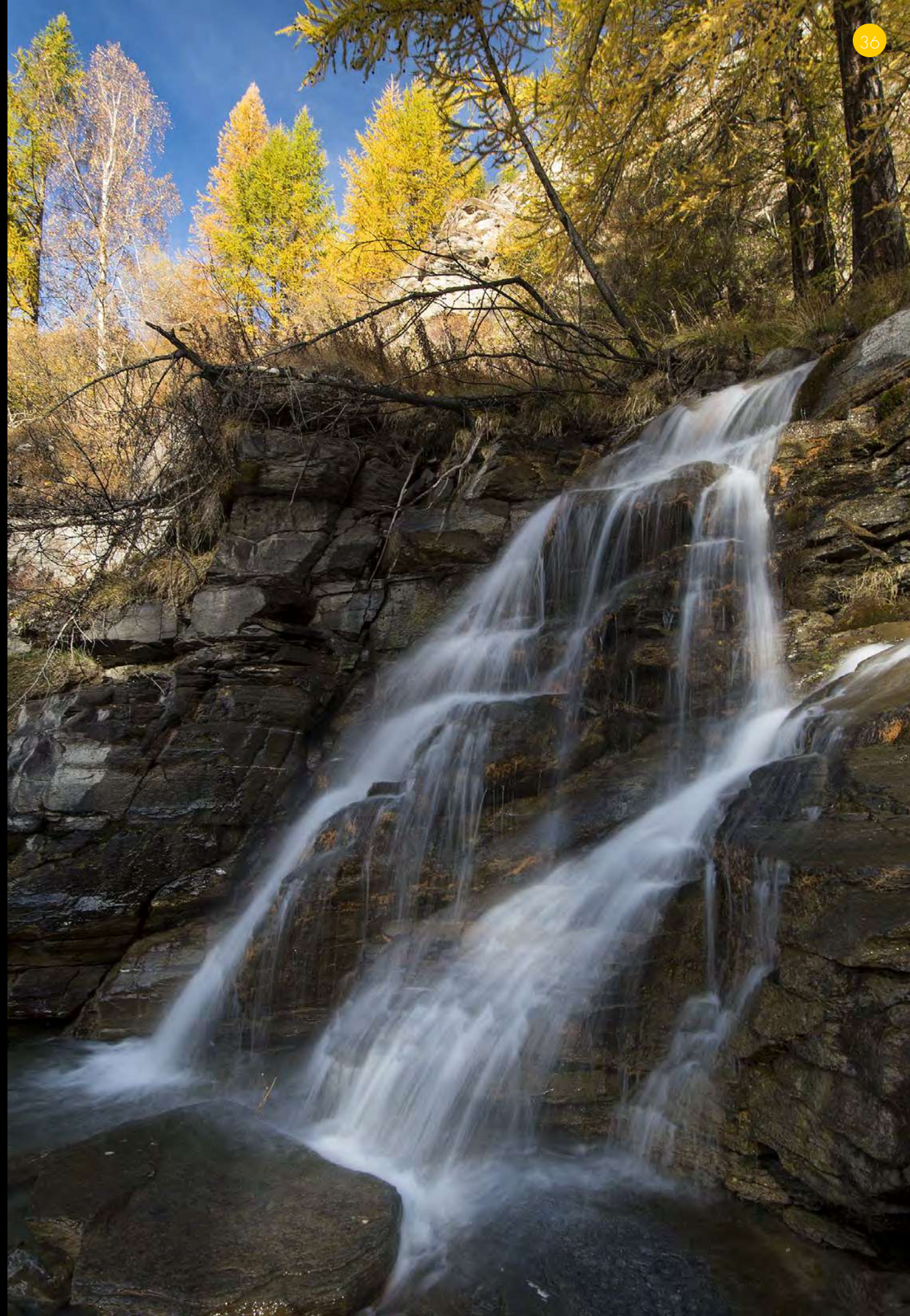
A photograph of a majestic, snow-covered mountain peak, likely in the French Alps, bathed in the soft, pinkish light of dawn. The mountain's rugged, rocky slopes are partially covered in white snow, with dark, jagged peaks visible. In the foreground, a dense forest of evergreen trees, possibly spruce or fir, covers the lower slopes, their dark green needles contrasting with the lighter tones of the mountain. The sky above is a deep, clear blue, indicating a clear morning. The overall scene is serene and awe-inspiring.

*Ice-clad mountain  
massifs are bathed  
in pink at dawn.  
This is a view  
from the small  
village of Cogne.*





Left, Alpine chamois *Rupicapra rupicapra*. Right, waterfall in early autumn, before the freezing cold of winter sets in.






Adult male ■  
European roe deer  
*Capreolus capreolus*  
in velvet, at the coming  
of winter and  
the first snowfalls.

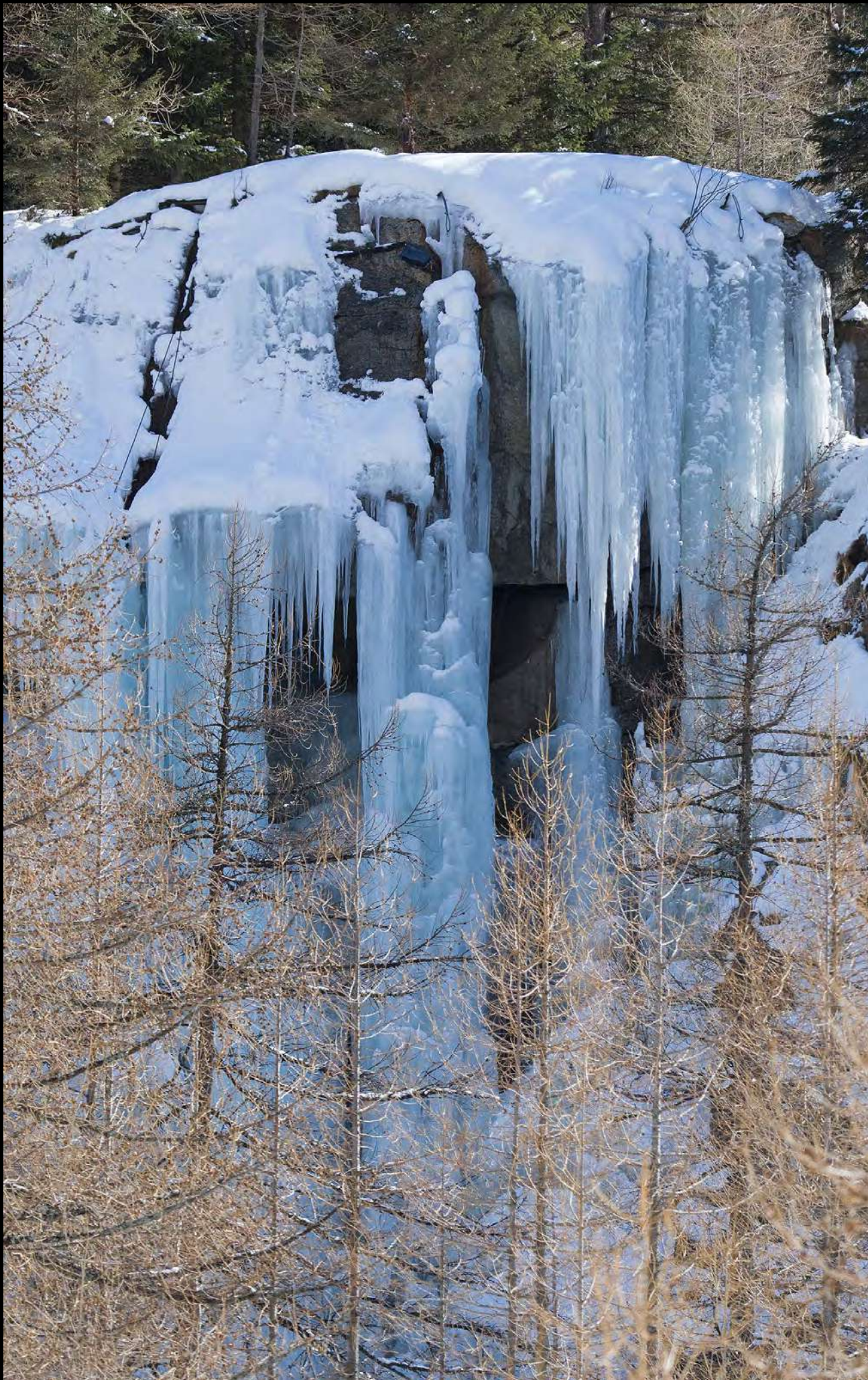




Alpine chough   
*Pyrrhocorax graculus* in winter  
landscape, Valle dell'Orco,  
Gran Paradiso National Park.







Left, the spectacular sight offered by iced waterfalls in winter time; right, the remains of an Alpine chamois *Rupicapra rupicapra* have provided much-needed nourishment to Red foxes, Bearded vultures and probably wolves.









The Bearded vulture or ■ Lammergeyer *Gypaetus barbatus* is a gigantic and sadly severely endangered bird. It has been successfully reintroduced in the Park where three-four pairs are currently residing.



A photograph of an Alpine chamois standing on a rocky outcrop. The chamois has dark brown fur, a white face, and small, dark horns. It is looking towards the camera. The background consists of bare, brown tree branches against a clear blue sky. The chamois is standing on a dark, mossy rock, with a patch of snow visible to its right.

*Alpine chamois*   
*Rupicapra rupicapra in a  
crisp winter landscape.*



Severe snow blizzards ■  
occur very often in winter,  
and the risk of dangerously  
blinding white-outs is always  
present when trekking, as this  
image of an Alpine chamois  
*Rupicapra rupicapra*  
in a snowfall clearly shows.





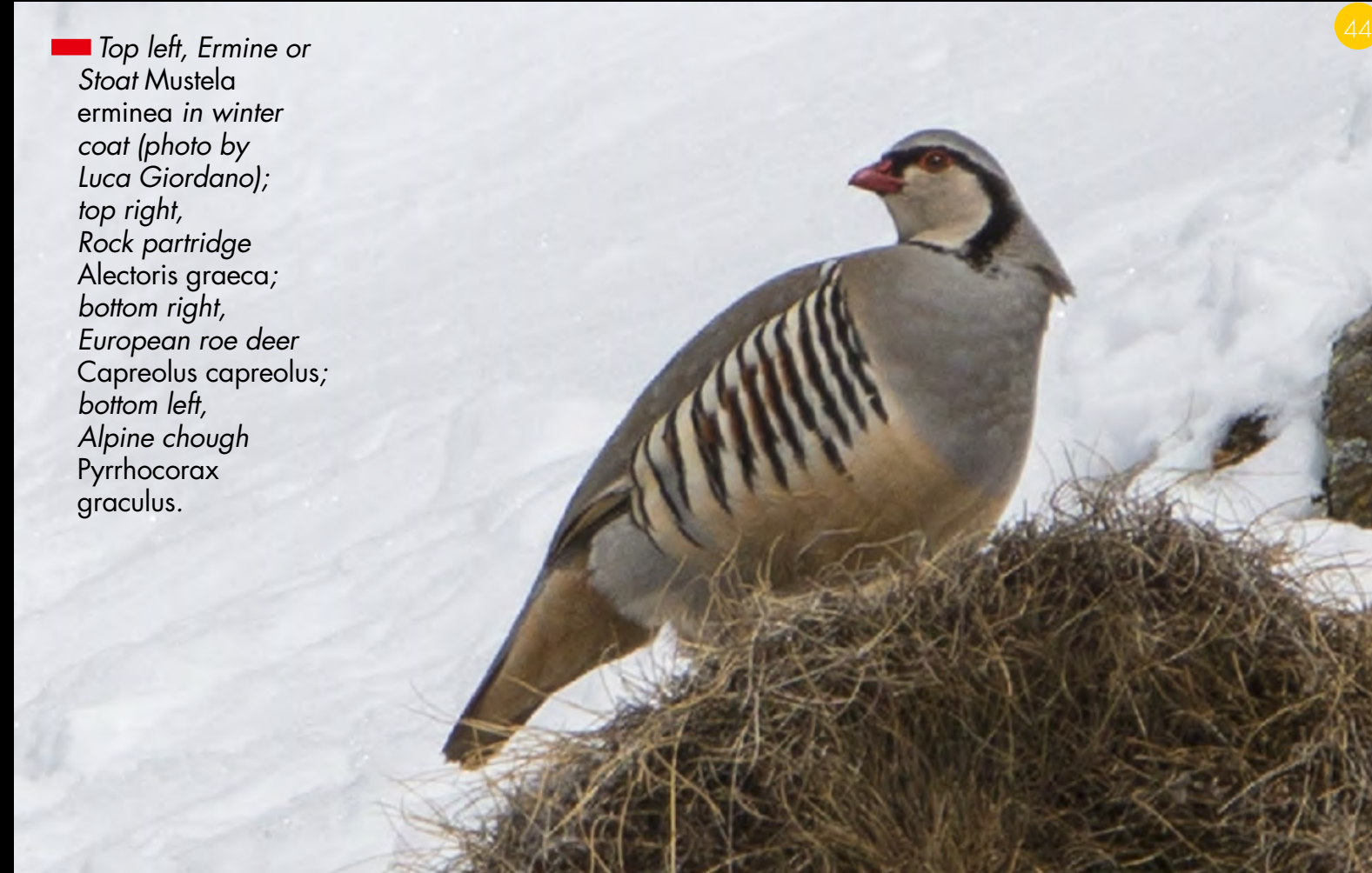


■ Iced-up, snow-clad landscapes have a magical atmosphere about them in the Gran Paradiso valleys.





■ Top left, Ermine or Stoat *Mustela erminea* in winter coat (photo by Luca Giordano); top right, Rock partridge *Alectoris graeca*; bottom right, European roe deer *Capreolus capreolus*; bottom left, Alpine chough *Pyrrhocorax graculus*.





■ A beautiful  
portrait of  
a Red fox  
*Vulpes vulpes*  
in a snowy winter  
landscape (photo  
by Luca Giordano).








Trekking and photographing in winter requires the use of snowshoes to negotiate the snow-covered terrain.





A photograph of an Alpine chamois standing on a snowy slope under a clear blue sky, framed by bare trees.

*Alpine chamois* ■  
*Rupicapra rupicapra*  
*in a peaceful winter*  
*landscape.*



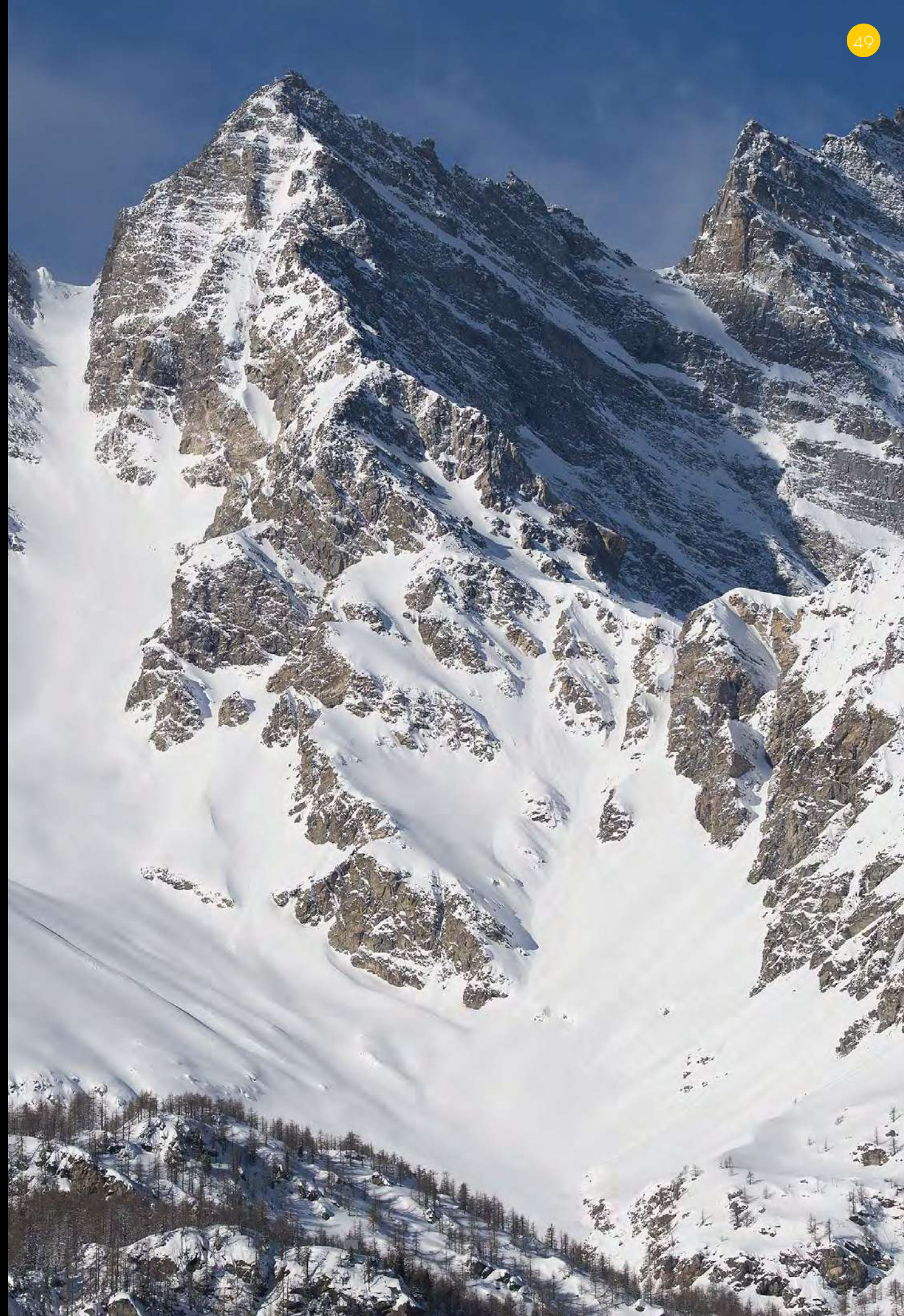
■ Visiting the Gran  
Paradiso during  
winter offers  
stunning vistas  
and wonderful  
landscape  
photographic  
opportunities.







■ *Left, Alpine chamois *Rupicapra rupicapra* grazing in a blizzard; right, the majestic snow-clad peaks of the Gran Paradiso National Park Alps.*







■ Alpine chough  
*Pyrrhocorax  
graculus* feeding  
on ibex carcass in  
winter landscape,  
Valle dell'Orco.  
Winter is an  
extremely harsh  
time for ibex and  
chamois, and  
many fall victims  
to ruinous falls  
or avalanches.





■ Left, Alpine chamois *Rupicapra rupicapra*; right, the beautiful sight offered by iced waterfalls in winter time.

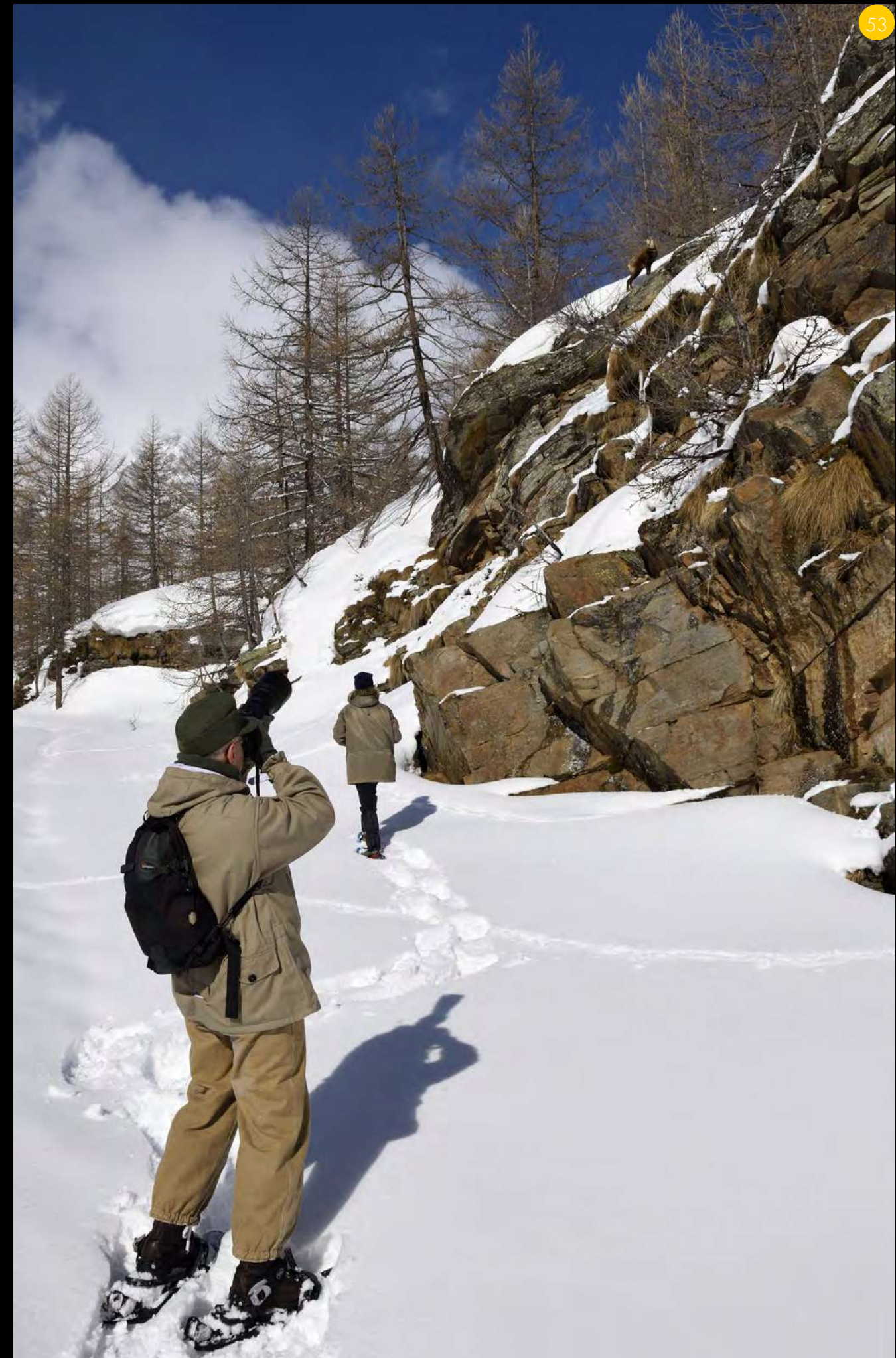








■ Alpine chamois *Rupicapra rupicapra* under a snowfall; right, photographing another individual on a sunny winter day. Notice the use of snowshoes, a necessity in deep snow.








Left, winter ■  
landscape; right,  
Alpine chamois  
*Rupicapra rupicapra*  
on a mountain slope  
during a blizzard.





Avalanches   
and snowslides present a  
constant danger to trekkers on  
sunny winter days, and one  
has to keep a careful eye on  
the coming day's atmospheric  
conditions and weather  
forecasts.





# At-a-glance travel guide

COUNTRY OF DESTINATION: ITALY



## 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:** International or domestic flights will land in Turin or Milan. From there it's a pleasant car or bus drive on scenic highways to Aosta, the last major city before entering the valleys of the Gran Paradiso National Park and their quaint little villages.

**MEANS OF TRANSPORT:** The protected area can be explored by car on paved roads first (as in most Italian National Parks the area is relatively heavily populated and surprisingly built-up, with extensive farming and even small industrial activities going on in the villages dotting the valleys) and then on foot, trekking on a wide-ranging network of well-marked, impeccably maintained mountain trails.

**CURRENCY:** European Euro.

**ACCOMODATION:** The area offers a huge number of widely different options, from inexpensive small family-run hostels and camping sites to upscale, luxurious hotels. As a general rule, accomodation on the Piedmont side of the Park is less expensive (and less attractive) than that on the Val d'Aosta side, which also caters to the fashionable winter sports crowds. We can safely recommend staying at Bellevue Hotel, in expensive, glitzy Cogne (<http://www.hotelbellevue.it/en/>) and at La Pietra Felice (<http://www.lapietrafelice.it/en/>) in quiet, sleepy Introd. Besides the wide choice offered by the

villages which are going to be used as "base camps" and starting points for the daily excursions, the Park offers several reasonably comfortable mountain huts or *rifugi* for trekkers and mountain climbers spending the night at greater altitudes, such as the famous Rifugio Vittorio Sella, Rifugio Chabod or Rifugio Vittorio Emanuele II. Keep in mind that these are all heavily booked a long time in advance during the peak tourist season in summer.

**FOOD:** Italian food is rightly famous all over the world, being noted for its dazzling regional variations and the creative use of fresh ingredients. Local recipes make large use of cheese, potatoes,



## *A National Park where humans and wildlife coexist side by side*



mushrooms, dried meats, venison and rye bread, to be accompanied by a variety of spectacular and robust wines, some even dating back to Roman times (Aosta Valley is also a winemaking region, with the highest elevated vineyards in Europe). When in Cogne do not miss having dinner at La Brasserie du Bon Bec.

**LANGUAGE:** Italian, French and English.

**WORRIES:** None as long as you follow the Park's rules. Remember however this is a true mountain area which you will be exploring on your own, so always keep a very careful eye on weather conditions and daily weather forecasts and always let your hotel *concierge* know where you'll be going and for how long. Emergency medevac helicopters with highly trained and very experienced personnel are on permanent standby.

**HEALTH:** No problems whatsoever. Standards of hygiene everywhere are absolutely stunning and there are no bugs to worry about.

**CLIMATE:** Standard European mountain climate, with severe winters (heavy snowfalls, blizzards, freezing temperatures), pleasantly mild springs and autumns, and warm, sunny summers. It is best to avoid visiting the Park at the peak of the summer holidays season in July-August, when visitors are literally everywhere, and if at all possible plan to visit during the week to avoid the weekend crowds.

**BESIDES:** Val d'Aosta is a mountainous area in North-Western Italy. It is the smallest, least populous and least densely populated region of the Country. This land is extremely rich in history: many ancient Roman ruins and numerous medieval castles represent fascinating tourist attractions, while a

charming nature characterizes all the territory. Countless historical sites dot the countryside, most notably **Fort Bard**, a fortified complex built in the 19th century by the House of Savoy; **Issogne Castle**, a residence of the Renaissance noteworthy for its fountain in the form of pomegranate tree and its highly decorated portico, a rare example of medieval painting with its frescoed cycle of scenes of daily life from the late Middle Ages; **Verres Castle**, a fortified 14th-century building and one of the most impressive from the Middle Ages in the area, built as a military fortress by Yblet de Challant; **Fenis Castle**, one of the most famous castles in Aosta Valley; many ancient Roman attractions in Aosta city centre, such as the Foro Romano, Arco di Augusto and Porta Pretoria; and **Sarre Castle**, a magical fortress which was renovated and used by King of Italy Victor Emanuel II during his hunting expeditions in Gran Paradiso National Park. ●



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*Pinnochio Lizard*



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ECUADOR'S GUANGO LODGE

# HUMMINGBIRD HEAVEN

Sited in the Andean foothills and close to Quito, this beautiful temperate forest private property is a destination not to be missed by hummingbird lovers





Guango's mountainous, cool, temperate forests in the Andean foothills - a veritable paradise for orchids and hummingbirds. On the opening spread, an in-flight portrait of the stunning Sword-billed hummingbird *Ensifera ensifera*, a rare species which is seen regularly on the lodge's grounds.





TEXT BY ANDREA FERRARI  
PHOTOS BY ANDREA & ANTONELLA FERRARI

Guango Lodge, located at 2,700 meters above sea level, is a charming tourist facility on the Ecuadorian eastern slope of the Andes, surrounded by a 300-hectare private reserve in an area classified as humid temperate forest, a habitat characterized by its stunted trees, cool climate, and stunning orchid diversity. Guango is only a short drive from the tree-line forests and treeless *paramo* zones above - only 11 kilometers down the paved Interoceanica Highway from the town of Papallacta and its hot springs, the lodge is easily reached from Quito in about 1 ½ hours. It truly is a paradise for hummingbird lovers and photographers, as seeing 14 species of hummingbirds within an hour is not uncommon, with the Sword-billed hummingbird with its uniquely long bill being particularly notable. Scenic vistas and a variety of easy trails offer visitors great opportunities to hike in a beautiful setting surrounded by forest-covered mountains. Hummingbird photography can be very fruitful here as hanging feeders adorn the gardens of the great stone lodge house, attracting spectacular species such as the Sword-billed Hummingbird, Tourmaline Sunangel and Mountain Avocetbill among many others. "Guango" in the Quichua language means *"a place of great mountains that crisscross, whose waters concur to form mighty rivers in deep valleys covered by the cloud forest of the Andean slopes, under an ever-changing climate and*



*a typical drizzle"*. This combination of geographic and climatic factors makes Guango a true gateway to the rainforests to the east or west. Guango has always been a necessary stop along the traditional route from Quito to the Napo River and remains one to this day. As part of the Papallacta region, Guango is the central point between the cold forest and Andean highlands and also between the Amazonian ethnic groups and Quito. This regular stop for travelers and transport carriers for years was transformed in the mid-twentieth century into a cattle farm. Today, it is a hostel specializing in nature tourism located between the Antisana

Reserve and Cayambe-Coca National Park. Over the years, the majority of the property has remained untouched. Be it a day trip from Quito, or a few nights in a gorgeous Andean valley with towering crests and forest-blanketed slopes, Guango Lodge provides a great getaway opportunity. Birds are an important part of Guango's fauna. Some birds of particular interest that can be seen with relative ease at Guango include the Andean Guan, Gray-breasted Mountain-Toucan, Turquoise Jay, Scarlet-bellied, Lacrimose, Buff-breasted and Hooded Mountain-Tanagers, Gray-hooded Bush-Tanager, Black-headed, Black-capped and Black-eared Hemispingus, Slaty Brush-Finch, and of course the unique stream-dwelling Torrent duck. ●

<https://www.guangelodge.com/>

Long-tailed Sylph *Agelaiocercus kingii*, rio Papallacta valley, Guango, Ecuador





Chestnut-breasted coronet *Boissonneaua matthewsii*, one of the hummingbird species most commonly observed in the rio Papallacta valley at Guango, Ecuador.





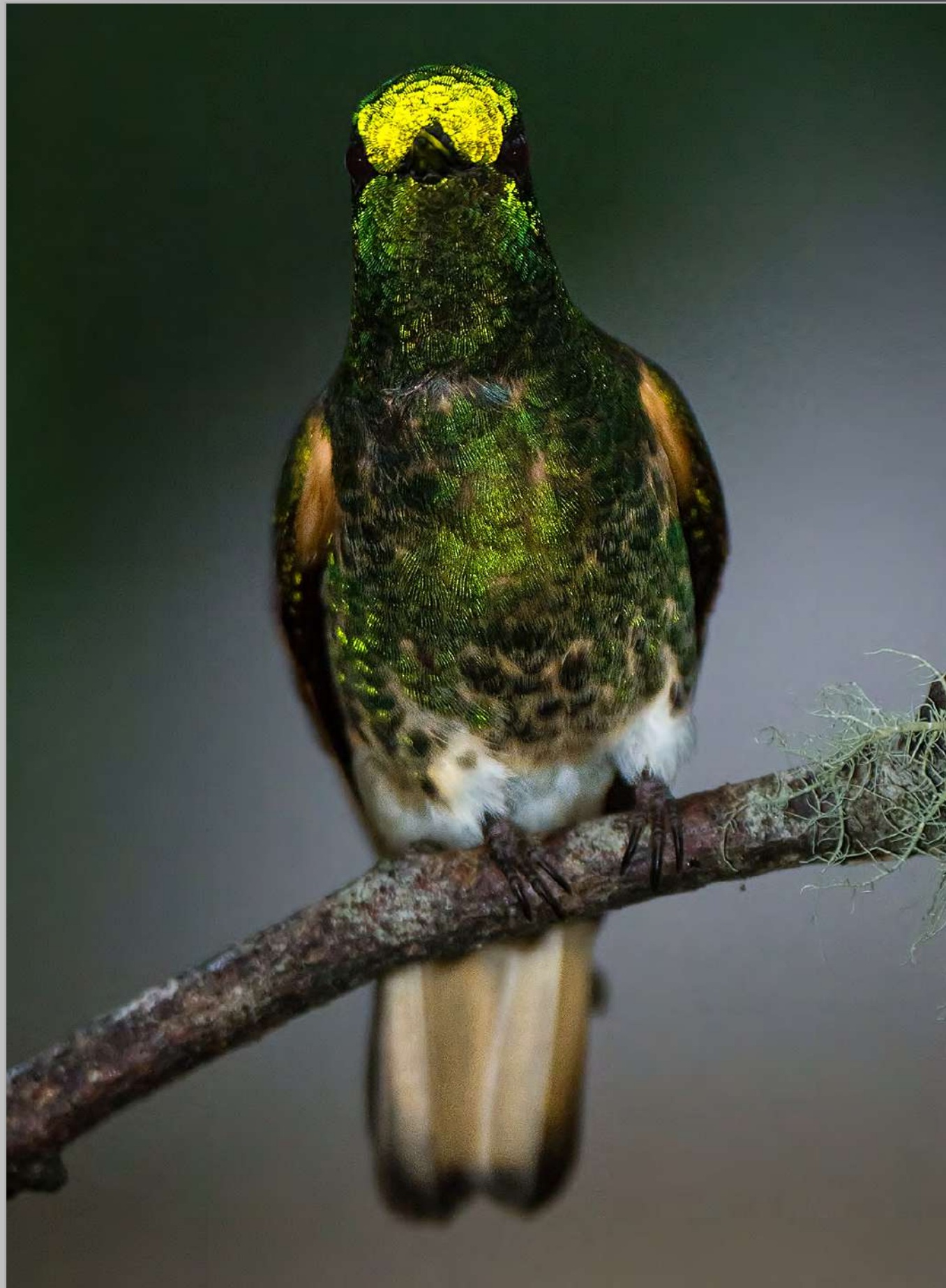
Tourmaline Sunangel *Heliangelus exortis*, rio Papallacta valley, Guango, Ecuador. None of the images featured here were taken - as it usually is done in hummingbird photography - in front of cut flowers hanging in front of an artificial background lit by a multi-flash set-up. We much prefer free-hand photography on the foot.





White-bellied Woodstar *Chaetocercus mulsant*, rio Papallacta valley, Guango, Ecuador, feeding on the wing. Such actions usually last one or two seconds at the most, offering an interesting challenge to the true nature photographer who refrains from using artificial set-ups in hummingbird photography.





Frontal portrait of a Buff-tailed Coronet *Boissonneaua flavescens*.



Portrait of a Chestnut-breasted coronet *Boissonneaua matthewsii*.



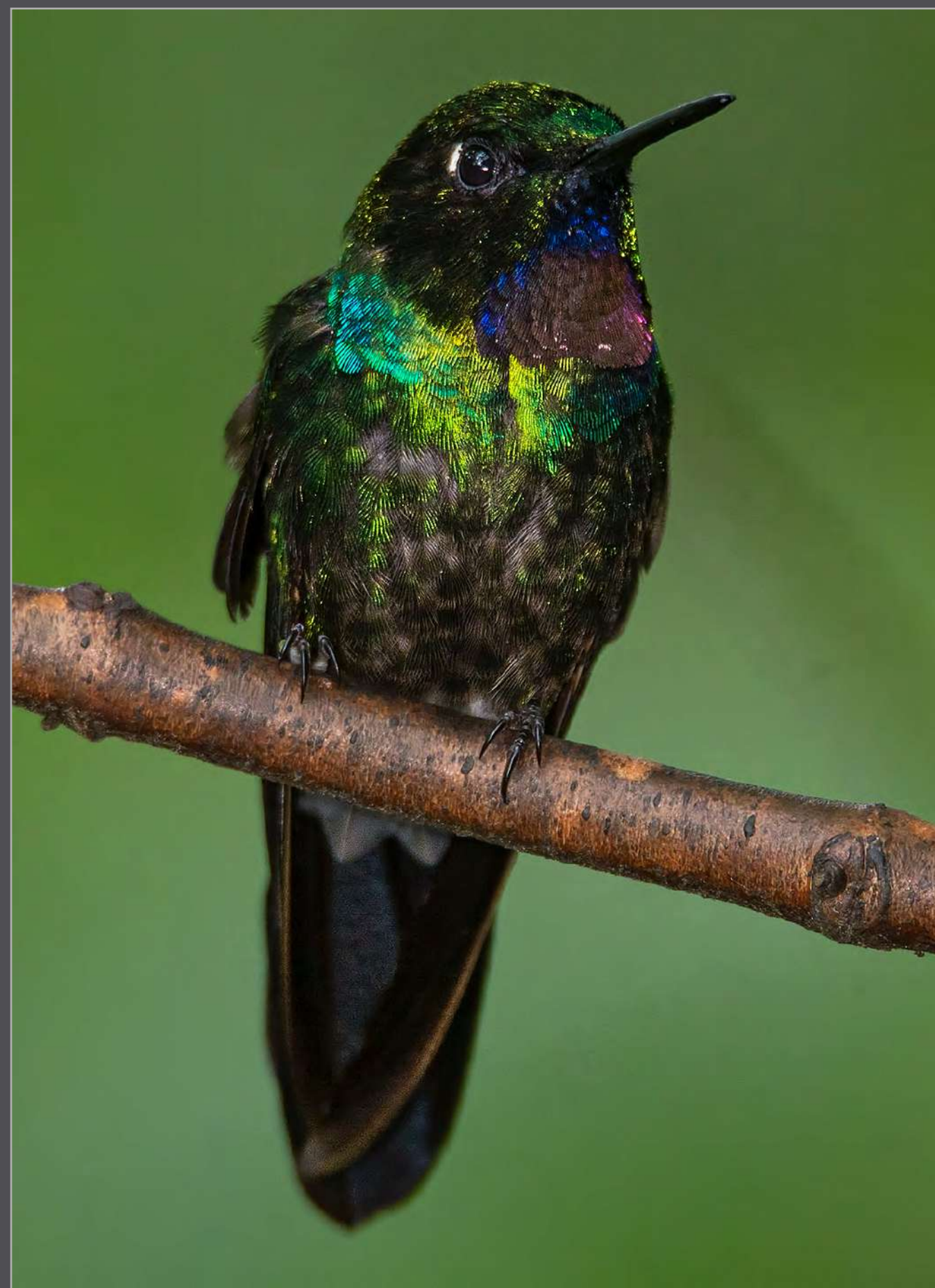


Torrent duck *Merganetta armata*, rio Papallacta, Guango, Ecuador. This is a rarely observed and beautiful species which is exclusively found in fast-running, cold, rocky streams running down the slopes of the Andes.





Buff-tailed Coronet *Boissonneaua flavescens*.



Tourmaline Sunangel *Heliangelus exortis*.





Buff-winged Starfrontlet *Coeligena lutetiae*. Photographing hummingbirds in mid-flight requires a steady hand and a manageable VR-equipped zoom with a fast autofocus which performs well in low-light situations. We utilize the Tamron SP 150-600mm f/5-6.3 Di VC USD and the Nikon AF-S Nikkor 80-400mm f/4.5-5.6G VR.





Andean Guan *Penelope montagnii*, rio Papallacta valley, Guango, Ecuador.





Top, Long-tailed Sylph *Agelaiocercus kingii*; bottom left, Chestnut-crowned Antpitta *Grallaria ruficapilla*; bottom right, Tourmaline Sunangel *Heliangelus exortis*. Hummingbird species identification is often complex due to local light conditions affecting colors/iridescence and sex and age of the specimen portrayed.





A pair of male Buff-tailed Coronet *Boissonneaua flavescens*. Hummingbirds are fiercely territorial, being very prone to fast, in-flight violent fights.





Top, Collared Inca  
*Coeligena torquata*;  
left, Tourmaline  
Sunangel  
*Heliangelus exortis*;  
right, Buff-tailed  
Coronet  
*Boissonneaua  
flavescens*.





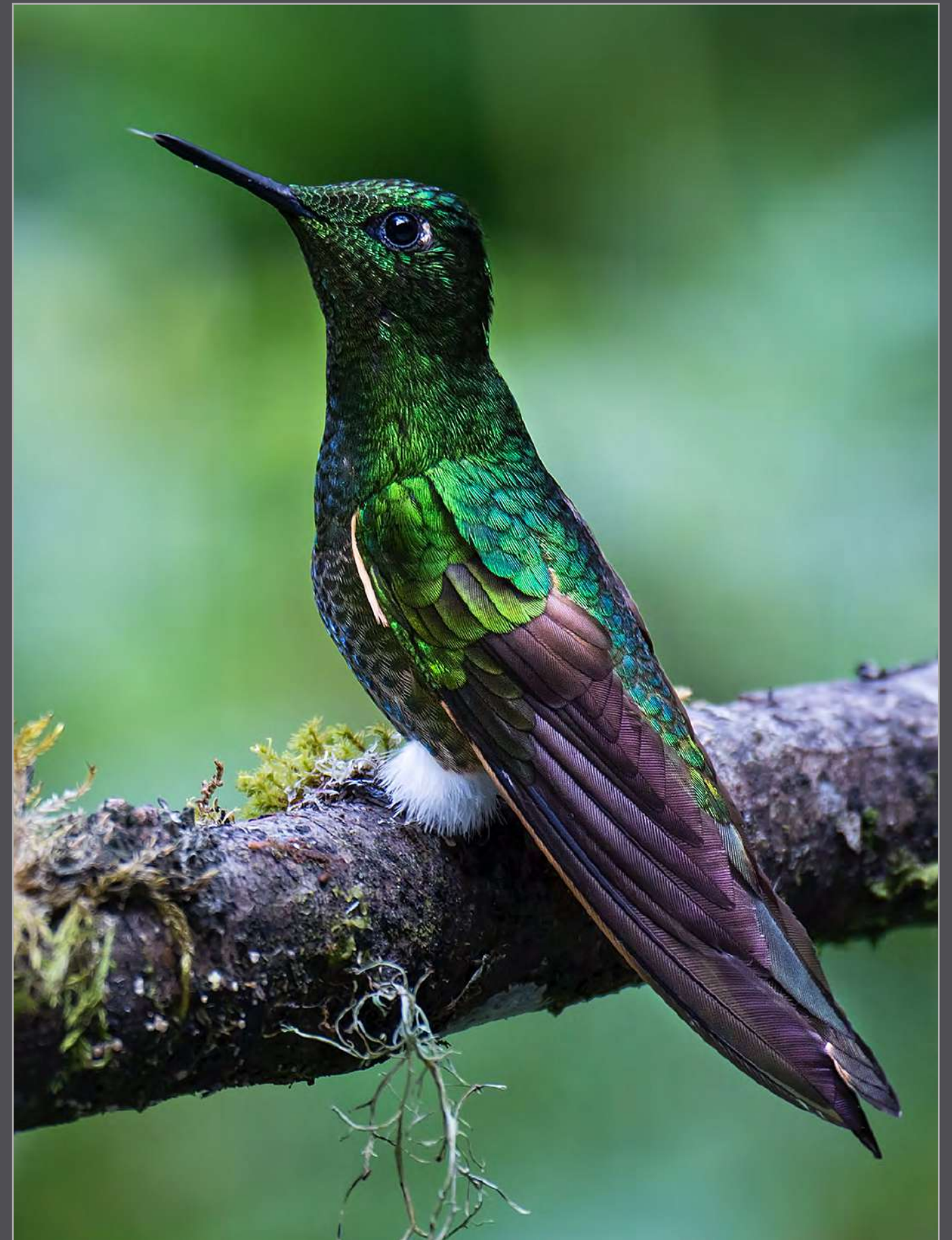


Masked Flowerpiercer *Diglossa cyanea*, found in humid montane forest and scrub in Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia. Flowerpiercers got their name from the fact that they have a sharp hook on the tip of their upper mandible which they use to slice open the base of flowers to get at the nectar.





Chestnut-breasted coronet *Boissonneaua matthewsii*.



Buff-tailed Coronet *Boissonneaua flavescens*.





White-bellied Woodstar *Chaetocercus mulsant* in mid-flight. Free-hand, on the foot photography of hummingbirds with a hand-held camera and without a tripod is much more difficult than the usual practice of sitting in front of an artificial set-up waiting for the subjects to come to the feeders, but it is also immensely more satisfying.





Torrent duck *Merganetta armata*, rio Papallacta, Guango, Ecuador - this beautiful, shy species is highly adapted to a strictly aquatic lifestyle.



Torrent duck *Merganetta armata*.



Torrent duck *Merganetta armata*.





Chestnut-breasted coronet *Boissonneaua matthewsii*, rio Papallacta valley, Guango, Ecuador.





Sword-billed hummingbird *Ensifera ensifera* - this is a largish, fast-moving, erratical species which can prove very difficult to shoot properly in a forested environment. The great majority of this bird's images are of baited individuals which are attracted to feeders positioned in front of artificial backgrounds lit by multi-flash set-ups.





Buff-tailed Coronet *Boissonneaua flavescens*. This is possibly the most commonly observed hummingbird species in the Guango Lodge grounds.





Sword-billed hummingbird *Ensifera ensifera* - hummingbirds will occasionally perch for no more than one or two seconds' time.



The Rio Papallacta valley is shrouded in a thick, humid temperate forest cut by countless brooks and waterfalls cascading from the Andes' slopes.



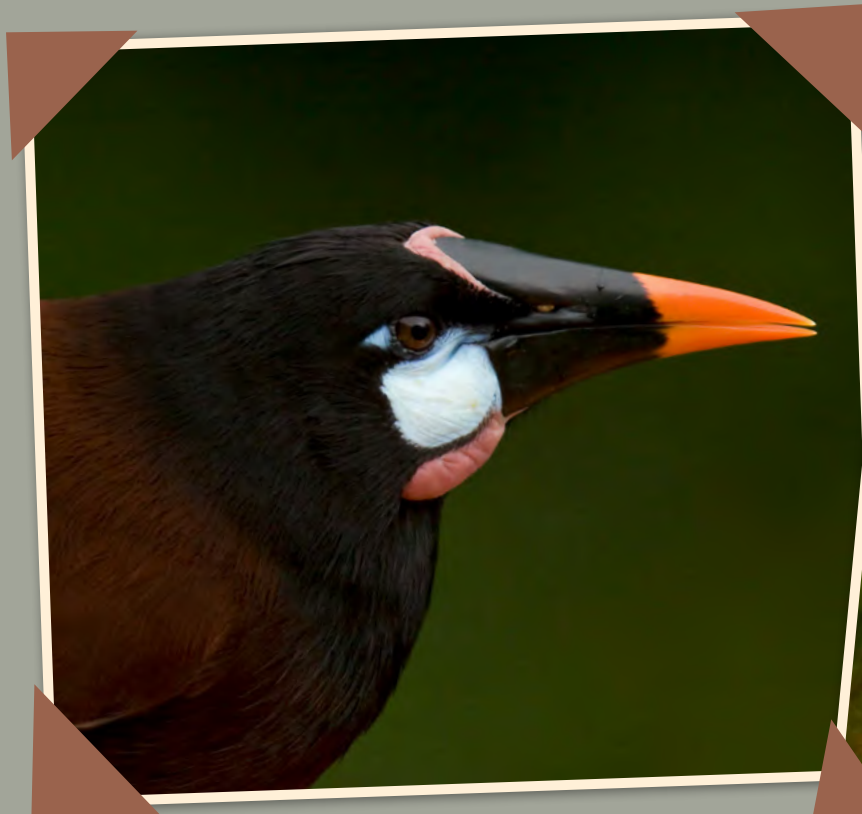


Guango's most iconic and beautiful hummingbird species, and certainly the most searched for - the Sword-billed hummingbird *Ensifera ensifera*. It uses its bill to drink nectar from flowers with long corollas. This is also one of the largest hummingbird species, and it is the only bird to have a beak longer than the rest of its body.



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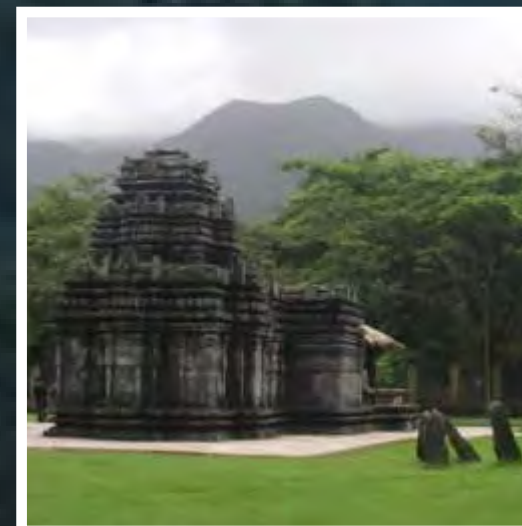
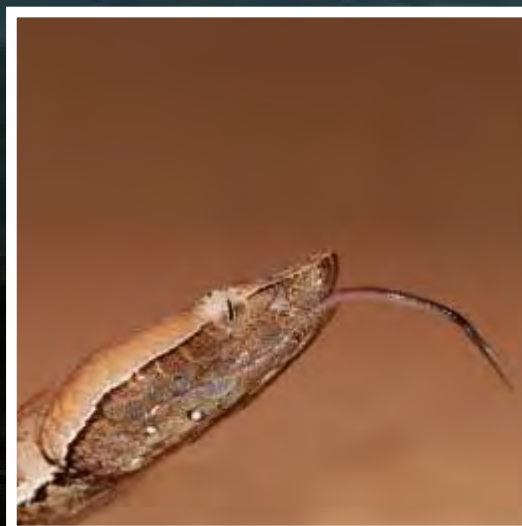


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# The Communicator

A burning passion for nature and conservation motivates a young author from Costa Rica to share with all a message of hope

*Álvaro Cubero -  
A Wildlife Photographer  
in His Own Words*

I was born in a small coastal village in Costa Rica, where I learnt to love nature since I was a child. Never I would have imagined the path which has taken me here. From the first moment I had a camera in my hands I started taking photos of wildlife, of animals, of ecosystems, all things alive and moving, and slowly I started to get specialized. Like all, I started taking pictures just for fun, to show others what I saw, but with the passing of time the fun turned into a challenge, and then the challenge became a veritable need, so that today I cannot think of my own very life without wildlife photography.

We are living difficult times for nature, since as human beings we are exhausting almost all resources of the planet - yet as a ultimate irony we are swamped and intoxicated by information. People are told so often to conserve and protect that their minds are shutting down. So I started to realize that photos are incredibly helpful to strike deep in people's minds and change their perception. When I saw the camera in my hand I then told myself that I was holding a tool, a tool which helps to communicate, to show the

facts, to show why it is important to conserve and why it is important to change our ways. Suddenly I wasn't a photographer of "pretty shots" anymore - I felt my images should carry a message, have a purpose.

This search to communicate and to share with the rest of the world has taken me to a great many places of my beloved Costa Rica and to many other countries where conservation is a real problem, such as Madagascar - where I learnt that now more than ever we must not give up and be defeated, that we need to be positive and transmit a message of hope, because if we lose hope than we shall give up the fight and everything will be lost forever.

I now am 27 years old, but this is not an obstacle for me to think for myself, for my kids, for my grandsons and granddaughters. We must protect and we must share. It is for this reason that wildlife photography is so important for me.

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### **Black Speckled Palm Viper**

I love snakes, incredible animals which fill me with adrenaline when I photograph them. This species is endemic to Costa Rica. Cordillera de Talamanca, Highlands of Costa Rica.

Canon 5D Mark IV  
Canon 100mm f2.8L  
1/160  
F16  
ISO 640



## Jaguar

The queen of the Pantanal, this beautiful female was resting quietly on the shores of the rio San Lorenzo. Mato Grosso, Brazil.

Canon 5D Mark IV  
Canon 600mm f4  
L II  
1/250  
F4  
ISO 2500







### Satanic gecko

My favorite reptile, a dream species which I photographed during my first trip to Madagascar. Andasibe National Park, Madagascar.

Canon 5D Mark IV  
Canon 100mm f2.8L  
1/160  
F16  
ISO640

### African elephants

The most amazing social behavior I ever observed - when a herd of elephants approached others at a waterhole in Etosha NP, Namibia. The interaction by rumbling, trunk touching and ear flapping was very special. Etosha National Park, Namibia.

Canon 5D Mark IV  
Canon 100-400mm II  
1/320  
F5.6  
ISO 2500





## Spiny-headed Tree Frog

This is a very special frog which is very difficult to encounter in its natural habitat.  
Parque Nacional Braulio Carillo,  
Costa Rica.

Canon 5D Mark IV  
Canon 100mm  
f2.8L  
1/160  
F16  
ISO 640







## African elephants

Using a wide-angle with giant animals such as elephants is always difficult as these animals are dangerous to people. This image was taken from a reinforced hide. Okavango delta, Botswana.

Canon 5D Mark IV  
Canon 16-35mm  
f2.8 II  
1/1250  
F4  
ISO 640





### Baby Tapir

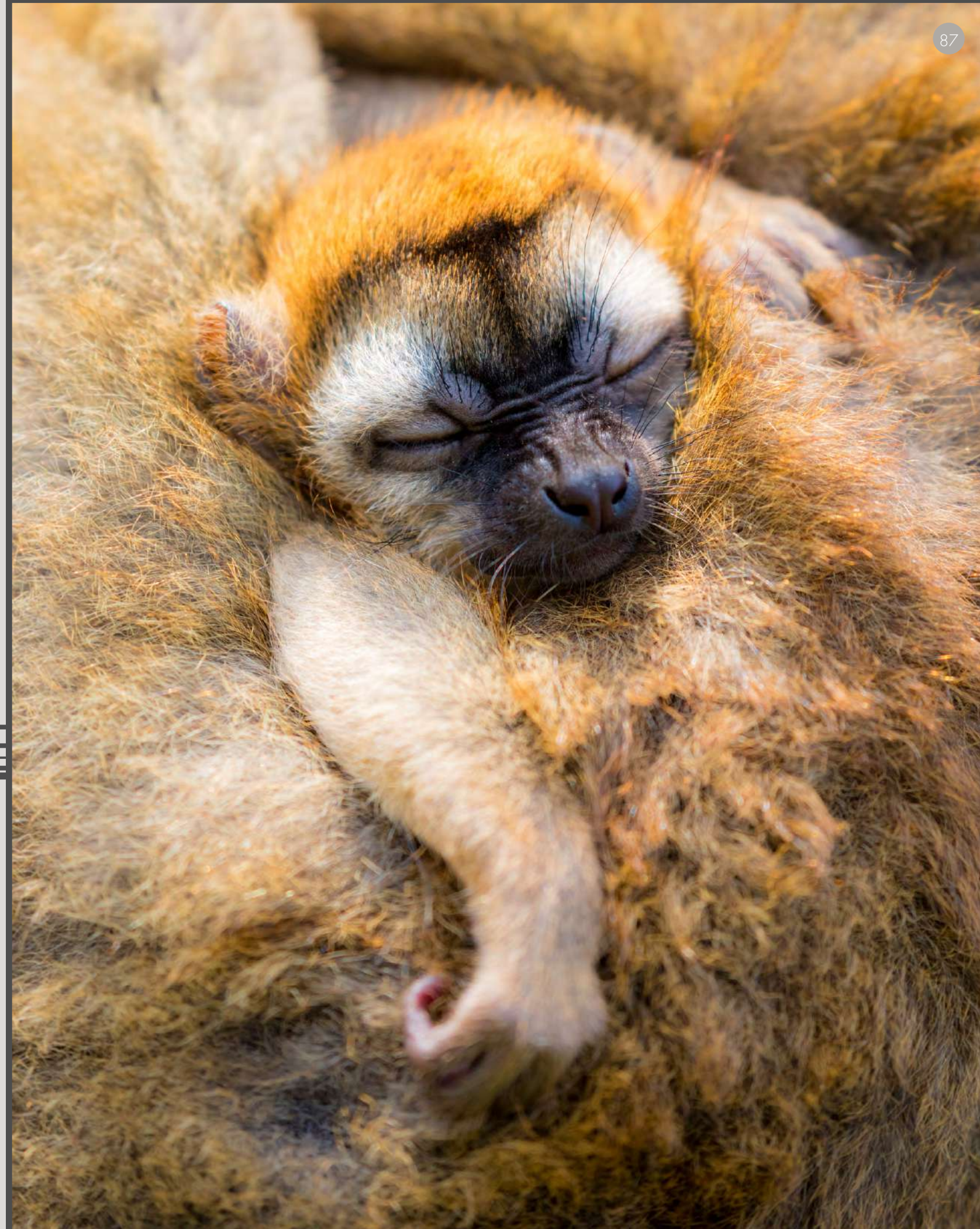
Photographing this baby Tapir was a real challenge. Parque Nacional Braulio Carillo, Costa Rica.

Canon 5D Mark IV  
Canon 100-400mm II  
1/320  
F5.6  
ISO 3200

### Baby lemur

A symbol of hope in a sadly very endangered island. West Madagascar.

Canon 5D Mark IV  
Canon 100-400mm II  
1/500  
F5.6  
ISO 2000





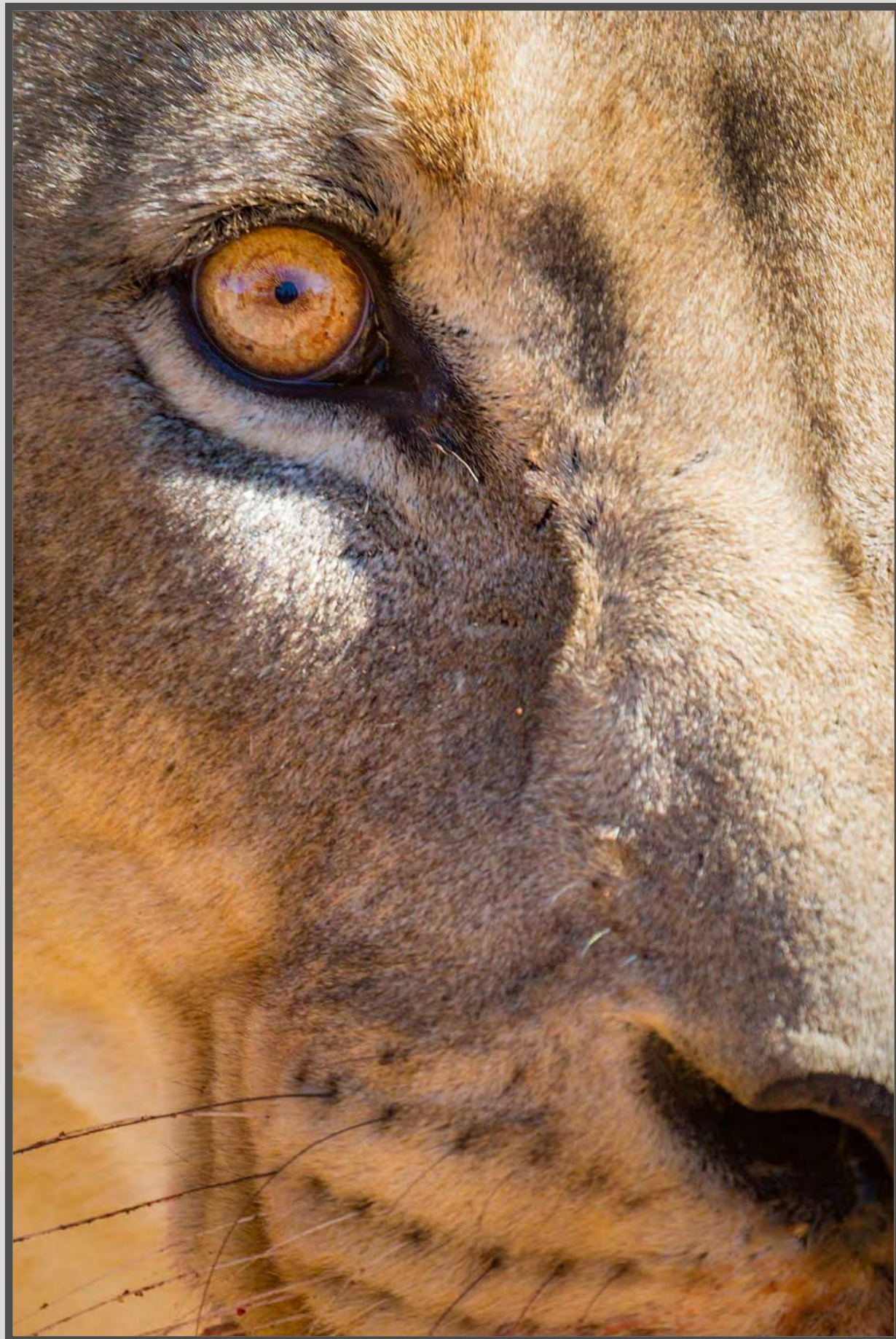


### Strawberry Poison Frog

One of the best-known diurnal frogs - for being toxic and for its "blue jeans" - which is easily encountered in the rain forest of the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica. Guápiles, Costa Rica.

Canon 5D Mark IV  
Canon 100mm  
F2.8 L  
1/160  
F16  
ISO 640



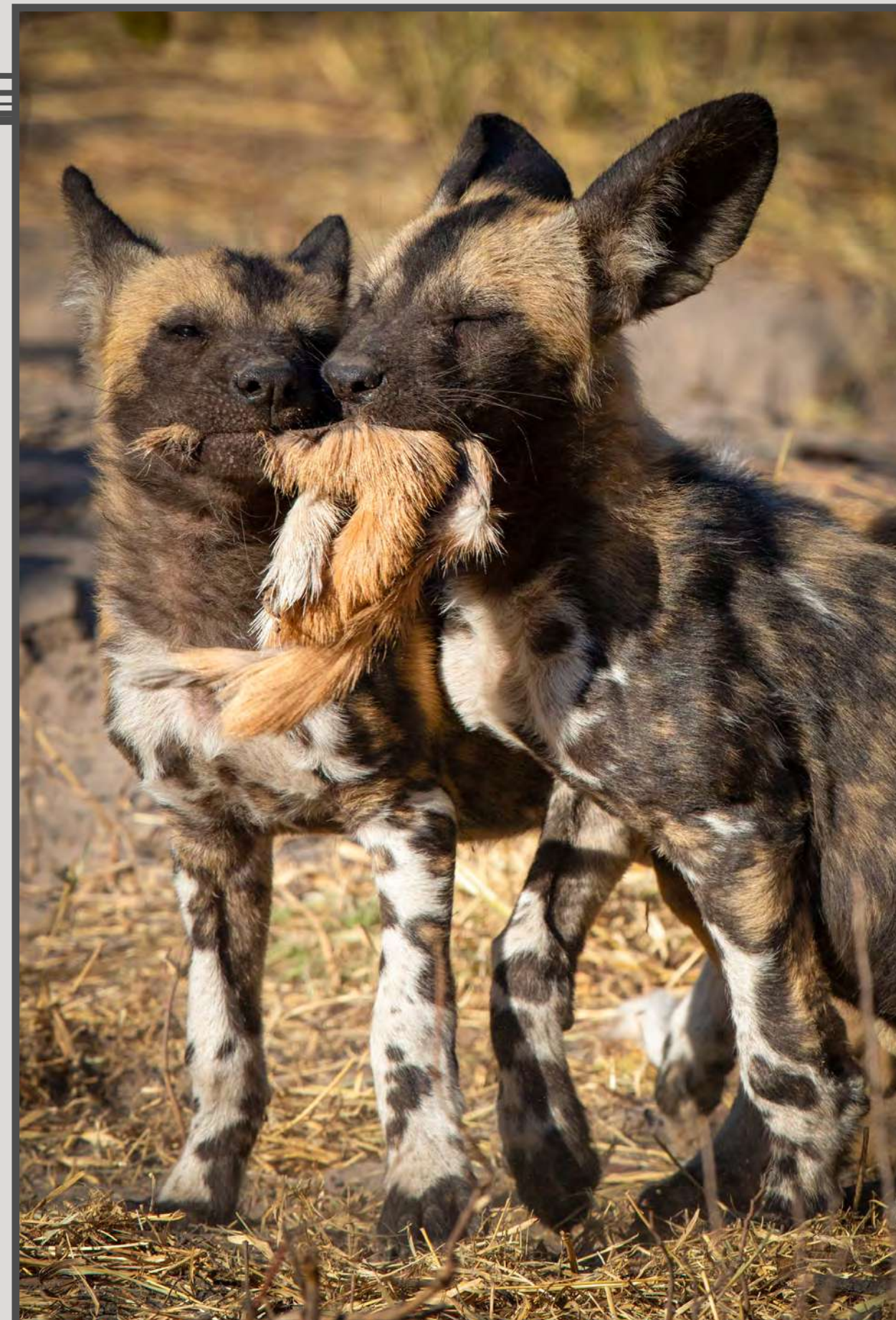


## Wild dogs

African Wild dogs are very successful hunters - these cubs were playing with the remains of an impala in a scene which was tender and grotesque at the same time.

Okavango delta,  
Botswana.

Canon 5D Mark IV  
Canon 600mm f4 L II  
1/500  
F4  
ISO 1250



## Lioness

A 50% crop of the eye of a lioness offers interesting details and composition. Namibia, Africa.

Canon 5D Mark IV  
Canon 100-400mm II  
1/2000  
F5.6  
ISO 320





### Vicuñas

These relatives of camels can be frequently encountered in the paramos around the Chimborazo volcano, as their numbers are luckily on the rise. Volcán Chimborazo, Ecuador.

Canon 5D Mark IV  
Canon 100-400mm II  
1/2000  
F5.6  
ISO 200



### Bamboo lemur

The Bamboo lemur is severely endangered, and being able to photograph one was a real blessing for me. Andasibe National Park, Madagascar.

Canon 5D Mark IV  
Canon 100-400mm II  
1/200  
F5.6  
ISO 800

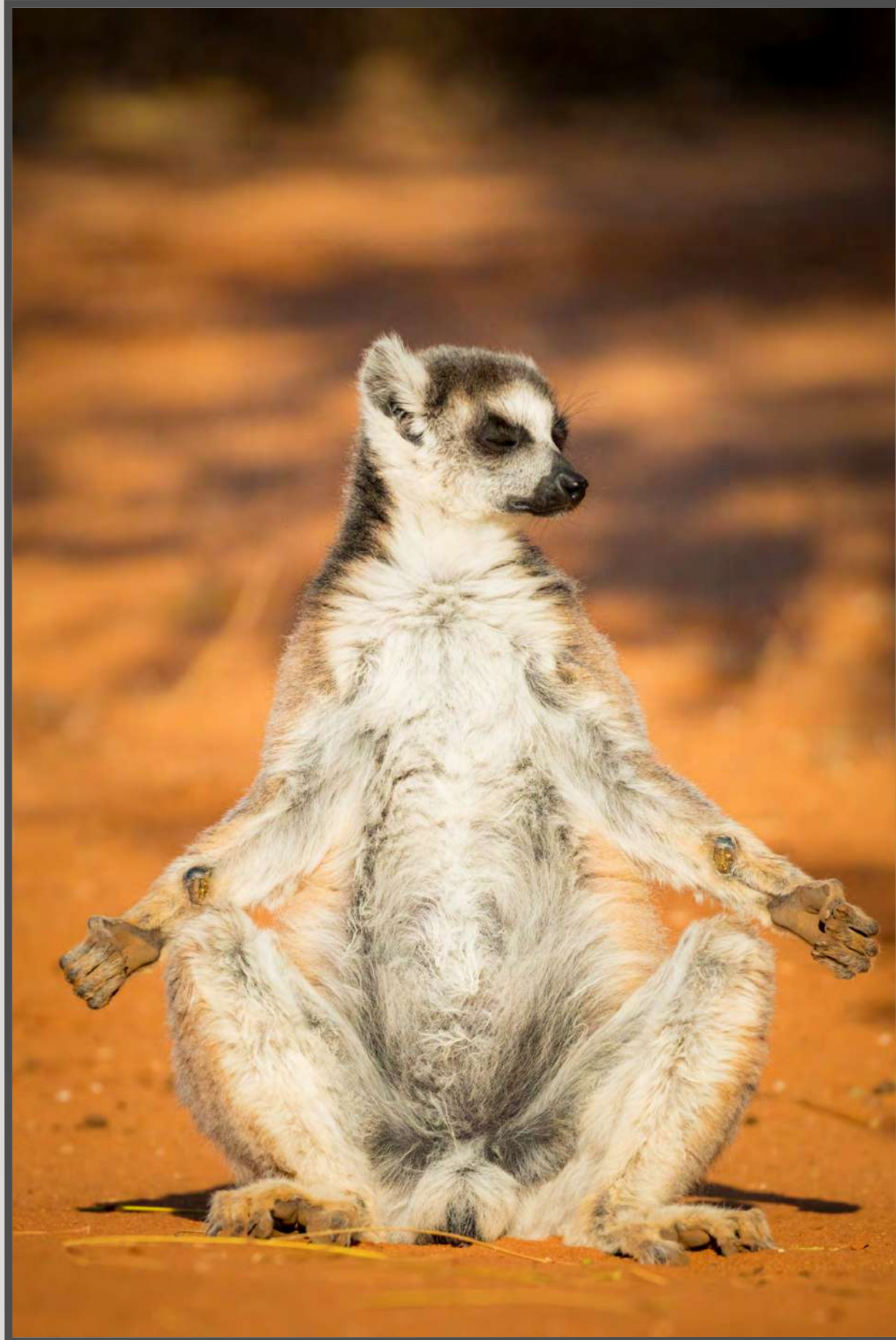


### Red-eyed Frogs

The mating embrace (*amplexus*) of the most famous frog species of Costa Rica. Sarapiquí, Costa Rica

Canon 5D Mark IV  
Canon 100mm F2.8 L  
1/160  
F16  
ISO 640





### Lemur

This lemur looks like it's doing yoga but in fact it is simply sunning itself. Berenty Reserve, Madagascar.

Canon 5D  
Mark IV  
Canon 100-  
400mm II  
1/2000  
F5.6  
ISO 200

### Elk

A Canadian elk resting on a hotel golf course. Banff, Alberta, Canada.

Canon 5D Mark IV  
Lente Canon 100-  
400mm II  
1/800  
F5.6  
ISO 2000





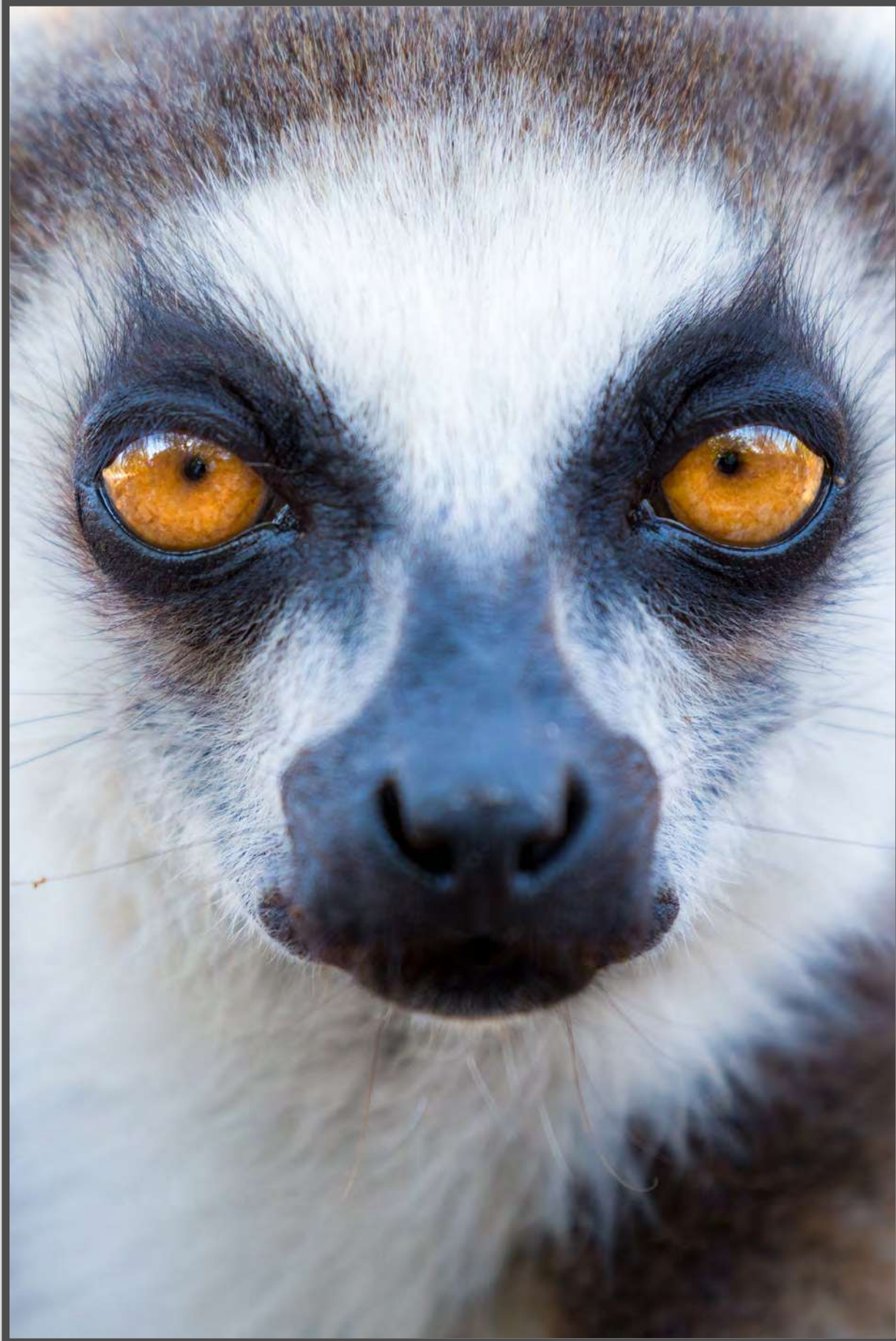


## Hippos

A mother hippo and her baby - a very tender scene which is also quite powerful, as this species is the most dangerous of Africa. Chobe river, Botswana.

Canon 5D Mark IV  
Canon 600mm f4 II  
1/320  
F4  
ISO 1250





### Tapir

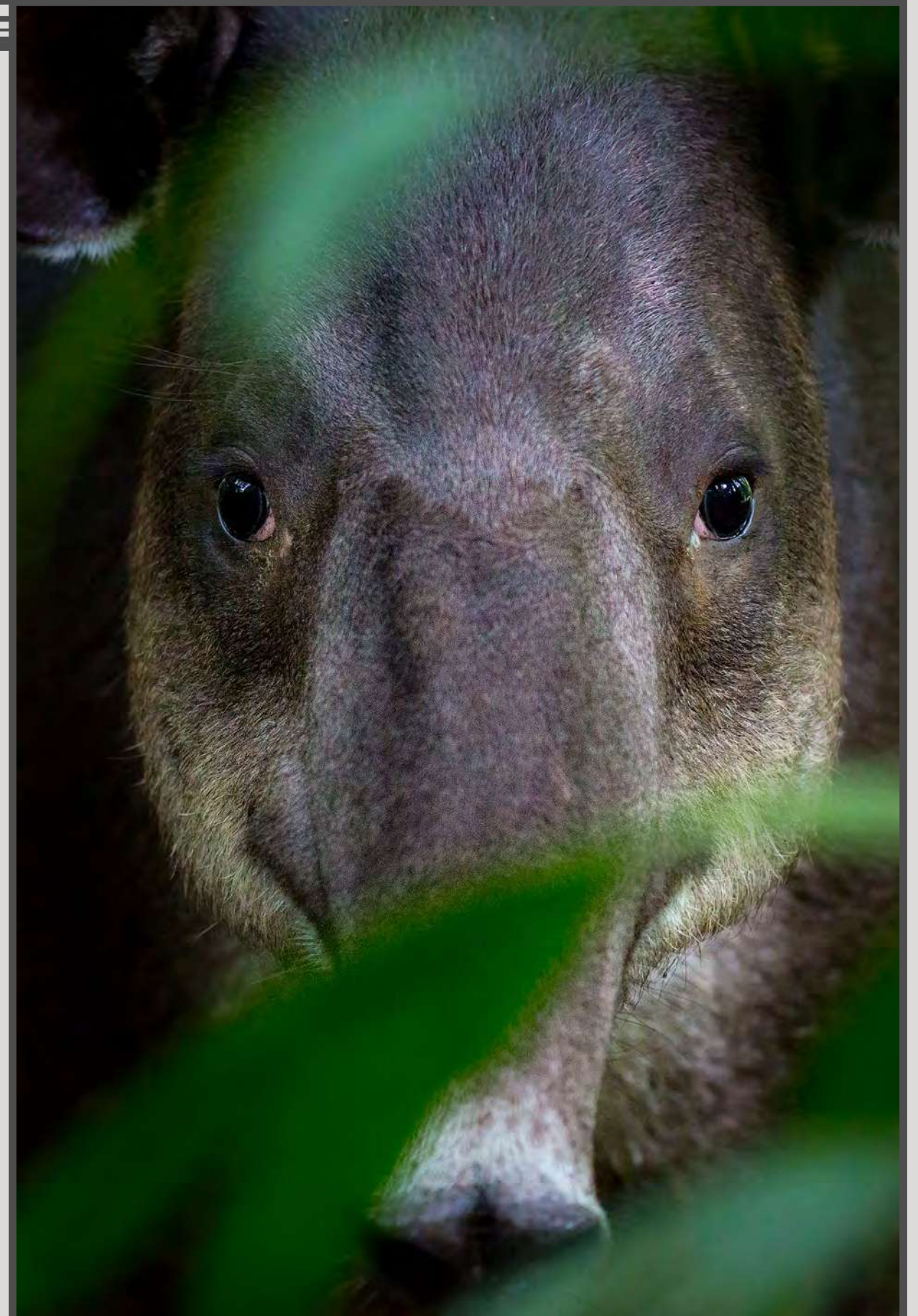
One of the most difficult photos I have ever taken, as tapirs are very fast and shy forest animals. Parque Nacional Braulio Carrillo, Costa Rica.

Canon 5D Mark IV  
Canon 100-400mm II  
1/125  
F5.6  
ISO 3200

### Ring-tailed lemur

One of the most charismatic and photogenic lemur species. Berenty Reserve, Madagascar.

Canon 5D Mark IV  
Canon 100-400mm II  
1/1000  
F5.6  
ISO 800





## Common iguana

As photographers we can show others - under a different light - common things which they would not normally observe, such as the eye of an animal which is everywhere in my native Costa Rica, the Green iguana. San Carlos, Costa Rica.

Canon 5D Mark IV  
Canon 100mm F2.8 L  
1/160  
F16  
ISO 640



## African sunset

African sunsets can be unbelievable, and this one with the elephants of the river Chobe is one of my favorite images - everytime I see this photo I remember that incredible moment. Chobe National Park, Botswana.

Canon 5D Mark IV  
Canon 600mm f4 II  
1/1000  
F4  
ISO 500



## Diadem Sifaka

One of the most  
endangered lemur  
species in  
the world.  
Andasibe National  
Park, Madagascar.

Canon 5D Mark IV  
Canon 100-400mm II  
1/250  
F5.6  
ISO 3200







### Young Baboon

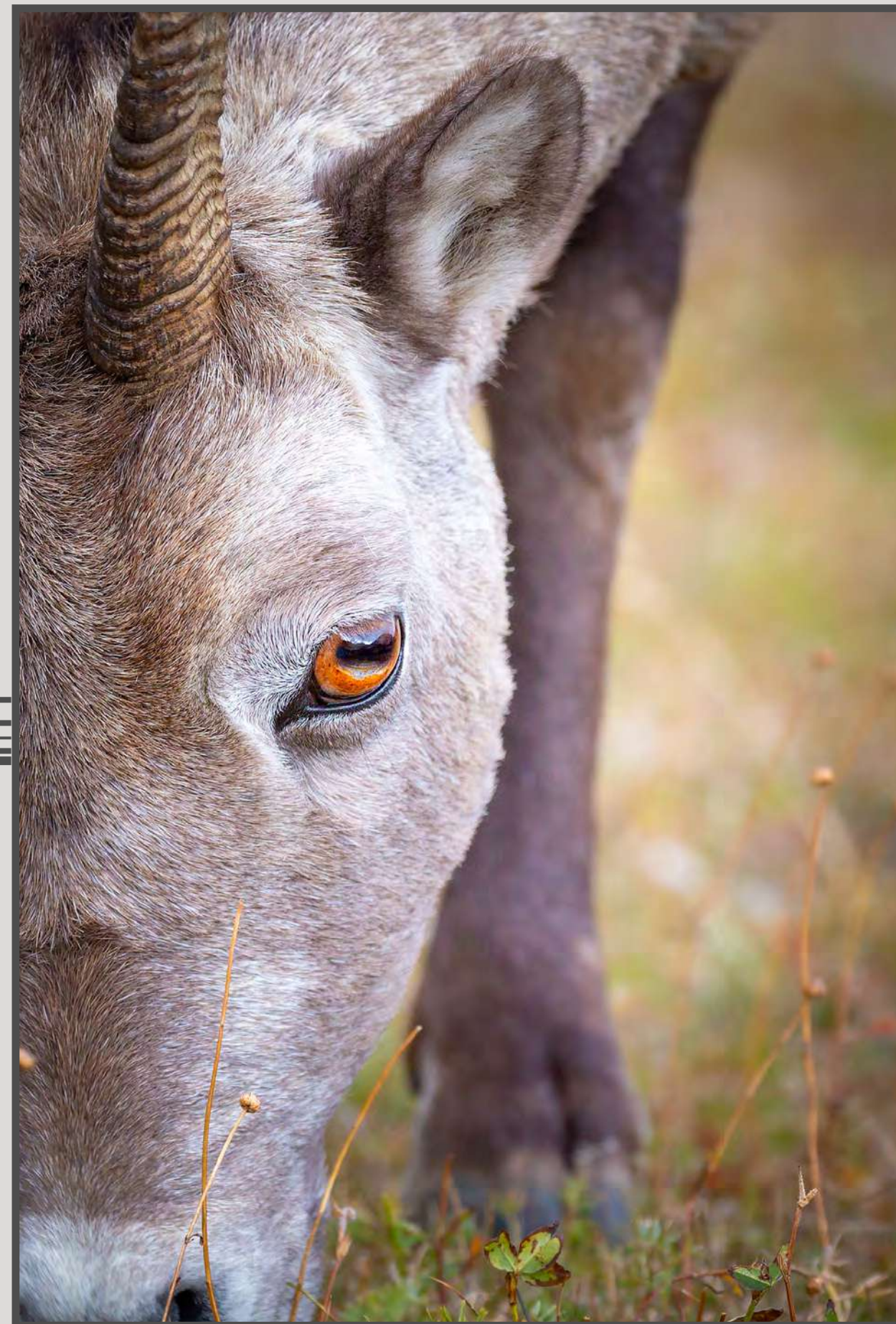
Taken with the so-called Rim light backlighting, a technique I love. Chobe, Botswana.

Canon 5D Mark IV  
Canon 600mm f4  
L II  
1/3200  
F4  
ISO 320

### Mountain goat

A mountain goat - a very challenging subject. If you look closely you'll see the mountains behind me reflected in its eye. Jasper National Park, Canada.

Canon 5D Mark IV  
Canon 100-400mm  
II  
1/500  
F5.6  
ISO 800







"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*

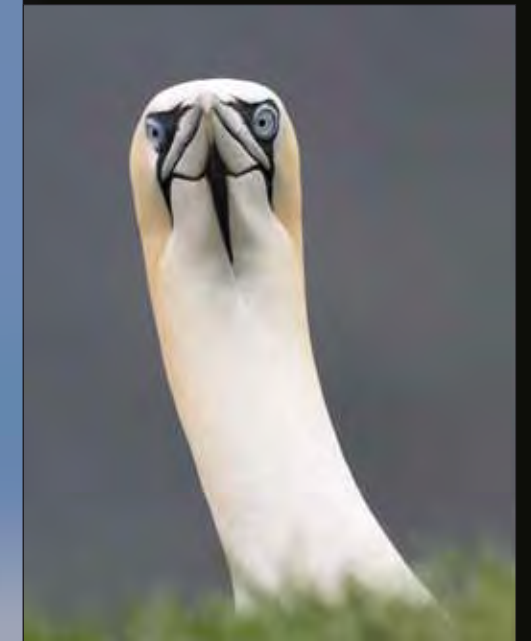
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*David Hemmings - President, Nature's Photo Adventures*



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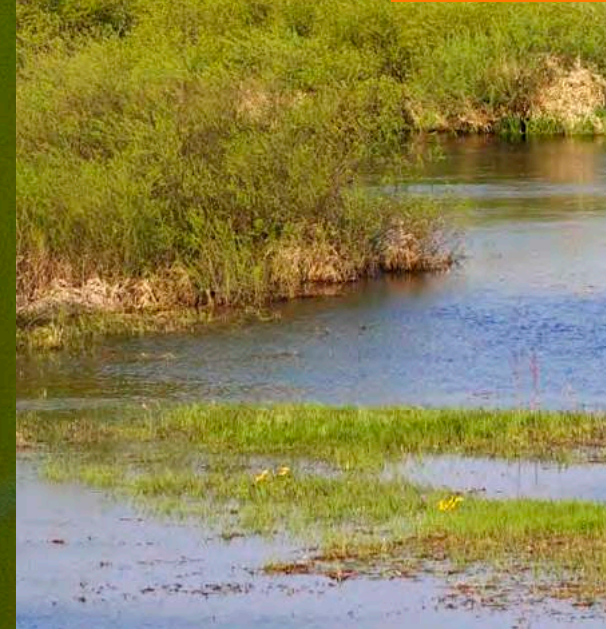


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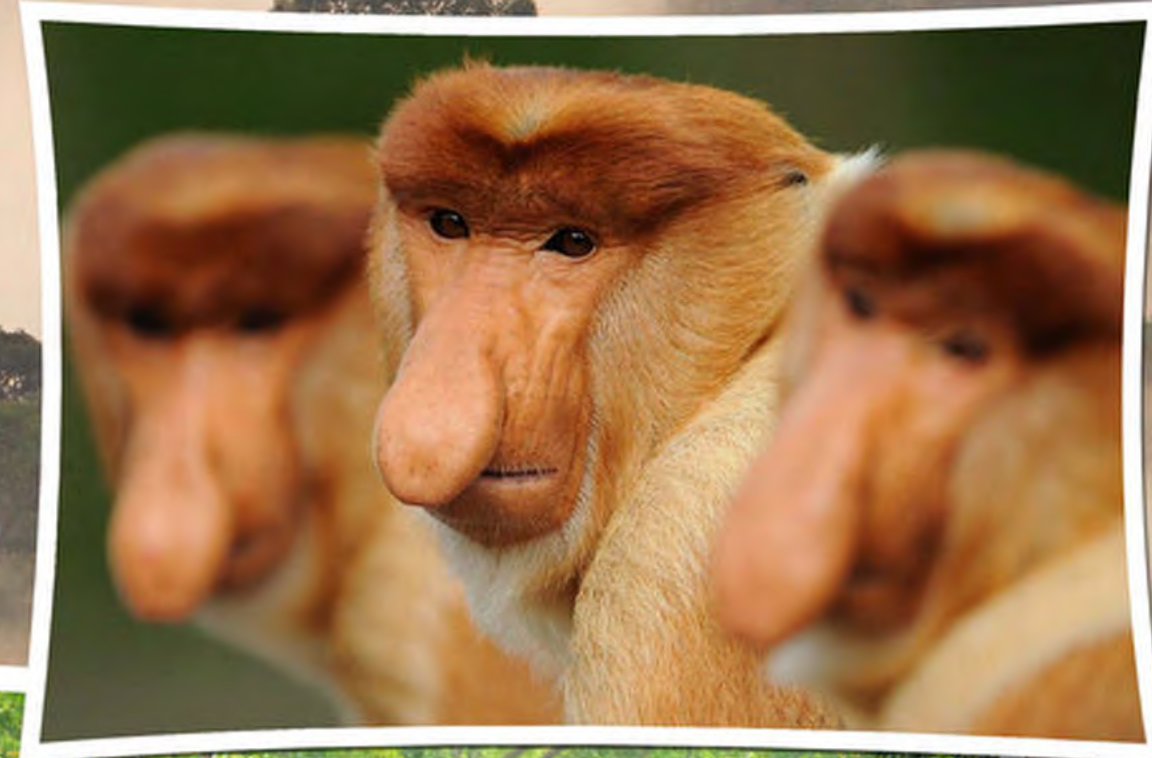
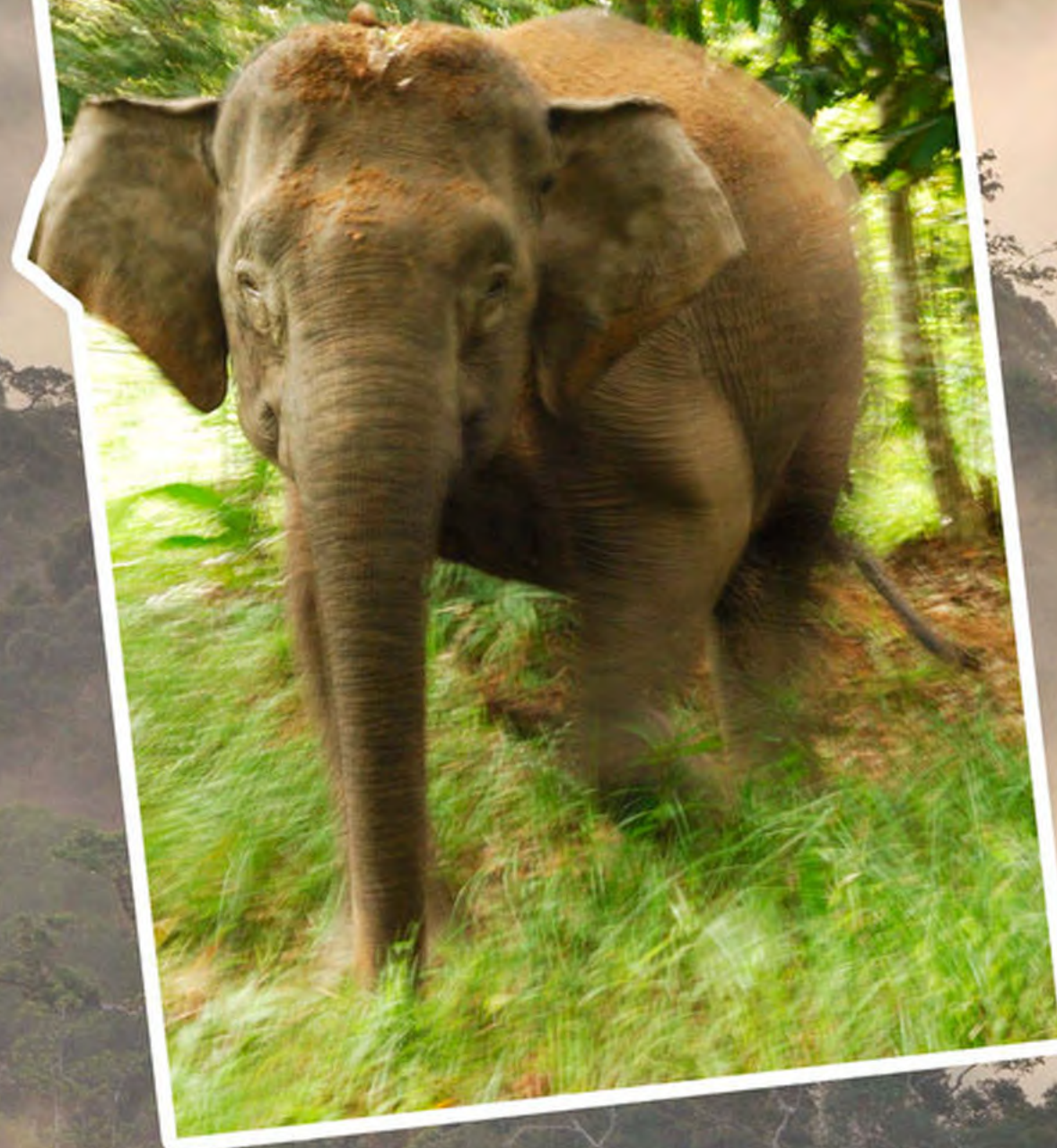


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# Trip Report

SEAHORSES OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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## IN SEARCH OF DRAGONS

Scuba diving in the waters off Tasmania and South Australia with two of the strangest and most wonderfully camouflaged fish species of the planet

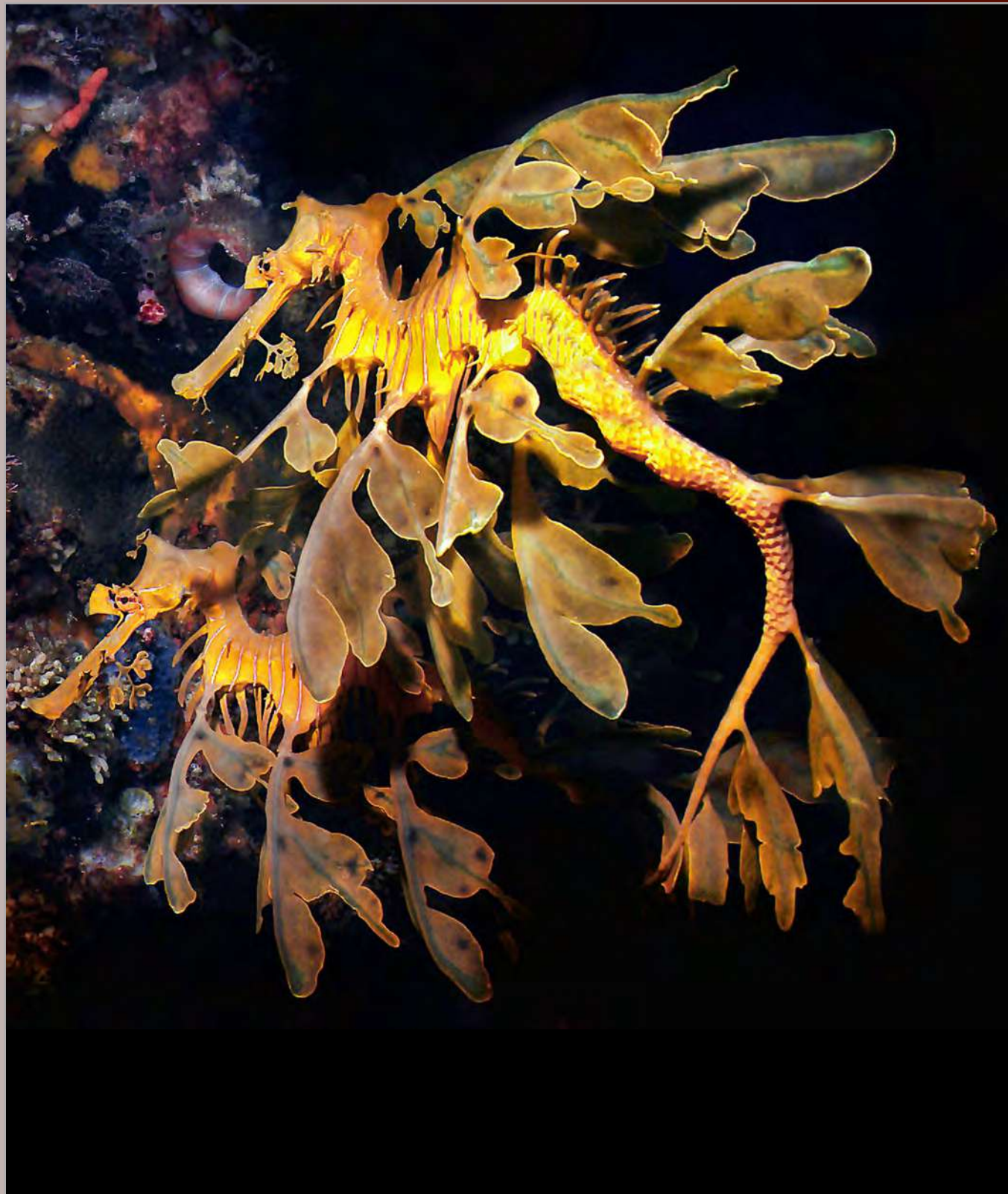




**Common or Weedy seadragon *Phyllopteryx taeniolatus***

The Common or Weedy seadragon is a marine fish related to the seahorse. Adult common seadragons are a reddish colour, with yellow and purple markings; note the egg mass sticking on the tail. On the opening spread, a portrait of the equally amazing Leafy seadragon or Glaucous seadragon *Phycodurus eques*.





**Leafy seadragon** *Phycodurus eques*

The common name of this species derives from its appearance, with long leaf-like protrusions coming from all over the body which serve as camouflage.

TEXT AND PHOTOS  
BY ALDO GALANTE

The cold waters off the coasts of South Australia and Tasmania are the home of the astonishing "Sea Dragons", a common descriptive name given to two marine fish species somewhat related to Seahorses or *Hippocampus* but with very different characteristics. These are the Weedy sea dragon *Phyllopteryx taeniolatus*, Lacepède, 1804, and the Leafy sea dragon *Phycodurus eques*, Gunther, 1865; their sobriquets are due to the dazzling ornamentation these fish have on their bodies to camouflage themselves in their environment, which is their main method of defense. Surprisingly to most divers and underwater photographers seeing them for the first time, these animals in general are quite large, reaching up to 50 cm, although the average size is between 30 cm and 35 cm long approximately.

As for the reproduction, like the seahorses, the males are the ones who take care of the eggs. The female gets to produce around 120 eggs in the case of

the Weedy and up to 250 eggs in the case of the Leafy, which are a bright pink color. The eggs will hatch after about nine weeks and the male helps the birth of the eggs by shaking and rubbing his tail (where they are sticking) against algae and rocks. When the fry are born they are about 2 cm in length, and they will reach adult size after only two years. Only 5% of the hatched babies survive. Like many other wonderful species of the planet, the Dragons are also threatened - essentially by pollution, climate change, habitat destruction and by depredation of fish collectors for the aquarium trade, taking into account that they manage to survive only for a very short time once in captivity. The reason that led me to write this article, after taking numerous dives in South Australia, is that this species is one of the most incredible creatures in nature.

In the south of Australia, which by the way covers a very extensive area, one can find many dive sites where the

*continued on page 103* ➤





**Common or Weedy seadragon** *Phyllopteryx taeniolatus*

Common seadragons can reach 45 cm (18 in) in length. This species is endemic to Australian waters of the Eastern Indian Ocean and the South Western Pacific Ocean. It can be found approximately between Port Stephens (New South Wales) and Geraldton, Western Australia, as well as Tasmania.





**Leafy seadragon** *Phycodurus eques*

The lobes of skin that grow on the Leafy seadragon provide exceptional camouflage, giving it the appearance of seaweed. It is able to maintain the illusion when swimming, appearing to move through the water like a piece of floating seaweed. It can also change colour to blend in, but this ability depends on the seadragon's diet, age, location, and stress level.





**Leafy seadragon** *Phycodurus eques*

This species propels itself by means of a fin on its neck and a dorsal fin on its back closer to the tail end. These small fins are almost completely transparent and difficult to see.

Dragons are usually found; from my own experience, some of these are more recommendable than others. On the island of Tasmania, Bicheno is one of the best sites to encounter the Weedy sea dragon, in addition to having beautiful beaches and offering fantastic dives. Bicheno is a small town located about 2 hours by car from Hobart (177 km approximately). The route from Hobart to Bicheno goes through several very nice locations, such as the Freycinet National Park which can be visited during the journey and which is a fantastic place for trekking. Once in Bicheno, I went to the Diving Center (named, not surprisingly, "Bicheno Dive Center"), where the owner and manager Bruce received us, facilitating the logistics of diving with the Dragons. The dive site is called Waubs Bay and dives are made from the beach; here the water temperature varies approximately between 12 ° C and 14 ° C, so a 7mm suit would be needed. It's a very simple dive, the visibility is about 15 meters. In addition, one can make wonderful dives on the nearby island called Governors

Island. I visited Bicheno in the month of November and I was able to observe the males with the eggs attached to the tail, which was a plus to the dive. Leaving from Hobart, there is another place called Eaglehawk Neck. The trip is about an hour, since it is only 76 km from the capital. The dive operator here is quite aptly named "Eaglehawk Neck Dive Center". Here one can do many dives of different types, in addition to the one related to the Dragons; these can often be observed and photographed in the environment of the giant forests of Kelp *Macrocystis kelp*. Water temperature and visibility are very similar to those in Bicheno.

Perhaps one of the best places in the world to see Dragons is however Bremer Bay, located six hours by car south of Perth (about 580 km), on the West coast of Australia. Here one can enjoy wonderful white beaches, with blue and crystal-clear waters offering more pleasant temperatures than those of Tasmania. In spring and summer the water temperature is around 21 °

*continued on page 105* ➤





**Leafy seadragon** *Phycodurus eques*

Individuals were once thought to have very restricted ranges, but research has discovered that seadragons actually travel several hundred metres from their habitual locations, returning to the same spot using a strong sense of direction. They are mostly found over sand patches in waters up to 50 m (160 ft) deep, around kelp-covered rocks and clumps of sea grass.





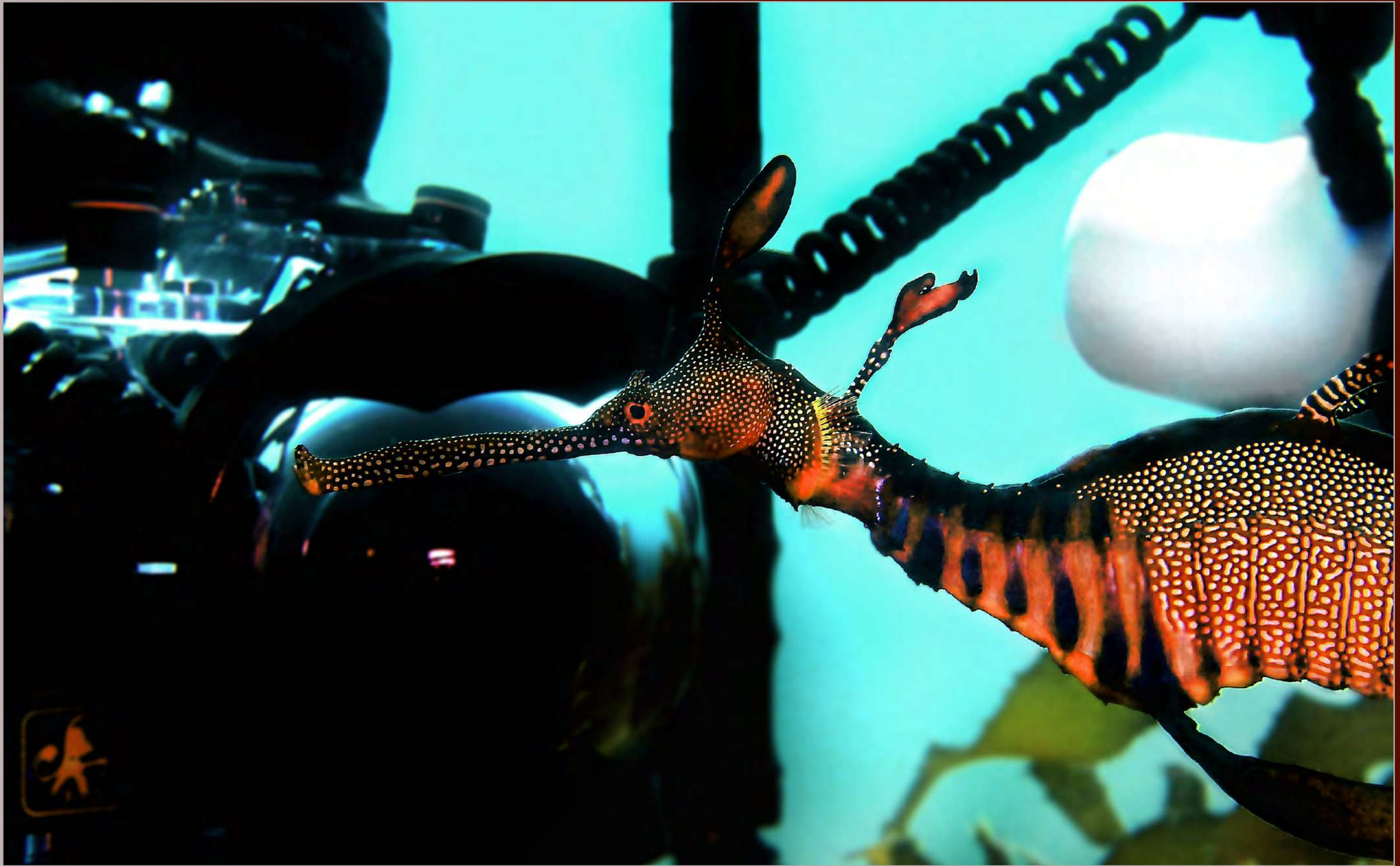
**Leafy seadragon** *Phycodurus eques*

As with seahorses, the male Leafy seadragon cares for the eggs. The female produces up to 250 bright pink eggs, which she deposits onto the male's tail with her ovipositor, a long tube. The eggs then attach themselves to a brood patch, which supplies them directly with oxygen.

Centigrade. The dive operator here is - guess what? - "Bremer Bay Dive Center" and its owner and manager is Craig, one of the most knowledgeable people about the subject of Sea dragons in Australia. The most important feature of Bremer Bay is that one can see the two Dragons (Leafy and Weedy) in the same dive area and many times in the same scene. The best dive site is named Little Boat Harbor Beach and is located in Dillon Bay. It is entered from the beach in a very simple dive; other times the area is easily covered by Craig in a Submarine Scooter.

When in South Australia instead, one can spot these enigmatic sea creatures mainly from Adelaide (Kangaroo Island, Rapid Bay Jetty and The Bluff, especially to see the Leafy sea dragon); and from the city of Melbourne as well, especially to encounter the Weedy sea dragon. ●





**Common or Weedy seadragon** *Phyllopteryx taeniolatus*

The Common seadragon inhabits coastal waters down to at least 50 m (160 ft) deep. It is associated with rocky reefs, seaweed beds and seagrass meadows. These fish are quite slow-moving and rely on their camouflage as protection against predation; they drift in the water and with the leaf-like appendages resemble the swaying seaweed of their habitat.



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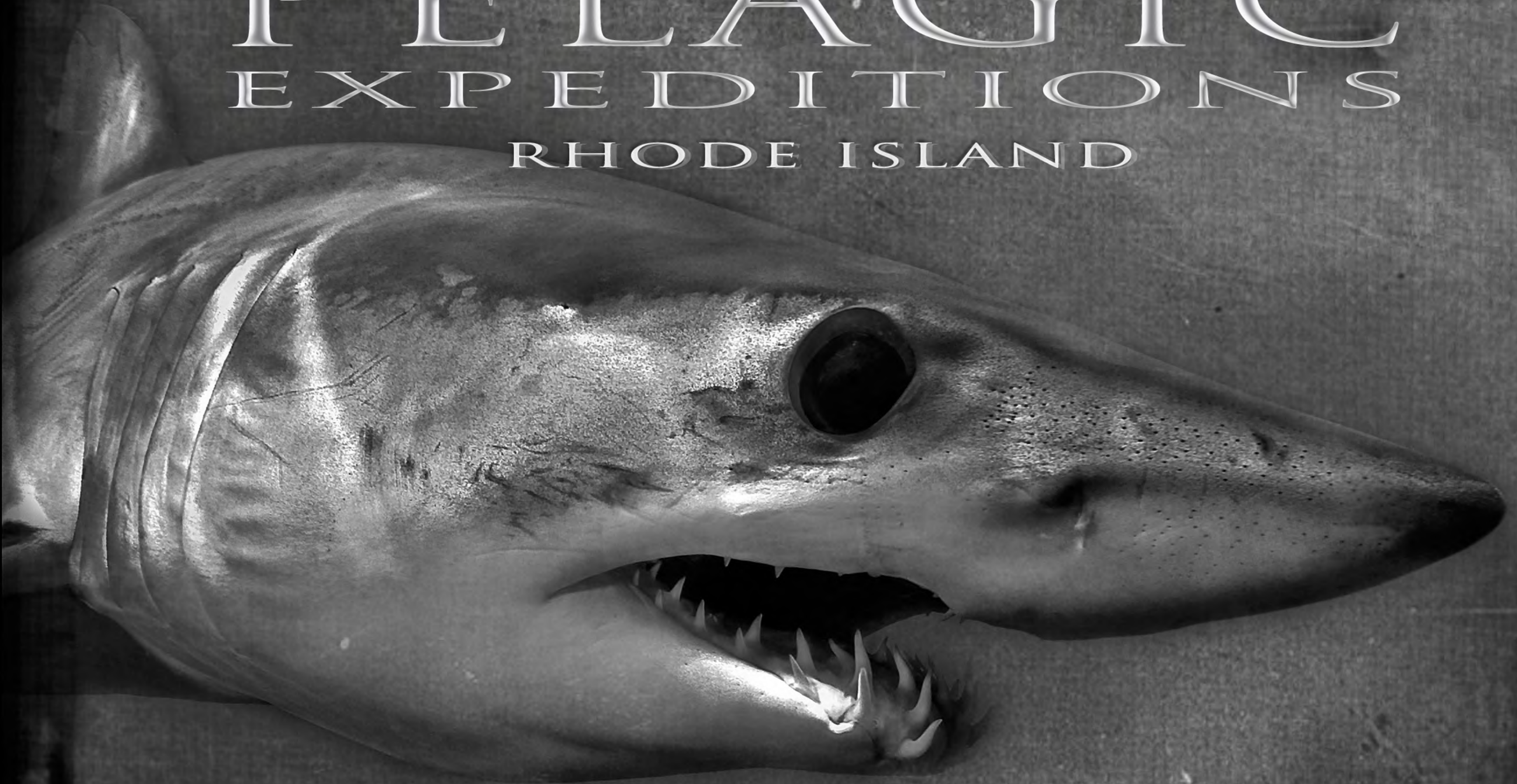
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exceeding by a couple of meters its closest relative *Crocodylus moreletii*. Despite its large dimensions when adult, it mostly feeds on fish and mammals of medium size, including however in its diet amphibians and even arthropods when young. This image of a juvenile about 1.20 meters long was taken in the

Colima swamps, Mexico, utilizing a Laowa 15mm/f4 lens on a Nikon D5600 at 1/80s, ISO 250, f/11". To see and enjoy more of Juan Manuel's stunning reptile photography feel free to visit his profile at <https://www.facebook.com/JuanMaGonzalezPhotography/> ●





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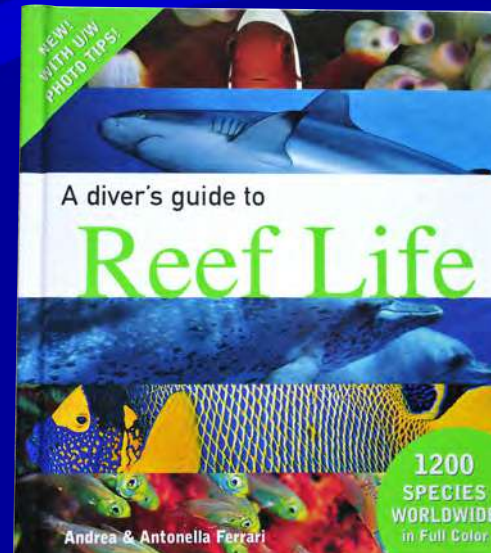
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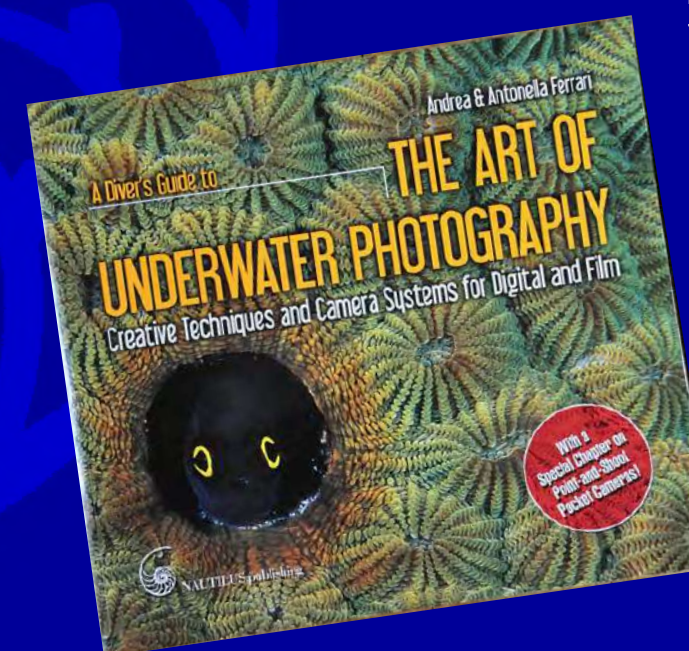
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There is none of the pseudo-art talk that often ruins otherwise beautiful books of photographs. I read it from cover to cover, and it's a great read. The pictures do the talking, and need no talking-up. This 360-page volume doesn't have a weak page in it. • MIKE SEVERNS DIVING: This book is less about the technical aspects of the craft and more about the art and the "eye." This is a big, fat, beautiful, coffee-table-type book that includes 400 photographs illustrating techniques to achieve such effects as artistic lighting and framing. Inspirational as well as educational.



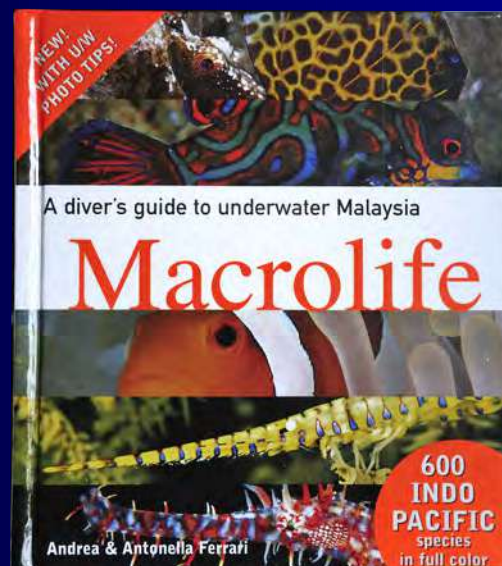
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