



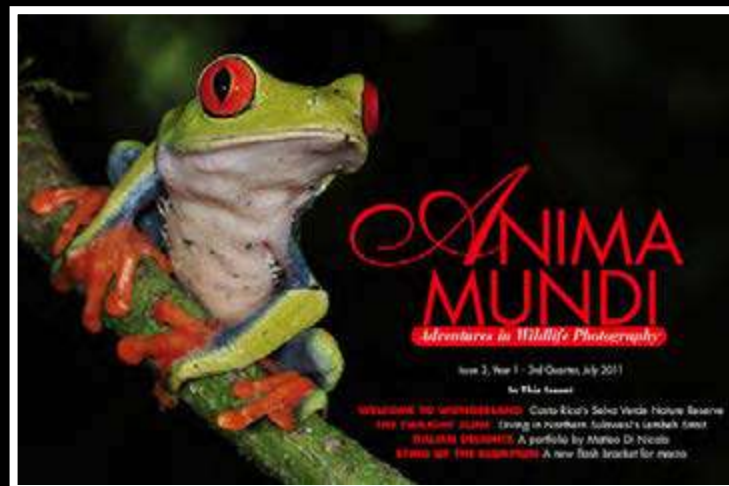
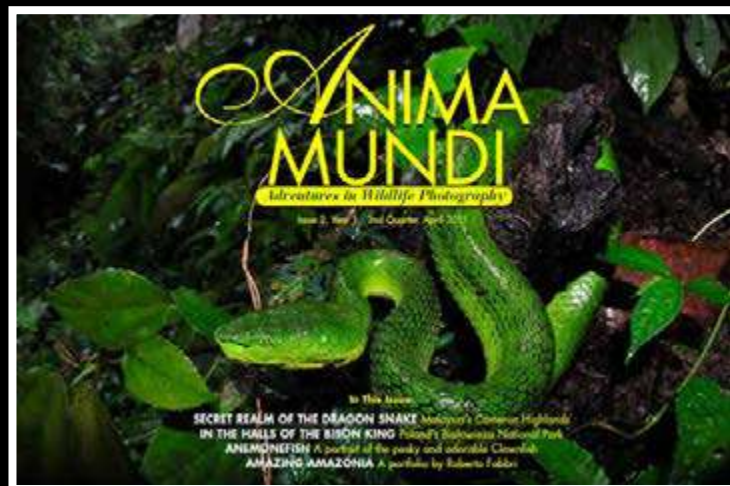
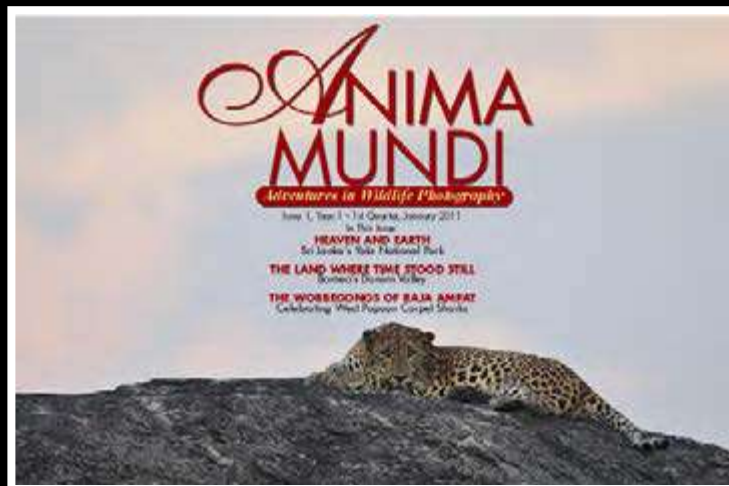
ANIMA MUNDI

Adventures in Wildlife Photography

Issue 35, Year 9 - July 2019

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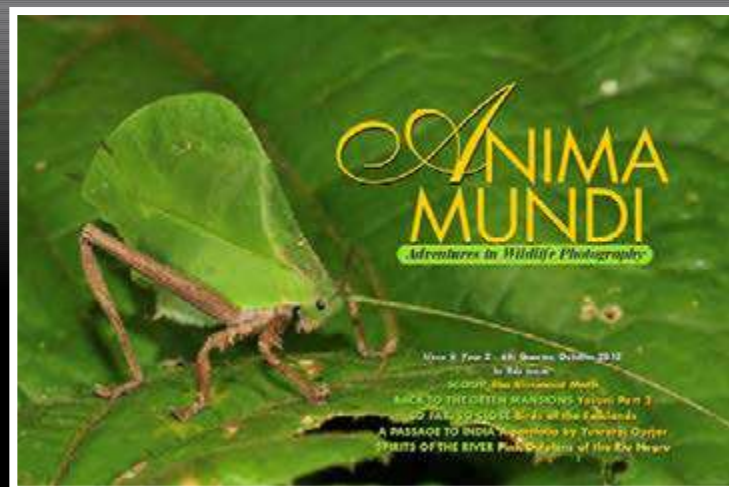
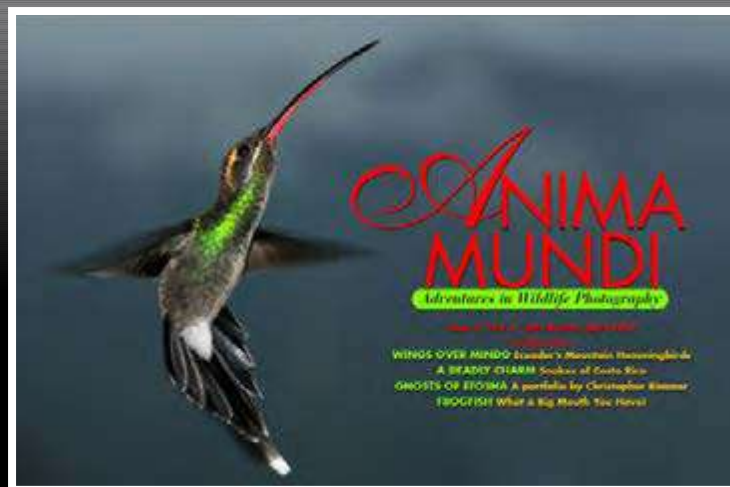


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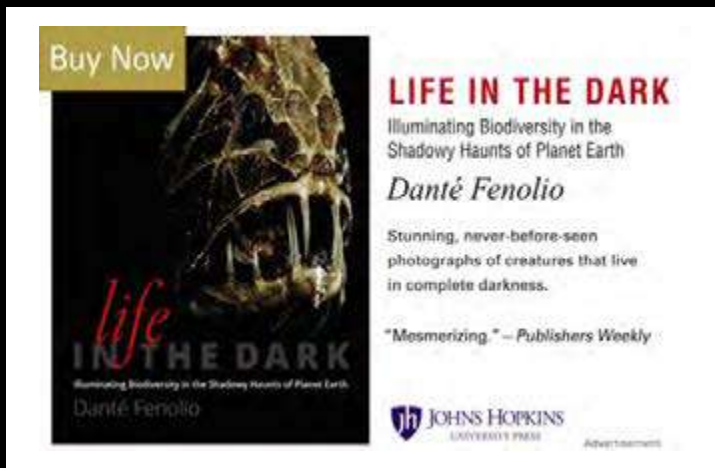
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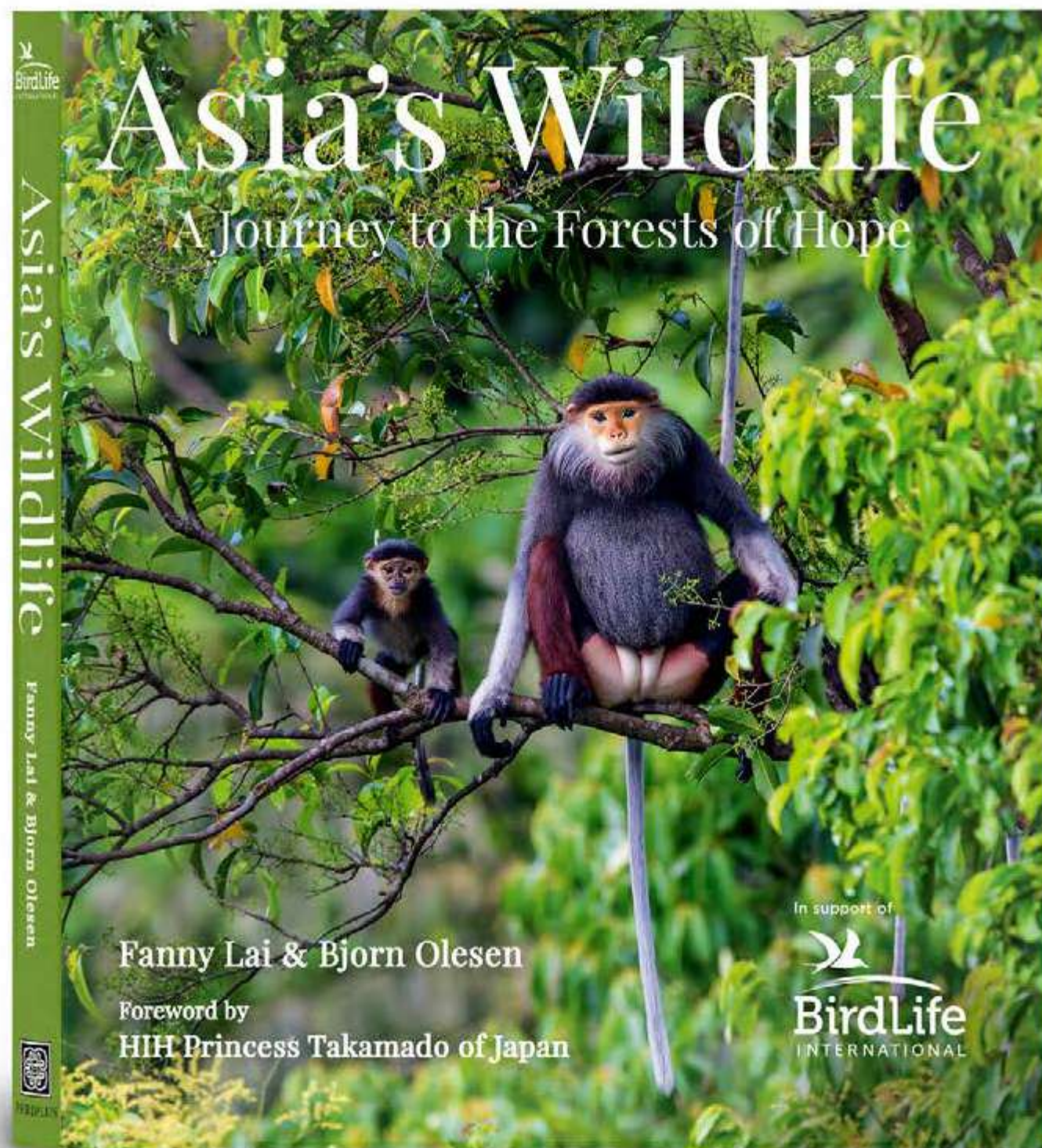
Dear Andrea & Antonella,

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

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

HIH 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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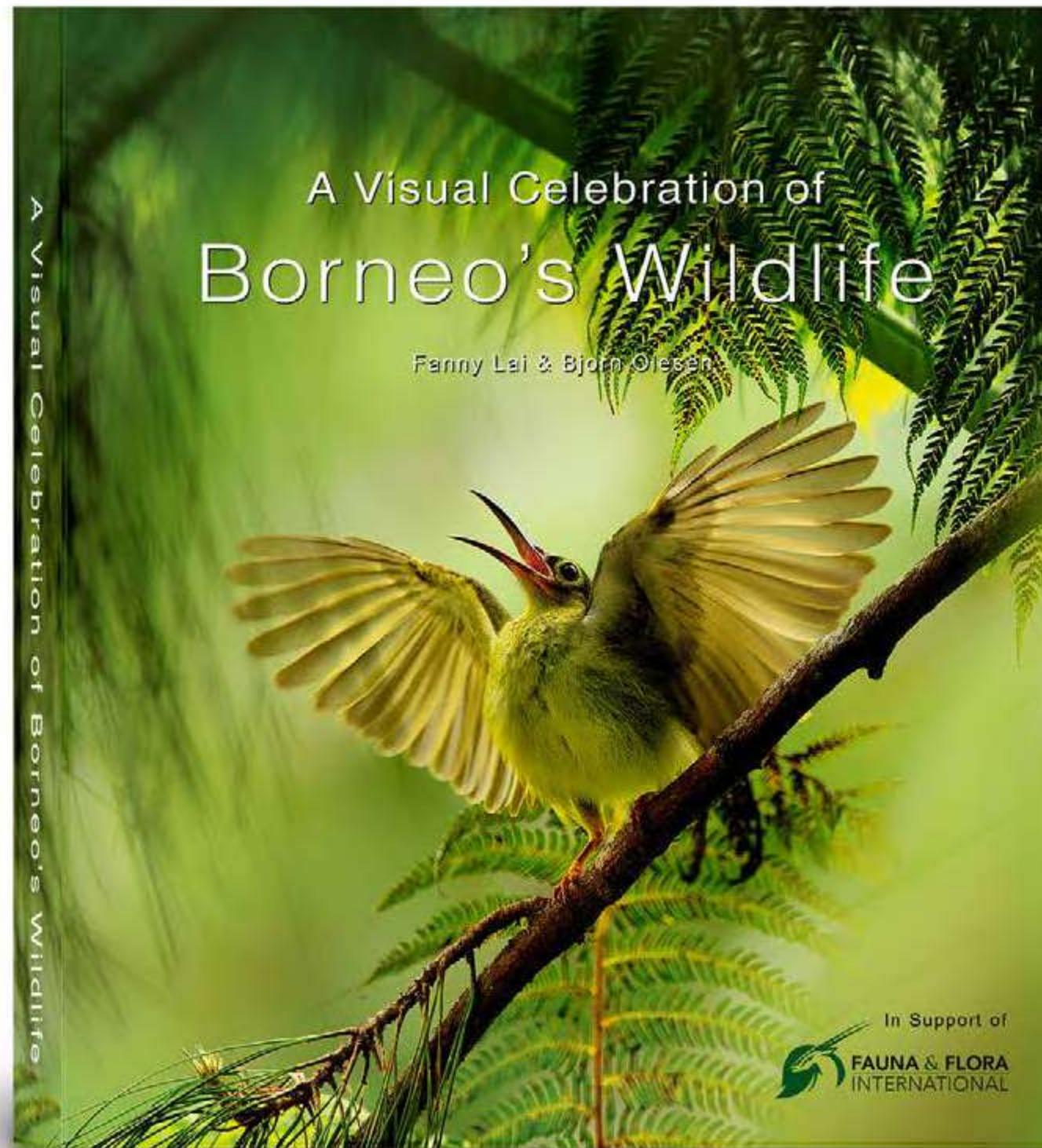
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■ A beautiful and supremely confident Sri Lankan sambar deer *Rusa unicolor sub. unicolor* from the Horton Plains National Park, Central Highlands, Sri Lanka. Our story starts on page 57.

ANIMA MUNDI

Adventures in Wildlife Photography

A world of islands and archipelagos

Welcome to a new issue of *Anima Mundi - Adventures in Wildlife Photography*! Islands and archipelagos - the Galapagos in the Pacific, Sri Lanka in the Indian Ocean, the Bahamas in the Caribbean - seem to be the common thread of this issue, even if we realized it afterwards...

We begin on page 4 with our own extensively illustrated trip report from a legendary wildlife photography destination which even the most seasoned nature traveller cannot afford to miss visiting - the Galapagos archipelago of Ecuador, cradle of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, home to countless endemic species and a National Park where animals show no fear of man. Truly an unforgettable trip, and as such it will take us two separate issues of *Anima Mundi - Adventures in Wildlife Photography* to cover it fully.

From page 57 and on we present you instead with a photographic tribute to the Horton Plains - Sri Lanka's cool, wet, beautiful highlands where huge rhododendrons bloom among extensive grasslands and where fascinating endemics - including a couple of very peculiar lizards - are easily encountered. Sri Lanka is very dear to our heart since a very long time,

and our article confirms its exclusive charm as a really fascinating and easily explored wildlife photography destination.

On page 80 we are then very happy and proud to present our contributor **Bjorn Olesen's** Personal Portfolio - a retired executive who displays a burning passion for nature, wildlife and conservation in his lovely work - taken during countless travels worldwide - with three coffee-table books under his belt (co-authored with his wife Fanny Lai), Bjorn is a shining example of how influential highly motivated individuals can be.



We finally wrap our current issue from page 98 and following with a stunning contribution by our contributor and underwater photographer **Don Silcock** from Bali, who tells us in images and words about his experiences in diving with the intimidating and uncommonly observed Great hammerheads in the Bahamas.

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

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

■ *Galapagos Land Iguana*
Conolophus subcristatus, Isla
Plaza Sur aka Plaza South,
Galapagos archipelago,
Ecuador. The first part of our
two-installments big story on
this legendary destination
starts on page 4.



We appreciate your feedback
- constructive criticism, useful
suggestions and interesting
contributions are welcome.
Please drop us a line at
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THE GALAPAGOS ARCHIPELAGO
**ENCHANTED
ISLANDS**

An unforgettable trip to Ecuador and
the magical place of origin of Darwin's
groundbreaking theory of evolution

Antonella photographs a Santa Cruz giant tortoise *Chelonoidis porteri*, Isla Santa Cruz, Galapagos archipelago, Ecuador. On the previous page, Marine iguana *Amblyrhynchus cristatus*, Isla Santa Cruz.



TEXT BY ANDREA FERRARI
PHOTOS BY ANDREA & ANTONELLA FERRARI

The Galápagos Islands are legend - a dream destination for naturalists and wildlife photographers worldwide. We have been able to visit them thanks to our friends and partners of Tropical Herping, and our extended, in-depth trip was truly unforgettable. But why are these islands so special? Some explanation is in order to understand their uniqueness...The Galápagos, part of the Republic of Ecuador, are an archipelago of volcanic islands distributed on either side of the equator in the Pacific Ocean, 906 km (563 mi) west of continental Ecuador. The islands are known for their large number of endemic species and were studied by Charles Darwin during the second voyage of HMS Beagle. His observations and collections contributed to the inception of Darwin's theory of evolution by means of natural selection. The Galápagos Islands and their surrounding waters form the Galápagos Province of Ecuador, the Galápagos National Park, and the Galápagos Marine Reserve, with a human population of slightly over 25,000. Straddling the equator, islands in the chain are located in both the northern and southern

hemispheres, with Volcán Wolf and Volcán Ecuador on Isla Isabela being directly on the equator. Española Island, the southernmost islet of the archipelago, and Darwin Island, the northernmost one, are spread out over a distance of 220 km (137 mi). The Galápagos Archipelago consists of 7,880 km² (3,040 sq mi) of land spread over 45,000 km² (17,000 sq mi) of ocean. The largest of the islands, Isabela, measures 2,250 square miles (5,800 km²) and makes up close to three-quarters of the total land area of the Galápagos. Volcán Wolf on Isabela is the highest point, with an elevation of 1,707 m (5,600 ft) above sea level. The group consists of 18 main islands, 3 smaller islands, and 107 rocks and islets. The archipelago is located on the Nazca Plate atop the Galápagos hotspot, a place where the Earth's crust is being melted from below by a mantle plume, creating volcanoes. The first islands formed here at least 8 million and possibly up to 90 million years ago. While the older islands have disappeared below the sea as they moved away from the mantle plume, the youngest islands, Isabela and Fernandina, are still being formed.

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Galapagos lava lizard *Microlophus albemarlensis*, Isla Santa Cruz.

Antonella with
a group of Santa
Cruz giant tortoises
Chelonoidis porteri
on Isla Santa Cruz.



BIODIVERSITY UNDER THREAT

The islands' biodiversity is under threat from several sources. The human population is growing at an unsustainable rate of 8% per year (1995). Introduced species have caused damage, and in 1996 a US\$5 million, five-year eradication plan commenced in an attempt to rid the islands of introduced species such as goats, rats, deer, and donkeys. Except for the rats, the project was essentially completed in 2006. Rats have only been eliminated from the smaller Galápagos Islands of Rábida and Pinzón. Introduced plants and animals, such as feral goats, cats, and cattle, represent the main threat to Galápagos. Quick to reproduce and with no natural predators, these alien species decimated the habitats of native species. The native animals, lacking natural predators on the islands, are defenseless to introduced predators. There are over 700 introduced plant species today, while there are only 500 native and endemic species. This difference is creating a major problem for the islands and the natural species that inhabit them. Non-native goats, pigs, dogs, rats, cats, mice, sheep, horses, donkeys, cows, poultry, ants, cockroaches, and some parasites inhabit the islands today. Dogs and cats attack the tame birds and destroy the nests of birds, land tortoises, and marine turtles. They sometimes kill small Galápagos tortoises and

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Yellow Warbler ■
Dendroica petechia aureola,
 Isla Santa Cruz.



■ Requiem
shark, family
Carcharhinidae,
photographed
at night from the
jetty of Puerto
Ayora harbor,
Isla Santa Cruz.



■ Marine iguana
*Amblyrhynchus
cristatus*, Isla
Santa Cruz.

iguanas. Pigs are even more harmful, covering larger areas and destroying the nests of tortoises, turtles and iguanas, as well as eating the animals' native food. Pigs also knock down vegetation in their search for roots and insects. The black rat *Rattus rattus* attacks small Galápagos tortoises when they leave the nest, so in Pinzón they stopped the reproduction for a period of more than 50 years; only adults were found on that island. Also, where the black rat is found, the endemic rat has disappeared. Cattle and donkeys eat all the available vegetation and compete with native species for the scarce water. In 1959, fishermen introduced one male and two female goats to Pinta island; by 1973, the National Park service estimated the population of goats to be over 30,000 individuals. Goats were also introduced to Marchena in 1967 and to Rabida in 1971. A goat eradication program, however, cleared the goats from Pinta and

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Left, Galapagos sea lion *Zalophus wollebaeki*, Puerto Ayora fish market, Isla Santa Cruz; top right, taxi parking in Puerto Ayora; bottom right, Galapagos Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis urinator* and fishermen at the Puerto Ayora fish market, Isla Santa Cruz.





Marine iguana
Amblyrhynchus cristatus,
Isla Santa Cruz.

Santiago and most of the goat population from Isabela. In fact, by 2006 all feral pigs, donkeys and non-sterile goats had been eliminated from Santiago and Isabela, the largest islands with the worst problems due to non-native mammals. The fast-growing poultry industry on the inhabited islands has also been cause for concern from local conservationists, who fear domestic birds could introduce disease into the endemic wild bird populations. The Galápagos marine sanctuary is under threat from a host of illegal fishing activities, in addition to other problems of development. The most pressing threat to the Marine Reserve comes from local, mainland and foreign fishing targeting marine life illegally within the Reserve, such as sharks (hammerheads and other species) for their fins, and the harvest of sea cucumbers out of season. El Niño has also adversely affected the marine ecosystem. In January 2001, an oil slick from a stranded tanker threatened the islands, but winds and shifting ocean currents helped disperse the oil before much damage was done. The devastating El Niño of 1982-83 saw almost six times as much rain as normal in the Galapagos and created a wildlife catastrophe. The 1997-98 El Niño adversely affected wildlife in the waters surrounding the islands, as the waters were 5 °C (9 °F) warmer than normal. Corals and barnacles suffered, hammerhead sharks were driven away, and most of the island's seabirds failed to breed in 1997-98. The mortality rate of marine iguanas rose as the green algae they

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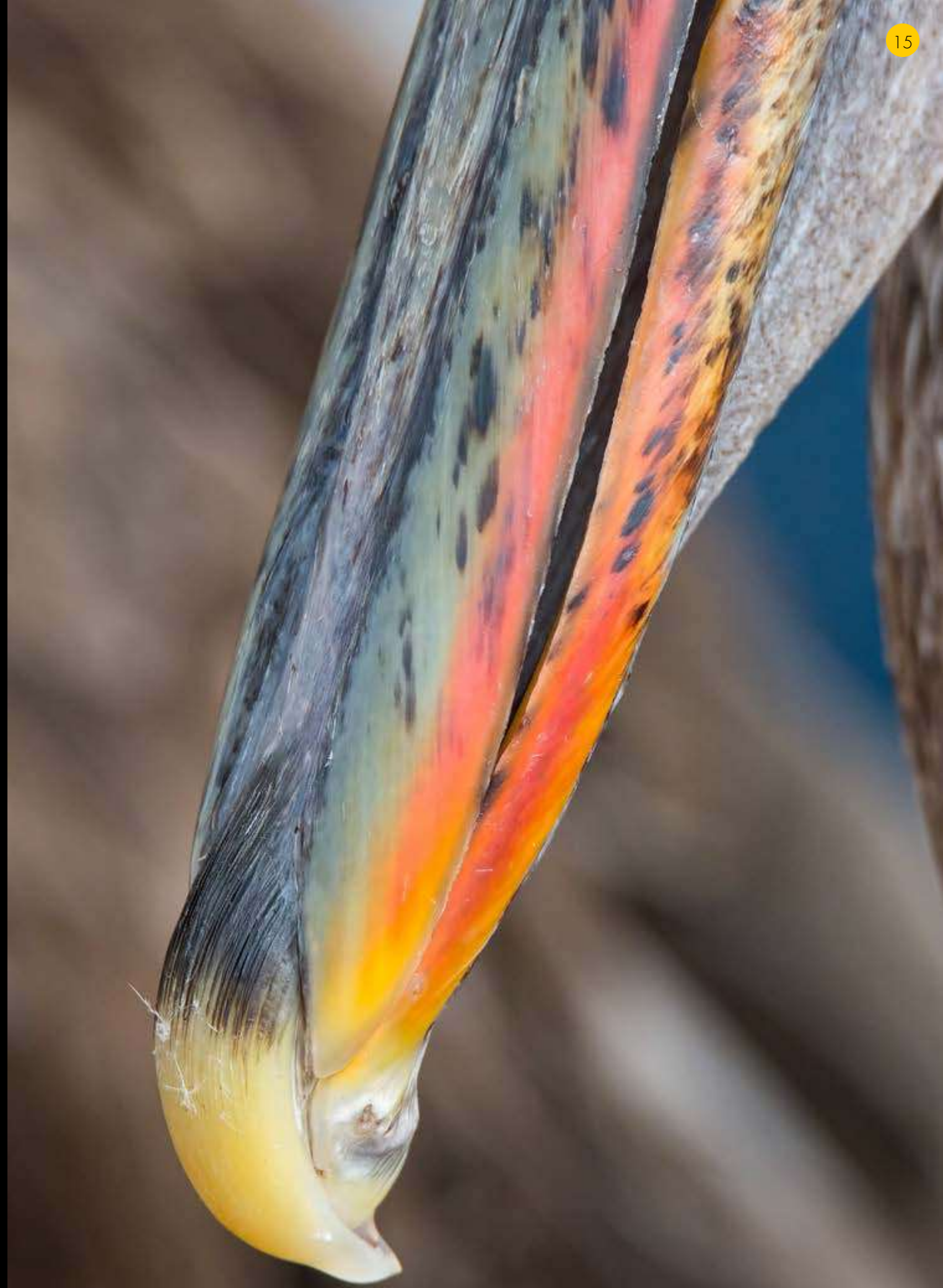
Medium ■
 ground finch
Geospiza fortis,
 Isla Santa Cruz.

■ Santa Cruz giant tortoise *Chelonoidis porteri*, Isla Santa Cruz, Galapagos archipelago, Ecuador. The shape of the tortoises' shell differs from island to island.



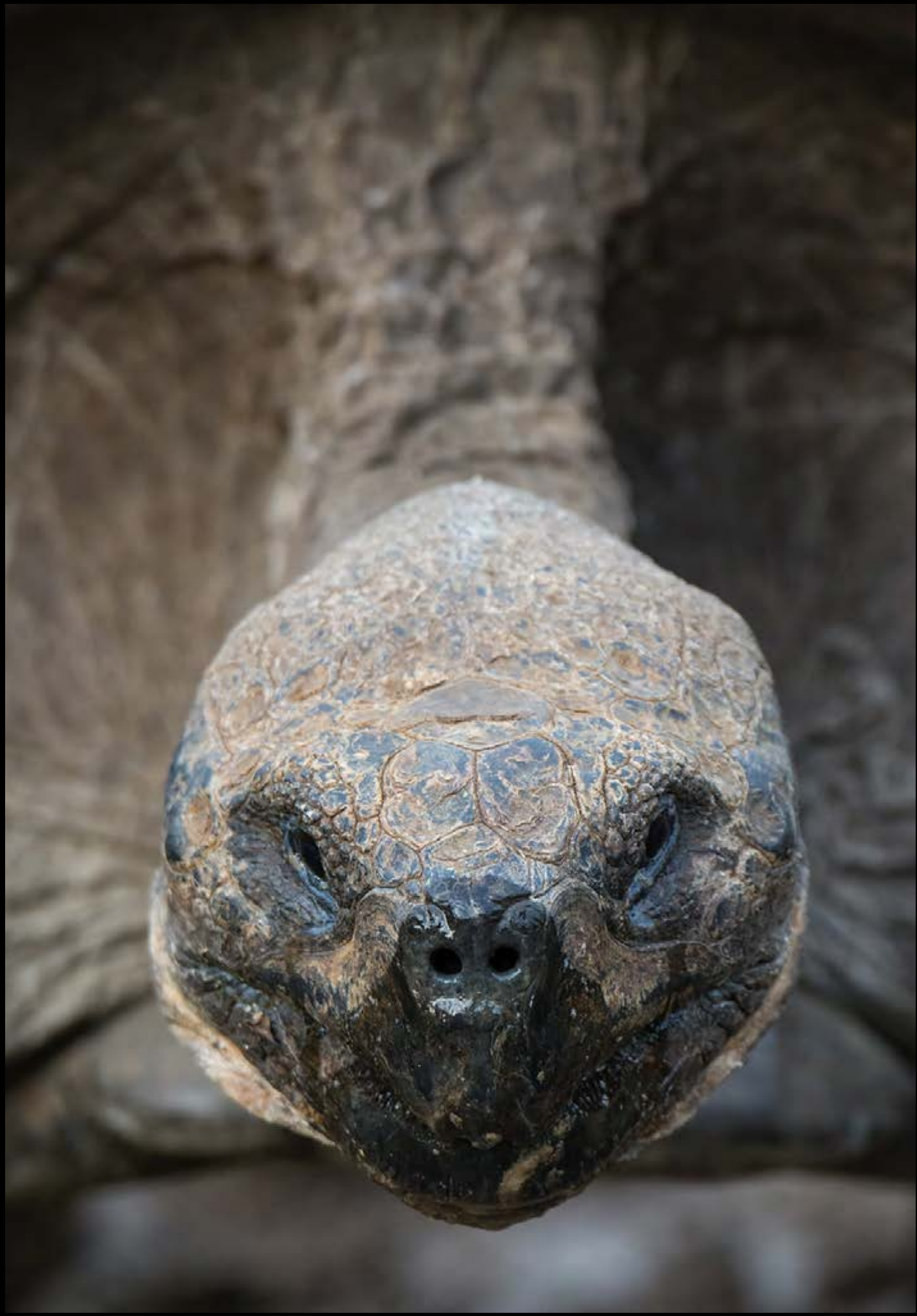


■ Left, Medium ground finch *Geospiza fortis*, Isla Santa Cruz. Right, detail of the beak of a Galapagos Brown Pelican *Pelecanus occidentalis urinator*, Isla Santa Cruz.



Galapagos
Brown Pelican
*Pelecanus
occidentalis
urinator*, Puerto
Ayora fish market,
Isla Santa Cruz.





■ Far left, swimming Marine iguana *Amblyrhynchus cristatus*, Isla Santa Cruz. Left, Santa Cruz giant tortoise *Chelonoidis porteri*, Isla Santa Cruz.

■ *Marine iguana*
Amblyrhynchus cristatus
basking in the sun,
Isla Santa Cruz.





■ Top left, Galapagos dove *Zenaida galapagoensis*, Isla Santa Cruz; top right, Galapagos white-cheeked pintail duck *Anas bahamensis*, Isla Santa Cruz. Bottom left, Lava heron *Butorides sundevalli*, Isla Santa Cruz; bottom right, Medium ground finch *Geospiza fortis*, Isla Santa Cruz.



Marine iguana ■
Amblyrhynchus cristatus,
Isla Santa Cruz.

■ *Marine iguana*
Amblyrhynchus cristatus,
Isla Santa Cruz,
thermoregulating in the
sun with the harbour
of Puerto Ayora
in the background.





■ Top left, the beautiful Finch Bay Hotel in Puerto Ayora; top right, Semipalmated plover *Charadrius semipalmatus*, Isla Santa Cruz. Bottom left, Medium ground finch *Geospiza fortis*, Isla Santa Cruz; bottom right, Antonella, Andrea and Tropical Herping co-founder Lucas M. Bustamante on their arrival in the Galapagos.



■ *Medium ground finch*
Geospiza fortis,
Isla Santa Cruz. It was
the shape of the beak
developed by the finches
of the Galapagos
archipelago - different
from island to island
according to their diet -
which gave Charles
Darwin the first idea
about the theory of
evolution.



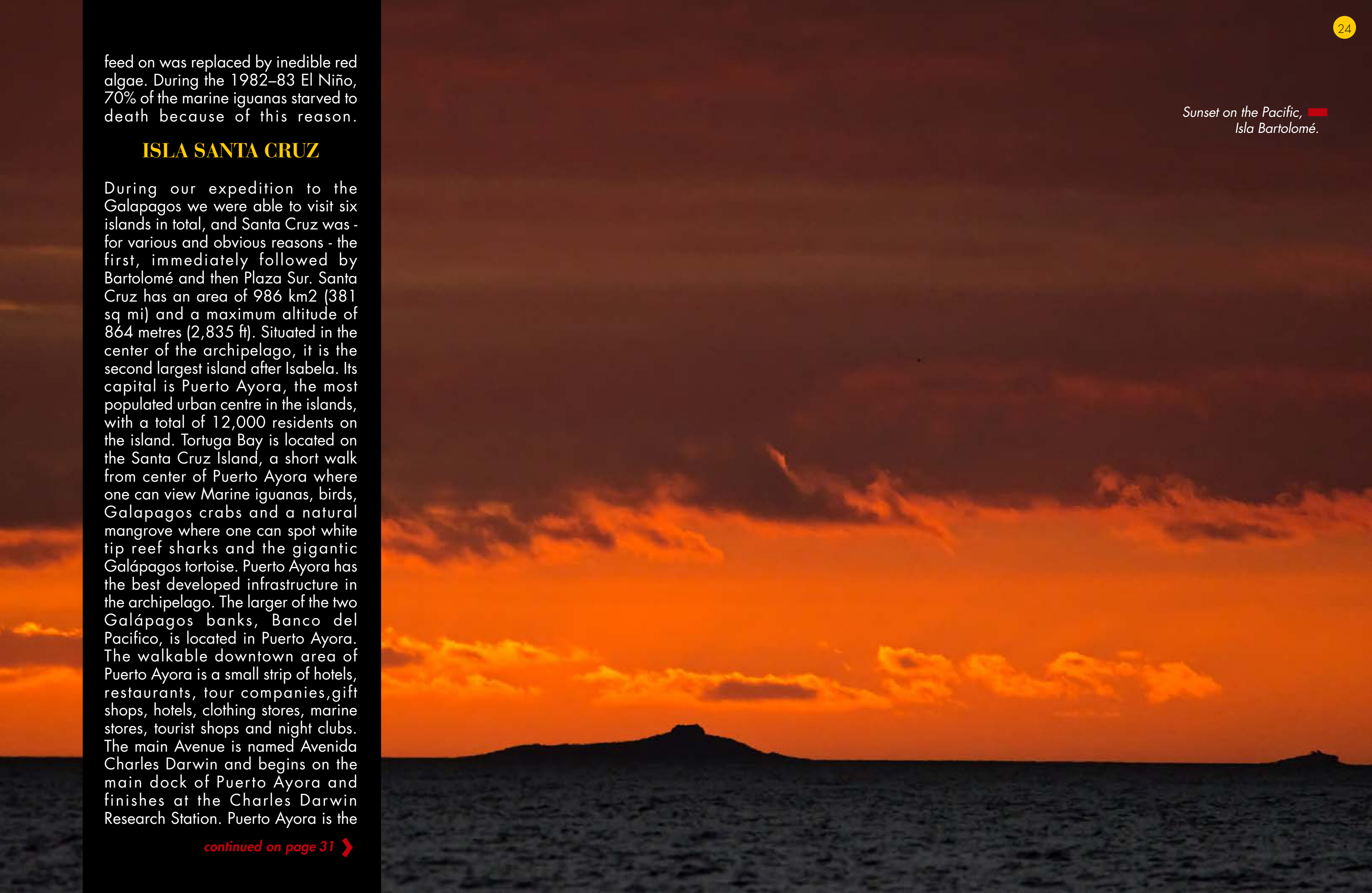
feed on was replaced by inedible red algae. During the 1982–83 El Niño, 70% of the marine iguanas starved to death because of this reason.

ISLA SANTA CRUZ

During our expedition to the Galapagos we were able to visit six islands in total, and Santa Cruz was - for various and obvious reasons - the first, immediately followed by Bartolomé and then Plaza Sur. Santa Cruz has an area of 986 km² (381 sq mi) and a maximum altitude of 864 metres (2,835 ft). Situated in the center of the archipelago, it is the second largest island after Isabela. Its capital is Puerto Ayora, the most populated urban centre in the islands, with a total of 12,000 residents on the island. Tortuga Bay is located on the Santa Cruz Island, a short walk from center of Puerto Ayora where one can view Marine iguanas, birds, Galapagos crabs and a natural mangrove where one can spot white tip reef sharks and the gigantic Galápagos tortoise. Puerto Ayora has the best developed infrastructure in the archipelago. The larger of the two Galápagos banks, Banco del Pacifico, is located in Puerto Ayora. The walkable downtown area of Puerto Ayora is a small strip of hotels, restaurants, tour companies, gift shops, hotels, clothing stores, marine stores, tourist shops and night clubs. The main Avenue is named Avenida Charles Darwin and begins on the main dock of Puerto Ayora and finishes at the Charles Darwin Research Station. Puerto Ayora is the

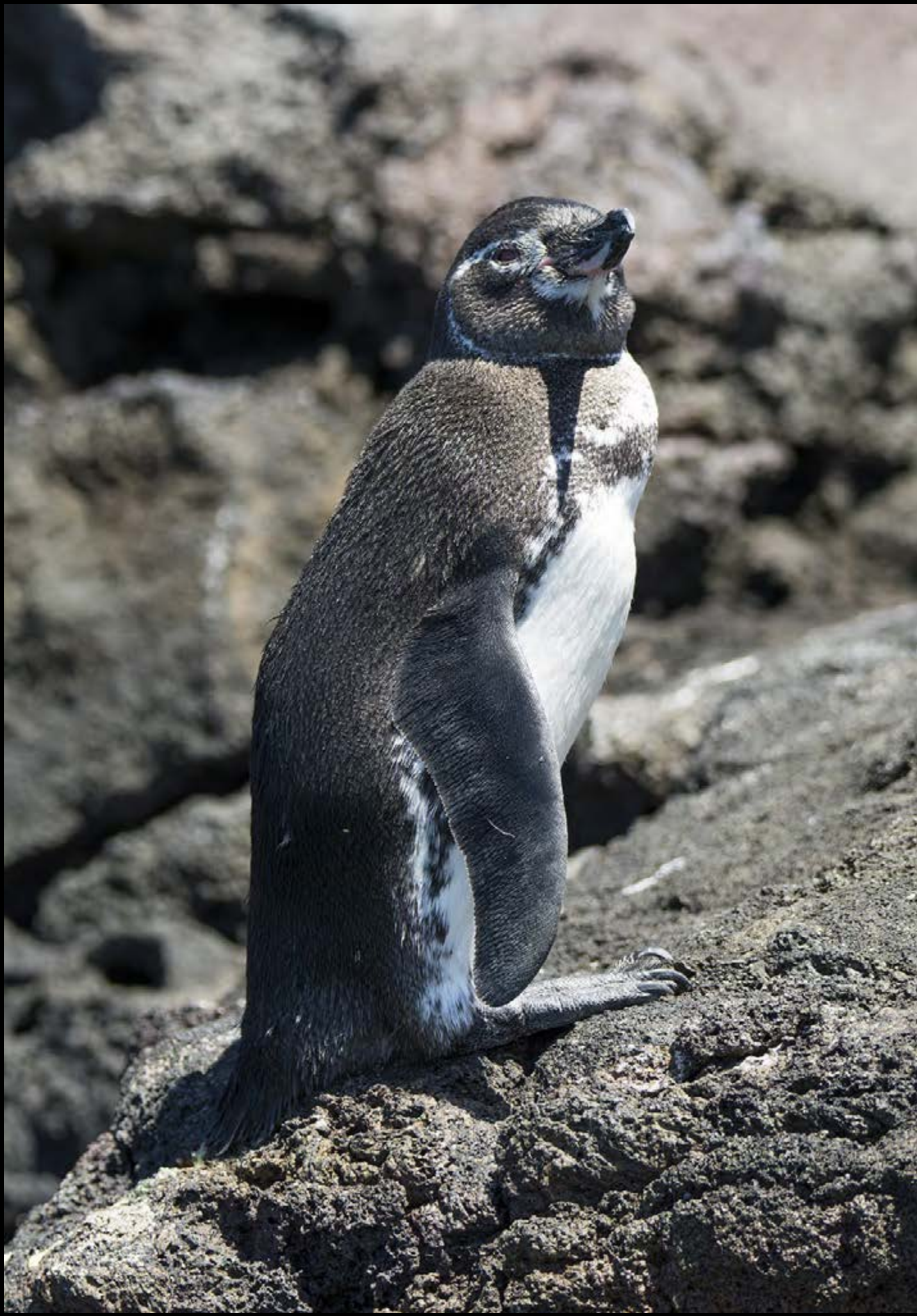
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Sunset on the Pacific, Isla Bartolomé.



■ The typical prehistoric-looking volcanic panorama of Isla Bartolomé.





■ Left, Galápagos penguin *Spheniscus mendiculus*, Isla Bartolomé; right, typical volcanic sand landscape, Isla Bartolomé.

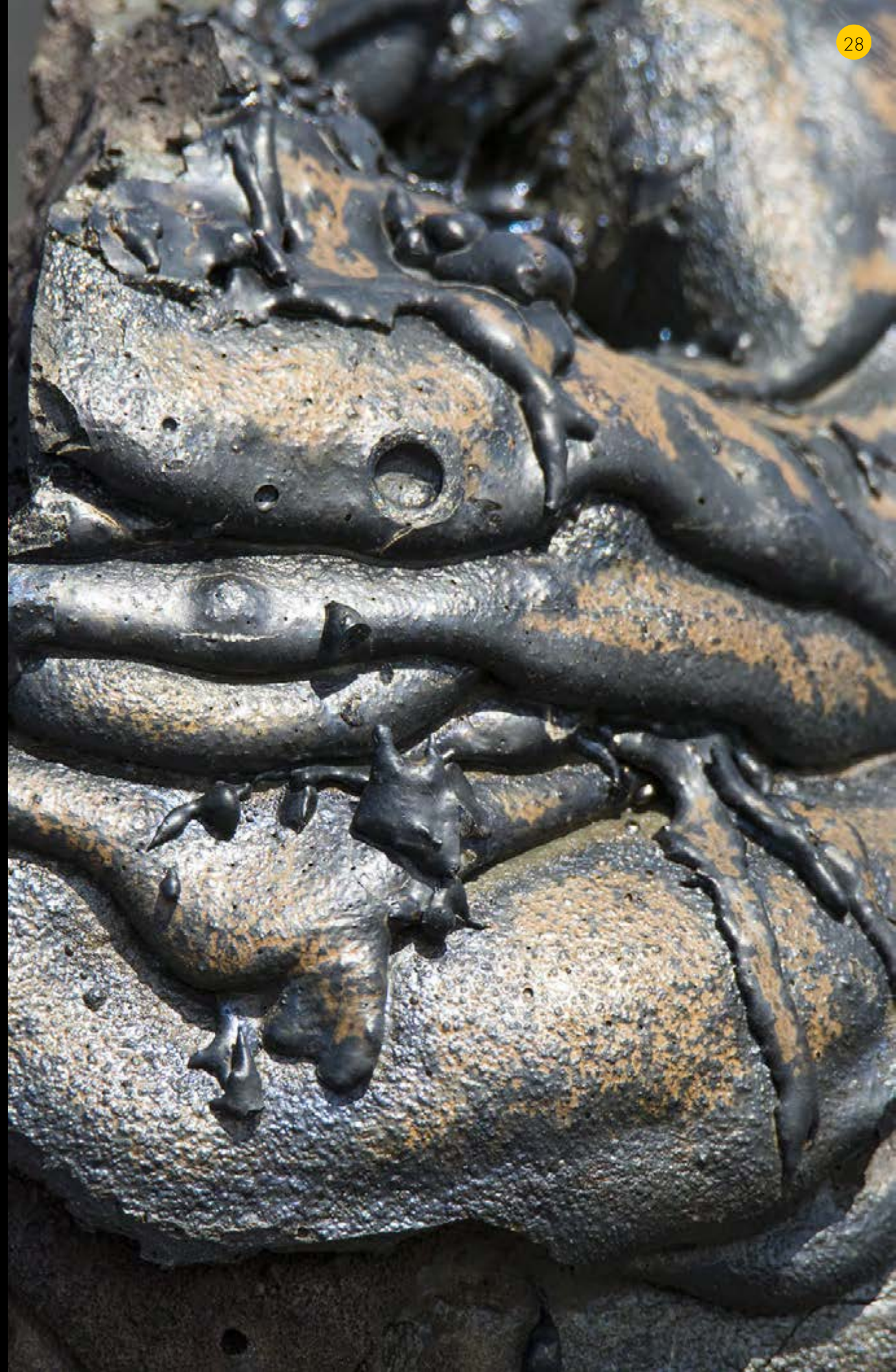




■ Solidified lava detail, Isla Bartolomé.



Solidified lava details, Isla Bartolomé. One could literally spend days photographing such fascinating details while on the island - the glassified lava fields stretch for hundreds of meters, offering an infinite variety of shapes.





Solidified lava detail, Isla Bartolomé.



■ Top, a panoramic view of the typical landscape of Isla Bartolomé; Bottom left, Galápagos penguin *Spheniscus mendiculus*, Isla Bartolomé; bottom right, Magnificent frigatebird *Fregata magnificens* at sunset, Isla Bartolomé.




best place in Galápagos for communicating with the outside world via numerous cybercafes with Internet access or telephone offices. Emergency medical facilities include a new hospital opened in 2006 and the island's only hyperbaric chamber. Most of the locals live in the northern part of the town where various schools, a market hall and a sports center were built. Most of the shops, hardware stores and grocery stores there can be found in Calle Baltra and Calle Durán. Fresh water is at a premium on the island and in this town. Locals practice water conservation and typically collect rainwater during the rainy season even if there is a desalination plant on the island. The Charles Darwin Research Station (CDRS) is a biological research station operated by the Charles Darwin Foundation. It is located here on the shore of Academy Bay, with satellite offices on Isabela and San Cristóbal islands. Here Ecuadorian and foreign scientists work on research and projects for conservation of the Galápagos terrestrial and marine ecosystems. The Research Station, established in 1959 and dedicated in 1964, has a natural history interpretation center and also carries out educational projects in support of conservation of the Galápagos Islands, and in support of external researchers visiting the islands to conduct field work.


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■ The typically arid landscape of Isla Bartolomé.





More solidified ■
lava details, Isla
Bartolomé.
Despite its solid
appearance, the
hardened lava crust
is often paper-thin
and incredibly
fragile, requiring
much attention to
avoid damaging it.



ISLA BARTOLOME

Bartolomé Island is a volcanic islet just off the east coast of Santiago Island. It is one of the "younger" islands in the Galápagos archipelago. With a total land area of just 1.2 square kilometres (0.5 square miles), this island offers some of the most beautiful landscapes in the archipelago. The island consists of an extinct volcano and a variety of red, orange, green, and glistening black volcanic formations. It has a volcanic cone that is easy to climb and provides great views of the other islands. Bartolomé is famous for its Pinnacle Rock, which is the distinctive characteristic of this island, and the most representative landmark of the Galápagos. It has two visitor sites. At the first one, one may swim and snorkel around Pinnacle Rock; the underwater world there is really impressive. Snorkelers are in the water with the penguins, marine turtles, white-tipped reef sharks, and other tropical fish. The bay is also an excellent place to go swimming. The twin bays are separated by a narrow isthmus. Galápagos penguins are frequently seen, and a small cave behind Pinnacle Rock houses a breeding colony. Seasonally, Bartolomé is the mating and nesting site for the green turtles. With herons, they make use of the gentler beaches. The Galápagos lava cacti colonize the new lava fields.



■ Magnificent frigatebird
Fregata magnificens
 at sunset, Isla
 Bartolomé.

ISLA PLAZA SUR


Plaza Sur is a small island off the east coast of Santa Cruz. It has an area of 0.13 km² and a maximum altitude of 23 metres, and it was formed by lava up streaming from the bottom of the ocean. Despite its small size, it is home to a large number of species and known for its extraordinary flora. The sea bluffs hold large numbers of birds, such as nesting red-billed tropicbirds and swallow-tailed gulls, and offer wide vistas. The prickly pear cactus trees *Opuntia echios* are noteworthy, as is the large colony of Galápagos land iguanas. Furthermore, the territory and breeding season of the

Galapagos land iguana overlap only on Plaza Sur with those of the marine iguana, giving rise to a unique population of hybrid iguanas. Depending on the season, the *Sesuvium* ground vegetation changes its colour from green in the rainy season to orange and purple in the dry season. ●

DON'T MISS THE SECOND INSTALLMENT OF OUR GALAPAGOS STORY – COMING IN OCTOBER 2019 ON ISSUE 36 OF ANIMA MUNDI – ADVENTURES IN WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY!



■ The typical panorama of Isla Bartolomé seen from the highest viewpoint of the small island.

Swallow-tailed 
gull *Creagrus furcatus*
flying over the Pacific
Ocean, Isla Plaza Sur.





■ Top, the typically arid landscape of Isla Plaza Sur during the dry season, with the unmistakable coating of *Sesuvium* succulents a bright red and orange; bottom, Galapagos Land Iguana *Conolophus subcristatus*, Isla Plaza Sur.



Galapagos Land Iguana
Conolophus subcristatus,
Isla Plaza Sur.



■ Ruddy turnstone
Arenaria interpres,
Isla Plaza Sur.



■ Red rock crab or Sally Lightfoot crab *Grapsus grapsus*, Isla Plaza Sur - one of the most colorful and iconic species of the Galapagos archipelago.




Typical coastal landscape of Isla Plaza Sur during the dry season.



A natural swimming pool (but the water is very cold!) along the shoreline of Isla Plaza Sur..



Nesting Swallow-tailed gull 
Creagrus furcatus, Isla Plaza Sur.

■ An inflatable boat loaded with tourists - accompanied by the obligatory guide - approaches the landing jetty at Plaza Sur.





A Galápagos sea lion ■
Zalophus wollebaeki frolicks
in the shallows at Isla Plaza
Sur - a common sight here.



Two typical images of the rather surreal and very photo-friendly Plaza Sur landscapes during the dry season.



A quintessential Galapagos image with a mother and baby Galapagos sea lion *Zalophus wollebaeki*, and Sally lightfoot crabs on the shoreline rocks, Isla Plaza Sur.



Left, Galapagos Land
Iguana *Conolophus*
subcristatus, Isla Plaza Sur;
right, Galápagos sea lion
Zalophus wollebaeki,
Isla Plaza Sur.



Red rock crab or Sally Lightfoot crab *Grapsus grapsus*, Isla Plaza Sur - one of the most colorful and iconic species of the Galapagos archipelago.



Galapagos
Land Iguana
Conolophus
subcristatus, Isla
Plaza Sur. These
peaceful reptiles
feed exclusively
on succulents.





■ Depending on its orientation, the Plaza Sur coastline offers quiet, glass-flat coves and scenic, surf-pounded rocky cliffs.






A tender moment between
a mother and baby
Galápagos sea lion
Zalophus wollebaeki,
Isla Plaza Sur.

■ *The stunningly colorful panoramas presented by Isla Plaza Sur during the dry season - a landscape photographer's dream.*



Swallow-tailed 
gull *Creagrus furcatus* flying
over over the pounding surf and
the steep cliffs of Isla Plaza Sur.



■ Prickly pear
Opuntia cactus
colonize the
Plaza Sur
landscape in
great numbers,
offering many
interesting
photographic
opportunities.



At-a-glance travel guide



COUNTRY OF DESTINATION: **ECUADOR**



USEFUL TIPS FOR YOUR EXPEDITION

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

ROUTE: Your international flight will land at Mariscal Sucre International Airport, close to Ecuador's high-altitude capital Quito. Domestic flights to the Galapagos leave from Quito or Guayaquil, both of which have regular morning flights to the islands (the Quito flight will however pass through Guayaquil). The islands are about two hour flight from Guayaquil, and the flight from Quito to Guayaquil takes about half an hour. The landing strip is on a small deserted island just in front of Isla Santa Cruz, which is reached after landing by a ferry service. The archipelago may also be reached by luxury cruise ships and scuba diving liveboards, again usually departing from Guayaquil.

MEANS OF TRANSPORT: Keep in mind that the National Park rules are very clear and adamantly enforced everywhere: visitors can only walk on the islands along fixed, well-marked, immaculately kept trails and - most importantly - for a given, limited period of time, to make room for the following group and not unduly harassing the confident wildlife. A National Park service guide will always be present. If staying on a given island, local boats will be used to reach the other islands nearby; cruise ships offer longer and wider-ranging itineraries. For a well-organized and successful trip we can - as it always happens with trips to Ecuador - heartily recommend the services of our friends of **Tropical Herping**.

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

ACCOMODATION: For our first visit we opted to stay on land rather than joining a crowded, highly organized cruise, and we can heartily recommend to all readers the stunningly beautiful and perfectly managed **Finch Bay Galapagos Hotel**, located in an untouched and peaceful setting in Puerto Ayora.

FOOD: Simple but healthy and filling. Ecuadorians love soups (try the delicious *Locro de Queso* - potatoes, cheese and avocado), meats and fish and

A trip to these enchanted islands is also - literally - a voyage back in time



are blessed all-year round with fantastic vegetables and fruit. Being in the Galapagos and in the middle of the Pacific, the natural choice for most will obviously be the spectacular fish catch of the day.

LANGUAGE: Ecuadorian Spanish and English, especially in tourist areas where many foreigners congregate, such as the Galapagos.

WORRIES: In the past Ecuador used to have a rather (and well-deserved) bad reputation regarding street muggings and tourist-related crimes. Things are much better now, but - like in so many other big cities worldwide - it's always better to be accompanied by local friends when visiting Quito's beautiful historical areas. The inhabited islands of the Galapagos archipelago - such as Santa Cruz or Floreana - are very peaceful, tourism-oriented and quite safe at all times of day or night.

HEALTH: No worries. New changes to entry requirements for the Galapagos Islands in 2018 require that you have a reservation with a cruise or land-based hotel, a return ticket, and proof of health insurance before leaving for the islands. Pre-registration for a transit card is available online.

CLIMATE: From June to December the southern trade winds bring the colder Humboldt Current north to the Galapagos. This means that the water is cooler, and a layer of mist pervades the island skies. The highlands of the larger islands are green and lush while the sea level islands and shorelines have little precipitation. June to December is generally called the "dry season" which is known for its blue skies and mid-day showers. Due to the water temperature, this is the perfect time for diving. The period between December and May is considered the "wet season." During this warmer season, the

Galapagos' climate is more tropical with daily rain and cloudier skies, and the ocean temperature is warmer for swimming and snorkeling.

BESIDES: Don't miss the historical center of the capital Quito, extensively and lovingly restored and featuring spectacular examples of colonial architecture from the Spanish domination. Quito is a vibrant metropolis - restaurants, theaters, art galleries and universities have much to offer to all, not to speak of the stunning vistas and landscapes surrounding it. Ecuador is a small but diverse Country, and it's impossible summarizing it in a few lines - a few hours's travelling will have one passing through high-altitude plateaus and valleys, Andean landscapes and cloud forests - descending to the dry Pacific coast (and the Galapagos Islands) if going West and to the lowland rainforest of the Amazon - locally known as El Oriente - if going East. ●

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EXPLORING THE HORTON PLAINS

SRI LANKAN HIGHLANDS

Endless grasslands, gently rolling hills and mist-shrouded cloud forests at altitude showing a dazzling biodiversity and countless endangered endemisms



Tree Rhododendron *Rhododendron arboreum* along a slow-flowing, crystal-clear mountain brook in the Horton Plains National Park, Central Highlands of Sri Lanka. On the previous page, adult male Sri Lankan sambar deer *Rusa unicolor* sub. *unicolor*, in the typical gently rolling grassland landscape of the area.



TEXT BY ANDREA FERRARI
PHOTOS BY ANDREA & ANTONELLA FERRARI

Horton Plains National Park is a protected area in the central highlands of Sri Lanka, covered by montane grassland and cloud forest. This plateau at an altitude of 2,100–2,300 metres (6,900–7,500 ft) is rich in biodiversity, and many species found here are endemic to the region, designated a National Park in 1988. The Horton Plains are the headwaters of three major Sri Lankan rivers - the Mahaweli, Kelani, and Walawe. Mean annual rainfall is greater than 2,000 millimetres (79 in), and frequent cloud cover limits the amount of sunlight that is available to plants. Mean annual temperature is 13 °C (55 °F) but temperature varies considerably during the course of a day, reaching as high as 27 °C (81 °F) during day time, and dipping as low as 5 °C (41 °F) at night. Ground frost is common in February and mist can persist during most of the day in the wet season. Many pools and waterfalls can be found in the Park, and Horton Plains is considered the most important watershed in Sri Lanka. The vertebrate fauna of the region includes 24 species of mammals, 87 species of birds, nine species of reptiles and eight species of amphibians. The local Sri Lankan elephant population disappeared from the region in the 1940s, massacred by the British tea planters. At present, the most commonly seen mammal is the sambar deer; some research findings estimate the population of sambar deer to be around 1500 to 2000, possibly more than the carrying capacity of the plains. Other mammal species found in the park include Kelaart's long-clawed shrews, toque macaques, purple-faced langurs, rusty-

spotted cat, Sri Lankan leopards, wild boars, stripe-necked mongooses, Sri Lankan spotted chevrotains, Indian muntjacs, and grizzled giant squirrels, with the Horton Plains slender loris *Loris tardigradus nycticeboides*, one of the world's most endangered primates, found only here. Together with the adjacent Peak Wilderness Sanctuary, Horton Plains contains 21 bird species which occur only on Sri Lanka. Four - Sri Lanka blue magpie, Dull-blue flycatcher, Sri Lanka white-eye, and Sri Lanka wood pigeon - occur only in Horton plains, while other endemic species include Sri Lanka spurfowl, Sri Lanka junglefowl, Yellow-fronted barbet, Orange-billed babbler, Sri Lanka bush warbler, and Sri Lanka whistling-thrush. Crested serpent eagle, Mountain hawk-eagle, Black-winged kite and Peregrine falcon are among the birds of prey found in Horton Plains. About 15 amphibian species inhabit the park. Among them are *Microhyla zeylanica*, *Ramanella palmata*, *Fejervarya greenii*, *Rana gracilis*, *Philautus alto*, *Philautus femoralis*, *Philautus frankenbergi*, *Philautus microtympanum*, *Philautus schmarda*, and *Polypedates eques*. Six endemic reptiles are found in the plains: *Calotes nigrilabris*, Rhino horn lizard, *Cophotis ceylanica*, *Lankascincus taprobanensis*, Common rough-sided snake, and Rat snake. Horton Plains is also home to many endemic crustaceans including *Caridina singhalensis* and *Perbrinckia* species. The former is found only in streams that have a temperature of less than 15 degrees C and is now restricted to only a stretch of 10 km of one stream. ●

Pseudophilautus frankenbergi, an endemic species of frog in the *Rhacophoridae* family with a very restricted distribution range from the cloud forest of Horton Plains.



Pygmy lizard *Cophotis ceylanica*, an endemic, slow-moving and severely endangered species with a very restricted distribution range from the cloud forest of Horton Plains National Park, in the Central Highlands of Sri Lanka. This is one of the rare lizard species with a prehensile tail.



Typical landscape with grasslands and Tree Rhododendron *Rhododendron arboreum*, Horton Plains National Park, Central Highlands of Sri Lanka.



Pseudophilautus microtympaum, an endemic and very tiny species of frog in the *Rhacophoridae* family from the cloud forest of Horton Plains National Park, showing its extraordinarily effective camouflage on a quartzite sand and pebble substrate.



Rhino-horned lizard *Ceratophora stoddartii*, an endemic species with a very restricted distribution range from the cloud forest of Horton Plains National Park.



Pseudophilautus frankenbergi, an endemic species of frog of the Horton Plains, here seen perching on Antonella's fingertip and showing its very small size.



Pseudophilautus frankenbergi, an endemic species. We are greatly indebted for all Horton Plains frog identifications to the kindness of Madhava Meegaskumbura, Ph.D., Evolution, Ecology and Systematics Lab, Department of Molecular Biology & Biotechnology, Faculty of Science, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka.



Pseudophilautus frankenbergi, an endemic species in the *Rhacophoridae* family with a very restricted distribution range from the cloud forest of Horton Plains.



Günther's whipping frog or Montane hour-glass tree-frog *Taruga eques*, an endemic species with a very restricted distribution range from the Horton Plains.



Sri Lanka white-eye *Zosterops ceylonensis*, an endemic species, Horton Plains National Park, in the Central Highlands of Sri Lanka.



Adult male Sri Lankan sambar deer *Rusa unicolor* sub. *unicolor*, Horton Plains National Park, Central Highlands, Sri Lanka. Notice the heavy, thick coat typical of deer living in the cool tropical highlands climate.



Top, Sri Lankan sambar deer *Rusa unicolor* sub. *unicolor*; bottom left, Yellow-eared Bulbul *Pycnonotus penicillatus*, an endemic species; bottom right, Eastern jungle crow *Corvus leuallantii*, sitting in a drizzle, cloud forest of Horton Plains National Park, in the Central Highlands of Sri Lanka.



Pied bush chat *Saxicola caprata* from the cloud forest of Horton Plains National Park, in the Central Highlands of Sri Lanka.



Top,
Pseudophilautus frankenbergi; left,
Pseudophilautus microtympanum;
 right,
Pseudophilautus alto. All these small-
 sized frog species show a very
 restricted range and are currently
 threatened.





Rhino-horned lizard *Ceratophora stoddartii*, an endemic species from the cloud forest of Horton Plains National Park, in the Central Highlands of Sri Lanka.



Black-lipped lizard *Calotes nigrilabris*, another endemic species with a very restricted distribution range from the cloud forest of Horton Plains National Park.



A typical, atmospheric image of the mist-shrouded cloud forest of Horton Plains National Park, in the Central Highlands of Sri Lanka.



Sri Lanka Dusky-blue or Dull-blue Flycatcher *Eumyias sordidus*, Horton Plains National Park, in the Central Highlands of Sri Lanka.



Günther's whipping frog or Montane hour-glass tree-frog *Taruga eques*, an endemic species of the Horton Plains.



Pygmy lizard *Cophotis ceylanica*, an endemic species.



Black-lipped lizard *Calotes nigrilabris*, an endemic species.



Sri Lankan sambar deer *Rusa unicolor* sub. *unicolor*, Horton Plains National Park, Central Highlands, Sri Lanka.



Pseudophilautus alto, an endemic species of frog in the *Rhacophoridae* family with a very restricted distribution range from the cloud forest of Horton Plains National Park, in the Central Highlands of Sri Lanka.



Tree Rhododendron *Rhododendron arboreum*, Horton Plains National Park, Central Highlands of Sri Lanka.



Fern detail, cloud forest at lower elevations of Horton Plains National Park, in the Central Highlands of Sri Lanka.



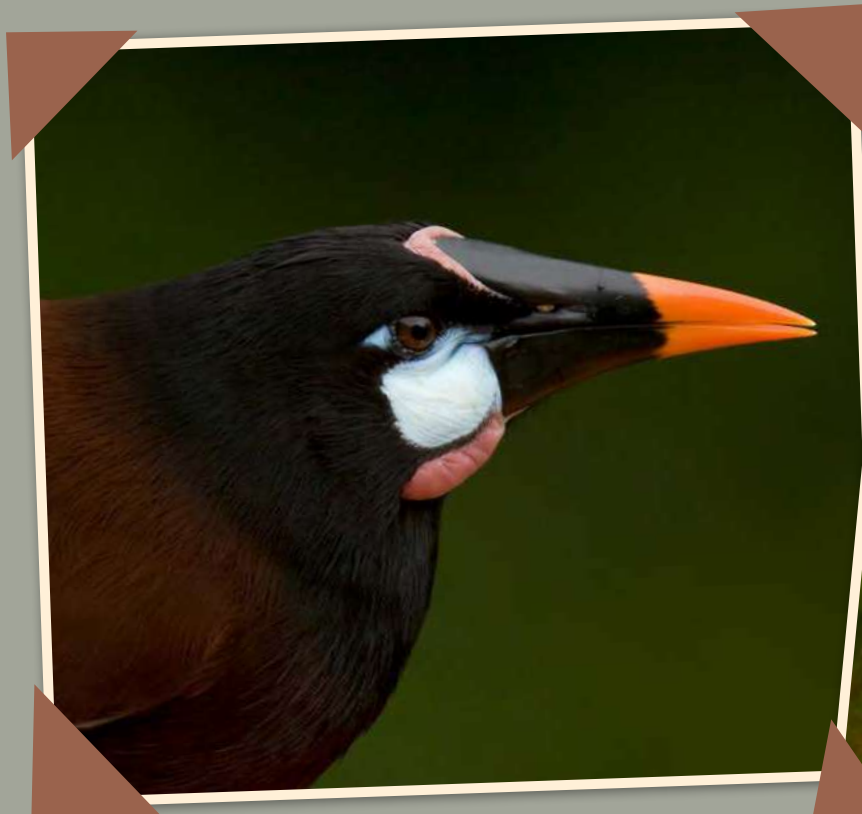
Cloud mountain or elfin forest of Horton Plains National Park, at a higher altitude in the Central Highlands of Sri Lanka.



Sri Lankan sambar deer *Rusa unicolor* sub. *unicolor*, Horton Plains National Park, Central Highlands, Sri Lanka.

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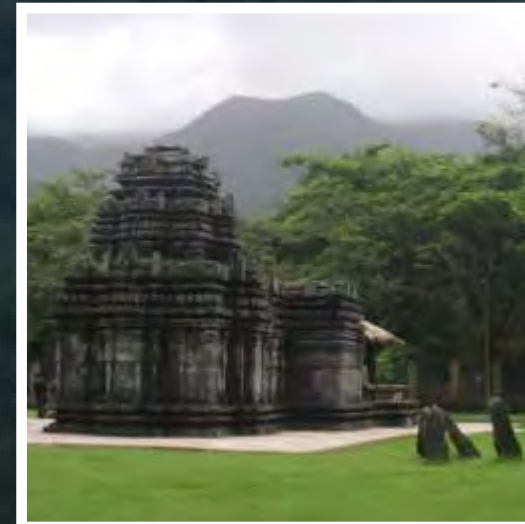
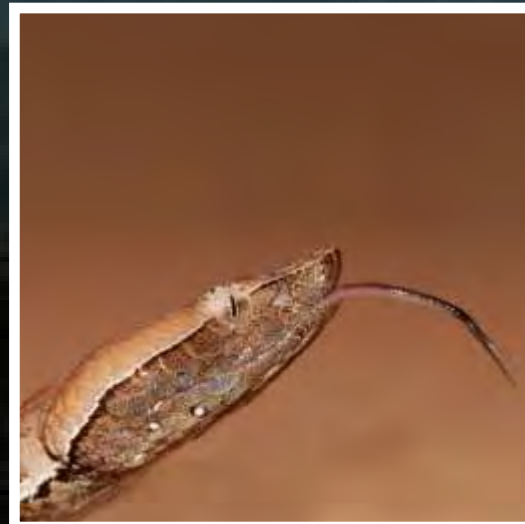
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Bjorn Olesen - A Wildlife Photographer in His Own Words

I am a retired corporate executive, award-winning wildlife photographer and a passionate conservationist. I have had the privilege to live in Asia for more than 30 years. Over the past 12 years I have travelled extensively particularly in Asia, but also in the Americas and Africa documenting many endangered species. In 2013 I was the Grand Price winner of the Smithsonian Magazine 10th Photo Competition with 37,600 submissions from 112 countries. With my wife Fanny I have authored three large format books: *A Visual Celebration of Giant pandas* in 2012, *A Visual Celebration of Borneo's Wildlife* in 2016, and *Asia's Wildlife: A Journey to the Forests of Hope* in 2018. All royalties from these publications will be donated to nature conservation

through World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Fauna & Flora International and BirdLife International. As a conservation photographer creating images that tell stories that can make a difference, the job only starts when you press the shutter. However, the more important challenge is to ensure that such stories reach the wider audience that needs to see and feel them, to get engaged to make a change. It is my hope, that these publications can create an insightful picture of current conservation issues, and call attention to the diverse threats faced by Asia's biodiversity. In the photo I am releasing a Common kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* found in a snare at the Indawgyi Wildlife Sanctuary, Kachin State, Myanmar.

<http://www.bjornolesen.com>



Helmeted Hornbill

Prehistoric looking
Helmeted Hornbill
Rhinoplax vigil,
critically
endangered. This
male is about to feed
the female inside the
tree cavity. Peninsula
Malaysia.

Nikon D500
600mm VR + 1.4
Teleconverter
1/160
f/5.6
ISO 320

**Sulawesi Crested
Macaque**

Sulawesi Crested
Macaque *Macaca
nigra*, critically
endangered.
Tangkoko NP,
Sulawesi, Indonesia.
Sadly even inside
National Parks
poaching is quite
common; the
individual on the
right has lost part of
his arm in a snare,
fortunately it
survived and
appeared fit.

Nikon D3S
300mm f/2.8
1/125
f/5.0 -2/3EV
ISO 3200





Waigeo Cuscus

The Waigeo Cuscus *Spilocuscus papuensis* lives high in the forest canopy and is rarely seen, as most are nocturnal and spend the day sleeping. Waigeo, West Papua, Indonesia.

Nikon D5
600mm VR
1/400
f/4.0 +2 2/3EV
ISO 2000

Southern Brown Kiwi

Steward Island at the southern tip of New Zealand is one of the few places to see the Southern Brown Kiwi *Apteryx australis lawryi*. No lights were allowed apart from a special low-light torch used by the guide, so without modern camera technology it would have been impossible to take this photo, virtually in total darkness.

Nikon D4
70-200mm
f/2.8 @ 200mm
1/50 f/2.8 -2EV
ISO 16000



King Penguins

King Penguins

*Aptenodytes
patagonicus*,

Falkland Islands.

With less than
3,000 overnighing
tourists a year,
Falkland Islands is
an attractive wildlife
photography
destination.

The various penguin
species are
completely fearless
towards humans,
and if you sit down
close to a colony,
often they will come
very close.

Nikon D5
600mm VR
1/2500
f/13
ISO 640





Magnificent Hummingbirds

Magnificent Hummingbird *Eugenes fulgens*, Costa Rica. Many hummingbird images are taken in studio-like conditions with multiple flashlights lights and an artificial background. To me, that has not much to do with nature photography. My preference is only to use natural light, which is perfectly possible, as you can see here.

Nikon D4S
600mm VR
1/4000
f/6.3 +2/3EV
ISO 3200
No flash



Northern Cassowary

The 1.5 m tall Northern Cassowary *Casuarius unappendiculatus* is a poorly known species. West Papua, Indonesia.

Nikon D850
300mm 2.8
1/640
f/4.0 -1/3EV
ISO 1600

Oriental Pied Hornbill

The Oriental Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros albirostris* was thought extinct in Singapore, but a population is now established. This pair was spotted inside the Botanic Gardens.

Nikon D5 Nikkor
600mm VR +1.4
Teleconverter
1/640
f/6.3 +2/3EV
ISO 3200





**Yacare
with prey**

Yacare Caiman
Caiman yacare
with an Akari
catfish. Pantanal,
Brazil.

Nikon D4
600mm VR
1/640
f/8.0 +1/3EV
ISO 800



**Mantled Howler
Monkey**

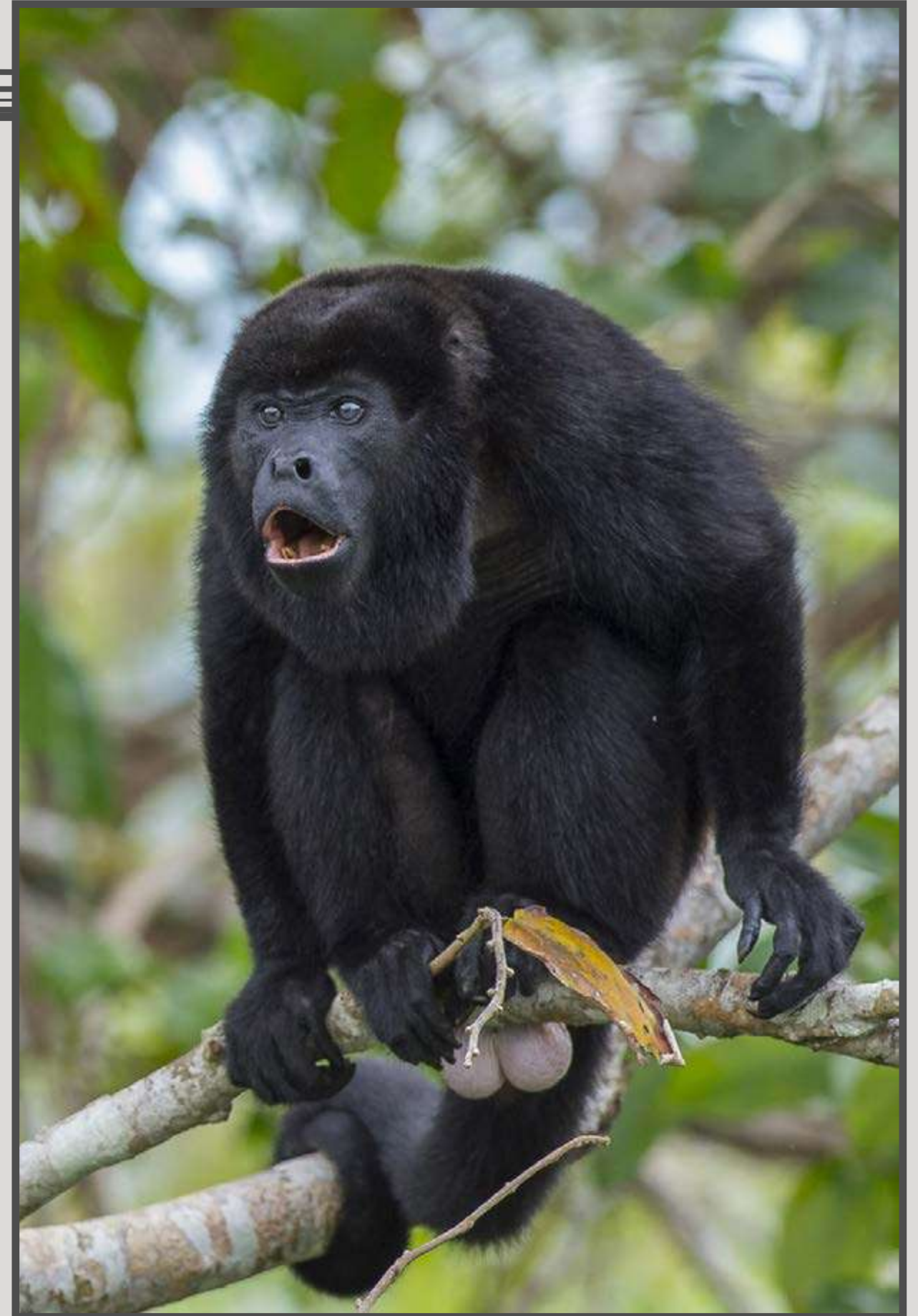
Male Mantled
Howler Monkey
Alouatta palliata
at Canopy Tower,
Panama.

Nikon D4S
300mm f/2.8
1/1000
f/8.0
ISO 1600

**Hodgson's
Frogmouth**

Hodgson's Frogmouth
*Batrachostomus
hodgsoni* family
near Dalat, Vietnam.

Nikon D5
600mm + 1.4
Teleconverter
1/100
f/10 +2/3EV
ISO 1600





Bornean Pygmy Elephant

On one of my trips to Borneo, I was fortunate to observe a group of the endangered Bornean Pygmy Elephants *Elephas maximus borneensis* crossing a tributary of the Kinabatangan River. The calf was reluctant to cross, started to panic and wanted to go back. However, with the encouragement of the experienced mother, it managed to swim across the narrow tributary with the mother behind, guiding it with her trunk.

Nikon D300
600mm VR
1/800
f/4.0
ISO 800

Diademed Sifaka

Diademed Sifaka *Propithecus diadema*, critically endangered, Mantadia NP, Eastern Madagascar. Madagascar is an amazing biodiversity hotspot with 93% of all mammals and 58% of birds endemic. Unfortunately the situation on the ground is not good, with extreme poverty and habitat destruction.

Nikon D3S

70-200mm 2.8 @ 165mm

1/2000

f/5.0

ISO 3200



Silvery Langur

Silvery Langur *Trachypithecus cristatus*, Bako NP, Borneo, Malaysia. During low tide groups of Silvered Langurs often come down from the hills to feed in trees that are not accessible at high tide. Having stalked a group for most of the morning without much action, suddenly half a dozen aggressive long-tailed macaques moved in, and the group of Silvered Langurs cleared out, with this individual escaping straight in my direction.

Nikon D700

300mm f/2.8

1/400

f/5.6 -1/3EV

ISO 800



Lesser Bird of Paradise

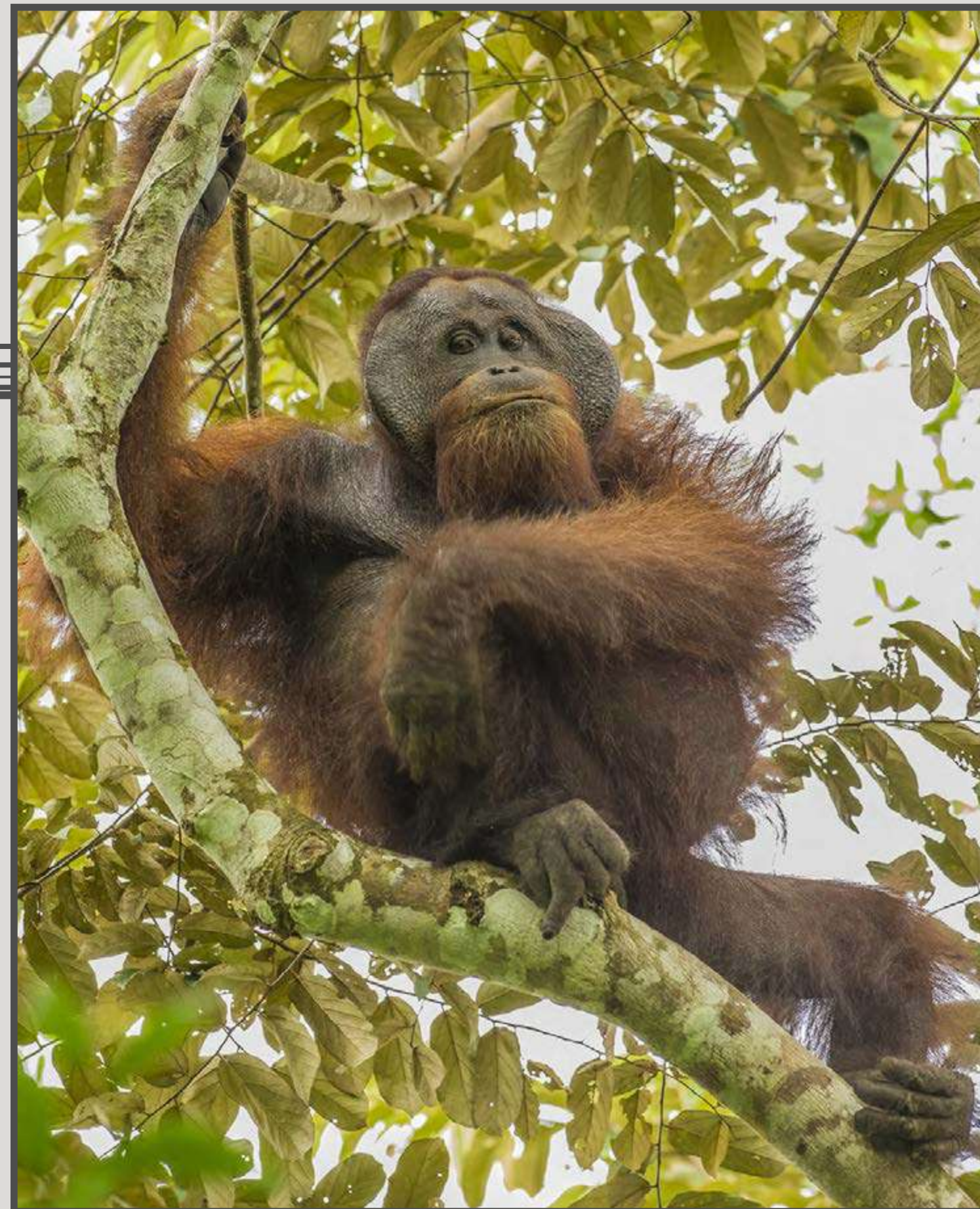
Male Lesser Bird of Paradise *Paradisaea minor* displaying, trying to attract female nearby. West Papua, Indonesia.

Nikon D5
600mm VR
1/1000
f/4.0
ISO 3200

Bornean Orangutan

Male Bornean
Orangutan
*Pongo
pygmaeus*,
critically
endangered,
Kinabatangan
River, Borneo,
Malaysia. More
often than not,
orangutans will
avoid eye
contact, but for a
brief moment this
male individual
decided to look
down and pose
for us.

Nikon D3S
300mm f/2.8
1/250
f/6.3
ISO 1600





Polar Bear

Seal River at Hudson Bay, Manitoba, Canada, is one of the best places to observe Polar Bears *Ursus maritimus* while hiking on foot.

Nikon D850
600mm VR
1/1250
f/6.3
ISO 800

Golden-cheeked Gibbon

Endangered Golden-cheeked Gibbon *Nomascus gabriellae*, female, here seen in Cat Tien NP, Vietnam.

Nikon D5
600mm VR + 1.4 Teleconverter
1/200
f/5.6 +1/3EV
ISO 3200



African Paradise-Flycatcher

African Paradise-Flycatcher *Trochocercus cyanomelas* on its nest, Botswana.

Nikon D3S
300mm f/2.8 + 1.4 Teleconverter
1/200
f/8.0 -1EV
ISO 3200



Giant Otter

The endangered Giant River Otter *Pteronura brasiliensis* can eat up to four kg of food per day. Here a Suckermouth Catfish *Hypostomus plecostomus* is being consumed. When they catch their food it is consumed immediately; they grasp the fish firmly between the forepaws and begin eating noisily. Pantanal, Cuiaba River, Brazil.

Nikon D4
300mm
1/1250
f/4.5
ISO 3200

**Purple Heron**

Near Lore Lindu NP, Sulawesi, Indonesia, I observed this Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* catching a big skink. It was so engrossed in the evening meal that it paid no attention to me in the car just 10 m away. To make a long story short: it was a short and uneven fight.

Nikon D5
600mm VR +1.4 Teleconverter
1/640
f/5.6
ISO 200

Asian Elephants

On 13 November 2016, the day before a "supermoon", two herds of Asian elephants *Elephas maximus* with 29 individuals congregated at Bardia NP, Nepal, as seen here. Subsequently a third group of ten elephants joined the congregation. According to the local guides it was the first time that so many elephants had been seen together in one location in Bardia.

Nikon D5
600mm VR + 1.4
Teleconverter
1/800
f/10
ISO 320



Spotted Owlet

Relaxing Spotted Owlet *Athene brama*
observed outside Bangkok, Thailand.

Nikon D4S
600mm VR + 1.4 Teleconverter
1/1250
f/8.0 +1/3EV
ISO 800

**Proboscis monkey**

The endangered and charismatic Proboscis monkey *Nasalis larvatus* is perhaps Borneo's most important animal flagship species because, unlike the Bornean Orangutan or the Pygmy Elephant, it is easily observable given the high encounter rates in the right locations. They can be regularly seen along the Kinabatangan River, at the Labuk Bay Proboscis Monkey Sanctuary in Sabah, and in Bako National Park in Sarawak, Malaysia.

Nikon D3S
600mm VR
1/640
f/10 +1/3EV
ISO 1600



Rufous-necked Hornbill

The Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis* occurs in the eastern Himalayas, the hill tracts of north-east India, and the east to the Annamite Mountains of Vietnam. It is threatened by habitat loss and hunting, and is listed as Vulnerable.

Nikon D4S
600mm VR
1/400
f/6.3 +1 1/3EV
ISO 3200



Northern Giant Petrels

A pair of fighting Northern Giant Petrels *Macronectes halli*, Kaikoura, New Zealand.

Nikon D4
70-200mm
1/1250
f/10 @ 200mm -2/3EV
ISO 400



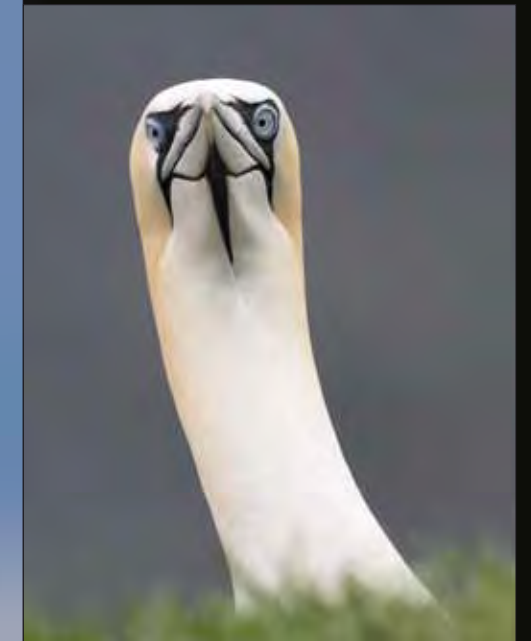
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David Hemmings - President, Nature's Photo Adventures



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

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

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

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

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

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



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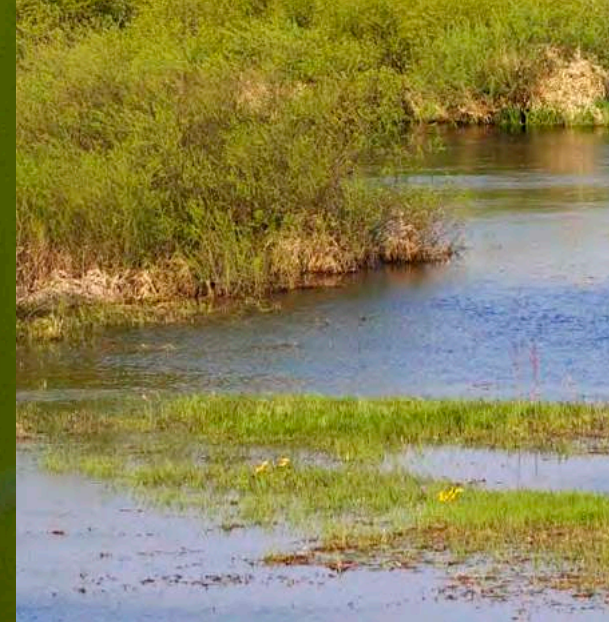


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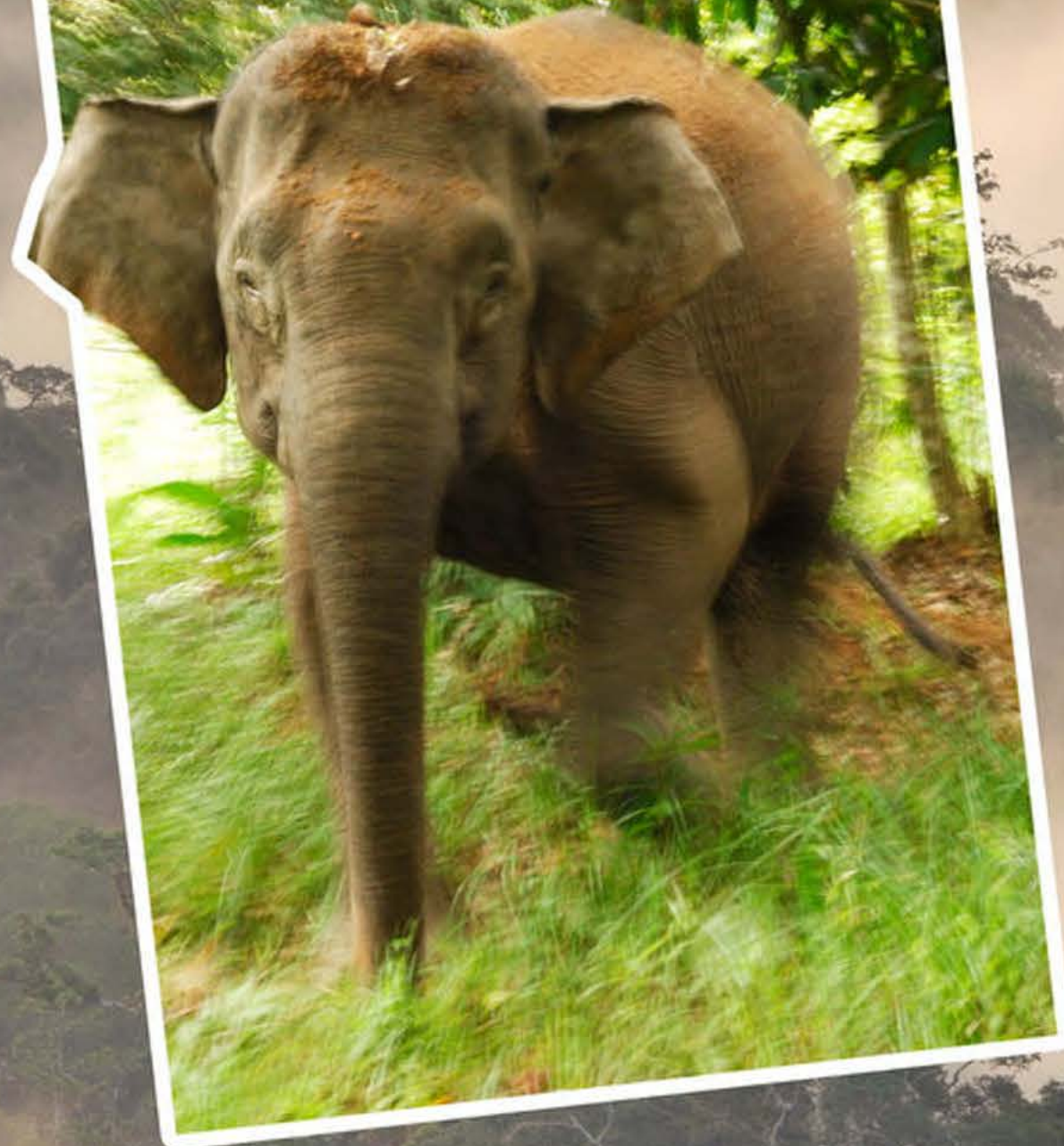
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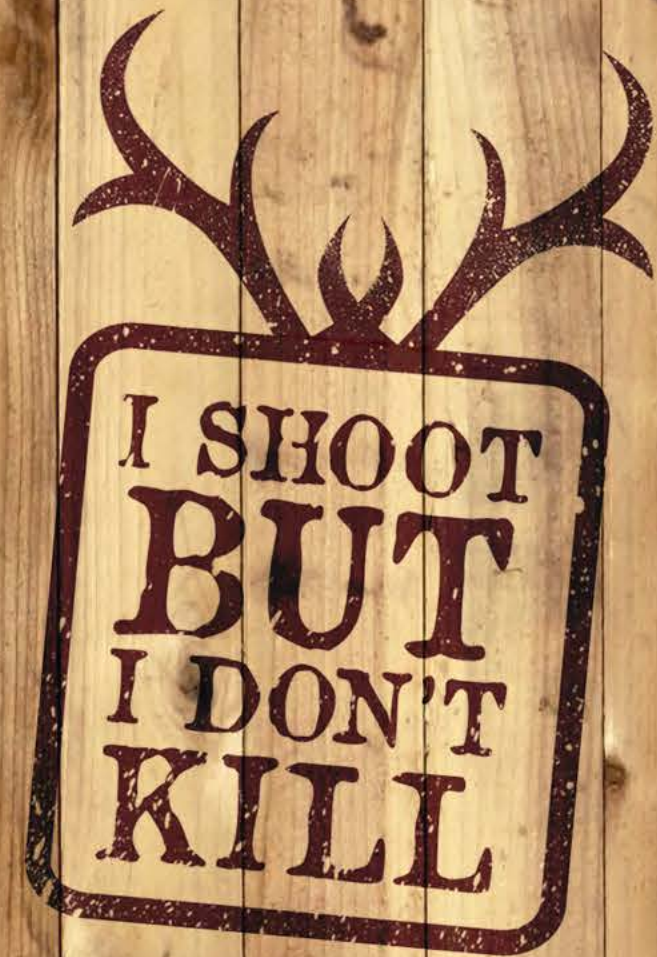
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Trip Report

THE GREAT HAMMERHEADS OF BIMINI

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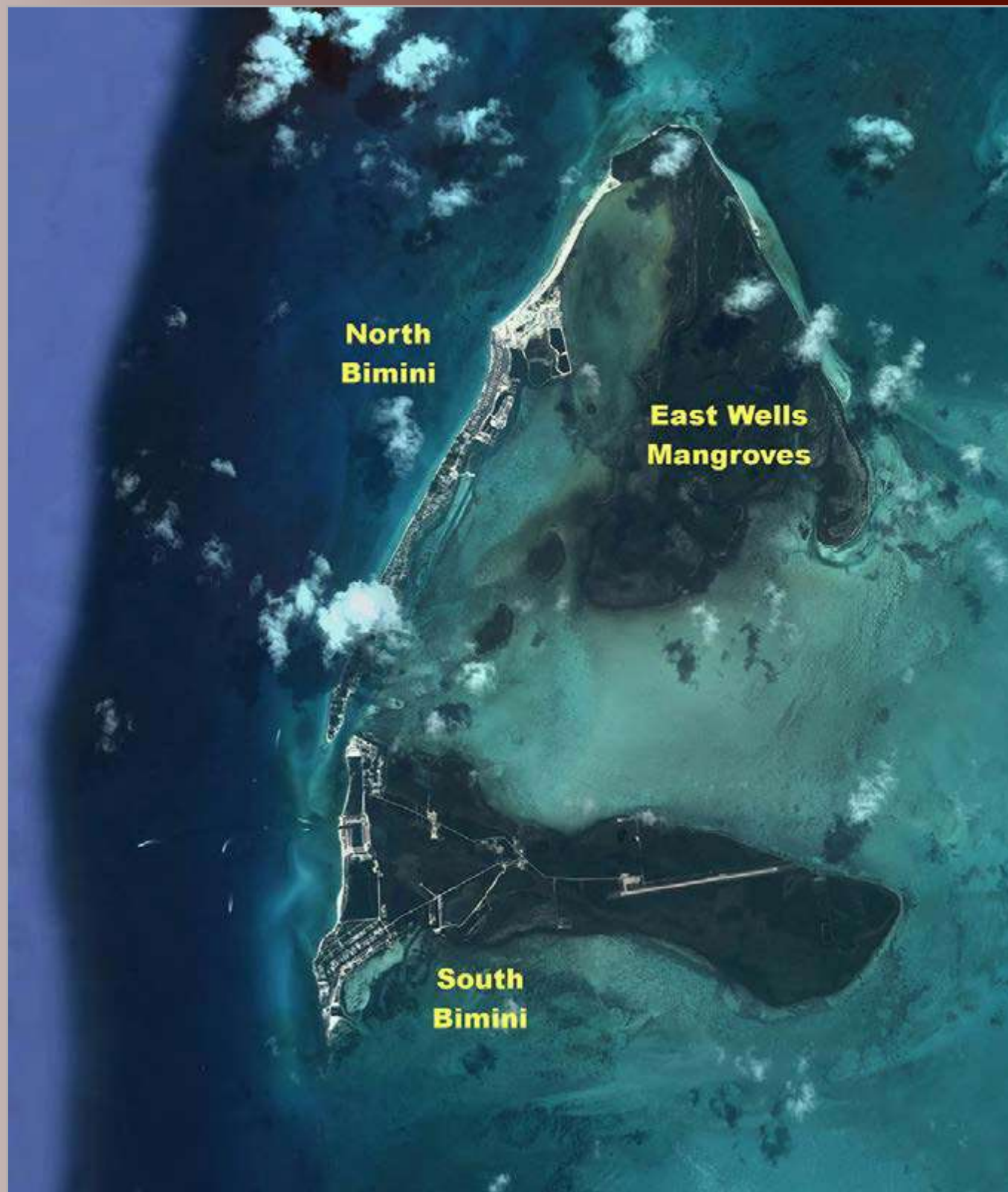


SUPERSHARK

Our contributor Don Silcock reports on scuba diving in the Bahamas to photograph the imposing - and intimidating - Great hammerhead *Sphyrna mokarran*



Great Hammerhead *Sphyrna mokarran*
A Great hammerhead *Sphyrna mokarran* calmly exits the feeding area, passing in front of the photographer - note the chunk of fish bait in its mouth and the obligatory attending school of Jacks in tow, waiting for the scraps to fall off.



Bimini aerial map

An aerial image of North and South Bimini on the Bahama Banks and the deepwater channel separating it from Florida.

TEXT AND PHOTOS
BY DON SILCOCK

Like a fashion model up on the catwalk, Great Hammerheads *Sphyrna mokarran* sashay into your field of vision and, if they were human, you would probably say they have just “made an entrance”. Their strange mallet-like head, robust body girth and tall sickle-shaped dorsal fin makes them well-nigh instantly recognizable and most other sharks in the immediate area spot that too and give them a wide berth. The Great Hammerhead has a unique and distinguished presence in the water, cautious but confident and seemingly in control of the environment, and as they approach, their distinctive head sweeps from side to side causing the rest of their body to move in an almost snake-like manner.

My first close encounter with a Great Hammerhead shark was in the Solomon Islands and although it was fleeting, it left me thinking about how a Jamaican mate of mine used to walk in to the pub back in England - dressed in his best suit, cigar in hand and scanning the room in search of a date for the evening!

But like all sharks, these magnificent animals have been impacted dramatically by the seemingly insatiable demand for shark fin soup in China, the status dish of choice at the ubiquitous celebratory banquets. That large dorsal fin, which makes hammerheads so distinguishable, is very highly prized in the Hong Kong markets that cater to the Chinese shark fin trade. So, encounters with the Great Hammerhead shark are particularly rare these days, everywhere that is except in South Bimini where, come winter, a sizeable number of these elusive sharks aggregate around the island’s waters.

South Bimini – Great Hammerhead Central

The islands of North and South Bimini are located on the western edge of the Bahamas archipelago, just 53 miles to the east of Florida, making them very popular with well-heeled large boat owners from America’s Sunshine State. Bimini is known for a few things... it was a favorite haunt of

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Great Hammerhead *Sphyrna mokarran*

The intimidating sight of a Great hammerhead *Sphyrna mokarran* closely approaching the photographer head-on. Notice the multiple rows of ever-changing teeth, with the inner ones progressively taking the place of the outer ones which fall off or get damaged in the feeding process.



Great Hammerhead *Sphyrna mokarran*

The imposing, somewhat ominous and strikingly unmistakable shape of a Great hammerhead *Sphyrna mokarran* doing an overhead turn above the photographers - notice the aluminum case containing the fish bait in the background.



Bimini life

Lifestyle in the Bahamas is generally rather simple, easy and laid-back.

the famous American writer Ernest Hemingway and it was also from where a great deal of rum was smuggled over to Florida during prohibition in the 1920's. But perhaps it is most renowned known for its sport fishing, often being referred to as "big-game fishing capital of the world". Less well known though is that South Bimini is the location of Dr Samuel Gruber's Shark Lab where, for over 25 years, significant research has been conducted in to the sharks and rays of this part of the Bahamas. "Doc" Gruber is an enigmatic and charismatic individual who, as he approaches his 80th year, has few peers in the field of elasmobranch study and research. His story is truly inspiring and is told extremely well in Jeremy Stafford-Deitsch's book *Shark Doc, Shark Lab*. Doc Gruber picked Bimini because of its large resident population of lemon sharks that use the large, mangrove-fringed, lagoon system to the east of the north island as a nursery for its young, making it almost the perfect spot for research. Many academic papers have been produced from the extensive field research conducted by Gruber and his team, but what they did not tell the world about was that just off the beach, to the west of South Bimini island, is probably the best place in the world to see the Great Hammerhead shark. The Shark Lab first

became aware of the reliable presence of Great Hammerheads back in 2002 but managed to keep the news to themselves for over 10 years. Word did eventually get out and without doubt, South Bimini is now firmly established as Great Hammerhead Central!

But Why South Bimini?

The Bahamas are said to take their name from Baja Mar – the Spanish term for "shallow seas" - because the archipelago of 29 main islands and roughly 700 cays that form the country reside on top of two main limestone carbonate platforms called the Bahama Banks. Great Bahama Bank covers the southern part of the archipelago and Little Bahama Bank covers the northern part, with incredible channels as deep as 4000m separating the two. The small islands of North and South Bimini sit at the north-western tip of the Great Bahama Bank, isolated from the rest of the archipelago and physically closer to Miami than the nearest Bahamian city of Freeport. Their location means that to the north, south and east is the shallow water of the Great Bahama Bank which is typically some 10 to 15 meters in depth. While to the west is shallow water that slopes down to about 50m before

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Shark catwalk

A reasonably-sized Great hammerhead *Sphyrna mokarran* approaches confidently the fish bait being offered by the feeder - notice the remarkable difference in size and shape between the hammerhead and the attending Nurse sharks *Ginglymostoma cirratum* in the vicinity.



Beaches and bait

The fish bait used to attract the Great hammerheads is being prepared on one of the Bahamas' world-famous sand beaches before the actual boat trip to the dive site takes place.

plunging down in to the 2000m deep channel between Miami and Bimini, through which the rich waters of the Gulf Stream current flow north towards the Atlantic Ocean. The Gulf Stream is a profoundly important force of nature and in many ways, can be thought of as almost a conveyor belt of warm, nutrient-rich water bringing life to the areas it touches. Rich with larvae swept up as it flows up from the Gulf of Mexico, those larvae thrive in the current and are deposited at landfalls along the way, with the islands of Bimini being the first major way-point. Bimini is uniquely placed to benefit from that life-flow as they are the only islands in the area big enough to sustain a significant, large area of mangroves and sea-grass that provide the nursery those larvae need to grow into crabs, lobsters and conch. Which, in turn provide a source of food for the animals higher in the marine trophic food chain such as stingrays and sharks. Basically, Bimini can be thought of as a rich, self-contained ecosystem that has benefited greatly overall from the protection the Government of the Bahamas has enacted over the years.

The Role of Government

The Bahamas was one of the first countries to understand the importance of sharks to their seas and fish stocks, plus the growth of shark tourism means that live ones are immensely more valuable than the dead

and de-finned variety. That said, the country has never been at the leading edge of the conservation movement and has suffered from over-exploitation of its fish stocks over the years and periodic over-development of tourist resorts in ecologically sensitive areas. But there is no major industry in the country and its people generally have a deep and visceral understanding of the importance the health of their surrounding waters is to their long-term prosperity. Therefore, the establishment of the Bahamas National Trust in 1959 to manage the world's first marine protected area – the 112,640 acre Exuma Cays Land & Sea Park - can now be viewed as an incredible piece of foresight. The Bahamas have since added another 26 national parks covering over 1 million acres of land and sea, together with enacting substantial supporting environmental legislation, including making Exuma Cays a no-take marine reserve. Then in 2011 the government went one step further and became the 4th country in the world to establish a shark sanctuary by formally protected all sharks in Bahamian waters.

Face to Face

Any encounter with a large animal underwater is an incredible mixture of fear and excitement that is at its most intense just prior to entering the water for the first time. Sure, you have read about the animal from those that went before you and the pre-dive briefings are almost always excellent. But

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Great Hammerhead *Sphyrna mokarran*

The elegant, sinuous and yet stunningly powerful swimming style of the Great hammerhead *Sphyrna mokarran* is quite obvious in this portrait, taken as the big shark exits the feeding area on the right. Notice the strict discipline being adhered to by the divers at the feeding site.



Great Hammerhead *Sphyrna mokarran*

Approaching the photographer during a night time feeding session, the Great hammerhead *Sphyrna mokarran* clearly displays a bolder, more nervous swimming style and a more inquisitive, possibly more aggressive attitude.

when push comes to shove and it's time to get in the water, I can tell you that this heart of mine is beating at an increased tempo and you could say I am focused...

Hammerheads are known to be aggressive hunters that feed on smaller fish, octopus, squid, and crustaceans but are not known to attack humans unless they are provoked. In Bimini they are tempted in close by feeding them and the whole thing is carefully organized to give the participants maximum exposure to the animals. That is done by limiting the number of people in the water at any time to six participants, one "feeder" and a safety diver watching your backs. The feeder is in the middle with an aluminum bait box (to keep the sharks from getting over excited...) and there are three participants on either side who rotate positions after 15 minutes, so everybody gets a turn next to the bait box where it can get very exciting. There are usually 12 people on a trip, so after 45 minutes you get a tap on the shoulder as it's time to give up your place and return to the boat. The safety diver is there not because of the hammerheads who often roam around behind you, but because of the Bull Sharks that are also quite common in Bimini. The reality is that any real danger in Bimini comes from those Bull Sharks rather than the Great Hammerheads – hence the safety diver. All this is in about 12m of water, so air consumption is minimal, and deco is not really an issue, so the show goes on all day. But interestingly the first hammerheads only

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Great Hammerhead *Sphyrna mokarran*

Approaches to the photographer in full daylight show a relaxed, calm attitude by the shark. Such behavior is never to be taken for granted however and a strict discipline must be observed by all participants to the feeding session in order to avoid possible incidents.



Bimini life
The Bahamas enjoy a typically relaxed tropical island lifestyle.

show up about ten in the morning so it's a leisurely start every day. During the day it is very easy to become lulled in to a false sense of security as the hammerheads appear out of the distant blue, sashay in towards the baitbox where they basically take the offered bait and then exit to the left or right. After the first day or so and the initial excitement has dissipated somewhat, it all seems very predictable and seems a bit like a petting zoo – and then you do the night dive!

Feeding Time

The job of distributing the pieces of fish on any shark feed is clearly somewhat of a fairly high-risk endeavor, but with the Great Hammerheads it takes on quite another dimension. As the shark approaches the feeder it can see the offered bait and at the last minute the feeder flicks the bait slightly to the left or the right so that the participant at that side will get an up-close and very personal photo-opportunity. The shark sees where the bait goes and turns, but at that point the bait usually disappears under its mallet-shaped head, so it instinctively chomps away till it bites on the bait. The issue is then that if you are next to the bait box the shark is chomping away right in front or on top of you – at which point you are sincerely grateful that your camera housing is made of aluminum! Nine times out of ten the feeder flicks the bait upwards and the shark gets it with the first chomp, but things can get a bit hectic around the

bait box and when they do you really do know it was the right decision to bring that big DSLR....

After Dark

On one day we kept up the rotations till late afternoon and then after a break and change of tanks all 12 participants entered the water together for the dusk/night dive. This time there were two feeders, but we followed the same routine of rotating positions so that everybody got a turn next to the bait box. There were two very noticeable differences from the daytime petting zoo that we had all become accustomed to – first the hammerheads were much more active and far more aggressive at night. Instead of the slow sashay along the bottom towards the bait box, they came in quite fast and at chest height. Their body language was completely different, and I have to say it was all a bit intimidating and reinforces the fact that you are interacting with wild animals and you are completely in their space. Secondly, while we had been repeatedly warned about Bull sharks *Carcharhinus leucas*, I don't think any of us actually saw any during the day. That changed completely as dusk fell and we could see them cruising the feeding zone in the distance, but ominously coming closer each time. The feeders would bang on the bait box to scare them away, but within minutes they would be back doing the same thing. However, as night fell, it became harder and harder to see where

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Great Hammerhead *Sphyrna mokarran*

A power pass by a Great hammerhead *Sphyrna mokarran* as it exits the feeding area on the right of the image. With fish chunks and smell gradually spreading over the area the big predators have to be kept under careful observation to avoid their hunting instincts to take over.



Great Hammerhead *Sphyrna mokarran*

A beautiful and somewhat intimidating frontal portrait of the Great hammerhead *Sphyrna mokarran* facing directly the camera. The highly-developed head lateral lobes are thought to better aid the shark in detecting prey and chemical particles in the water column and under the sand, as Great hammerheads most often prey on large stingrays.



Great Hammerhead *Sphyrna mokarran*

A portrait in elegance and raw power as the shark swims by the photographer.

the Bull Sharks were... and then it dawned on me that if they were sneaking towards us from the front, there was a distinct possibility they were doing the same behind us! As you can probably tell, I am not a great fan of Bull sharks and I personally consider them the most dangerous and unpredictable of all sharks. So, it was a case of being glad when you have had enough when we got the signal that the feed was over, and it was time to head back under the boat. We had been given very strict instructions that only two people at a time were to be at the surface behind the boat at any time and we were to get out of the water as quickly as possible because of the presence of Bull sharks. It was with great relief when my turn came, and I produced an Olympic-like performance to get out of the water in record time!

The Ethics of it All

Feeding sharks as a tourist attraction is a contentious subject and there are two basic schools of thought about its overall wisdom. The nay-sayers are adamant that it induces dangerous behavioral changes in the sharks by conditioning them to approach humans for food and therefore promoting the same (potentially...) dangerous behavior that occurs when bears, lion or crocodiles are fed. The argument goes that sharks will be unable to differentiate between an encounter where they will be fed and one where they won't – thereby greatly increasing the risk to humans. The counter argument being the benefits that flow to the local communities from the tourism revenue and the lack of any

substantial evidence of behavioral change. There is no real data to support either case, so we are firmly in the realm of anecdotes and opinions... However, given that his life's work has been the study of sharks, the opinion of Doc Gruber deserves to be heard and like most things from him it is very clear. *"The relative risks are nil, and the relative benefits are great"* is how he describes it, while conceding that there is some alteration of the shark's behavior, but it is not significant and normal patterns of migration are not impacted. In other words, the availability of food in South Bimini during the main Great Hammerhead dive-tourism season does not change the way that the sharks behave overall. They turn up at the feeding stations for a snack, but continue to do all the other things they normally do. Plus, there is no evidence at all of increased aggression towards humans from the feeding of the Great Hammerheads. All that said, perhaps the biggest impact from these quite unique in-water encounters is that virtually all of the participants leave the Bahamas as confirmed shark ambassadors, which has to be a good thing given the ridiculous and irresponsible media coverage given to sharks generally. Sharks have an incredibly significant role to play in the ocean. Without them the dead, the dying, the diseased and the dumb of the oceans can pollute and degrade the health of those ecosystems and the genetic quality of its inhabitants. The many species of sharks are there for a reason and they have evolved superbly, in true Darwinian fashion, to execute their mission. Remove the sharks

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Great Hammerhead *Sphyrna mokarran*

An interesting image as the feeder on the left offers a fish bait chunk to the Great hammerhead *Sphyrna mokarran* approaching him at night. Those experienced in shark body language cannot avoid noticing the nervous, inquisitive approach of the shark to the food source.



Great Hammerhead *Sphyrna mokarran*

The last thing its prey will ever see as a Great hammerhead closes in and chomps down on its victim - in this case only a piece of fish. Night dives with hammerheads show them - like all other sharks - to be more nervous, active and aggressive than during the daylight hours.

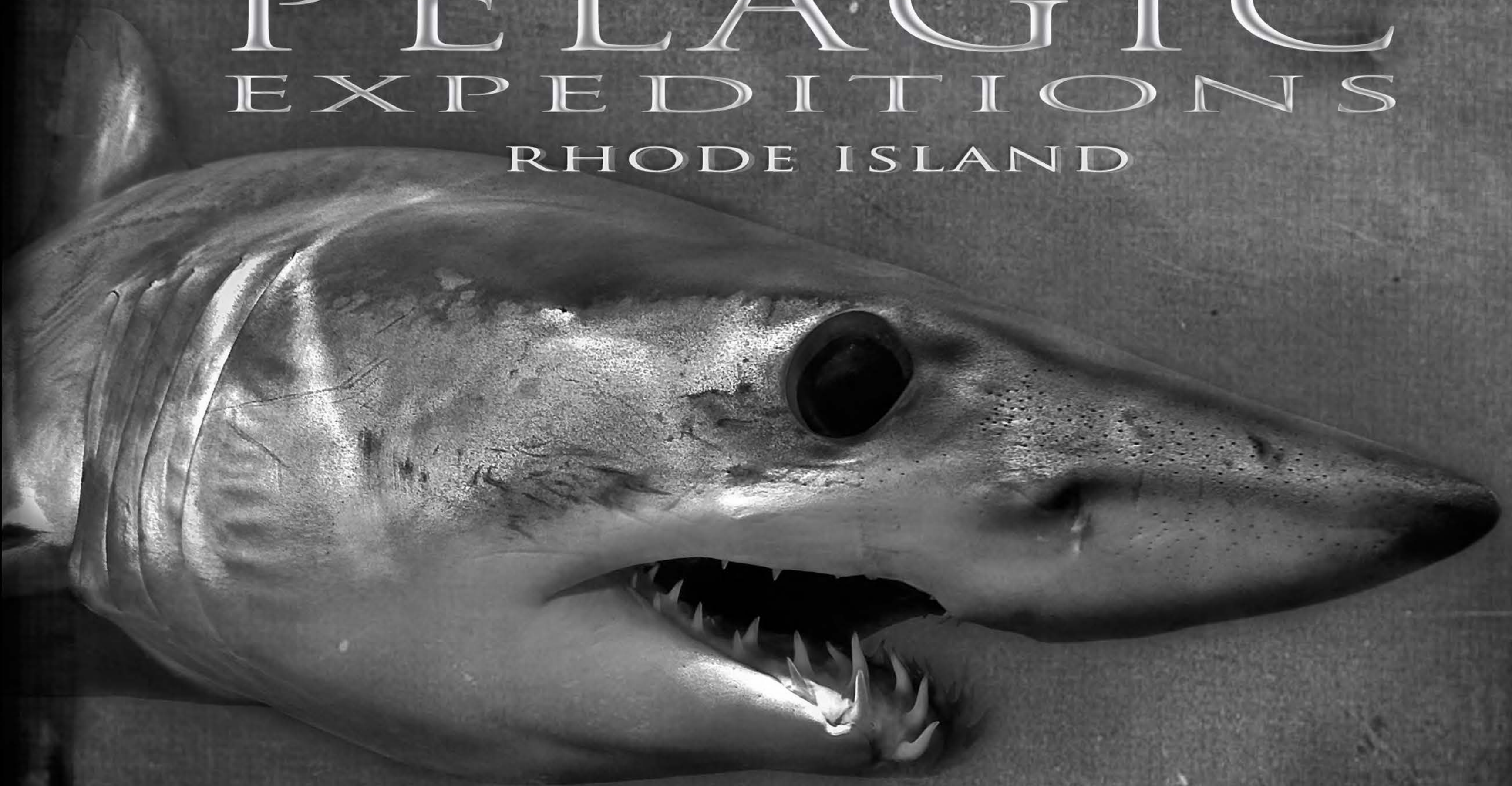
and disruption occurs, something marine scientists refer to rather prosaically as “trophic cascades” – think of the shark as the first in a long-line of finely balanced dominos and if it is tipped over the rest start to go down as well. The impact of shark finning in the Caribbean illustrates the impact of such cascades extremely well, for when the shark population declined it removed one of the natural limitations on the number of groupers in those waters. Groupers have voracious appetites and also breed rapidly, but a healthy shark population would keep overall numbers in check and maintain that fine balance. But as the number of sharks declined it allowed the number of groupers to increase, who subsequently consumed a disproportionate number of reef fish, which meant that the naturally occurring algae was no longer being consumed and so the reefs started to die. There is no quick fix for these events because sharks grow slowly, mate intermittently, have long gestation periods and do not mass produce their young. But all that gets lost in the hype that sharks generate and the only way to really put it back in perspective is to see them in their own space. Simply stated, South Bimini is the best place to do that with the very special creature that is the Great Hammerhead. ●

Don is based from Bali in Indonesia and his website www.indopacificimages.com has extensive location guides, articles and images on some of the best diving locations in the Indo-Pacific region.

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The Parting Shot



Passionate French wildlife photographer **Frank Deschandol** (Instagram: @frankcanon_image_in) tells the story behind this stunning image of a Perentie or Giant monitor: "During 3 weeks, I did a lonely trip to Western Australia, driving for about 8500km from Perth to the Pilbara region. I went to some very good places for monitor lizards and especially for the spectacular Perentie *Varanus giganteus*. Unfortunately this species was elusive.

After staying a week at Shark Bay, I decided to leave because the bad weather did not allow me to see many animals there. I woke up early in the morning, starting to head south, when suddenly, I spotted a large monitor crossing the road, about 20m from me. I stopped the car and took my camera, 7DII + 300mm f/4 IS... The animal, which walked slowly, stopped under a bush and remained there immobile for almost 15 minutes, watching all

around, head up. I managed to get very close (about 2.50m). Then, the animal moved towards a big bush and it was difficult to photograph. Instead of my camera, I used my iPhone to take some videos. Finally the lizards fled from behind and unfortunately I couldn't find it again. A great experience, especially since I was convinced at first that it was *Varanus panoptes*, a much more common species. *V. giganteus* is actually rare in this area!" ●

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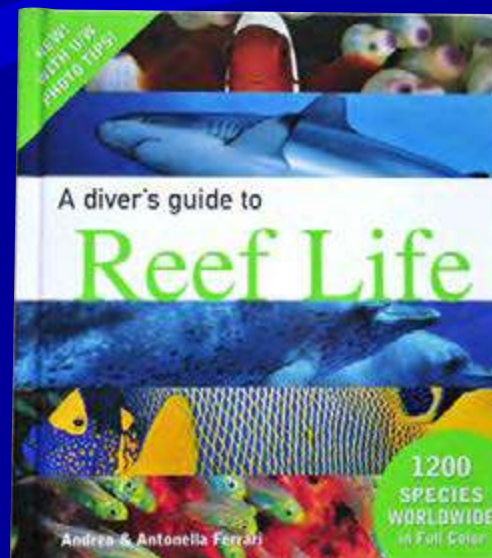
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JANE MORGAN, DIVE MAGAZINE: A stunning tropical marine life reference guide which is bursting at the seams with outstanding photographs. • WILLY VOLK, WETPIXEL.COM: No marine guide in the world will excite you with this much color, thrill you with this much variety, and fascinate you with this much information. This is an absolute must-have for any diver who has eyes and plans on using them while diving. • TIM ECOTT, author of *Neutral Buoyancy*: With 1200 tropical species, ranging from coral polyps, gorgonians, sea squirts, sponges, nudibranchs and all of the main fish groups, this is a truly comprehensive work, and probably the only reef guide most divers will need to take with them on a trip. The Ferraris also produced *A Diver's Guide to Underwater Malaysia Macrolife*, in my opinion the best of its kind. Now they have created an indispensable companion volume that will serve every diver well. • BOB GOEMANS, SALTCORNER.COM: This work is truly a must for all that are interested in the underwater creatures that inhabit our tropical waters. • CLAUDIA PELLARINI, SUBMERGE MAGAZINE: As essential as your passport on every dive trip from the Red Sea to the Caribbean and Indo Pacific.



A Diver's Guide to the Art of Underwater Photography

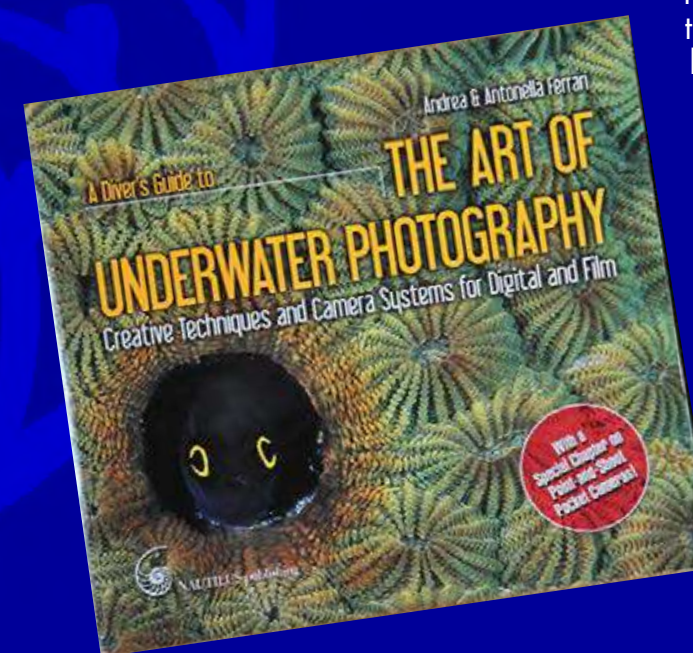
Creative Techniques and Camera Systems for Digital and Film

A highly-readable, technically-accessible, step-by-step guide in eight chapters to the secrets and wonders of underwater photography - featuring dozens of stunning, inspiring images by several of the world's most brilliant authors

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ALEX MUSTARD, WETPIXEL.COM: This book gives us a rare insight into the mindset, dedication and imagination involved in creating magnificent underwater images. I sat down and read this enjoyable book from cover to cover. The lack of techno-talk makes it a very accessible method to improve your photography. The images are some of the finest you will see in a guide to underwater photography. All the images are very well reproduced, which will not come as a surprise to anyone who owns any of the other books by the authors. A large format 360 page feast of fabulous images and thought provoking and enjoyable writing on taking pictures in the ocean. • UNDERCURRENT: This book is filled with spectacular images, designed not only to offer great technical guidance, but also help the underwater photographer discover and develop the artist within. Clearly the best and most beautiful "how-to" book ever produced. • JOHN BANTIN, DIVER MAGAZINE: With an enviable reputation for authoring fine books on underwater photography, the Ferraris have laced the pages of their new book with juicy pictures.

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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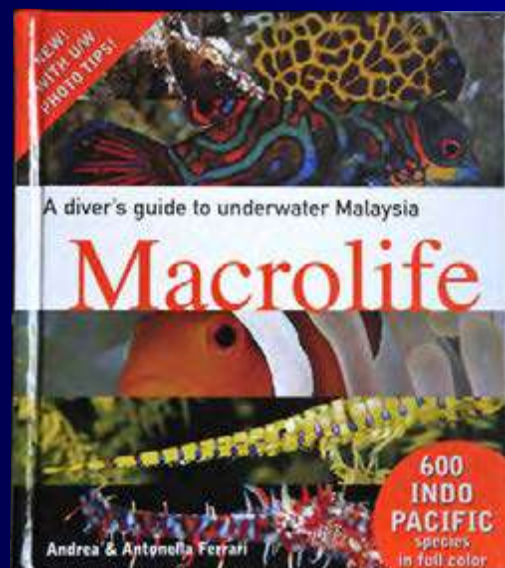
DIVE INTO DISCOVERY WITH NAUTILUS PUBLISHING

A Diver's Guide to Underwater Malaysia Macrolife

600 INDO-PACIFIC MACRO marine species featuring 800 SPECTACULAR COLOR PHOTOS with full details on distribution, habitat, size, life habits and underwater photography tips

THIS IS WHAT THE DIVING COMMUNITY SAYS

DIVERNET: Not only does it help identify the critters, but it also gives useful tips on how to photograph them. • BACKSCATTER: Best work I've yet seen. For Mabul or Kunkungan, this book should be as necessary as a passport. • FAMA MAGAZINE: Well written, quite informative, beautifully illustrated... a priced right, quality publication. Get a copy, you'll be happy you did! • TAUCHEN MAGAZINE: 600 marine species illustrated with spectacular photos and a compact text for a very useful and much needed underwater guide. • ASIAN DIVER: Illustrated with more than 800



extraordinary colour photos, this is the field guide of choice for all serious macro divers. • NORTHERN CALIFORNIA UNDERWATER PHOTOGRAPHIC SOCIETY: The photography is impressive - if you need to identify any species from this area, this guide is a gem. • UNDERCURRENT: We just discovered the ultimate guide to Indo-Pacific macro life - this book is a must for traveling divers. BBC WILDLIFE MAGAZINE: Identifies and describes 600 small marine species from the Indo-Pacific. Clear, concise, informative... packed with more than 800 colour photos. • FOUR LAKES SCUBA CLUB: Both a macro and a fish field guide for all serious divers from the Maldives to Australia. A must! • DIVER MAGAZINE: Colour photographs of the highest quality make it easy to identify what you have seen...An essential tool for anyone.