

OCTOBER  
NOVEMBER  
2015



# WILD

## SOJOURNS

**LOST!**  
**AMPHIBIANS**  
**OF INDIA**



**Exotic World of**  
**Cacti and Succulents**

**Blood Pheasant**  
**The Lord of the Snow**



# Conserve and Preserve



## Wild Sojourns Team:

Megh Roy Choudhury  
Ritesh Nangare  
Prasanna A V

## Magazine designing:

Sandeep Solkar

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**Megh Roy  
Choudhury**

**T**he cardinal aspect of Conservation is a fundamental creation of awareness. You simply can not preserve something you do not cherish. It is impossible to love something when you are not even aware of it's existence. Inculcating this intense passion in people to safeguard the beautiful world we live in and the desire to pass it on to the future generations is the only plausible way.

Conservation starts with defining what resources we have and what we are in the danger of losing out. Many species of animals and birds are rapidly declining giving way to a very fragile ecosystem. Intense focus needs to be concentrated on these vulnerable and threatened species. But at the same time a pivotal observation is that we can not take anything for granted. We need not push anything to the brink of extinction before realising the need to save it. Conserve and preserve has to be the mantra. It is high time for us to decide what measures are to be taken and what message should be percolated to the younger generation.

The three highly essential and critical goals should be **"To educate the public about nature and wildlife, to inspire the young generation to embrace nature and to publicize widely the need to protect our Mother Earth"**.

Conservation is not the responsibility of only some foundations or organisations. It is about what an individual can achieve. It starts with each human being asking himself how he can create a difference. Through our endeavor of 'Wild Sojourns' we aspire to foster the love for nature in people. We are focussing on connecting the society and people to nature via photography.

Wildlife photography has reached it's zenith due to the rapid technological advancements and massive social networking. A picture can capture one's imagination in a much more profound way than words ever can. We intend to reach out and capture everybody's attention through this very powerful pictorial medium. A photographic documentation can be an extremely powerful tool for conservation measures too. What we need to appreciate is not just the beauty of these pictures. Instead the firm focus should be on the story of the living beings behind these images and their struggle for existence.



**Ritesh Nangare**



**Prasanna AV**



# C O N T E N T S



## Top Story

Lost Amphibians of India

Dr Caesar Sengupta

## Photo Stories

Partridge Pitta & Pheasants

Vijay Sachan

Clinging Tenderly!!

Yasir Mehmood

Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher

Ritesh Nangare

Exotic World of Cacti & Succulents

Nirmala Sridhar

The Planet We Live in

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An Oasis for Primates

Samrat Sengupta

Spot Light

Black Eagle

Krishnamurrthy

The Lord of the Snow

Biju PB

Prized Catch

Chesnut-breasted Partridge

Gururaj Moorching

Environs

Mesmerising Lakshadweep

Bijoy Ki

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Meghna Banerjee

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Travelogue

Waterfalls of Coorg

Alankar Chandra

Walong: Out of Syllabus Birds

Rajneesh Suvarna

Workflow

Clipping Mask

Dr Krishna Mohan

Angling Wide

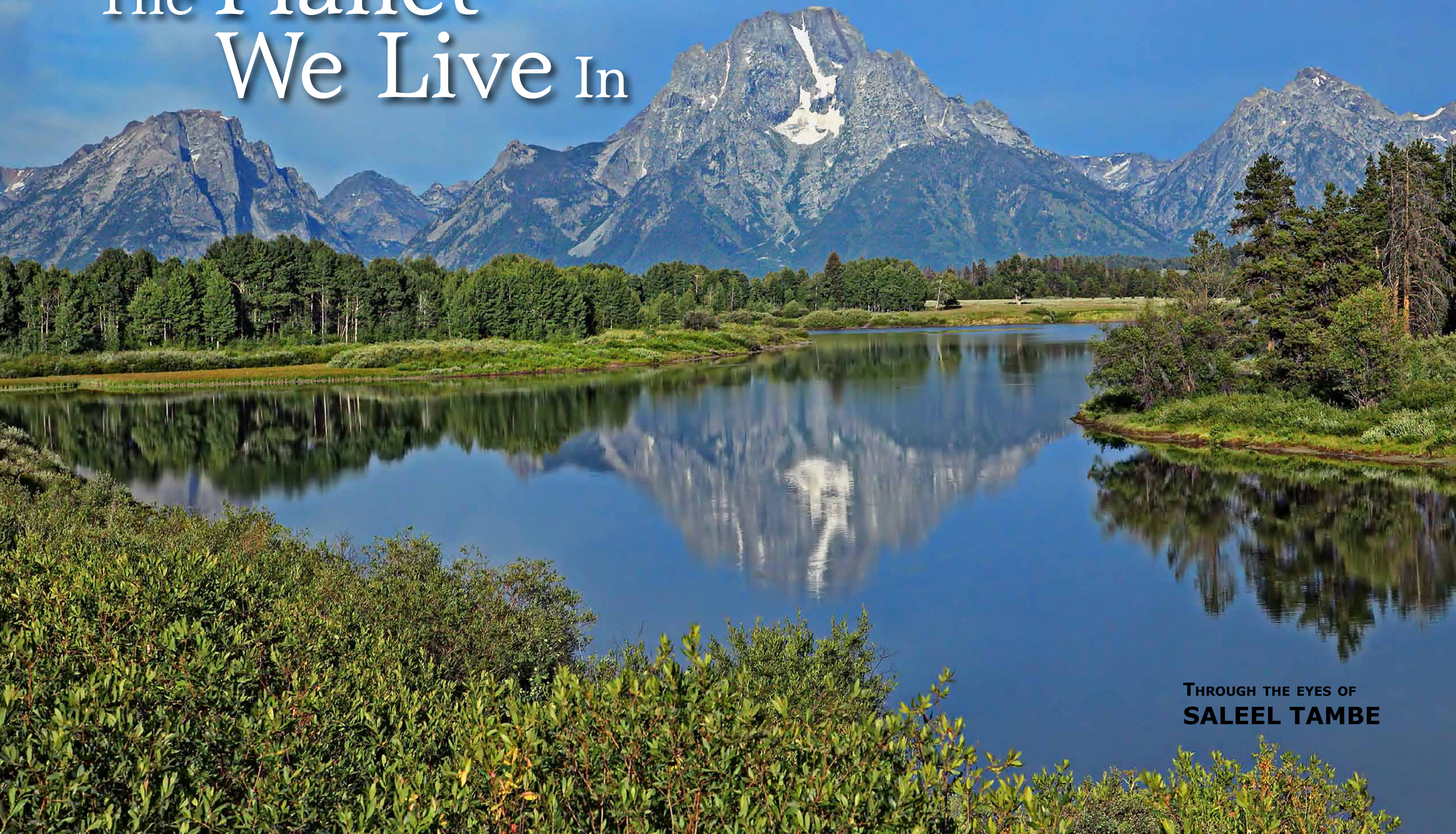
Nitin Vyas



Malabar Slender Loris

Image Courtesy: Shefiq Basheer Ahammed

# The Planet We Live In



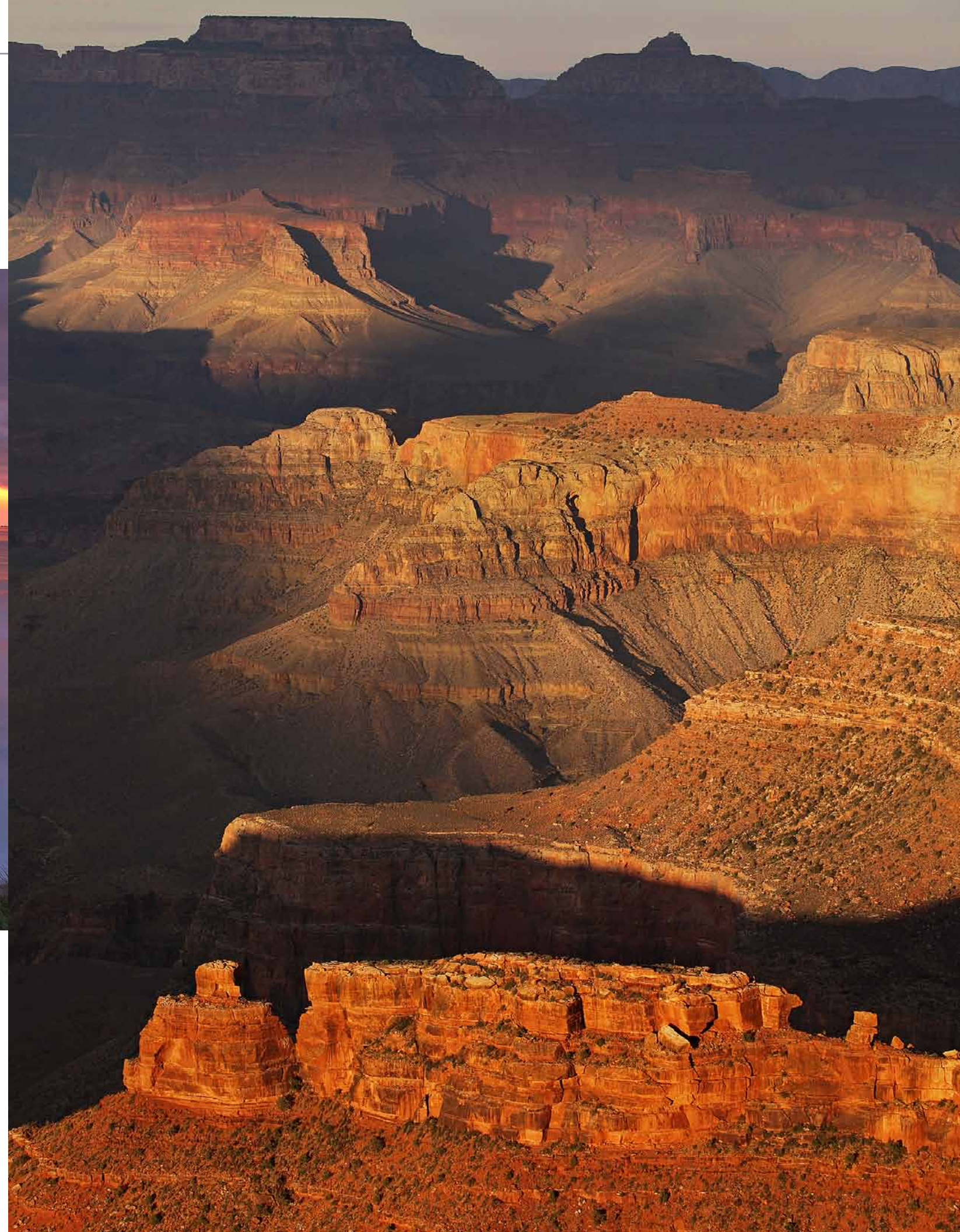
THROUGH THE EYES OF  
**SALEEL TAMBE**

**Saleel Tambe is a renowned nature and wildlife photographer. He has travelled worldwide and has seen the various facets of Mother Earth. We are presenting those wonderful vistas as seen from his perspective.**



**Right: Grand Canyon National Park, USA. No wonder this magnificent canyon is one of the seven natural wonders of the world. With its rugged mountain and breath-taking cliffs – it is a place not to be missed by any nature and wildlife lover.**

**Top: Low light levels after the sunset can be used quite dramatically if the compositions are done carefully. The slow shutter speed creates a gentle blur and the colours get intensified with long exposures. This was photographed at Durdle door, Lulworth, Southern England.**



**T**o me, nature is like a story which never has an end! Right from the school days, I was always attracted to the nearby lakes, rivers and loved watching various elements of the surrounding habitat – be it the mountain slopes, vegetation, flowers, insects, butterflies, birds, mammals or even the crabs and fish.

I always find a tremendous inspiration while being in the great outdoors – the unique feeling of being part of Mother Nature. For many, the approach to nature is through photography but for me, it has been the other way round. I spent a lot of quality time during my early childhood observing the nature right from my backyard to the faraway exotic places. Then came the birds and the binoculars – emphasising on identification, analysis and documenting. Photography naturally followed.



**Right: Autumn colours are always an essential ingredient of yearly transition of nature cycles. The multicolour plethora gets more and more interesting as the leaves get mature right before the fall.**

**Top Left: Sea waves can be quite interesting when observed touching the shore. Here, the dwindling light at sunset provides a moody atmosphere. Location near Brighton, UK.**

**Bottom Left: Remote scenic locations are always a delight for nature lovers. Completely away from the maddening crowds and traffic in the metros, these kind of spots are a great solace.**

**A waterfall from Wales, UK.**



**Grand prismatic Spring at Yellowstone National Park, USA.  
This is truly an amazing geological wonder.**

**The salts and the extremely hot boiling water makes the spring to  
attain these surreal shades.**



I have always treated photography as a very personalised medium to embrace nature and see it through the eyes of creativity. Photography is far beyond just the clicks of a shutter and discussion of brands of equipment, a jargon of technology – it is a wonderful expression of your inner vision. Photography has in fact fetched me some of the most magical and beautiful moments of my life – which are a treasure to cherish for ever! Another thing that brings me very close to nature is my passion for classical music. I find lot of commonality between the two in terms of – perseverance, passion and the

unconditional joy and that these two provide to oneself – immense positivity and stress relief. Both these fields require deep insight and regular practicing. They both need a lot of learning to be absorbed from the work of stalwarts and both these fields need highest level of motivation....more the strong spirit of life!!

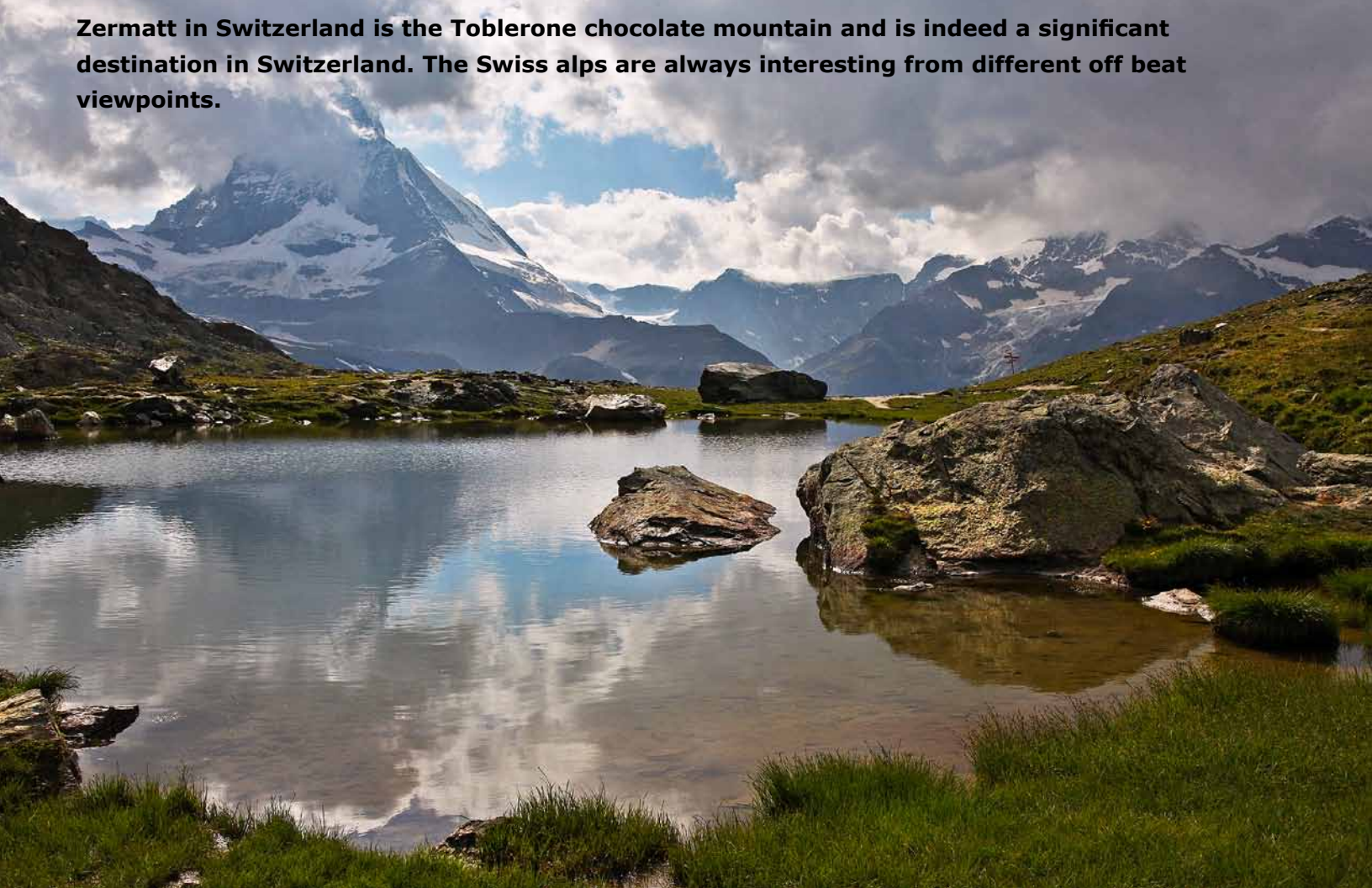
Trees and green vegetation are the lungs of earth and should be preserved and multiplied to the greatest extent. The increasing urbanisation is a direct threat to the trees around the city outskirts and contribute a lot in marinating the ecological balance.



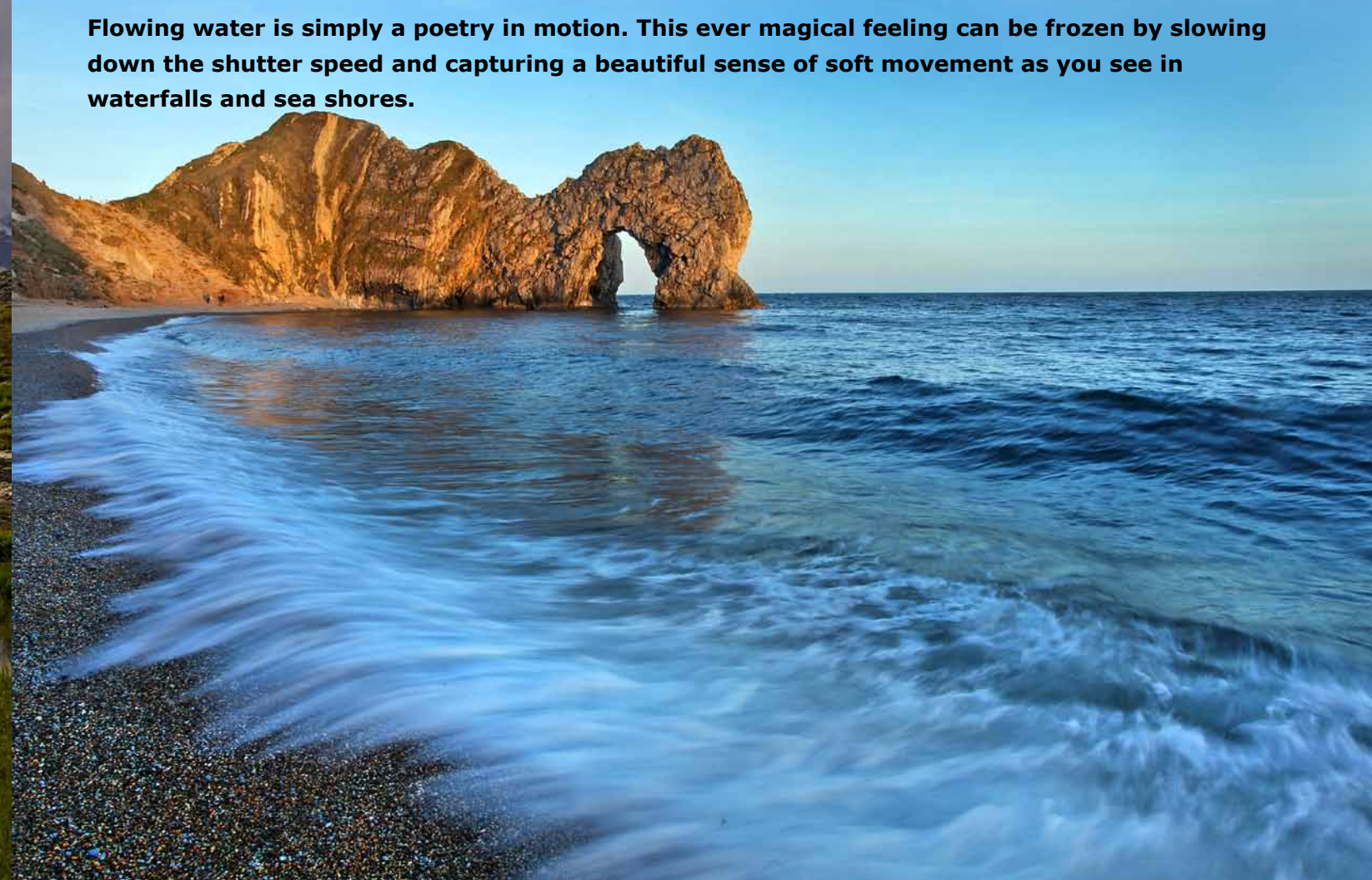
**Lush green hill slopes and lingering clouds are not just in the dreams but in reality too! It's a great experience to observe the clouds from above. This is Mount Rigi in Switzerland.**



**Zermatt in Switzerland is the Toblerone chocolate mountain and is indeed a significant destination in Switzerland. The Swiss alps are always interesting from different off beat viewpoints.**



**Flowing water is simply a poetry in motion. This ever magical feeling can be frozen by slowing down the shutter speed and capturing a beautiful sense of soft movement as you see in waterfalls and sea shores.**





**This image is from Bryce National Park, Utah. These hoodoos [peculiarly shaped pillars] are formed because of incessant rains, wind and heat. These kind of Canyons are an interesting feature of the Utah and Nevada areas in the United states.**



A passionate nature lover, an ardent photographer, an author, a performing musician and on the other hand a full time IT and Telecoms professional, Saleel has pursued the creative passion balancing it very well with his professional career.

His solo photography exhibitions have been organized in reputed International art galleries and his photographic work is recognized, awarded and published internationally. Saleel has authored and contributed for several books. His images and articles are often seen in major publications, magazines, online resources and he has been a popular columnist.

Always committed to conservation, he has led some significant conservation activities. Saleel is a member, advisor and mentor to various nature conservation bodies and is regularly invited by various organizations to conduct slide shows, talks, speeches, seminars and workshops. He loves travel, adventure, exploring places and is very keen on speciality cuisines. Born in a family of musicians - Saleel is also a performing artist. He has been playing Tabla in reputed concerts as a soloist and as an accompanist to many renowned musicians and dancers. In the UK and Europe, he has performed at most of the prestigious venues also several other venues in Europe.

Conserve or Perish

# The real face of “JHAPAN” festivities



MEGHNA BANERJEE

SUVRAJYOTI CHATTERJEE



If you have travelled to West Bengal and parts of North East India chances are that you would have heard of the much sought after 'Jhapan' festival and 'Manasa Devi', the Hindu goddess of snakes, to whom the festival of "Jhapan" is dedicated. In West Bengal, "Jhapan" is celebrated annually in the District of Bankura, especially in the town of Bishnupur, and in some places in Bardhaman and Nadia Districts during the month of Sravan (Mid-August), when snakes are most active. Bishnupur, otherwise known for its terracotta temples built by the Malla rulers during the 17th and 18th century, becomes a coveted destination for snake charmers across the region during "Jhapan" celebrations.



Before the commencement of festivities, snake charmers descend from neighbouring villages to Bishnupur and illegally capture snakes from the wild and keep them in poor unhygienic conditions. Venomous snakes are de-fanged and the venom glands are removed immediately after capture. The snakes not only experience extreme pain and



Once these glands are destroyed, the snakes are unable to catch or digest food which results into a slow and painful death. The scale at which "Jhapan" is celebrated is massive.

Despite the obvious suffering of the snakes, the snake charmers continue to handle the snakes roughly. These snake charmers travel to different localities or paras with their booty of snakes captured from the wild. Local clubs and 'Puja' committees pay them well to perform the popular "snake shows". In Bishnupur, these clubs bring the snake charmers in vehicles to the ancestral ground of the 'Rajbari', a heritage residential building of the Malla dynasty. Here, an assemblage is organised in the memory of the first "Jhapan mela" which was held sometime in 17th century to greet the ruling king Hambir Malla when he returned victorious after winning a battle



distress during the process of defanging and de-glanding but also as a result suffer from severe dental infections. The venom glands secrete specialized saliva containing a cocktail of toxins which help a snake to immobilize its prey and also aids in digestion.

against the Huns. Today, however, the festivity of bliss has turned into nothing but a brutal practice where snake charmers stand on top of vehicles and display the defanged and traumatized snakes to the multitudes of people gathered. They place multiple snakes round their neck, put them in their mouth, bite them, play with them and lick them in front of a cheering crowd. Amidst the revelry the extreme cruelty meted out to these hapless creatures go completely unnoticed.



The deglanded/defanged snakes do not survive this abuse for long and once they are dead they are discarded like used commodities only to be replaced by new snakes captured from the wild. Although, "Jhapan" is celebrated for three days, the snake charmers continue to travel to adjoining localities and perform "snake shows" for three months after the completion of the festivities. According to local communities, approximately 200-400 snakes are brought by the snake charmers to perform snake shows in and around Bishnupur alone.

The abuse continues within the confines of the snake charmers' homes as well. There the snakes become subjects of entertainment for these snake charmers, especially when they are in an inebriated state. The snake charmers abuse the snakes at will and indulge in private display of bravado to spectators who are willing to pay for it. The mutilated snakes are stored in plastic bottles and extremely small jhapis (cane baskets). A cursory examination of the snakes reveal that most of them suffer from severe dehydration.

This wanton abuse of snakes by the snake charmers is in complete violation of the laws of the country. Such abuse violates several provisions of law, namely:

- 1) **Section 428 of the Indian Penal Code specifically bars** maiming and killing of animals or rendering any animal useless.
- 2) **Section 11 of the Prevention of Cruelty Act, 1960** which specifically prohibits causing unnecessary pain to animals, mutilating them or confining them in closed spaces. These offences are punishable with jail term which may extend upto 3 months.

3) **Section 9 and Section 51 of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972** specifically penalizes hunting of any wild animal and hunting is given a broad definition under 2(16) of the Act which includes capturing, killing, trapping, destroying or injuring any wild animal. It is a cognizable offence where the jail term may extend to three years with or without fine (which may extend to Rs 25,0000) where the offence does not relate to animal protected under **Schedule I** and **Part II Schedule II** of the Act. However, if the offence relates to an animal covered under these schedules, (cobras, pythons, rat snakes, etc are covered under these schedules) then the minimum jail term would be one year which may extend to six years with fine which may not be less than Rs 5000. In case of a second or subsequent offence of this nature, the jail term can extend to 6 years but shall not be less than 2 years and the amount of fine shall not be less than Rs 10,000.

These barbaric practices perpetrated by the snake charmer communities during the festival of "Jhapan" do not find any support in religious texts either. Contrary to what is popularly believed, snakes are not supposed to be touched on the day of worship of Manasa Devi. This emanates from the religious belief which finds mention in Manasa-Mangal Kavya that no male can touch Manasa Devi even for worship. In fact, in earlier times, females would perform the puja during the worship of Manasa Devi.

Snakes are vital to India's natural heritage and **Article 48A and 51A (g)** of the Indian Constitution enjoins the state and the citizens to protect wild animals and show compassion to all living creatures. The maiming of snakes to entertain the masses and the support rendered by the local people as well as spectators from urban areas, who come solely to witness this event, is against the letter and spirit of the principles enshrined in our Constitution.



Last year, the inhumane treatment of snakes during the festival was extensively documented by our team from PUBLIC (People United for Better Living in Calcutta), a Kolkata based environmental NGO and the same was reported to the **West Bengal Forest Department**. The Department took prompt action against some local clubs that had sponsored the snake shows.

This August, we decided to file a pre-emptive complaint with the authorities to prevent these illegal "snake shows" during "Jhapan" from happening. The District Magistrate, and Additional District Magistrate, Bankura District along with the Superintendent of Police, Bankura District and the West Bengal Forest Department, were intimated in advance about the rampant snake charming. Details of the local clubs that foster such criminal activities to vie with each other in their bid to display the largest number of snakes, were also put forth in the complaint seeking pre-emptive action. Acting on the complaint, the Divisional Forest Officer, Panchet Division, Bishnupur conducted extensive announcements and patrolling in Bishnupur to convey to the public that snake charming or shaap khela is a criminal offence and also warned the clubs against inviting snake charmer communities for "Jhapan Mela". The result was unprecedented. For the first time in centuries Jhapan festivities in Bishnupur were marked by the absence of traumatized, emaciated snakes.

Preventing re-occurrence of snake shows in Bishnupur during the coming years will require continuous vigilance on the part of district authorities and Forest Department coupled with extensive awareness campaigns by conservationists. Although sensitising the masses about the plight of snakes, perhaps the most misunderstood of all creatures, is a daunting task, sustained awareness programmes and strict implementation of laws can bring a change of attitude. When locals fully comprehend the degree of abuse that these snakes suffer and the legal implications thereof only then will we be able to put an end to this barbaric practice.

**Text and Images by Meghna Banerjee and Suvrajyoti Chatterjee**

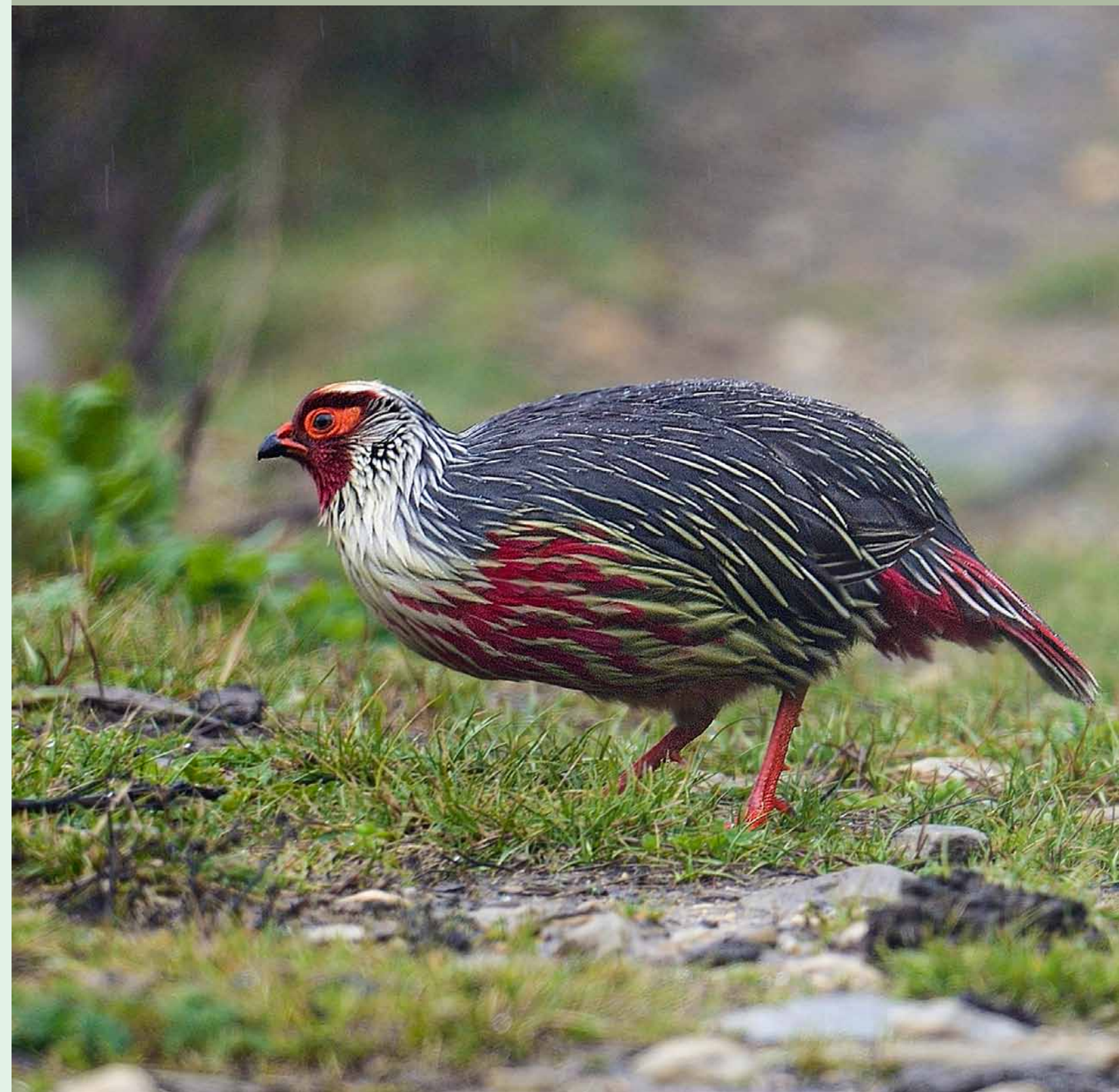
**Suvrajyoti Chatterjee is a young business entrepreneur, a conservationist at heart, an avid reptile enthusiast and is associated with various philanthropic works for the society.**



**Meghna Banerjee, is a corporate lawyer and an environmental activist who has been fighting to save wetlands and prevent wildlife crimes. An avid birder and nature photographer, she wants to use her photography skills as a tool for conservation.**

# The Lord of the Snow

**BIJU P B**





There are some birds whose sheer brilliance is bound to take your breath away. Blood pheasant is arguably one of the most gorgeous birds you can ever come across. As the name signifies males have resplendent blood red coloring on the feathers of the breast, throat and forehead. Both males and females have red feet along with a distinct ring of skin around the eye which is coloured bright crimson. Females are dull and are reddish brown. Various subspecies are recognised and are determined by varying amounts of red and black feathers.

The Blood Pheasant is the state bird of Sikkim and resides in the mountains of Nepal, Sikkim, Tibet, northern Burma and the north-west areas of China. The habitat of Blood Pheasants is closely associated with snowline. The surrounding coniferous forests and scrubland is most preferred. It is found at a comparatively higher altitudes in summer. It moves down in winter when the snowfall increases.

It is often easier to sight this bird in Bhutan as all the species are protected and the poaching is very scarce.

After utterly failing in my attempt to spot anything worthwhile at Chele La, Bhutan, my only ray of hope remained at Thrumshing La National Park to find some pheasants. The drive from Ura Valley to Sengor was not eventful. The mist played havoc at almost all places. Our friend who was also driving had to use all his experience behind the wheels to keep us in good shape. After checking in at the resort in Ura Valley and after lunch, myself and Pema decided to have a short drive towards the famous National



Park. We didn't have any high hopes to find anything significant as it was too late for the pheasants. It began to drizzle and soon mist engulfed all over us. Pema was telling that this phenomenon is quite rare during the season. The entire stretch was clinging precariously from some steep cliffs. After a sharp turn, we spotted a reddish bird in the background of the rhododendrons. My heart skipped a couple of seconds as I visualised a magnificent male blood pheasant, which was basking after the drizzle. Then it just rained blood pheasants everywhere. We could hardly believe our luck as we counted more than 20 birds in less than an hour. My heart in mouth, I went on a clicking spree. After a fantabulous session, thoroughly satisfied, we returned to the hotel in the evening to hear the tragic news of the Nepal earthquake. Was it the quake that flushed the pheasants from their hides? I could not be sure. But, the early morning trip next day didn't yield even a single pheasant. But, I was not complaining at all!!!



***Text and Images by Biju P B***



**Biju.P.B is from Trivandrum, Kerala. He is a Post graduate in English Literature and Political Science, presently working as Asst Director in ESIC (GOI) in Salem. He is active in birding and bird photography for more than 10 years.**





# Lost!

## Amphibians of India

**A team of scientists and naturalists from India led by the "Frogman of India" Dr S D Biju ventured into a project called 'Lost Amphibians of India' with the hope of rediscovering over 50 species of amphibians in India which were believed to be extinct.**

**Dr. CAESAR SENGUPTA**





**Panoramic view of the Western ghats from Ponnudi, Kerala**

**B**iodiversity hotspot!!!

The term is very frequently heard but little understood. I found a very good opportunity to discuss about it and interact with the readers when the editorial team of Wild Sojourns asked me for a cover story. Everybody talks mainly about tigers and elephants when it comes to wildlife. I think it is highly imperative to emphasize that biodiversity is not only about majestic and charismatic animals alone. It is about the entire forest, the plants, the insects, the lesser fauna, the amphibians and all the microconstituents which blend and coexist beautifully and synergistically to create a viable ecosystem. Technically speaking, a Biodiversity hotspot is an area anywhere in the world, which is biologically extremely rich, characterized by a lot of plant endemism and is under threat of habitat loss due to human encroachment.

Well, to be a bit more precise, these biodiversity hotspots of the world host at least 1500 species (more than 0.5% of total world's population) of vascular plants as endemics, nearing 60% of world's plant, bird, animals, reptiles and amphibian species (many of them being endemic ones) and are under tremendous threat having lost more than 70% of their primary habitat. Endemism refers to an ecological state of any life form being unique to a particular geographical location.

Endemic life forms are the most vulnerable to become extinct due to their restricted geographical distributions. Globally, a lot of conservation efforts have been initiated for the protection of the endangered species in these biodiversity hotspot regions. IUCN, World Wildlife Fund, Conservation International etc are amongst the world's leading conservation organizations. India has two major biodiversity hotspots and they belong to the Western Ghats and Himalayas. Major threats of this enormous biodiversity is

logging of the forests, conversion of forests to agricultural lands and other plantations. This amounts to severe habitat destruction. Now above all, these vulnerable regions are further threatened by a number of developmental activities such as roads, railways, dams etc.

Western Ghats is a 1600 km long mountain range running through the west coast of India. It covers the states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Goa, Maharashtra and Gujarat. These mountains cover approximately 1,40,000 sq km and is home to a number of endemic plants, animals, birds, amphibian and reptilian species. The Western Ghats is considered as one of the top ten global biodiversity hot-spots. The Western Ghats has over 450 species of birds (35% endemic), 140 mammal species (around 20% endemic) and 260 reptile species (over 60% endemic).

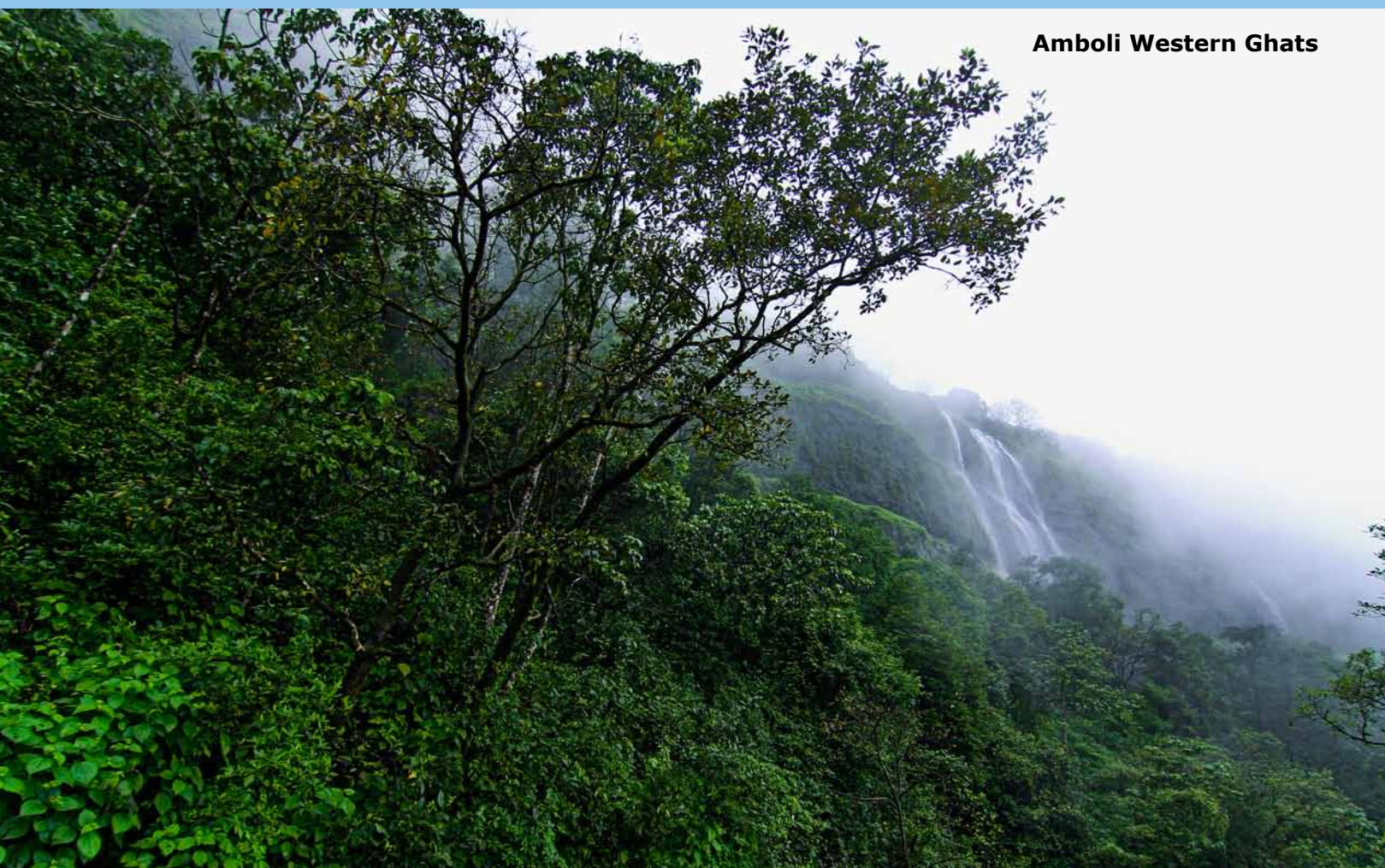
The range also has a number of freshwater fishes and a number of invertebrates most of which are endemic to the region. Similarly, a number of amphibians are endemic to the Western Ghats and the area has become a hotspot of discovery of new species of frogs in the last decade. In the northern part of the Western Ghat range, which falls in Maharashtra, about one-third of the plants, almost half the reptiles, and more than three-fourths of the amphibians known in India are found in this narrow strip of rainforest just off the west coast.

The Himalayas stretch over an arc over 3000 kilometers across Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Northwestern and Northeastern states of India and covers an enormous 750,000 km<sup>2</sup> of area. The hotspot includes all of the world's highest peaks (more than 8000 meters including the Everest) and also few of the deepest river gorges. Both the Eastern as well as the Western Himalayas are home to diverse ecosystems and thousands of different life forms.



**Mahananda Wildlife sanctuary, West Bengal**

Life happened on earth 3.5 billion years back and human life came in much later. After decades of research, scientists have not been able to discover even 15% of all possible forms of life on Earth. While we know about 1.7 million species on Earth, the estimated figure of possible life forms is 10 millions. Thousands of species will get extinct even before they could be discovered, identified or catalogued. So what remains undiscovered is a huge portion of our biodiversity. Against the background of still unknown richness of biodiversity, this century has witnessed rapid extinctions of species. Millions of species are disappearing directly as a result of human destruction of natural habitats.



**Amboli Western Ghats**

There are about 7000 species of known amphibians. Among vertebrates, they are the third largest group – after fishes and birds. Many amphibians are yet to be discovered and many aspects of the known species are unknown. On the express road to discoveries, descriptions and conservation action is an urgent need.

Amphibians were the first vertebrates to venture out onto land. The earliest amphibians resembled modern coelacanth and lungfish both of which have leg-like fins that enabled them to crawl on land. Once acquiring solid land, these animals underwent drastic adaptations that sowed the seeds for the evolution of all higher group of vertebrates. Though small in size, amphibians have successfully survived the massive upheavals on earth which wiped out the midgets as well as giants like dinosaurs.

### **Lost Amphibians Of India (LAI)**

Teams of scientists and naturalists from India ventured into a project called 'Lost Amphibians of India' with the hope of rediscovering over 50 species of lost amphibians in India. These animals were feared to have become extinct but there was still hope that some may be holding on in a few remote places. The project was launched with a ray of hope that probably these animals are not extinct and most probably not enough work has been done to prove that they still exist. This search, which involved multiple states of India, was the first ever coordinated effort to find such a large number of lost creatures. Globally amphibian populations are on a shocking decline – with more than 30 per cent of all species threatened with extinction.

**Dr Sathyabhama Das Biju (SD Biju)** is a Professor in the Department of Environmental Biology (Systematics Lab <http://www.frogindia.org/>), University of Delhi. He has a PhD in Biology (Animal Science: Amphibians) from Vrije Universiteit (Brussels) with the greatest distinction, as well as a PhD in Botany from Calicut University in plant systematics. He is also a Scientific Associate at the British Museum of Natural History, London and a visiting researcher/faculty at Vrije Universiteit, Brussels. SD Biju specializes in systematics of Indian amphibians, with over 25 years of field experience. He discovered over 100 new species of amphibians (76 formally described till September 2015), including the description of two new families and seven new genera. Biju is the recipient of the prestigious IUCN/SSC Amphibian Specialist Group's Sabin Award for the year 2008 in recognition of his amphibian research and conservation initiatives. The award carried a cash prize of 25,000 USD and a citation. Presently, he is the coordinator of Lost! Amphibians of India program, an initiative to rediscover 50 'lost' amphibians which have been not reported after their original description, for a period ranging from 30 to 170 years.



© S D Biju

### The Fabulous Five:

These are the five species of frogs which were rediscovered by Lost Amphibians of India. They were found after a very long hiatus. These are some of the tantalising findings that the Lost Amphibians of India project brought to the notice of the world. There are still many unidentified species which are being studied and catalogued.

© S D Biju



A LAI team in field

A long list of approximately 50 amphibian species (including frogs and caecilians), was made. The recent most in the list was last described 18 years ago and the oldest was as far back as 169 years. These amphibians, which once lived in habitats throbbing with life, are now seen only in the silent and sterile unchanging world inside spirit jars. The question "Are they really extinct or have we not looked hard enough?" kept coming back again and again. A thorough and a well coordinated search would be the highly essential strategy. The "Lost! Amphibians of India" programme was probably the first of its kind in India which initiated a citizen scientist involvement and built the first list of people interested in joining expeditions to search for lost amphibians. Fortunately I was in the list of the first few selections. The programme was formally launched in a function at University of Delhi on 2nd November 2010. Researchers conducted more than 50 expeditions to the most remote wild places of India including some of the unexplored terrains of the Western Ghats and the North East Indian rainforests.

More than 150 members from different walks of life including scientists, students, general public, wildlife enthusiasts, naturalists, photographers participated in these expeditions. The LAI initiative received support from cricket legend Mr Anil Kumble and the Writer & Producer of The Simpsons, Mr George Meyer which helped enormously to spread the awareness among people. Expeditions kept continuing and within three months after launch of the campaign, Lost! Amphibians of India (LAI) made remarkable rediscoveries of five lost species of frogs. The teams came across several known endangered species during the expeditions and did extensive documentation of the Indian amphibian biodiversity. The team of scientists is still working on many other findings that came up subsequently.

More information can be availed at <http://www.lostspeciesindia.org/LAI2/>  
For complete publication and research visit: <http://www.frogindia.org/>



### Anamalai Dot-Frog [*Aamanella anamalaiensis*]

This was rediscovered after 73 years. This narrow-mouthed frog is named after the Anamalai Hills in the southern Western Ghats where it was discovered (and last seen) in 1937 and the presence of yellow spots on its upper side and scattered white spots on its underside. The original specimen was lost and there was no confirmed information on the species until its rediscovery from Parambikulam, in Kerala, by SP Vijayakumar, Anil Zachariah, David Raju, Sachin Rai and SD Biju.

The frog calls loudly from marshy areas during the monsoon season but hides the rest of the year under stones and logs on the forest floor or in tree holes. The current status of this frog in IUCN list is Data Deficient.

# Chalazodes Bubble-nest Frog

## [*Raorchestes chalazodes*]

### Rediscovered after 136 years!!!



#### Chalazodes Bubble-nest Frog

[*Raorchestes chalazodes*]

It was without any doubt, the find of the century. It was last seen in 1874 from 'Travancore'-colonial collective phrase referring to part of the southern Western Ghats. Until that day, no reliable observations were made of this species since its original description. This species was rediscovered after 136 years from Upper Kodayar in Tamil Nadu by Ganesan R, Seshadri KS and SD Biju.

This frog leads a secretive life presumably inside reeds where the frog rests during the day, and becomes active only at night – making it extremely difficult to find. This frog's most distinctive feature is its striking fluorescent green body with ash-blue thighs and groin, and black pupils with golden patches, both highly unusual traits among amphibians. Its current status in IUCN Red List is of a Threatened Species as Critically Endangered (CR).



© S D Biju

**The Silent Valley Tropical Frog**

The Silent Valley Tropical Frog [*Micrixalus thumpi*] was previously known only from the two individuals in the original description found in Silent Valley National Park, Kerala in 1980. This find was the outcome of the first LAI expedition after the Delhi launch in 2010. The Silent Valley Tropical Frog was unexpectedly located in a rubbish bin near the Silent Valley trek path. After being lost to science for 30 years, it was rediscovered by Don Church, Robin Moore, Franky Bossuyt, Ines Van Bocxlaer, Gower David, Mark Wilkinson, Darrel Frost, Wes Sechrest and SD Biju.

The team further observed several more individuals adjacent to a streambed under leaf litter in closed forest cover within the Kunthi river watershed. More field studies are essential to ascertain the biology and conservation status of this species. Current status in IUCN Red List of Threatened Species is Data Deficient (DD).

**The Elegant Torrent Frog**

The Elegant Torrent Frog [*Micrixalus elegans*] was known only from the original description based on a collection from "Kempholey, Hassan" in 1937. The type specimen was subsequently lost and this species has evaded detection until its rediscovery by KV Gururaja, KP Dinesh and SD Biju from the original collection area in "Kempholey" (Kempholey Ghats of Hassan).

The Elegant Torrent Frog, seemingly a fairly common frog within this area, lives in forest streams and calls from the edge of riverbeds where it probably breeds. The area is a hotspot of amphibian diversity, containing another 20 species. Currently there is a hydroelectric project proposal in this area and the site is urgently in need of protection, particularly because it represents the only known site for several highly threatened species. The current status in IUCN Red List is of Threatened Species as Data Deficient (DD).

**The Dehradun Stream Frog**

The Dehradun Stream Frog [*Amolops chakrataensis*] was known only from the original description based upon a single specimen from "Chakrata, Uttar Pradesh" in 1985. The rediscovery of this species from the original collection locality came after 25 years. It was rediscovered in 2011 by a team of graduate students, Sonali G, Gargi S and Pratyush from Delhi University, as part of their master's thesis work led by LAI coordinator SD Biju and by RG Kamei and Robin S.



© S D Biju

The frog is characterized by a light green dorsal colour with dark minute spots. More extensive field surveys are essential to determine the distribution range of this species. The current status in IUCN Red List of Threatened Species is Data Deficient (DD).

Dehradun Stream Frog

**Elegant Torrent Frog**

© S D Biju





*Pseudophilautus amboli* (Biju & Bossuyt, 2009) or the Amboli bush frog is a small frog of about 1.5 inches listed as critically endangered in IUCN red list because of its extremely restricted geographical distribution with a growing threat of habitat loss.

*Xanthophryne tigerina* (Biju, Van Bocxlaer, Giri, Loader & Bossuyt, 2009) is a critically endangered species. This species is known only from its typical locality Amboli Ghats, Maharashtra. Its area of occupancy is estimated to be less than 10 square kilometer. There is also a continuous threat of declining habitat.



Ironically, these hardy beings who have even survived of cataclysmic events are presently helpless to handle habitat destruction that threatens them with extinction. As agents of this massive habitat destruction, it is high time that we take action and conserve these beautiful creatures before they go extinct.

Amphibians fascinate us not only because they have lived on this earth longer than us but also because of their beauty, behaviour and biological characteristics. Many amphibian activities have human friendly results. They control pests of agriculture and vectors of diseases like malaria. They contribute to healthy ecosystems by being a vital link between aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. Amphibians are also an asset to biomedical research; by studying the permeable skin of amphibians, scientists have made advancements towards potential painkillers, HIV and skin cancer treatments. Frogs are indicators of ecosystem health. Silence of frogs is a loud message that something is seriously wrong with our ecosystems.

*Raorchestes luteolus* (Kuramoto & Joshy, 2003) also Known As the Coorg Yellow Bushfrog is a recently described species. It is known only from a small pocket in Karnataka state. It is listed in IUCN red list as data deficient because of lack of enough data.



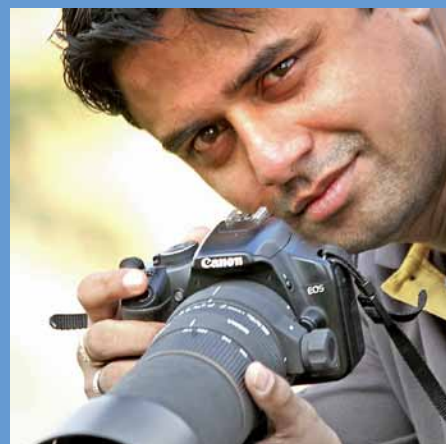


*Raorchestes charius* (Rao, 1937) is listed as endangered in IUCN red list due to its restricted distribution in less than five locations with a growing threat of habitat loss.

It is at this relevant juncture that a question arises, can conservation photography help? Conservation photography is an evolving concept, well appreciated world over. It is a blend of the art of wildlife photography and the science of natural history documentary photography. Lost Amphibians of India (LAI) has been the first formal citizen scientist program in India and it has proven it;s worth well. It was the first organized project in India which initiated a community movement of photographers contributing for building up scientific data base. Conservation photography can work as a fantastic tool for the non-scientist and non-biologist community to contribute for science. Conservation photography creates awareness among common man since it unveils the hidden beauties of nature. Today with the help of internet, social networking sites and various other forums, we come across hundreds of people sharing their images and talking about their conservation. A drastic change is visible over last couple of years, which is really motivating.

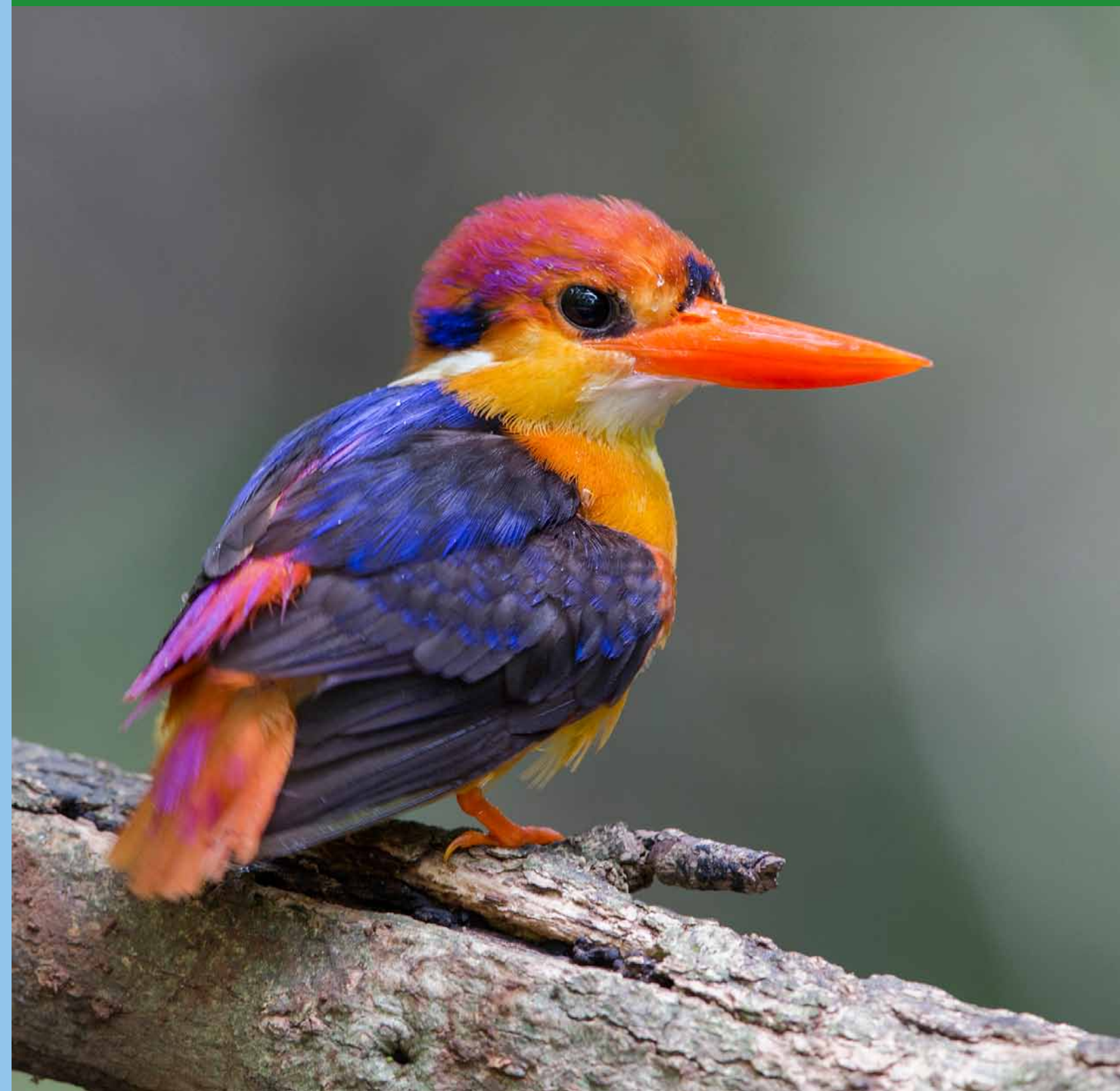
**Text and Images by Dr Caesar Sengupta**

**Dr Caesar Sengupta is an acclaimed Wildlife Conservation Photographer, a National Geographic educator, freelance writer and a trainer. Professionally, he is an MD, Medical Microbiologist. He works with Thyrocare Technologies Ltd as a General Manager, heading the laboratory operations. He conducts regular wildlife conservation photography workshops and field expeditions across India and abroad with a focused motto of using photography as a tool for conservation. He has traveled far and wide across the Indian geography, exploring the rich Indian biodiversity stretching from North East Indian rainforests to the magnanimous Western Ghats, from the Sub Himalayan forests to Coastal strips of India. Through his photography, he tries to depict the untold and unseen beauties of nature. He works in association with environmentalists, conservation activists, naturalists, scientists and researchers in an attempt to generate awareness about the earth's natural history.**



# Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher

**RITESH NANGARE**





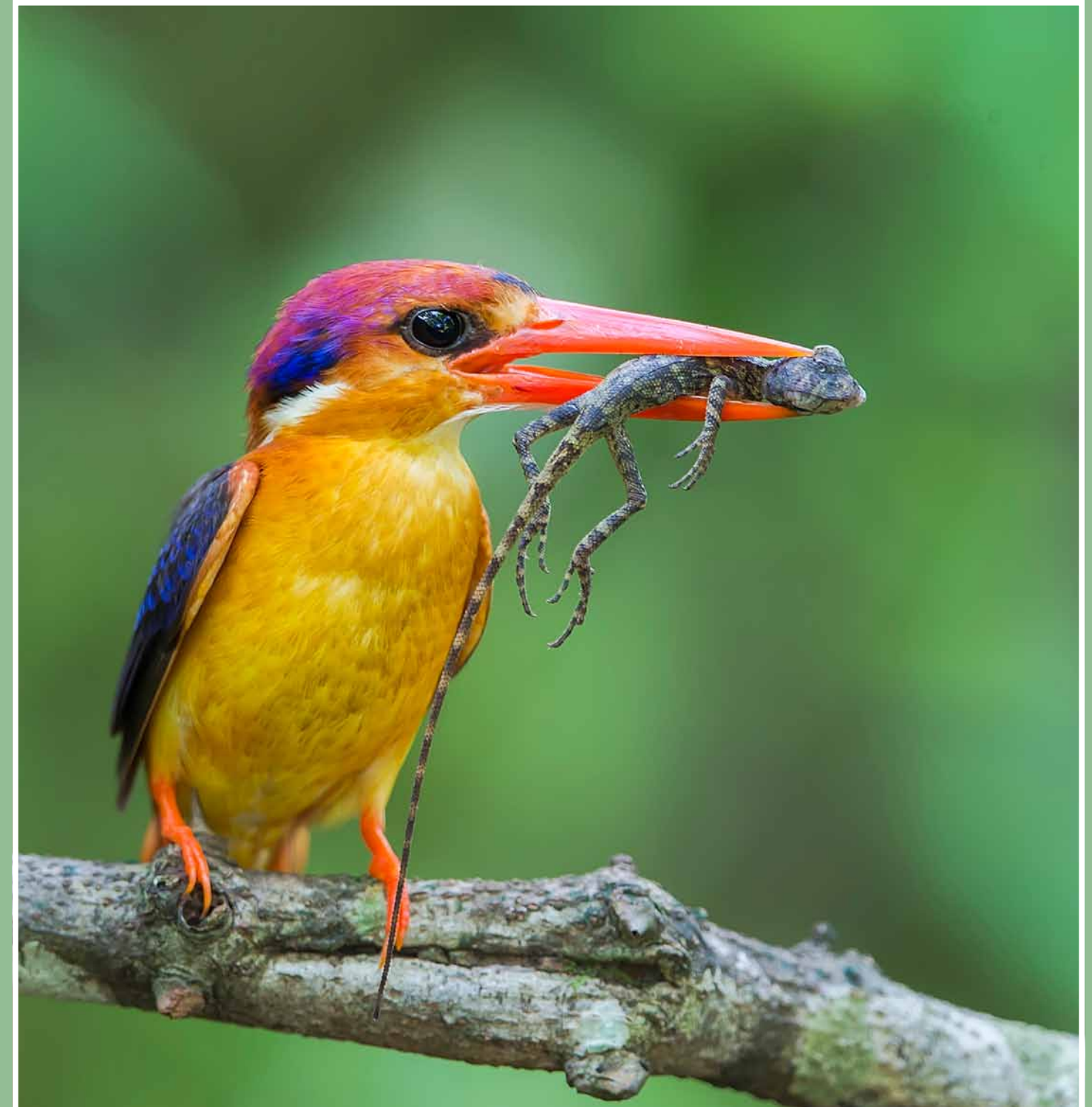
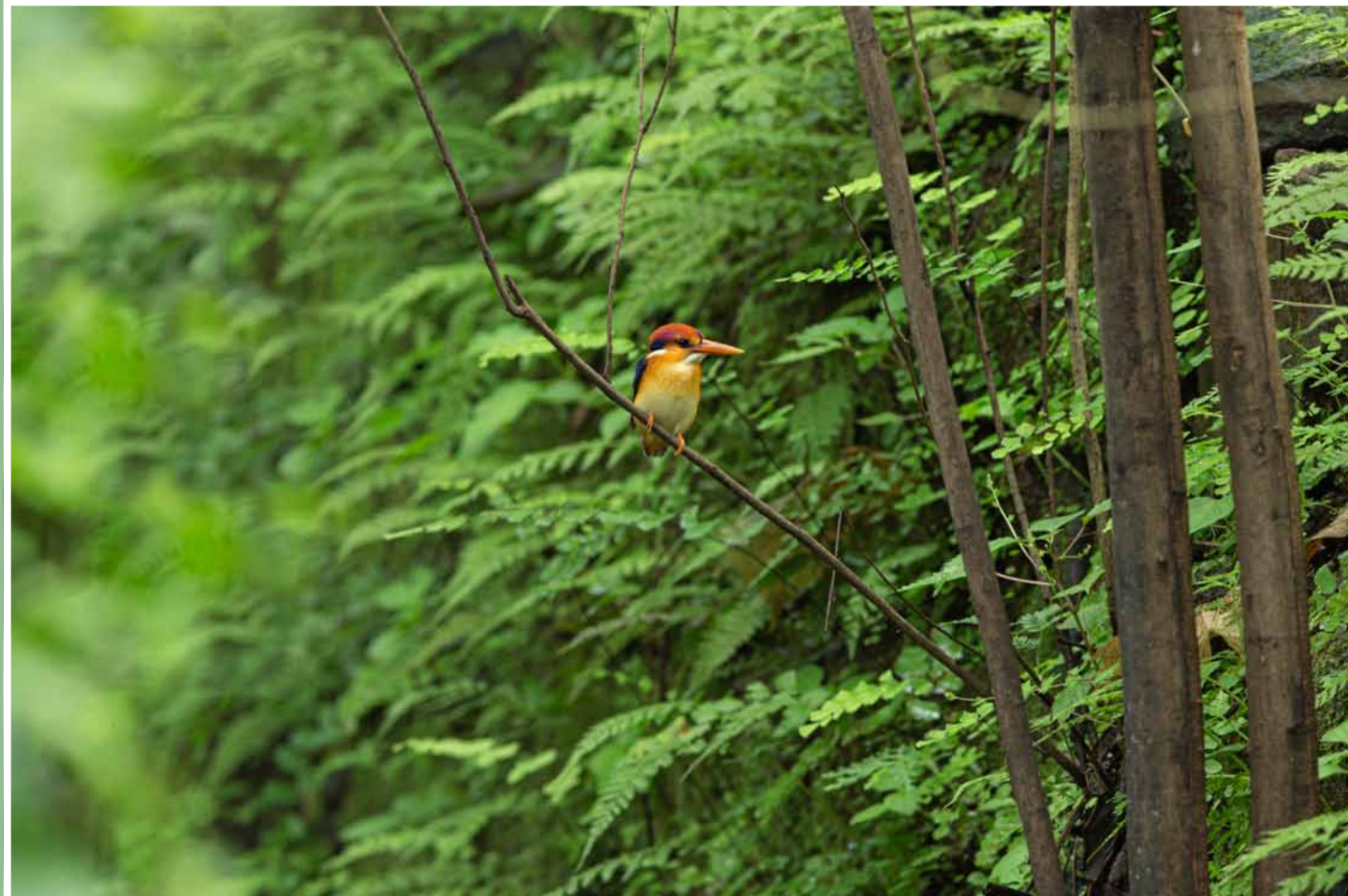
### Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher!!!

The name itself conjures a prismatic image in the mind liberally jostled with some of the brightest colours one can imagine. Arguably one of Almighty's best ever creations, this charmer is aptly christened "Jewel of Konkan".

A resident in the lowland forests of the Western ghats, it is one of the charmers of nature. Ritesh has spent a better part of last four years exploring and studying this bird. He has roamed for hours around in the jungles of Alibag, Tamhini Ghat around Pune and Chiplun. One fact he has realised is that the nesting period probably accords the best time to observe this bird.



Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher in it's habitat

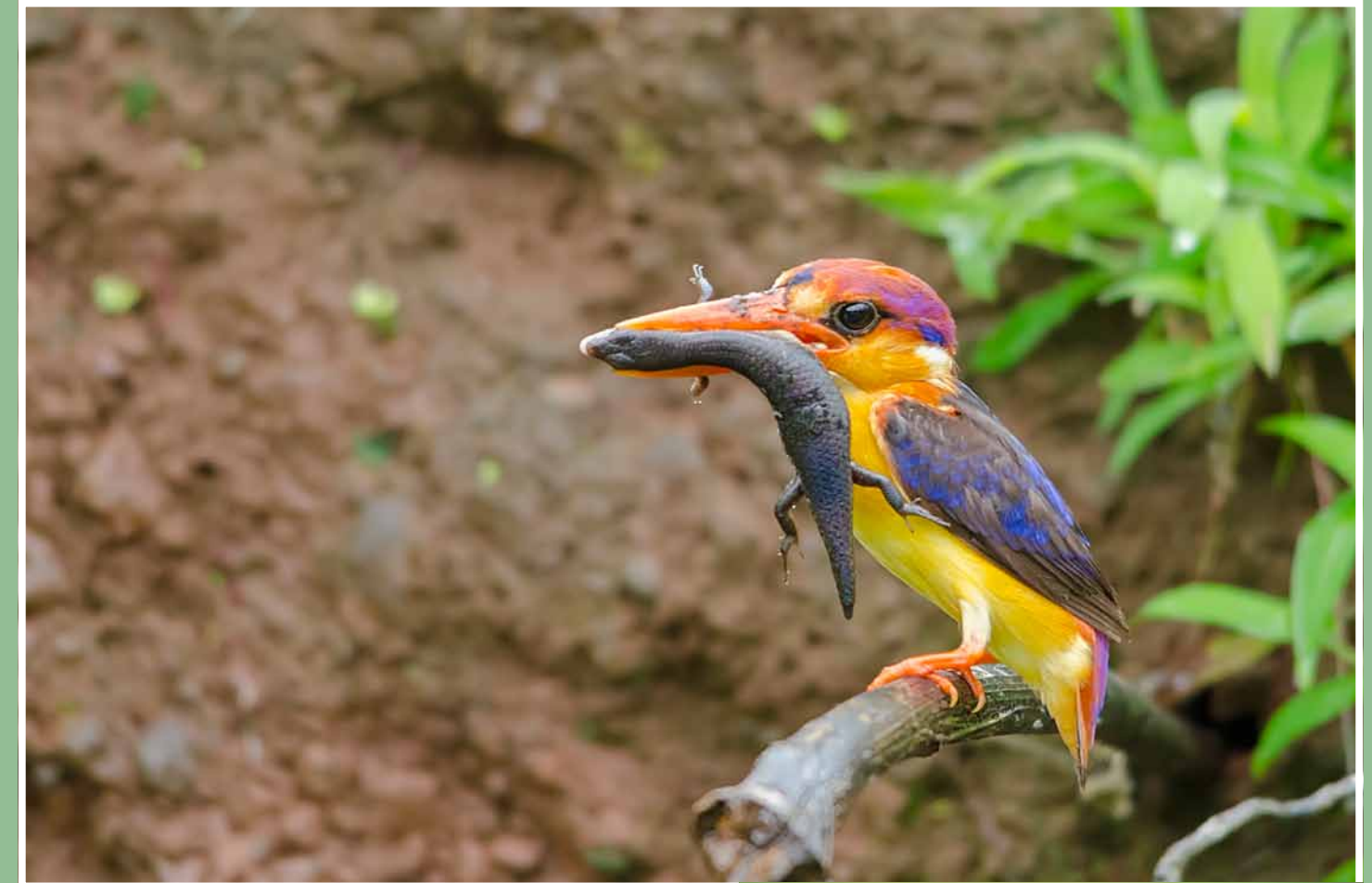


The Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher is one of the most prolific hunters nature has ever produced. It always hunts from a perch. The diet along with fish also includes a good share of insects, as well as small lizards or frogs. Before eating lizards or frogs, it kills them by holding them in the beak and continually hitting them against a stone or tree stump. Cleanliness is very important to this Kingfisher. It is often seen diving into the water to bathe, then fly to a perch to preen and dry it's feathers in the sunlight. It usually utilizes a branch to clean it's main weapon, keeping the highly efficient bill in excellent condition by scraping it against the wood.

Nesting activity coincides with the advent of the South west monsoon. Nesting site is decided after a thorough reconnaissance wherein the procurability of prey is of prime importance. Nest security and the presence of a sturdy perches near the site are also important prerequisites. Usually it is on the sloping banks of shallow streams. Both male and female participate in the digging of the tunnel which is horizontal usually with a gentle slope downwards. Sometimes the tunnel may even bifurcate into two compartments. A narrow chamber is hollowed out at the end of the tunnel in which eggs are laid. Usually these birds take around seven days to finish the tunnel. Tunnel depth varies and solely depends on the toughness and penetrability of the ground.

Once the nest is made it might be used for a second time in the same season.

Interestingly the nesting and egg laying corresponds with that of frogs. His theory is as the chicks grow proportionally the tadpoles also increase in size providing for a naturalised escalation in the bulk of the prey. Another fact he has observed is that most of the times the nest opening is East-West oriented. They are very fiercely territorial and defend their nests very aggressively.



**This image of the Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher is taken in Alibaug where the prey is a rarer skink belonging to Eutropis species.**



Normally 3 to 6 eggs are laid. In some cases in the avian world where either of the partners predominantly assumes parental duties, both parents here equally share all responsibilities starting with incubation. Eggs hatch in around 17 days. The hatchlings are altricial (weak, blind and helpless) and they require care and feeding by the parents, who bring the food into the nesting chamber and keep them warm. However, the nestlings grow quickly and soon they are able to travel toward the entrance of the tunnel where they encounter the adults and wait to be fed.





Kingfishers establish a distinct configuration of movement while feeding the young ones. First thing is that they create a definite **"Corridor of Flight"**. The sequence starts with the kingfisher flying away from the nest, hunting and catching the prey. Then it flies into the vicinity and perches on various previously selected branches 25 to 50 feet away from the nest. After few moments of respite it flies on to the perch near the nest. Here it usually makes a 360 degree observation and then flies into the nest. Initially the preys are smaller and

intervals are longer. As the kids grow they develop a humongous appetite. Both parents are seen making very frequent trips then. The assortment of prey includes geckos, crabs, spiders, frogs and skinks.



The young ones leave the nest once they are around 20 days old. Parents are seen feeding them upto one month after this.

The more one studies this bird the more one falls in love with it. One can't help but marvel at the skills it has in catching various preys and that too catering to the massive demand by the hatchlings. It not only takes care of the helpless young ones but also shepherds the juveniles till they become very well versed in the precise skills what the parents have. An unparalleled efficacy in hunting and a very loving and responsible way of parenting is what sets this beauty apart from other birds.

**Text by Prasanna A V**  
**Images by Ritesh Nangare**



**Ritesh Nangare is from Pune. He has been studying Oriental Dwarf kingfisher for the last four years. He is at home in the Western ghats. The dense forests, the rains and the silence which is broken only by the singing birds brings out the best in him. He also is a fierce tiger lover and has made lot of trips to various tiger parks.**

# Exotic World of CACTI AND SUCCULENTS



**Edithcoles grandis**

**NIRMALA SRIDHAR**

Cacti and succulents belong to a very unusual group of plants. They require little or no water for their growth and as such are found in arid conditions.

When one hears the word "Cactus", the image which invariably jumps in front of our mind is of an ungainly prickly plant. One wouldn't pay more than a cursory glance if we were to come across such a specimen....But go deeper into this fascinating group of plants and you discover that these, along with other succulent plants come in an mind boggling array of shapes and sizes. Many even come with amazingly beautiful flowers which can put any regular flowering plant to shame!!

Unfortunately, cacti are embroiled in controversy and are considered as inauspicious plants according to few sciences like Vaastu. It is generally advised that such plants should not be kept in the house!!!

Even if one were to follow this ideology, two observations call for a worthy mention.



**Astrophytum myriostigma**  
**Fukuryu**



**Echinocereus rigidissimus var**  
**rubrispinus**

First one is that it makes sense not to keep 'poky' things in the house where family members or children may get hurt. The second fact is that Cacti are sun loving plants and aren't going to survive very long indoors anyway.

So as cacti themselves prefer to stay put outdoors, where is the question of keeping them inside one's house ?? However my personal experiences guarantee an immense gratification as I have placed a lot of these plants on my window sill !!

You can just try it too!

Succulent plants conventionally grow in regions where water is scarce and are so named because they store water in their leaves, stems or roots to survive such harsh conditions.

Strictly speaking, from the botanical point of view, all cacti are succulents while all succulents need not be cacti. In horticultural/ the grower's parlance, the term 'succulents' is customarily used for non-cacti succulents.

Cacti are typically plants that are native to North and South America while succulents can be found practically all over the world.

As a hobbyist, I prefer cacti without spines or flattened/ pectinate spines as I find it easier to handle these....and I love succulent plants! Each grower has his/her favourite plant choices and one only has to enter into this exotic world to see the amazing diversity which is at display here.



**Opuntia Santa Rita**

How to determine whether a plant is a Cactus or not???

Cacti typically have small round, cushion-like structures called areoles from which the spines, leaves, flowers arise...so though many succulents (like agaves and euphorbias) resemble cacti, they do not have these areoles and that's how one distinguishes them from cacti.

Cacti come in various shapes and sizes.. Blossfeldia liliputana is supposedly the smallest cactus species in the world while Pachycereus pringlei (Mexican giant cardon) takes the prize for being the tallest! Though cacti are grown for their beauty as it is, the grower can only be satisfied if his/ her cacti flower and when they do, they beat most other flowers hands down on the beauty quotient.....

As many growers say..."The spines (read-injuries and pokes) are well worth the flowers"!

Cacti are by and large found in dry areas with scant rainfall though epiphytic cacti grow in rainforest and need more water.

In order to grow these beauties, one must understand the native habitat of each species and accordingly care for it, though most plants adjust to climates that are quite different from their native ones.



**Astrophytum asteria variegated**

**Sulcorebutia vasquezianus**



**Tephrocactus sp**

Though there are innumerable species of cacti, the X-factor that attracts one to a particular



**Lophophora Diffusa**



**Astrophytum Asteria superkabuto**



**Lophophora frisia**



**Echinofossulocactus sp**



**Mammillaria hahniana**

species lies in the eye of the collector. Cacti can be grown and appreciated for a multitude of reasons. Cacti can be loved and harnessed for their cute shape, type of spination, quirky looks, interesting pattern/surfaces and colour/variegations (different coloured zones in stem/leaf). Greatest feeling of happiness is experienced by a cactus enthusiast when a species blossoms. The cacti look absolutely beautiful when they bloom. It is quite amazing to see the spines and flowers coexist and form an heartwarming display.



**Turbinicarpus minimus**



**Ariocarpus godzilla**



**Ariocarpus Godzilla variegated**

I am sure you have had your fill of cacti and want more....So we will move on to the succulents. (other than cacti, of course!!). Frankly, these happen to be my favourites!

These are distributed worldwide and though they can adapt to alien climates, they thrive best in their native climate...as a hobbyist, one tries to grow such succulents that are difficult to cultivate in one's climatic conditions, but that's the part of the challenge and one may often succeed with some trial and error. But when entering into this hobby, it's wise to start with succulent plants suited to the local climate and then progress to the difficult/exotic ones!

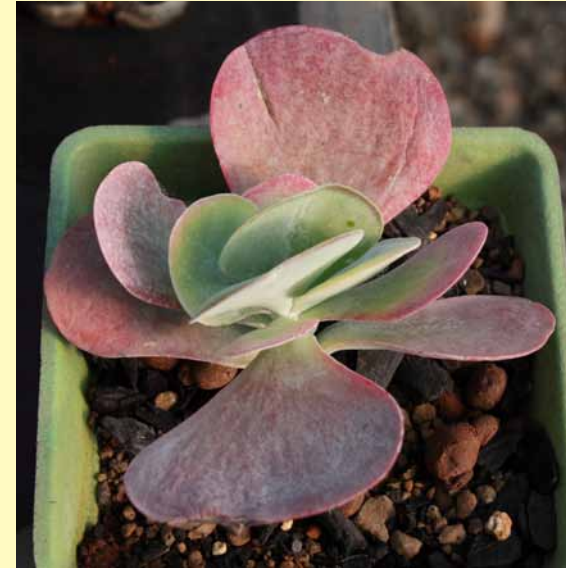
Though succulents are very attractive to look at, they cannot be grown the way we grow the usual tropical plants like for example hibiscus! That's because unlike the C3 or C4 metabolism typical of plants we see around us, most of these plants (including cacti) utilize CAM or Crassulacean acid metabolism for photosynthesis.



**Astrophytum myriostigma**



**Euphorbia obesa**



**Kalanchoe Flapjack**



**Adromischus cooperi**

The family Crassulaceae is my favourite and the CAM photosynthesis has been named after this family in which it was first studied.



**Graptopetalum superb**

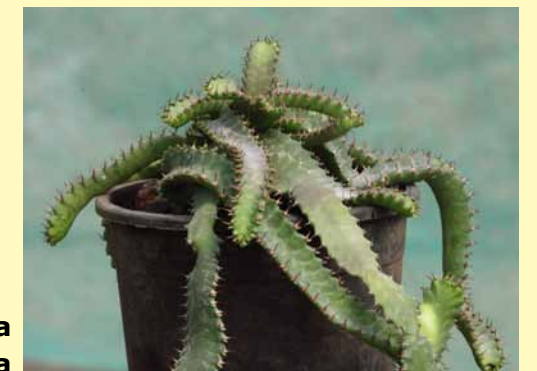


**Echeveria peacock**

Another beautiful set of plants belong to the family Euphorbiaceae; many plants in this family are easy to grow and look amazing too!



**Euphorbia innermis**



**Euphorbia stellata**



**Huernia thuretii**

Compound this with the fact that most are native to subtropical and temperate climates, growing many of these is somewhat more difficult than growing cacti, but it's not impossible!

The different genera also have different cultural needs which needs to be addressed meticulously.



**Adenium obesum**

The most popular ones and easy to grow are adeniums belonging to the family Apocynaceae. These are comfortable with tropical conditions so are the other plants in this family, those of sub-family asclepiadoideae, which have beautiful flowers.



**Orbea Caudata**



**Caralluma Adscendens fimbriata**



**Caralluma sarkariae**



**Stapelia grandiflora**

## Succulents in Bloom



**Stapella schinzii**



**Delosperma tradescantioides**



**Caralluma stalagmifera**

## Succulents come in attractive shapes and contours too.

Not easy but a very popular genus in this family is Lithops- 'living stones' These resemble stones/pebbles, an adaptation in their nature habitat to avoid being eaten by grazing animals... a friend of mine cheekily calls them 'Butts of the Desert'



Lithops



Pseudolithos cubiformis



Aloe castilloniae

Another beautiful group of plants - belonging to family Aloaceae, in which everyone must be familiar with Aloe vera, but care is needed to grow the more attractive variants so they look compact and pretty and without ugly scars due to overwatering!



Haworthia fasciata variegated

Haworthias are other genera of plants in this family. They are convenient window sill plants as they are slow growers and can do well with reasonable ambient light- the perfect succulent for the Mumbai dweller I'd say!



Haworthia cooperi silver swirl





Crassula volkensis

flourish in a drought-like situation. During the learning period one often stumbles across the fact that periodic water does help these plants to thrive. Now, my general thumb rule is to water when the soil is dry. Usually it is required twice in hotter climates and less frequently in colder climates. I see a lot of people killing their succulents by overwatering. You can avoid this by making sure the soil is totally dry between waterings.

**Sunlight:** Generally, succulents do best in bright but indirect sunlight. One needs to experiment with the plants to see what works best according to the local weather conditions. Most of the plants don't do very well in direct sunlight. The amount of shade and sunlight required also needs to be carefully titrated.

So, in order to grow these plants correctly, one has to adjust the type of soil, watering regimen and duration of/percentage exposure to sunlight depending on where one lives as the local climate is the unadjustable factor! Of course- as goes with any subject- as one learns, there is a curve one ascends with many hits and misses along the way. But in the due course of time with perseverance and diligence one ends up growing these plants comfortably and happily.

I hope this small glimpse into this world of cacti and succulents creates a new passion in you and inspires you to try growing these beauties.....

**Begin....and you shall be hooked!!**

**Welcome to Succulent Madness!**

*Text and Images by Dr Nirmala Sridhar*

## Growing succulents at home

**Here the golden triad consists of soil, water and sunlight.**

**Soil:** Soil should be a variety which doesn't hold water and should drain well. If you feel like your soil is just not retaining water long enough, you can mix your cactus soil with a bit of regular potting soil to increase the water retention to your liking. One can add a bit of sand to aid draining if soil is holding more water. You can even keep plants in containers without drainage holes, often decorative like mugs and big cups. Here it will help to have the bottom layer as sand or pebbles and water as per demand.

**Water:** The generally prevalent idea that succulents don't need much water is a misconception. Though they need less water compared to regular plants they will not



**Dr Nirmala Sridhar has been growing cacti and succulents for the past few years and has accumulated enormous amount of species and precious knowledge about them. She is a noted wildlife photographer and a classical Bharatnatyam dancer. She is a practising pediatrician and is settled down in Mumbai. This article only gives the basic ideas and people who are seriously interested can contact her on [nirmalasridhar55@rediffmail.com](mailto:nirmalasridhar55@rediffmail.com).**



Mesmerising  
**Lakshadweep**

**BIJOY KI**

Agatti Airport- A view from Kalpitti island.



Lakshadweep is a tropical archipelago consisting of many islands, atolls and coral reefs, off the coast of Kerala, India. Many of these islands are uninhabited and around only ten have human habitation. Lakshadweep is one of the world's most breathtaking tropical island systems. Entire landmass is only thirty two square kilometers. It is surrounded by 4200 sq. km of lagoon rich in marine wealth. As the precious natural wealth is associated with an extremely fragile ecosystem, a very well thought of and balanced strategy is followed with respect to both tourism and conservation. Tourist entries are very well regulated and one needs permits to visit the islands.

It is one of the most exotic locations you would ever visit for birding. There is a daily flight from Kochi to Agatti operated by Indian Airlines. It is best to stay in Agatti and visit the various birding hotspots via boats. One week stay would be enough to cover all the usual locations. One can start birding in the lagoons and coastal waters around Agatti. Bangaram island which is around 75 minutes by boat from Agatti has a lot of avifauna including Sandpipers, Golden plover, Greenshanks, Redshanks, Plovers and Whimbrels. Other islands to visit include Thinnakara Island [15 min from Bangaram by boat, Parali Islands - two small islands very near to Thinnakara island, Perumal par - a very small land around 3000 sq ft, which is 3 hours by boat from Agatti, is noted for Brown Noddy, Red-billed Tropicbird, Lesser and Greater Crested Terns etc. Pitti island around 35 kilometers from Agatti is a known breeding site for Brown Noddy and Sooty Terns.



The Sooty Tern, belongs to the tern family and is a sea bird found in tropical oceans, breeding on various equatorial and subtropical islands throughout the equatorial zone. It has a funny nickname of 'wideawake tern' which is derived from the "ker-wacky-wack" or "wacky-wack" of their calls. Every summer, thousands of Sooty Terns breed here. Each pair of birds have only one egg and as soon as it hatches the young one is religiously taken care of by the parents. The young terns leave as soon as they are ready to fly. They infact do not return home for several years. They travel very far reaching, African and American coasts before returning home some day.

On the wings continuously, they do not sleep, nor rest on the water, and infrequently land on floating objects. They even feed midair, hunting off the ocean's surface. They live in air for many years together and some even wonder whether they have mastered the art of sleep in flight. Their nick name is probably derived from their sleeping habit. It is also the state bird of Lakshadweep.

The Green Sea Turtle is a large sea turtle and is classified as an endangered species in IUCN and is under global protection. The clear waters in the lagoon provide lovely opportunities to photographically document this elegant reptile. Like all sea turtles, it migrates a long way between its breeding and feeding sites. It is distributed widely across the Indian ocean and has many prominent nesting grounds in this area. It is the most extensively studied turtle and much of the known ecological behaviour of turtles is from this research.





### Greater Crested Tern

The Greater Crested Tern is a larger sea tern and has grey upperparts, white underparts, a yellow bill, and a black crest. Young ones differ from other juvenile terns and rely on their parents for food for several months after they have fledged. One strange fact is that it has adapted a behaviour wherein it follows fishing boats to catch the discarded fish.

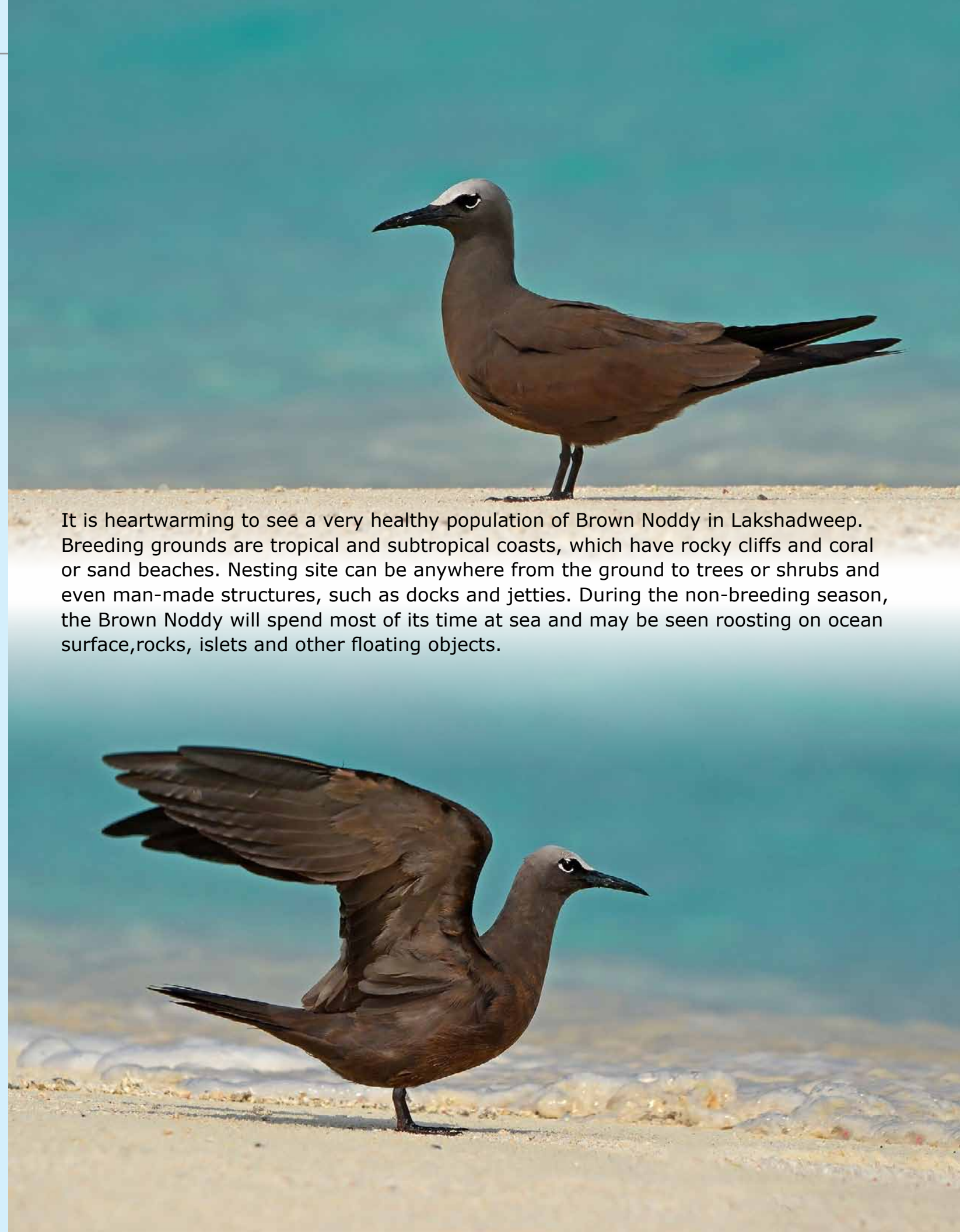
### Lesser Crested Tern

The Lesser Crested Tern is a medium-large sea tern, very similar in size and general appearance to its close relative Sandwich Tern. The summer adult has a black capped head, black legs and a long sharp orange bill. The grey rump is a useful flight identification feature distinguishing it from the other closely resembling species.



### Saunder's Tern

The Saunder's Tern is a smaller sized tern resembling the little tern. Adult non breeding individuals have a mostly white head, with black plumage extending from the back of the neck through the eye, and an all-black bill. A black cap is present in the breeding phase.



It is heartwarming to see a very healthy population of Brown Noddy in Lakshadweep. Breeding grounds are tropical and subtropical coasts, which have rocky cliffs and coral or sand beaches. Nesting site can be anywhere from the ground to trees or shrubs and even man-made structures, such as docks and jetties. During the non-breeding season, the Brown Noddy will spend most of its time at sea and may be seen roosting on ocean surface, rocks, islets and other floating objects.



**Red-billed Tropicbird**



Red-billed Tropicbird is the biggest among the similar species and sport two very elongated tail feathers. They can be witnessed in good numbers on the small islet of Perumal par. Though a very strong flier, it moves very awkwardly on land crawling on it's belly using the wings to push itself forward.



**Bijoy Ki is from Kochi, Kerala and is working in BPCL Kochi refinery as equipment operator for 20 years. He has always been a keen traveller. For last 4**

**years he has fervently dedicated himself to birds and has clicked more than 500 species in this period. He is using Nikon D 7100 and 300 mm f/4 lens with 1.4 X Teleconverter for bird photography.**



**Whimbrel with a catch**

Plenty of other coastal birds can be seen and photographed here. A trip to Lakshadweep also accords one with an unparalleled scope to record some pleasing landscapes. The pristine beaches with the white sand and swaying palm trees and the seascapes which change the colours miraculously at sunrise and sunsets are a visual delight to behold. Crystal clear waters and abundant marine life give fabulous chances for underwater photography. The trip can be coupled with various other activities like scuba diving, snorkelling and parasailing. This amazing island system can be a complete vacation one aspires for.

***Images by Bijoy Ki  
Text by Megh Roy Choudhury***



# Angling WIDE

“

Normal is boring. Being imaginative, unconventional and inventive is the mantra. This incredible image takes wild life photography to an altogether new level. An image which not only has the perfect details of the target species but also has captured the vivid habitat.

I am Nitin Vyas, based in Bangalore. I am an engineer by profession and am working as an Apparel Business professional. I am now gearing up for a career in professional photography with a keen interest in travel and nature photography.

During my trip to the Himalayas, I Spotted this Himalayan Marmot near the Sarchu camp on Leh - Manali road. Initially I started shooting with my 100-400mm lens from a distance of about 50 meters and slowly approached this 'Tibetan Snow Pig'. I could slowly crawl till I was around 5 ft

from this cute and furry animal. Then I Had a brainstorm!! Why not a wide angle??? I decided to go wide with 16-35mm lens and with a low POV I could also include the breathtaking background in the frame.



**NITIN VYAS**

# Waterfalls of COORG

**ALANKAR CHANDRA**

**Chunchanakatte falls**

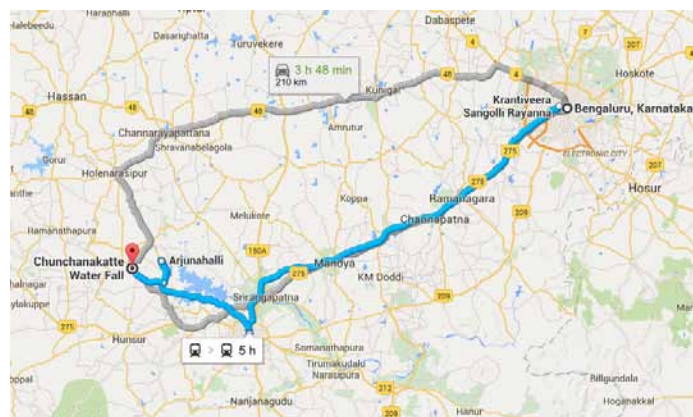




Chunchanakatte falls

September usually is a time which is not considered ideal for wildlife. I had planned to start my birding season from November and the tiger season had already ended in June. During the monsoons I was not left with too many options. One definite alternative was to head to the Western Ghats for its naturescapes. I wanted something different this time, hence I decided to explore an offbeat location. As I was mulling over my choices, I thought of Coorg.

Coorg is a small district located in Southwest part of Karnataka bordering Kerala. It was called "The Scotland of India" by the British. Western Ghats traverse the entire district which gets a heavy dose of monsoon rains as is expected. It goes without saying that Coorg boasts of picturesque and cascading waterfalls and I finally decided to zero in on them.



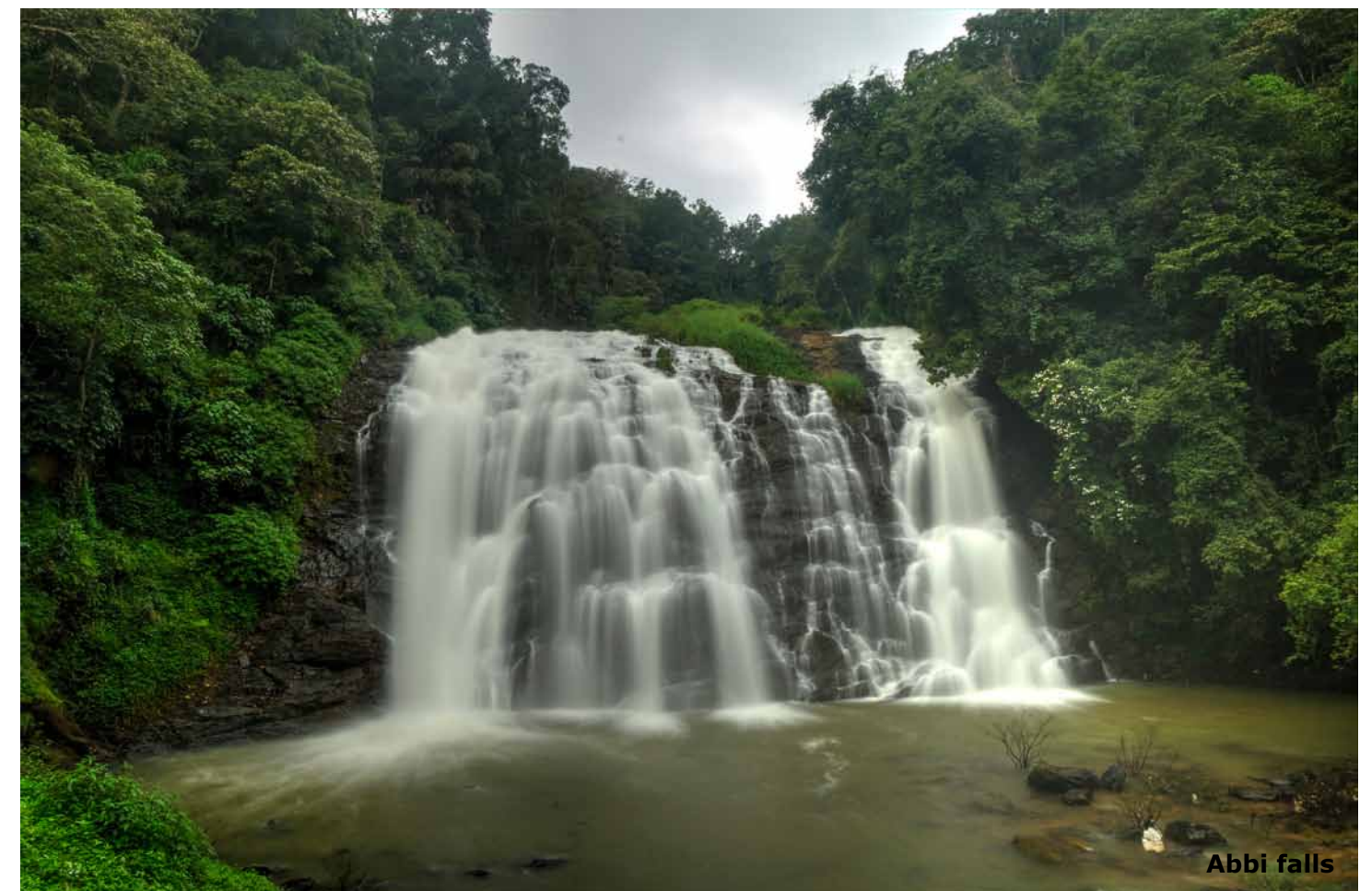
I am an early riser and for such weekend trips I like to get out of the city before sunrise so as to avoid the traffic. Me and my two friends headed to Mysore which is around 140 kms from Bangalore. Our first falls for the trip was Chunchankatte falls, some 60kms out of Mysore. I, being the lone photographer among the three, promptly assumed the charge of deciding route and spots. Reaching this falls was no less than an expedition, thanks to the Sygic GPS app

on my phone. The app should at least realize that the people using it are not supermen. It was guiding us to fly our car over a paddy field, and some times row it in water. This also meant a lot of U-turns and diversions. For a good ten kms it made us drive on a

two meter wide village mud road. But finally after all these attempts to murder us, the app took mercy on us and led us to the intended destination. While the other friends were busy in filling their vision with the beauty all around, I brought out my waterfall shooting kit, which comprised of tripod, ND10 filter and a wide angle lens with camera. The equipment was enough for normal tourists to pass curious looks at me. Some even wondered aloud whether I was shooting for movies.

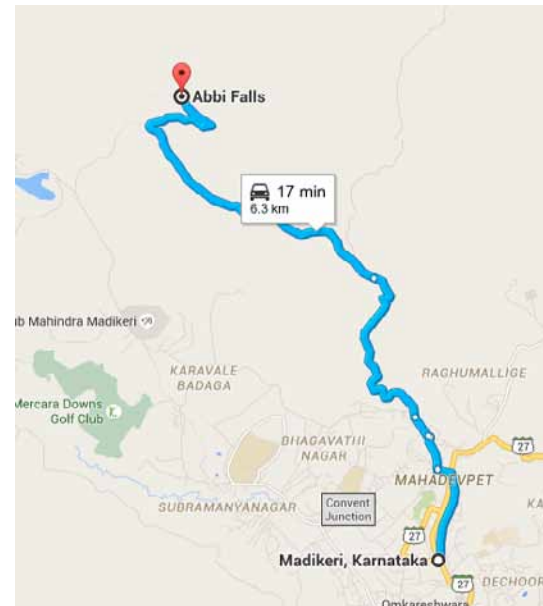
Chunchanakatte falls dries out to a trickle in summer and becomes very active in monsoon. It also has a lot of associated folklore with it. One interesting myth states that Rama stayed here during his exile and used to take bath in the waterfall. There is a Kodandarama temple which supposedly belongs to Lord Rama's period. Strangely even when the falls are in full flow the sound cannot be heard once you are inside the temple.

After spending a nice refreshing time we decided to move on. The night stay would be at Madikeri, which is the capital of Coorg. As evil forces grow stronger in dark, we decided to discard the GPS app for good and relied on route directions from local people. The rest of the journey was uneventful and we settled down in a comfortable homestay at Madikeri for night. We decided to explore the neighbourhood hotels for the taste of the famous Kodava cuisine. Rice is the main base of the meal with chicken, mutton or the much loved pork curry. Most of the curries are tangy, spicy and coconut based. Vegetarians need not lose heart. Delicacies are available and are made of raw mango, raw jackfruit, colocasia and wild mushrooms. We had a fantastic meal to round of the day and went to a well deserved sleep.



Abbi falls

Next day morning the first destination was Abbi falls, on the outskirts of Madikeri town. We reached there in the early morning at 7am and were the only people present. I was actually wondering whether I am the only early riser in the world, and all the other tourists take it easy. The waterfall is formed by the early portions of river Kaveri and is a sight to behold in monsoons. The road to the falls is peppered with coffee plantations and spice gardens. There is a Kali Mata temple near the falls and a hanging bridge is built



Mallalli falls



opposite the falls. The roar could be heard from the road and we weaved through the small path leading to the falls amidst the cardamom plantations. We were expecting the presence of the bhelpuri, panipuri vendors and lots of tourists around it. But pleasantly their activity had not started yet. Abbi falls in full flow is an amazing sight and we thoroughly enjoyed our stay there. While returning we got a gastropod species called Indrella Ampula which I learnt is quite common in Coorg region. It is an endemic species found only in the Western Ghats and can be found in various colours.



The next destination for the day was Mallalli falls, some 60kms away from Madikeri. Roads were pretty good for the initial 50 kms or so, but became progressively worse and it turned out to be some serious off-roading. It was a mud road leading to the falls, with 2 feet deep craters at some places where only a road-roller could safely pass. We finally reached the last point where the car could go. There is a thin line between being lazy and committing suicide. We thought this was that line and got down and parked the car. It was about 45 mins walk to the falls, which was all downhill. The trail was narrow, steep and treacherous, not to forget the leeches in the monsoon. But everything was forgotten as we

stood at the end of our trek and laid our eyes on the falls. Hands down, this was one of the best waterfalls I had ever seen. The Kumaradhara river plunges over 200 feet down creating a spectacle of sheer magnificence. The shutterbug in me went into an overdrive as I craved to fill the whole opulence in my camera frame.

Walking up the hill on return was an arduous task and made us realize the importance of gyms in our lives. Once we reached the car, the car too realized the importance of horsepower in its engine.

After a thrilling but tense drive, we passed via Madikeri and headed to our last

Mallalli falls



destination of the day, Chelavara falls. There are two trails and you can either go to the top or the bottom of the falls. As it is a relatively unexplored waterfall nobody was around. It is also called the 'tortoise rock' by the locals. It had the least meat for photography, but was good for us to take a dip at end of a tiring day. It was time for pack up and we left for Bangalore. Though I realised that I could have had covered Iruppu falls, another captivating location but had to painfully postpone it to next time owing to time constraints. By 7.30 pm we entered Nagarhole forest checkpoint and were to drive inside the forest area for about 30kms before exiting the forest. There were sound of tuskers from not so far away and we were in middle of a Jungle that boasts itself of Tigers, Leopards and Tuskers. Were we on the menu of any of those that night, we were wondering. We finally reached Bangalore at 11.30 PM to round off a memorable weekend.

**Text and Images by Alankar Chandra**



Chelavara falls



**Traveller forever, that is what defines Alankar Chandra. An IIMA**

**alumnus, his heart finds its place amongst nature outside the cities. He took to photography to share his moments with nature. He stays in New Delhi. His journeys and photography can be followed at [www.alankarchandra.com](http://www.alankarchandra.com).**

# PARTRIDGE PITTA AND PHEASANTS

**VIJAY SACHAN**



Mangrove Pitta

Any serious birder perfectly knows how very elusive these birds are. Partridges and pheasants prefer the undergrowth of dense tropical and subtropical forests. They rarely come out in open and even tougher to flush out. They also are very shy and are extremely wary of human presence. Pittas are a bunch of very notorious skulkers. You can hear their calls all around yet sighting them can be a gargantuan task. To get decent images of these birds is not an easy chore at all. We are featuring here some exquisite images of these highly slippery customers taken by Vijay Sachan in the jungles of Malaysia and Thailand.

**M**angrove Pitta as the name implies is a resident of the mangrove forests. Though little easier to spot because of its habit of calling from the top of mangrove trees, making a decent image poses a hefty challenge. Classified as 'Near threatened' in IUCN list, it becomes quite vocal in the breeding period and remains mostly silent in other times. This image is from Klang, Malaysia.



Garnet Pitta, Malaysia

Garnet Pitta is found mainly in Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and Brunei usually referred to as Sundaic lowlands. Confined to broadleaved evergreen forest below 200 metres, it exists probably in meagre numbers in due to deforestation of the lowlands. Though listed as locally common it is very very difficult to sight and photograph this colourful pitta. It is also under 'Near threatened' in IUCN list and is severely threatened by habitat loss. Anyone looking for this bird should listen out for its call which is a drawn out monotone whistle. This image is taken in Taman Negara, Malaysia.

Hooded Pitta is found in Eastern and Southeastern Asia and maritime Southeast Asia, where it lives in different types of forests as well as on plantations and other cultivated areas. It can be seen better during the breeding season from February to April. It is a difficult species to see and this is photographed in Shah Alam, Malaysia.



Rusty-naped Pitta is typically found above the altitude of 800 mm and can be seen in Malaysia, Thailand, China, Laos, Vietnam and Myanmar. Only a few people are lucky enough to get even a sighting, due to its highly secretive nature. This image has been taken in Mae Wong National Park, Thailand.

Mountain Peacock Pheasant is also known as Rothschild's Peacock Pheasant or Mirror Pheasant. A shy and elusive bird, it is distributed and endemic to montane forests of the central Malay peninsula. Due to ongoing habitat loss, small population size and limited range, the bird is evaluated as vulnerable. Sightings of course are extremely rare. This image is from Bukit Tinggi, Malaysia.





This photograph of the highly elusive Mountain Bamboo Partridge has been taken in Doi Lang, Thailand. This magical place accords the best chance of seeing Mountain Bamboo Partridge as one drives up the road through the pine forest or walking slowly and quietly and listening out for these birds as they scratch around in the undergrowth. It is possible to get a sighting when the undergrowth is dry and has died back or even burnt, so that opportunities for to hide are reduced. Though said to be common in their range, their numbers are declining.

Rufous-throated Partridge is found in Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia including India, Laos, Myanmar, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Thailand, and Vietnam. It's natural habitat is moist lowland evergreen forest with thick undergrowth in subtropical or tropical montane regions. This image was made in Mae Wong National Park, Thailand.

**Rufous-throated Partridge**



Grey Peacock Pheasant is widely distributed and in South East Asia and is classified as a 'Least concern' species. Male is more ornamented than female. It is the national bird of Myanmar. This beauty was captured in Mae Wong National Park, Thailand. This park is a birders delight and is the biggest remaining forest area in Thailand.



**Grey Peacock Pheasant**

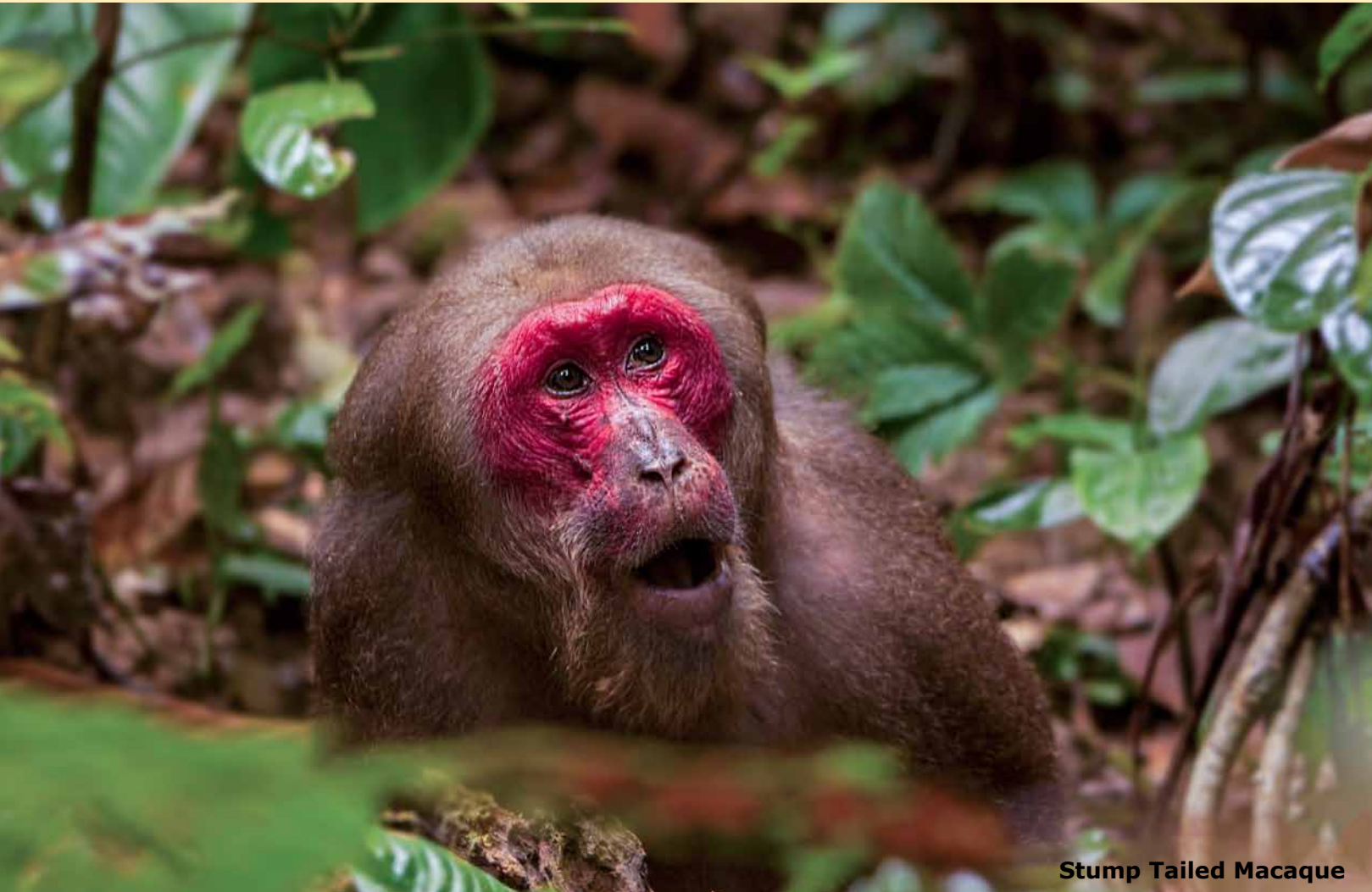
**Vijay Sachan was born in Meerut but spent most of his childhood in Delhi. Presently he is settled in Malaysia. By profession Vijay is an IT Manager who always had a keen interest in photography. He used the basic point and shoot camera in the early days of his hobby and slowly progressed to DSLR. He tried his hand in various shoots such portraits, landscapes but found his interest in Bird Photography in early 2012. Since then there is no looking back for him. He has explored various forests in East and West Malaysia and Thailand. Being an enthusiast, he always keeps his eyes and ears open for any news on birds found in the region and packs his bag for the location. So for he has observed and photographed around 250 species of birds in their natural habitat. He plans to cover other regions in Southeast Asia and his homeland India in the near future.**



# An Oasis for Primates

**HOLLONGAPAR GIBBON WILDLIFE SANCTUARY**

**Samrat Sengupta**



**Stump Tailed Macaque**

**A**re you getting the smell? My field guide asked, as I wrinkled my nose in distaste. It was Stump Tailed Macaque's urine, and as we approached closer to the troop, which usually goes beyond few hundreds of individuals, the stench became stronger. I pulled my cell phone out of the back pocket of my grubby jeans to have a look at the time. It was 4.45 pm. The screen looked blank, with the network bars playing hide and seek. We were up to our every senses, cautious with our every step cause we're deep, very deep in the midst of a rainforest fragment in Assam – a land dominated by primates, meandered by wild elephant herds and prowled by stealthy leopards.

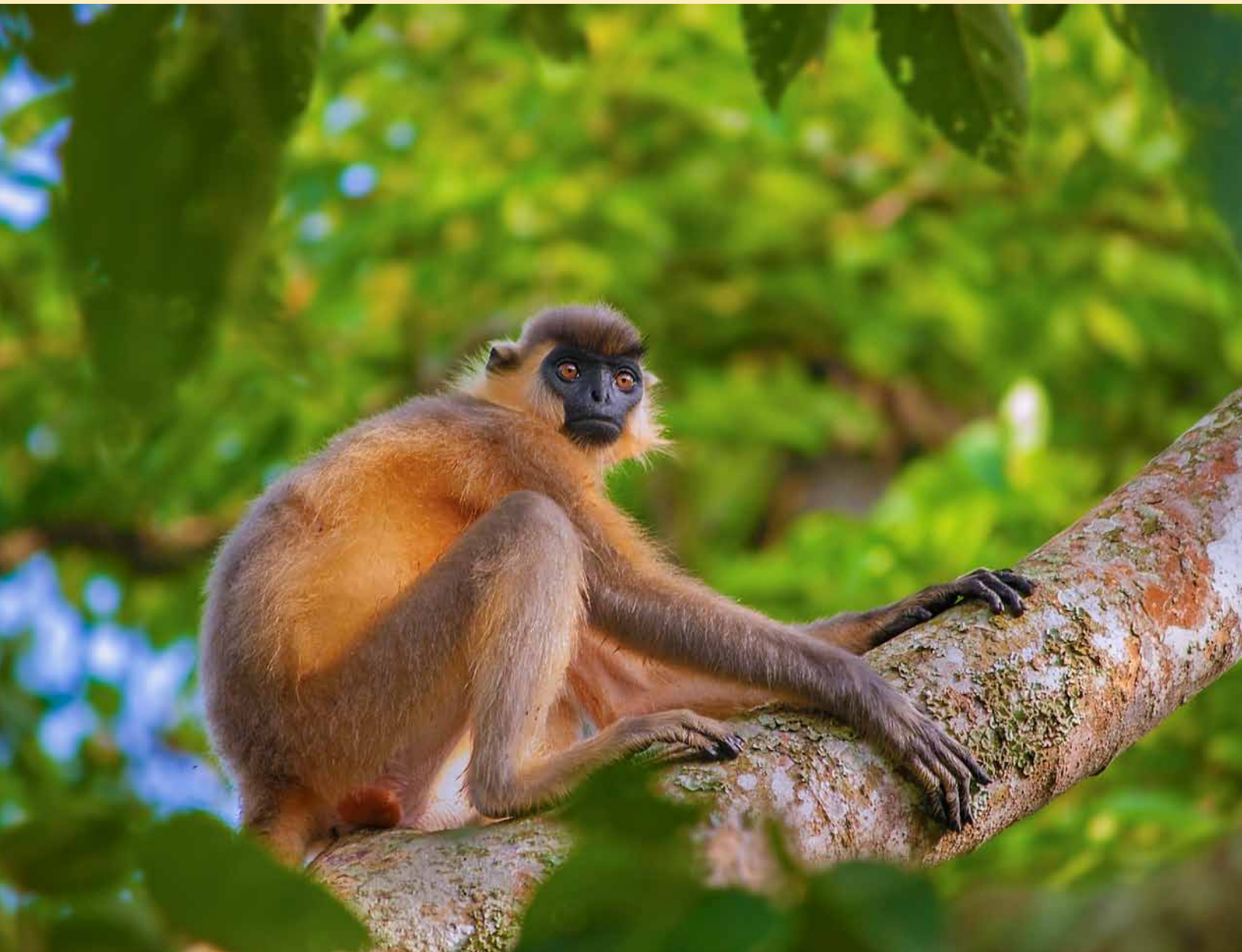


Four days back, I was in Dibrugarh, spending some quality time with my family because my profession hardly allows me to spend time within these concrete jungles. One fine morning then I woke up from my slumber with a smile. The day was bright and sunny. As I scrolled down the messages that went on unread from previous night, I found one message from Deben Da, a forest guide. His text was short, but loud and clear- "THE TROOP HAS BEEN SPOTTED, COME SOON" and the next thing I knew was off home again to this beautiful land which people call Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary, but I prefer to call this mystical utopia - AN OASIS IN THE DESERT. After a 4 hour bus drive from Dibrugarh, I arrived at around 11:00am. Deben Da was already geared up with his pair of binoculars, so without wasting any more precious time, I bundled myself off on a leisure stroll; my first visit into this magical forest.

The first thing that struck me about the forest was the sheer size of the Hollong trees: tall and majestic, looming over the forest like ancient guardians. Minutes into the forest I saw a Barking deer. It was gone by the time I could blink once. Couldn't capture a decent frame, but I was thrilled. I suppose spending many such vacuous days in the jungle have taught me well the virtue of optimism, moreover doing wildlife photography in northeast India is a different ballgame, the subject is unpredictable, doesn't allow any second takes, mostly comes with poor light conditions and above all is highly sensitive to the approaching photographer due to subsistence hunting since time immemorial. With the sun now at its zenith, every tree, every leaf blade had an unsightly shadow right beneath it. The track was still muddy, slush from the early morning shower. I breathed in the intoxicating smell of fecund damp earth mingling with the fragrance of flowers in bloom. I knew that I had come to a place of spectacular and unspoiled beauty.

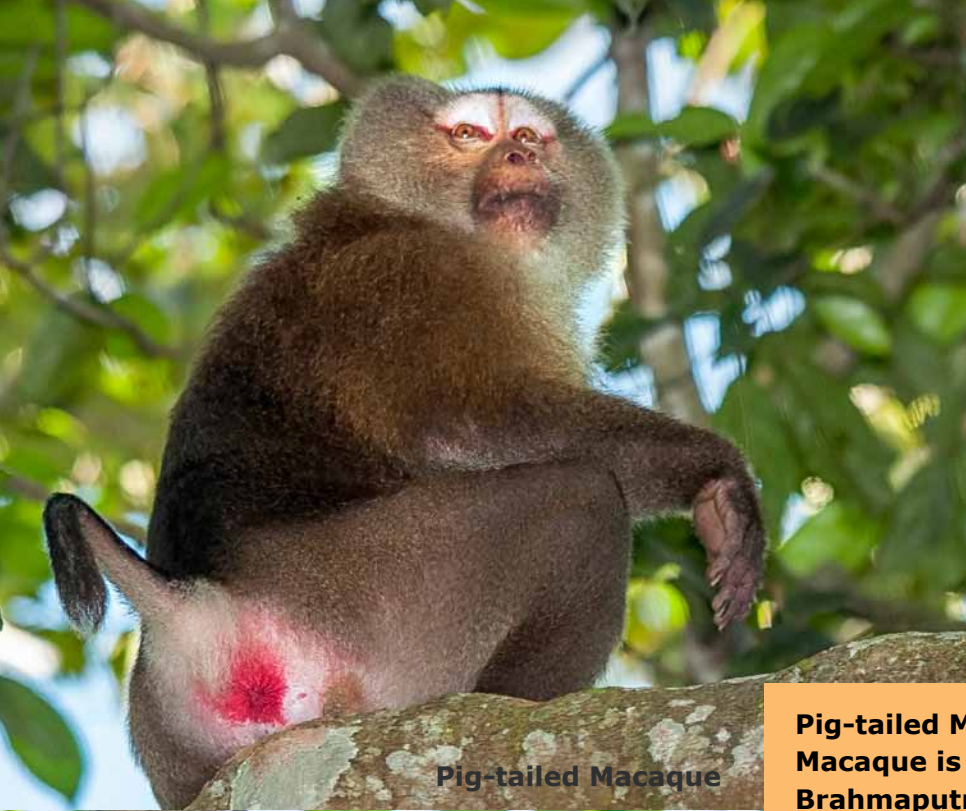
Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary is a genuine wilderness. It's a 21 sq. km. forest patch located near the foothills of Nagaland, just few kilometres away from the bustling Mariani town of Assam's Jorhat district. A fragmented and isolated tropical rainforest in a sea of sprawling tea estates and human settlements, the wilderness harbours a unique assemblage of seven primate species, including the Capped Langur, the Bengal Slow Loris and the Western Hoolock Gibbon. Imagine the beauty of a protected area without pesky tourists in their noisy, diesel-spewing vehicles. Imagine a protected area teeming with wilderness, where you can track the forest on your foot. For lengthy and close sightings, one must have tons of patience, faith and a keen understanding of animal behaviour. And nothing proves this better than my long awaited Stump Tailed Macaque's sighting. I had heard stories from local villagers about research scholars combing the forest floor months after months in search of this elusive primate, and reminded myself that this majestic species has gone locally extinct in many small forest fragments of the Brahmaputra Valley with Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary among their last strongholds.

**Capped Langur is a vulnerable species and is a resident of topical and subtropical dry forests. At present it is threatened by the habitat loss.**



I returned with hordes of colourful butterflies and bird images from my first outing. I sat still and silent reclining in the modest accommodation available out there, an old bucolic IB which is situated in the heart of the jungle, where you can spend the evening gazing at the setting sun giving way to star sprinkled skies at night, with the gentle breeze for company. Guests must bring their own rations for the bungalow cook to prepare. But that's a fair bargain when you're falling asleep to the sound of a lone scops owl hooting in the distance and the crickets clattering in time to a random cacophony of cicadas and geckos. There are stories of occasional visits by wild herd of elephants and leopards beyond comfort level very near to the IB, but I wasn't lucky during my stay there. The feel of camping in a glade of great forest surrounded by towering trees and clothed in a cloak of blackness is itself magical and enticing.

The jungle drowsily woke up at dawn the next day with the golden light of the morning lifting up the veil of darkness hanging over the tall canopy. The rainforests emerged in a myriad of glistening colours, and before you is spread a terra nova with the most exotic and endangered animals on earth. My second day also began promisingly. I saw a troop of Rhesus Macaques planning to slowly slip into the nearby tea gardens and human habitations, creating pandemonium among the villagers. They are notoriously versatile and adapt to any kind of habitat. Leaving the macaques behind, we headed into the jungle, while the prevailing stillness and silence gave way to an avian songs. After a few kilometres walk, I was blessed with the sighting of Pig-tailed Macaques up early for a morning dash of bountiful breakfast.



Pig-tailed Macaque

I hurriedly captured few frames and moved ahead as I had a daunting wish-list to fulfil and with this sighting, there was another five of the seven primates to be seen. On our way back to our base camp, we saw the Capped Langur resting on a large tree at a distance, with their distinctive long tails hanging down and arms coiled up around tree trunks for support.

**Pig-tailed Macaque. The Northern Pig-tailed Macaque is found in North-East India North of Brahmaputra river. Listed as Vulnerable as the population is very likely to be declining across its entire distribution range due to several threats, and this decline is predicted to continue at the same rate.**

**Both images by: Udayan Borthakur**



Hoolock Gibbon

**The Western Hoolock Gibbon is a primate native to Northeast India.**

**There are numerous threats to these gibbons in the wild, which include habitat encroachment by humans, forest clearance for tea cultivation hunting for food and "medicine", capture for trade, and forest degradation. It is in the endangered category now.**

Our 3rd day began early as I was awoken by nature's most enthralling symphonies with the Gibbon pairs very close to the forest office. This canopy opera is what I was looking for, as I ran with just my slippers on to grab them in action, and I was lucky enough to be given a rare insight into the secret life of one of India's most intriguing and endangered primates known as the Hoolock Gibbon. The sight of a pair skilfully and acrobatically brachiating from one end of the tree to the other, demolishing the juicy fruits of *Artocarpus chama* will remain vivid and etched for eternity in my mind. I called off the day early not only because I was profusely bleeding from my legs due to leech bites, but also I had plans for a night trail in search of the most elusive Slow Loris found in here. A chat over an evening cup of hot coffee, downloading the images on laptop, sharing some jungle lores with Deben Da, when he jokingly said that "If you are lucky enough, you can spot one loris right near the base camp". I grinned because I very well knew the hardship involved in sighting a slow loris in a tropical forest with thick canopy cover. But maybe I was really riding high on my luck that day. Two kilometres along the track that runs through the heart of the sanctuary and there she was, materialized out of nowhere, her eyes burning bright red, foraging majestically in the top canopy, as if awaiting our arrival. She gave my camera a 2-minute performance before vanishing into the thick canopy. The moment was magical and idyllic, but brief and illusory.



Hoolock Gibbon



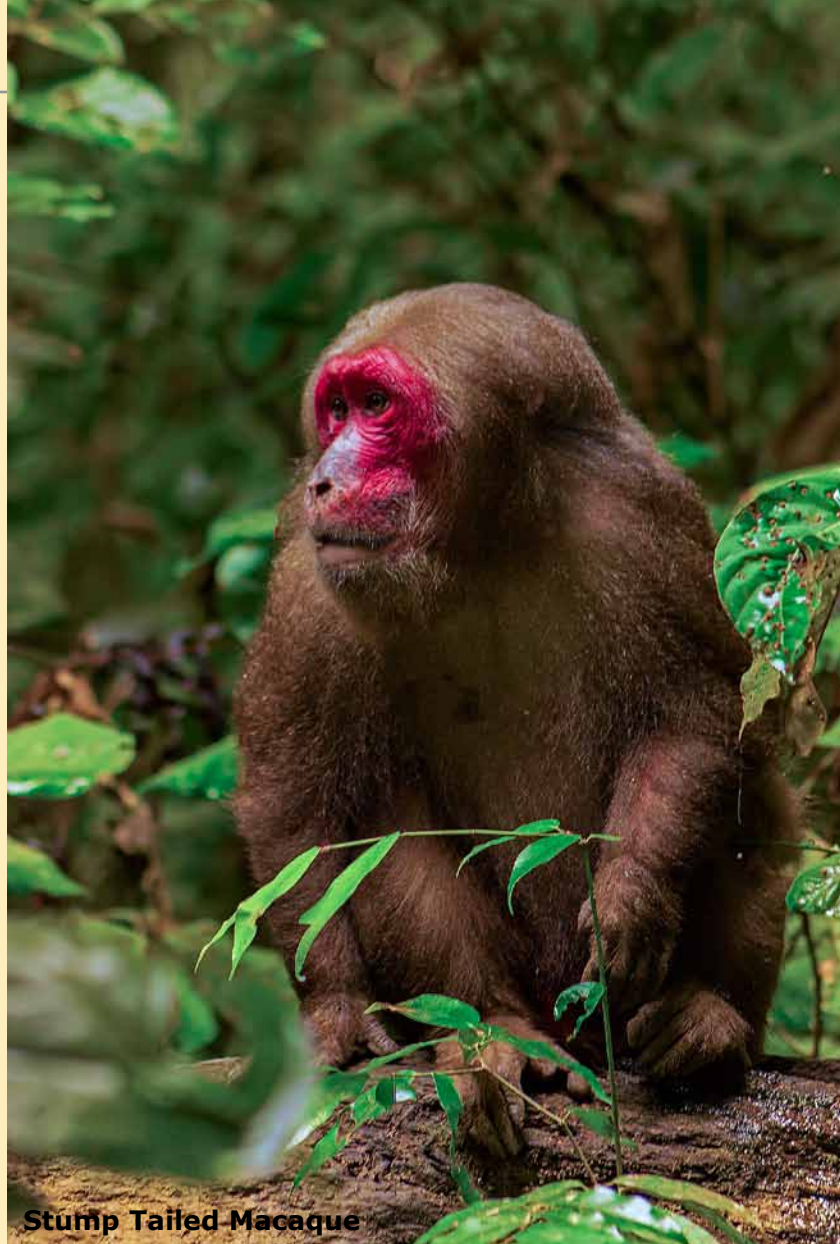
**A strictly nocturnal species, the Bengal Slow Loris can be found stalking through the trees with slow, deliberate movements as it searches for food. This is an essentially an arboreal species and is classified as vulnerable.**



I had got more than anybody can ask for within these few days of my stay. What was left was Stump-tailed Macaque, not the whole troop, but the main lady protagonist who controls the whole troop.

Our 4th and last day, already afternoon and our search for the stump-tails did not yet yield any result. All that I had been seeing and hearing from morning were only a bunch of Abbott's babblers which was making me a bit bored and even a little piqued and sullen. The afternoon torpor was becoming intolerable. May be I ran out of my lucky charm, because our chances looked bleak. Evening was fast approaching with wind catching up fast and with the fading light, our spirits began to dim. A sudden, shrill call alerted us and gave us hope. If you spend time long enough in the jungle, you learn, almost instinctively, the rhythms of nature and the significances of the jungle noises. We slowly moved ahead, in the direction of the sound and followed the trail of uprooted shrubs. What followed was the moment I'd been waiting for. And there, in clear sight of us and deliberately ignoring detection, sat over 100 stump-tailed macaques! I was a bag of nerves having spent the whole morning going around in circles but finally our patience, faith, and resolve had paid off. I found myself a spot some distance away and watched as the troop crossed the road one by one, but still the lady protagonist was evading us. Finally, I could see her on a raised highland keeping a watch over the entire troop. Her fur coat was glowing in the dying sunlight.

She was beautiful, majestic. She let me watch and share the magic of their blissful world as I captured what little of it I could through my camera lens. I was happy to have had singled her out as it was very difficult to single out a social primate which lives in the company of few hundreds. She was the last to cross the road ensuring the safety of the entire troop first, qualities of a true leader.



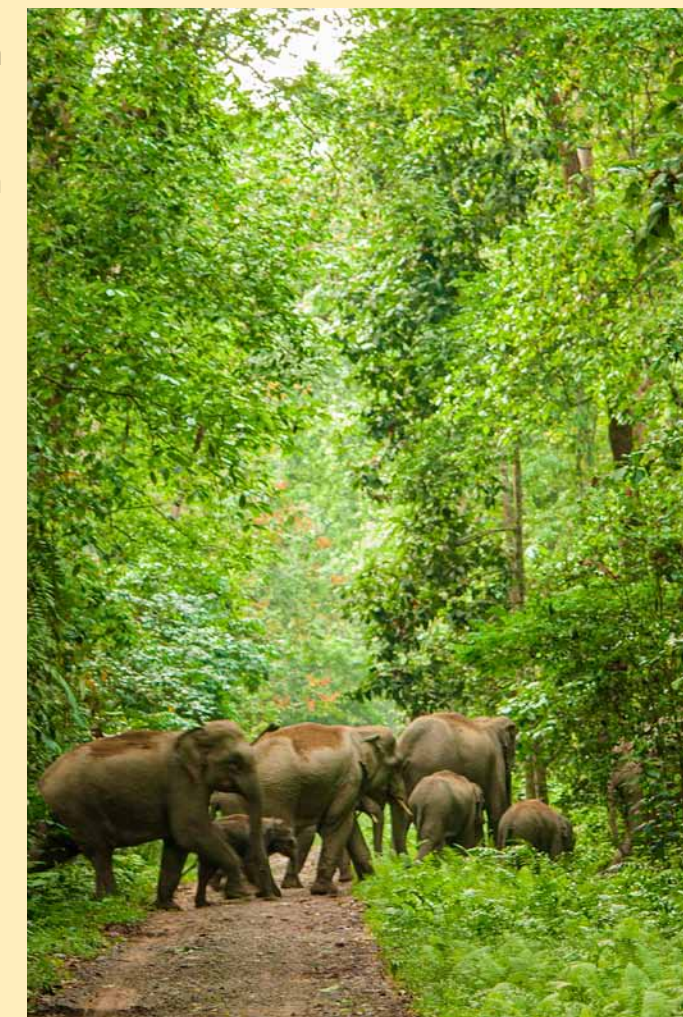
Stump Tailed Macaque

**Aptly named, Stump-tailed Macaques also called Bear Macaques have thick, long, dark brown fur covering their bodies and short tails). Stump-tailed macaques have bright pink or red faces which darken to brown or nearly black as they age and are exposed to sunlight. Like some human males, these macaques become partially bald as they age. Minoxidil which successfully caused hair regrowth in macaques was later approved for human use.**



Stump Tailed Macaque

You see, like in all great stories, I had managed to get only few good shots at it, that we heard thundering rumbling just ahead of us. I knew this rumbling sound came from the digestive processes of an elephant's stomach. An instant later there came a loud sound "Tri-aa-ankhh" !! It was definitely the sound of elephants, but I had no idea if this animal alone or a whole herd awaited us. Elephants, though gentle are almost unpredictable. We can never say how they may react. I wished Deben Da could be of help with the wide experience of them in Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary, but still respecting wild animals in their own backyard was the safest way to go. The sounds closed in, they were closer to us then we had thought for these sounds revealed crashing of bamboo culms and the peeling off the tender upper leaves and outer skins of which elephants are very fond. Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary has around 42 elephants as one big herd, but the recent death of the tusker under a Train broke the group into small parties with no one to take the lead. We squatted on the ground to await further evidence, and for a while there was absolute silence. The silence continued to be intense. It became domineering. It got on our nerves. This silence was not for long as I saw clearly the herd of elephants ahead of us. A few heart-stopping moments later, they made up their mind to turn and walk away, vanishing into the undergrowth. As a biologist and a wildlife photographer, the grand spectacle I was fortunate to capture quite obviates the threat we currently face from it.



**Named according to country of origin, Rhesus Macaques are referred to as Chinese-and Indian- derived. They are only second to humans with respect to a broad geographic distribution. Rhesus macaques are exceptionally adapted to coexisting with humans and thrive near human settlement, in both urban and agricultural areas. They are also the most extensively studied primates and have a least concern status as of now.**



**Both images by: Udayan Borthakur**

Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary is beautiful and teeming with spectacular wildlife. Yet this wilderness is helpless. As everywhere else, the man-animal conflict takes its inevitable toll on wildlife and their habitat. Was nature encroaching on human civilisation or were human's sharing Nature's space? For a wildlife photographer, it is one of those places which guarantees a few great moments if primates are what you're looking for. Among the primates, langurs are relatively easier to photograph. A gibbon with its agility can swing from one tree to another within seconds. But macaque and langurs, luckily, don't play as hard to get. They will even allow you to get up close and personal. And since they are social creatures congregating in groups, you get wonderful opportunities to capture assorted portraits as well as interactive behaviour. Unless you're freakishly unlucky, you should most certainly see two, if not all the seven primates your stay, which should be for at least four or five days. All in all, for any wildlife enthusiast, Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary is a place worth visiting. Of course, like in any other game reserve you need to get your season right, and your attitude right, to better your chances for an eventful trip. All you need is patience, faith and a little bit of luck, and then at the end of a long wait, you too will witness a moment as beautiful as the one I was privileged to share.

**Assamese Macaques are diurnal. They can be both arboreal and terrestrial. They normally occur in groups and have a Near threatened status. Most of these primates are affected by habitat destruction, farming, logging of the forests and hunting.**

**Udayan Borthakur is the head of Wildlife Genetics division, Aaranyak.**

**Image credits of Assamese Macaque, Pig tailed Macaque, Rhesus Macaque and one of the Hoolock Gibbons belong to him.**



**Samrat Sengupta is a young and dynamic zoologist and a Wildlife expert, specifically working extensively in the forests of North East India for over 5 years. He comes with exhaustive experience of working in the lesser known wild places of North East India including Dibru-Saikhowa National Park, Joypore Rain Forest, Deepor Beel, Orang National Park, Amchang Wildlife Sanctuary, Gibbon Wild Life Sanctuary, Talle Valley Wild Life Sanctuary, Eagle Nest Wild Life Sanctuary and much other difficult geography of eastern Himalayas and North East India including Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Manipur studying primate diversities, surveying avifauna conservation status and documenting about tribes, their culture and history. He is an avid naturalist and prolific writer of conservation photo stories.**

**Text and Images by Samrat Sengupta**



Walong-Arunachal Pradesh

# In Search of Out of Syllabus Birds

Rajneesh Suvarna

The Lohit which later becomes the mighty Brahmaputra has its origin in China, flowing into Arunachal Pradesh right at the eastern tip of India near Kibithu. We planned to trace this route following the river upstream as this valley was a logical extension from China and we could possibly spot birds that are normally not seen in India, that is 'Out of Syllabus' to use a term from school with reference to the list in most popular bird field guides for India. This route through the valley twisted and turned on broken roads that finally converted to a dirt track after Walong until the road itself vanished at Kibithu and all that was left was a trail towards China. The last part of the road was the eastern most road in India passing the little hamlet of Dong that laid the claim to receiving the first rays of the sun in India.

We set off from Tinsukia, the last big town on the eastern tip of Assam towards Hayuliang. Without any bookings for our stay over the next few days we were fervently

hoping that the IB's, the only places to stay at these locations would accommodate us at the last moment. The route being long, circuitous, winding and with no destination at the end sees no tourists. Consequently there are no hotels or restaurants or the quintessential tea stops that invariably dot Indian highways big and small. The little shacks that we came across made the inveterate traveller in us think that we had found one, didn't serve tea, though we could pick a bottle of wine if we wished. We had planned to bird all day on the route where ever the habitat permits but calculations of time and distance goes awry on the condition of the roads in the Northeast. We made decent speed on the plains having a hearty breakfast at Doom Dooma after which we hit a patch of broken road as we crossed into Arunachal Pradesh. The forest besides though degraded and dust covered from the ongoing roadwork supported a good collection of lowland species. We soon crossed over into an open area flanked by fields and were



rewarded by an unexpected sighting of a beautiful adult male Hen Harrier. The hills of Arunachal now loomed on the horizon as the sides of the roads were dotted with orange sellers, we stopped to pick some at the first opportunity with very sweet results. At Wakro a road branched off to Namdapha while we continued towards Parashuram Kund along the foot of the mountains, though not before replenishing our supplies of oranges which nearly everybody proclaimed were the sweetest oranges they had ever eaten. Parashuram Kund a place with mythological significance, was where sage Parashuram is supposed to have washed his sins and is now the site for a mela in the month of January. The bridge here is the longest in the area has practically destroyed the 'kund' but allows a panoramic view of the valley.

The road then started to climb, we could see the steep mountains draped with thick virgin forests that skirt the sometimes emerald green sometimes turquoise blue waters of the Lohit. The river banks are sometimes embellished with white rounded boulders or beaches of sparkling white sand. The traffic then dropped to less than a trickle the ride through the wooded areas was beautiful as we stopped to watch the birds and admire the landscape. The thought that we might not get a place to sleep if we reached late kept us moving. We did see some interesting birds though including flocks of Beautiful Sibia, Golden Bush Robin, Hodgson's Redstart, Black Eagle and Plain-backed Thrush. We reached Khupa by late afternoon but being assured rooms took more than a few hours. Along with the rooms we also got the news that the governor with his Z+ security was on a visit to Walong for the next couple of days which meant that the entire officialdom of the valley had descended into town so any guest house, government or otherwise on our journey was out of question.



The next morning we set off towards Walong a distance of 100kms knowing very well that we might have to return for the night if we didn't get any quarters for the night. Birding on the way was good as the area was well forested, sightings included Crested Goshawk, Grey-chinned Minivet, Rusty-fronted Barwings, Silver-eared Mesias, Dark-breasted Rosefinch and close looks at the Rufous-backed Sibia and Flavescent Bulbul. The road was still climbing and there were a few villages surrounded by cultivation some of which had shacks and we still persevered with our request for tea, with the same results. As we approached Walong the proximity to the Chinese border got evident with the growing presence of the Army on and besides the road. It was late afternoon by the time we crossed Walong when the habitat changed suddenly we left the mixed deciduous behind and entered a coniferous pine forest. The sky was now getting rapidly overcast

and we stopped at the first meadow to bird for a bit. To add to the dark skies it was also very windy and though no apparent visual activity we could hear a number of calls.

The first bird to be sighted was a Bunting and a **Godlewski's Bunting** for that matter, our first 'out of syllabus' bird of the trip! As we were still celebrating a flocks of smallies started flying in while calling shrilly, a peep from the bins confirmed them to be **Black-headed Greenfinches** our next OoS bird. Elated by this back to back sighting we drove further losing some altitude before we hit another hunting party of Lemon-rumped Warblers, and Green Shrike Babblers and the much sought after **Black-browed Tit**.

This flock soon crossed the road and descended into a bush at eye level giving us delightful views. In a span of less than an hour we saw 3 species that until

**Grey-chinned Minivet**



recently didn't feature on the Indian list! All this excitement meant that we were too late to drive back, our resourceful driver though had scouted the area and was able to locate a central government guest-house, that on paper was equipped with beds, mattresses and a flat screen tv. In reality it was one bare cramped room featuring windows with broken shutters, there was no question of a bathroom. The employees stationed whose sole job there was to record level of the water in the river and report it kindly offered to shutter the windows and save us from the now howling winds and as if that wasn't enough they even cooked up a meal for us.

Further help came from the army in the form of sleeping bags which ensured that we could spend the night indoors and warm while the wind huffed and puffed around. The road towards Kibithu was now just a treacherous dirt track fit only for army vehicles, here on the dirt shovelled on the side we had yet another sighting of the Godlewski's Bunting foraging in the dry dirt. As we drove back from



**Godlewski's Bunting**

Kibithu we had another glimpse of the Black-browed Tit. We then heard the call of the Spot-breasted Parrotbill, a beauty which we weren't expecting on this leg of our trip. Further investigation got a flock of these in more than one location. We stopped at a place that looked like a haven for buntings and not one but three species made their appearance apart from Bush warblers and two species of scimitar babblers also showed up before we reached Hayuliang.

We drove back to Tinsukia driving through bird rich country but the drivers watch would not let us do justice. The only stop permitted was a food break but surprisingly the few joints at Walong that we went into stonewalled us by saying 'no food' even when there were people inside eating, even refusing hot water for our cup noodles. The army once again came to the rescue providing a full meal when we enquired at one of their camps if their canteen could spare us some food. We though did make time for the umpteenth



**Grey-chinned Yuhina**

time for an 'orange stop' picking up 4 baskets or roughly 200 of the sweetest oranges any of us had tasted before, though some people made an excuse that they were buying it for the pretty baskets that they were sold in. In the midst of all this we still managed to log 65 species with Grey-chinned Yuhina, Mountain Hawk-Eagle, Red-headed Trogon, Brownish-flanked Bush-Warbler, Gray-throated Babbler, Large Niltava, a hunting Asian Barred Owlet, Black-headed and Blyth's Shrike-Babbler being among the notables.

We arrived back at Tinsukia after 4 days of hard driving, tired but happy at our success with our target list and 143 species in the kitty. The dash back to Tinsukia was also deemed a success as we could squeeze in time for the customary samosa/kachori at Madhumilan before embarking on the next leg of our tour, on the other side of a train ride to Jorhat.

**Text & Images by Rajneesh Suvarna**



**Black-browed Tit**

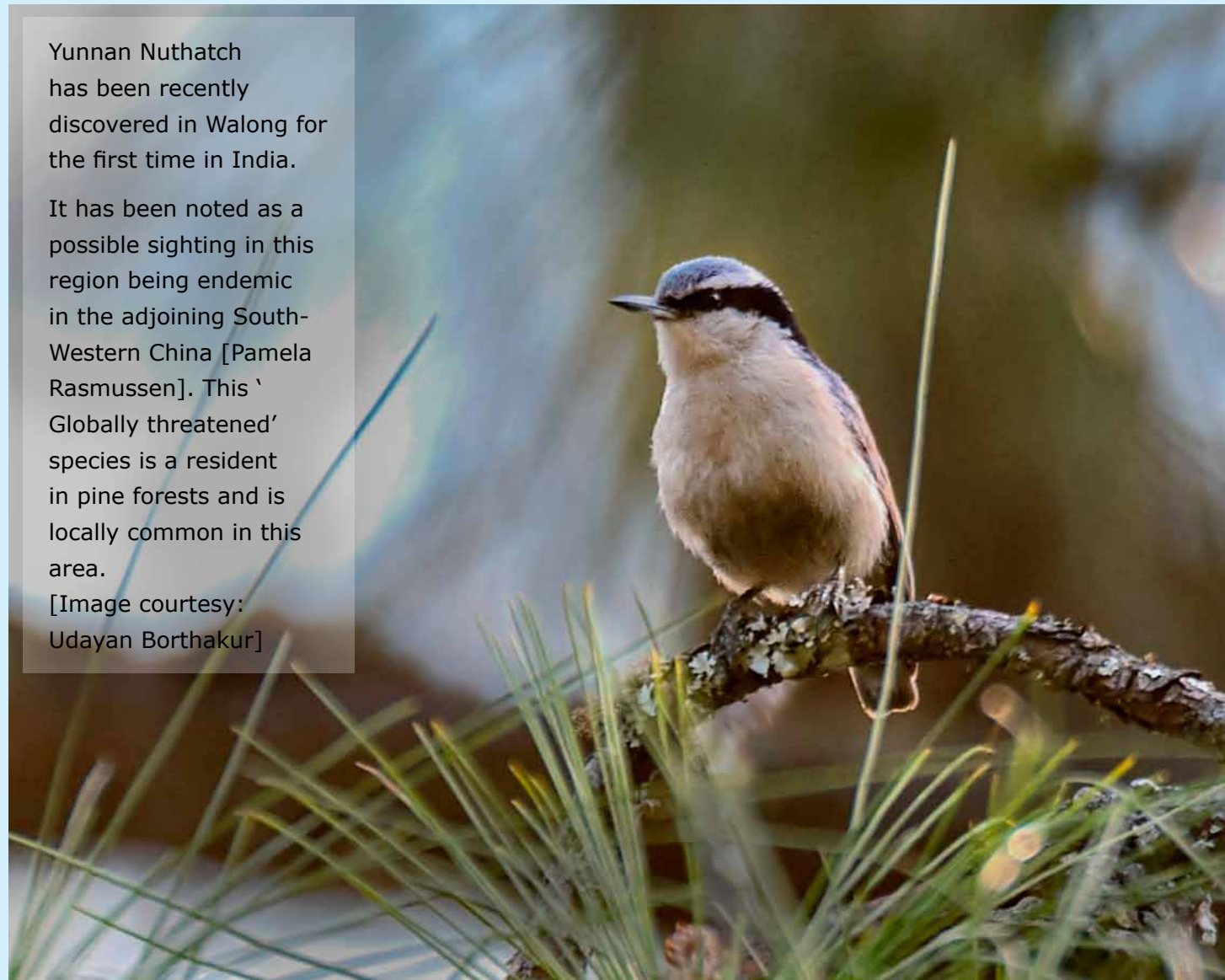


**Spot-breasted Parrotbill**

Yunnan Nuthatch has been recently discovered in Walong for the first time in India.

It has been noted as a possible sighting in this region being endemic in the adjoining South-Western China [Pamela Rasmussen]. This 'Globally threatened' species is a resident in pine forests and is locally common in this area.

[Image courtesy: Udayan Borthakur]



Epilogue: My sense of adventure was put into perspective after a conversation with my uncle where he talked about his time in Walong. Then there were no roads after Hayuliang and Kibithu was a tough 6 day trek peppered with river crossings on 'cable bridges' where you strapped yourself to the cable overhead and pulled yourself to the other bank with the raging river in the gorge below, knowing very well if you did slip even your body would not be recovered. Our hardships seemed very tame to say the least after hearing this.



**Rajneesh Suvarna has been passionate about nature from his very childhood. He completed his formal education in Computer Science and Management. After more than 2 decades in the software industry he decided to step aside to devote time to his twin passions. Photography, a hobby since very young became an extension to his wildlife watching and travel. He has been widely published in Indian and International publications.**

**He currently runs a software design consultancy and an adventure and wildlife travel company where he leads bird tours.**

# Chesnut-breasted Partridge

**PRIZED CATCH**

**Gururaj Moorching**



A dream to sight or photograph a rare and seldom seen species accompanies one with every journey into the wild. Chestnut-breasted Partridge (*Arborophila mandellii*) is one such bird. Classified as 'vulnerable' under the IUCN Red List, it is undoubtedly a highly prized catch. Gururaj Moorching with two of his fellow photographers Gaurav Kataria and Gaurav Deshmukh, were blessed with a two minutes of a scintillating encounter with this coveted species in the jungles of Arunachal Pradesh.



## Chestnut-breasted Partridge in it's habitat

When Gaurav Kataria invited me to go with him to Eaglenest during March this year, I had loads of apprehensions about the weather, terrain and the proximity to medical assistance. But finally I decided to make the trip. In the presence of intense birders, tough itineraries become joyous holidays. Eaglenest and Bompou camp was no exception. As the jeep, loaded with breakfast and lunch, followed us at intervals, I never felt the need to hop onto it. We would happily walk with our gears on the shoulders for 6 to 8 hours each day. Invigorating days those were. It was here I met **Marmot Snetsinger**, daughter of **Phoebe Snetsinger**, my idol, the record holder for seeing the highest number of birds. The moment Marmot slung Phoebe's binoculars around my neck, patted my back and asked me to go watch birds was without an iota of doubt, the most magical moment in my bird photography life. Another pleasant surprise was Phurpa Arteju, our guide. This kid was a big surprise. He could call out the names of a dozen birds in a flock by their calls only

As far as the story of the prized and elusive Chestnut -breasted Partridge, here it goes !!!!

On the way up from Haathi Naala to Bompou Camp towards evening, Phurpha our guide heard the call.

Its origin was at a distance of 100 metres. I was already looking forward to the local brew which was organised by Gaurav's partners at Bompou- Camp and was content with the day's catch. I reluctantly halted and on looking back at Gaurav Kataria's face, I sensed that the bird must be very special. I dragged my feet back and positioned on the far end of the track. The call inched a bit closer by the minute. After a seriously long wait, we could sense movement behind a pile of dry leaves. The crest slowly appeared a few centimetres above the pile of dry leaves. The bird kept moving to and fro, feeding and finally, he just stood before us with his head cocked up and started calling. It was my turn to hit the trigger now and what followed was 2 minutes of frenzied camera action. For a change, what appeared like a first in my photography times, the ear-to-ear grins, backslapping and fist pumping happened even before we reached for the LCD display, to have a peep at the pictures.

Very few places on this planet offer you endless serendipities other than the one main reason you have travelled there to experience... Maybe a couple more, if you are fortunate. But how I witnessed a serial sequence of value pile-up at every turn is beyond my comprehension.

Eaglenest in Arunachal Pradesh is that rare bonus on earth. The habitat and the avian residents morph into a new avatar at an average of each kilometre. With each habitat a new

beauty beckons you and most often the call of a mixed hunting flock with their captivating acrobats will whizz past you nose. You could be anybody or everybody in a magical merge; A birder... Photographer... Honeymooner... Drifter... your time hangs still and you begin to transcend into pure bliss.

The mist hangs over the thick forest like a shimmering sheer and drifts across the hills bringing in the right amount of pleasing light for photographers. The camping experience is magical and at the same time offers you a feel of luxury.

Would I go back? Definitely yes. At the first opportunity, I would be back in Eaglenest and Arunachal Pradesh.

**Gururaj Moorching just loves connecting with nature. He loves to travel and is intensely fond of the North East. He has rediscovered life through his wildlife escapades and his photography is the elixir which drives him forward. He lives in Bengaluru, India.**



# BLACK EAGLE







**B**lack Eagle (*Ictinaetus malayensis*) is a mighty raptor which seldom seen perching.

Two resident populations are seen in Western ghats as well as in the Himalayas. This elegant all black hunter typically preys on nests and is even reputed to lift the whole nests with eggs and hatchlings. It has a black body with yellow cere and legs. While sitting, primaries are at or beyond the level of tail feathers. Flying often high above the canopy it soars very slowly looking for prey. It hardly ever settles down prompting some to label it as a 'bird which never sat down'.



**Krishnamurrthy, a highly reputed wildlife photographer from Tiruppur, Tamil Nadu had the great fortune to shoot this raptor while it perched on a tree. While birding in Nilgiris he saw a Black Eagle circling around a neighbouring hill. He decided to move rapidly to the summit and took around 40 minutes to climb to the hilltop with all his gears. Then he came across a dead tree with a very nice perch. As he waited there, against all odds the Black Eagle slowly descended and landed on the branch rendering him a rare opportunity.**

Hooded Grasshopper

# CLIPPING MASK

DR KRISHNA MOHAN

**C**lipping Mask is a technique which has a ton of uses. It allows you to fill shapes, text, or any other layer in Photoshop with another layer. The result? You can fill text with images, make silhouettes, and change the colour of shapes/objects that are imported into Photoshop. And it's actually very simple! Clipping masks are among the most powerful, yet most misunderstood features in Photoshop. While most people are familiar with layer masks, clipping masks are still woefully underutilized, despite their flexibility. You can attribute much of it to a basic misunderstanding of how they work and how they differ from layer masks, and a general reluctance to try out a new tool.

Before we can dive deeper into clipping masks, we first need to understand how masks actually work in Photoshop. Masks effectively act as transparency controllers in Photoshop. When a mask is active, it makes the underlying layer transparent (the degree of transparency can be controlled as well). When it is switched off, the layer becomes opaque and visible again. Think of it like a mask in real life, except in reverse – putting on the mask reveals what's underneath (instead of hiding it).

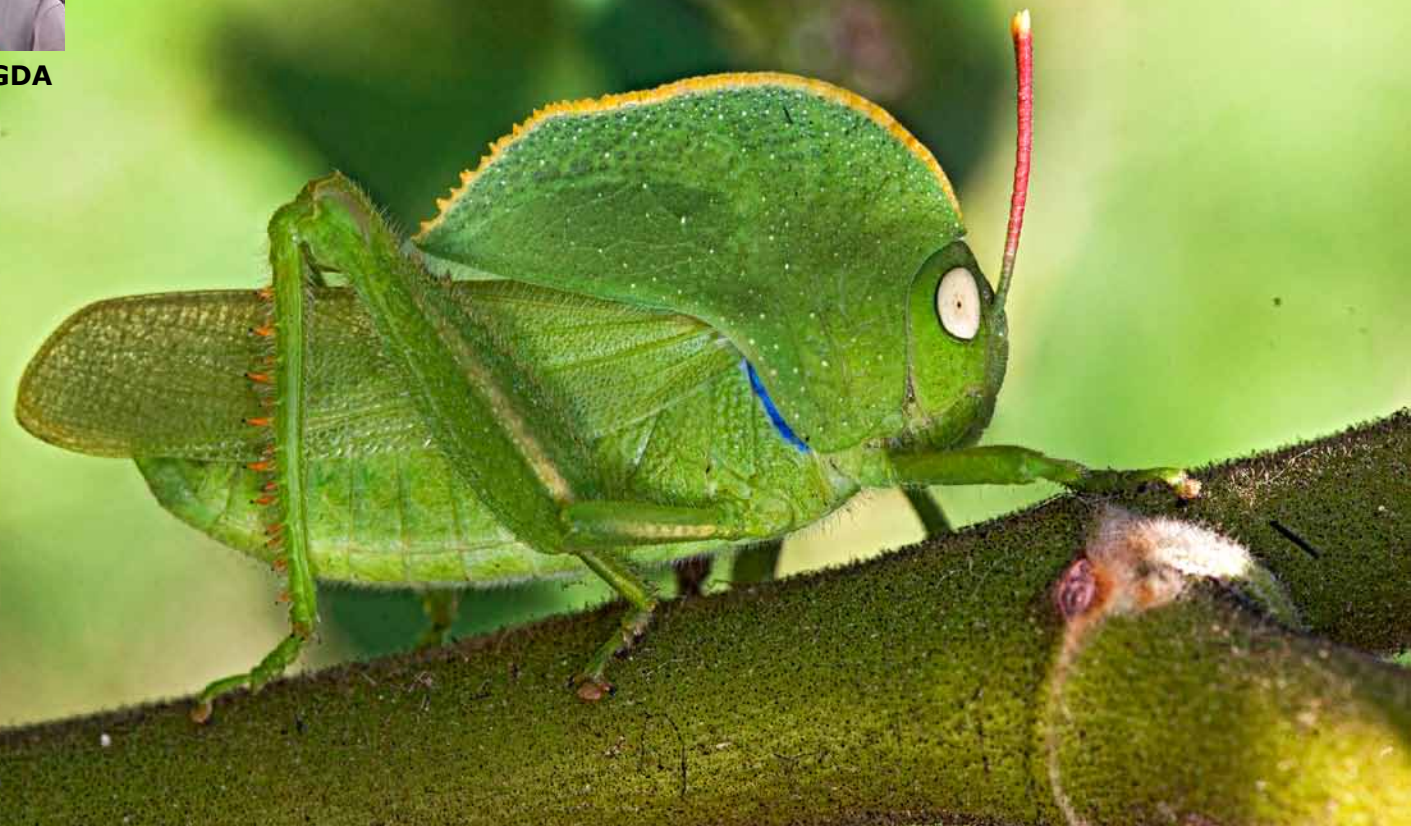
Clipping masks are theoretically similar to layer masks, albeit with a few key differences:

- Clipping masks can be applied to multiple layers, while layer masks work on just single layers.
- Clipping masks act as layers themselves and thus, can be stacked, just like normal layer. A layer mask, on the other hand, is merely a modification of a layer.
- Since clipping masks act as layers, you can apply multiple effects to them. In contrast, layer masks can only be used to control transparency of underlying layer.

To illustrate the clipping mask, I first want to show you how to create one using a photo masked over text. Note that in order to complete this tutorial, you'll need some basic working knowledge of Photoshop, specifically how to use the Move and Type tools, as well as how to open images and adjust image sizes.



JAYESH NAGDA



Champions of Camouflage



RAVIRAJA PONNUSWAMY

Indian Chameleon

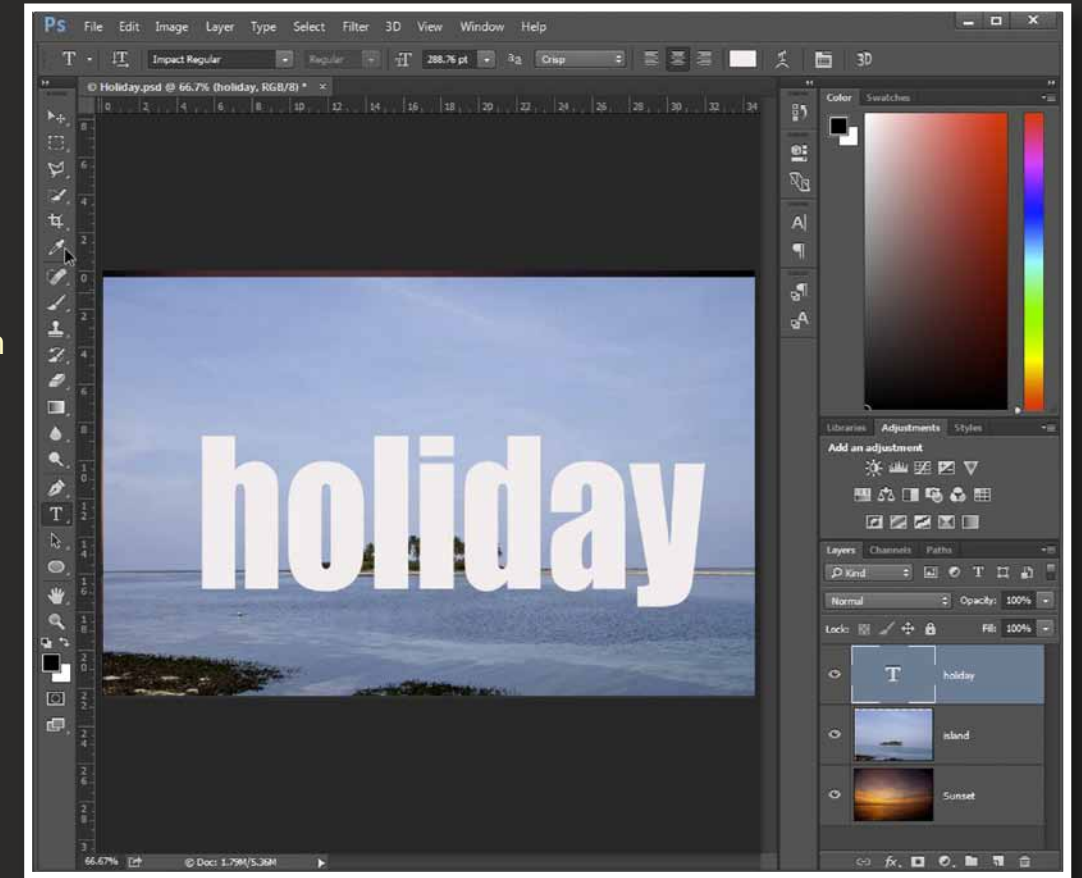
## Open Background Image

In Photoshop, open up the background image you plan on adding the text over, and re-size it to your requirement. In our example, I'm using two pictures from my Lakshadweep trip. The sunset picture is used as my background image.



## Write the text you want

Add the text to your background image. With masked text, I usually find that larger, blockier text is going to look better and really show off the clipped image. I have used Impact font which gives that thick blocky appearance.



## Move Text Layer in between the image layers

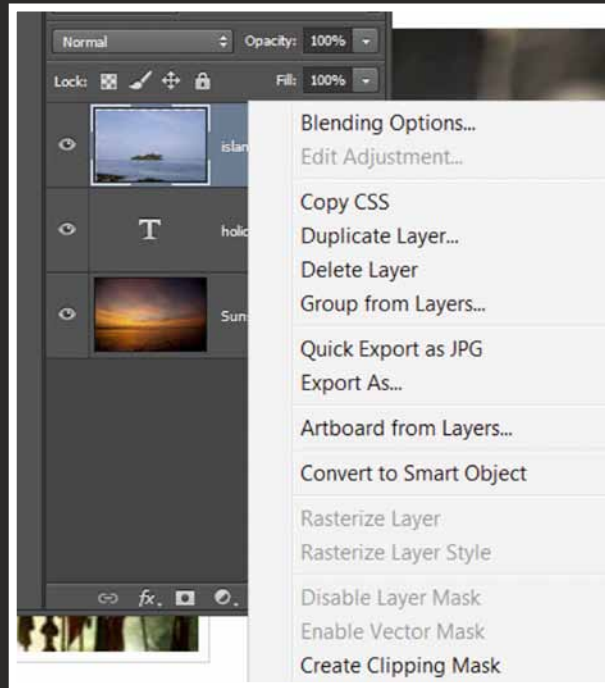


## The image used for clipping

Next, open up the image that you'd like to mask the text with. Again, in our example, the ocean with island picture is the masking image. You can resize this image if you'd like, but it's dependent on how you plan to use the image to mask over the text. More about this in a second.

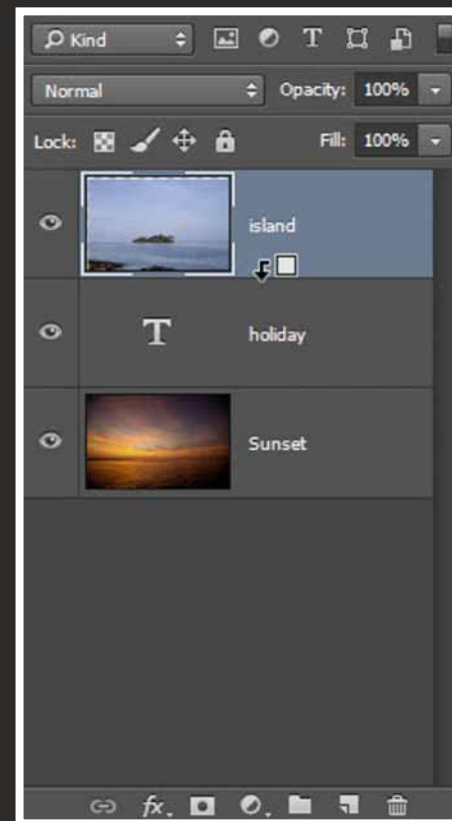


Now, move the clipping image (island) onto the background image (sunset) document. You can do this using the move tool to drag it over to the document tab. Here's where things get really important. Over in your Layers palette, be sure that your clipping image layer is above the text layer, as it is in the screenshot above. The order you should see within the Layers palette is Clipping Image, then the text, then your background layer.



### Right click on the Image Layer and choose create Clipping mask

Right click on the clipping image layer — the one on top of the text layer — and select Create Clipping Mask. After you select it, you'll see a little right angle arrow appear on this layer, indicating that it's clipped to the text layer below it.



### Alternatively hold Alt/option and place mouse between two layers

There is a shortcut method of doing the same. Position your mouse pointer over the border between the two layers (island & text) and hold down the Alt key (Option key on the Mac). When the mouse pointer changes to two overlapping circles downward pointing arrow & a box, click once to create a clipping mask. This is also accomplished by clicking the topmost of the two layers and choosing Layer > Create Clipping Mask.



### Clipping Mask is created

Now, in the document, you can see that the text is filled with the island image. Even though the image is clipped to the text, you can still move the ocean image around independently of its text layer, making it larger, smaller, or simply adjusting what part of the image you want to appear in the text. For example, I can use the Move tool and move it so that I can position the island where I want. You can also lighten or darken that island layer using adjustment layers.



### Add drop shadow or any other embellishment to the Text layer

The text layer also can be modified, both for its size or if you want you can change the text content as you want. Here I have added the drop shadow to the text to make it stand out. Even though I have in this example used a text layer, the technique can be used in all type of layers, fill shapes, or any other layer. You can fill text with images, make silhouettes, and change the colour of shapes/objects that are imported into Photoshop.

**Dr Krishna Mohan is Surgeon by profession but an environmentalist at heart. He is a self professed techno-fetishist. He suffers from chronic photophilia and wanderlust. He is an ardent educationalist and imparts his vast knowledge of photography, technology and wildlife to many nature enthusiasts via his workshops and his monumental blog [www.drkrishi.com](http://www.drkrishi.com). An eminent trekker and mountain climber he is also a very active member of wildlife first and is very passionately involved in conservation.**



Crow: The fearless Warrior



@Bhavya Joshi

Cover Page credit: Bhavya Joshi



Bhavya Joshi got addicted to Nature at a very young age. A Civil Engineer by profession and a Wildlife and Nature Explorer by passion he tries to be in the wild as long as he can, to understand how nature works and also get the self-satisfaction of observing and photographing nature. His work has been appreciated by many Magazines in India and Abroad and he has won many National and International Awards.



# CLINGING TENDERLY!!!

YASIR MEHMOOD



Nature bestows us with some scintillating symmetries and even more enthralling interactions between the various elements. A tendril or a small branch which is immensely delicate by itself can provide sustenance for another life form creating some soothing moments. Yasir specialises in capturing this delicate relationships in the microcosm as a recurring theme in his photography. These images reflect a deeper sense of understanding that permeates through the nature. There is also a message of peaceful co-existence to be understood and adopted.

The walk of life



Escaping a trap



Clinging on



Brothers hug





The two protagonists here though appear to be at loggerheads, the way the damselfly is holding on to the climber depicts a much more sensitive interaction. Both the subjects have been accorded equal importance which creates a dramatic effect.



Here is a baby bat which is fallen of it's nest. Nature however has diligently provided the much needed bolstering. The delicate grass reeds here have assumed the role of a saviour.



This cracking image is a tribute to the wondrous art of camouflage displayed by nature!!!



Some things become more beautiful the more closer you get to them!!!



Yasir Mehmood is an Interior Designer by profession. To him photography is synonymous with oxygen, as he has to make a few clicks of camera everyday to keep his spirit satiated and healthy.

For him photography is not just a hobby, rather a tool of insight into nature. He specializes in insect photography. He sees insects as objects of beauty, and they form a recurring theme in his photography.



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