wildeye

Issue 09 OCTOBER 2026

Simone Sbaraglia Merges Math and Nature

Daniel Kordan Weaves a Tapestry of Trees

Gurcharan Roopra Shines Light on Kenya



wild eye

A LENS ON THE UNTAMED WORLD

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BEHIND THE COVER
Words and Image by Gurcharan Roopra

Nairobi National Park, Kenya Male lion Kitili walked toward me in the low light of late evening. His damaged right eye, injured soon after he left his pride as a young male, is what makes him so recognizable. I waited for the wind to catch his mane and face, then used the low light to add drama and emphasize his strong presence.

www.wildeyemagazine.com

Publisher's Message



NATURE NEEDS NO JUSTIFICATION

We have a curious habit of measuring nature's value by what it provides us. Forests are valuable because they absorb carbon. Oceans because they feed us. Wetlands because they filter our water. Biodiversity because it sustains the ecosystems upon which our survival depends.

These are compelling arguments for conservation, and they're undeniably true. But I've been wondering whether, in making them, we're overlooking something more fundamental.

What if the natural world has value simply because it exists?

Consider a lion roaming the African savanna, a tree standing in a remote forest, or a creature living thousands of feet beneath the ocean's surface. Their lives unfold independently of our awareness. They form relationships, respond to their environments, struggle, adapt, and participate in a world far more complex than our understanding of it.

None exists for our benefit. And none requires our appreciation to make its existence meaningful.

Yet we humans have an extraordinary tendency to place ourselves at the center of everything. We assign value according to usefulness, beauty, rarity, or the emotional connections we establish. Even our language of conservation often frames the natural world as something worth saving because of what we stand to lose.

But perhaps we're asking the wrong question. Rather than asking what nature is worth to humanity, perhaps we should ask why humanity gets to determine its worth in the first place.

Throughout this issue of *Wild Eye,* we encounter worlds that exist beyond our purposes. Ami Vitale documents the process of returning giant pandas to the wild. Simone Sbaraglia explores the intersection of mathematics, creativity, and nature. Daniel Kordan reveals the intricate beauty of trees, while Gurcharan Roopra illuminates Kenya's wildlife. Katie Farr reveals landscapes beyond visible light. Each contributor offers a different perspective on the extraordinary richness of our planet.

Together, these stories remind us that we're participants in something much larger than ourselves.

Perhaps therein lies a deeper foundation for conservation. Not simply the recognition that nature sustains us, but the understanding that other lives have their own claim to this world. That their autonomy matters. That their existence enriches the fabric of life, whether or not we ever witness it.

Maybe the greatest expression of our humanity is recognizing that the world doesn't belong exclusively to us.

And that something need not be useful to us to be worthy of our respect.

JASON BRADLEY, PUBLISHER AND CONTENT DIRECTOR

Lunar Flight

WORDS AND IMAGE BY EGOITZ ICAZA GONZALEZ

NIGHT FALLS OVER THE FOREST and, beneath a clear sky, the stars begin to shine. Amid an extensive stand of Monterey pines, a small stone hermitage silently withstands the passing of the centuries. Its bell tower still stands, and on its northern side, several tiny windows barely allow a glimpse into its dark interior.

In front lies a clearing, sheltered by pine trees whose silhouettes stand ominously in the growing moonlight, guarding the dwelling.

Yet this mysterious hermitage is far from abandoned. It has become a refuge for the greater horseshoe bat, a species that's both well known and widely feared, and a familiar star of numerous horror films.

Here, each year, bats find a safe place to form a maternity colony. Although their natural roosts are caves and sinkholes, they have also learned to make use of abandoned mines and quiet buildings.

During the breeding season, females may gather in large groups and share their roost with other species, such as the Mediterranean horseshoe bat and notch-eared bat.

Inside, the chambers remain shrouded in gloom. There, the bats rest hanging upside down, clustered together and wrapped in their own wings.

When night arrives, they leave the roost to hunt. They are among the first bats to emerge, even before darkness has fully fallen. Using echolocation to navigate, they travel less than three miles in search of insects. The females must return to the colony during the night to nurse their young before heading out to hunt once again.

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*See more of **Egoitz Icaza Gonzalez**'s work at www.egoitzicaza.com.*



Beyond the Visible

Nature in Broad Spectrum

WORDS AND IMAGES
BY KATIE FARR



MY INTEREST IN INFRARED PHOTOGRAPHY began in a slightly unexpected place. I studied war photojournalism at university, so I had always been fascinated by documentary photography and the power an image can have in changing the way we see a subject.

Years later, I came across Richard Mosse's work from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. His use of infrared film to photograph war and human suffering completely stopped me in my tracks. The images were extraordinarily beautiful, yet what they depicted was anything but. I was fascinated by that contradiction, but also by the idea that photography could reveal infrared wavelengths that are physically present in our environment yet completely invisible to the human eye.

Eventually, I began experimenting with infrared myself. I turned it toward the landscapes I was already photographing — first in the Alps, and later while traveling through places such as Iceland and Norway. I quickly became obsessed with how infrared could transform these environments into something unfamiliar while remaining entirely rooted in the natural world.

The human eye only sees a relatively small part of the electromagnetic spectrum, roughly between 400 and 700 nanometers. Infrared light exists beyond that visible range. I photograph with a full-spectrum converted Canon camera, where the filter that would normally block infrared light has been removed, allowing the sensor to record wavelengths our eyes can't see. External specialized infrared filters then allow me to choose which part of the infrared spectrum I want to work with.



P10-11: Megève, France A sweep of crimson forest climbs toward jagged alpine summits, where the contrast between foliage and icy rock creates a striking mountain panorama.

→ Iceland A solitary waterfall spills into a dark ravine, cutting through volcanic terrain whose fiery tones make the flowing water appear almost silver by comparison.



↑ **Norway** Turquoise water winds between steep mountains, while rose colored slopes and low clouds lend this remote fjord an atmosphere of quiet, dreamlike serenity.

→ **Iceland** From high above, a narrow blue river meanders across an immense rust red plain, its graceful curves resembling a lifeline drawn through the earth.



Different wavelengths produce very different results. Living vegetation reflects infrared particularly strongly, transforming into luminous whites or unexpected shades ranging from yellow and gold to pink and deep red, depending on how I choose to capture and process the infrared light. Skies can become darker and more dramatic, while rock, snow, ice, and water respond differently. Cooler blues and cyans often emerge alongside the warmer tones, and I love the contrast they create, but within this spectrum I'm particularly drawn to the pinks and reds. To me, they seem to expose the rawness of a landscape rather than simply transform it.

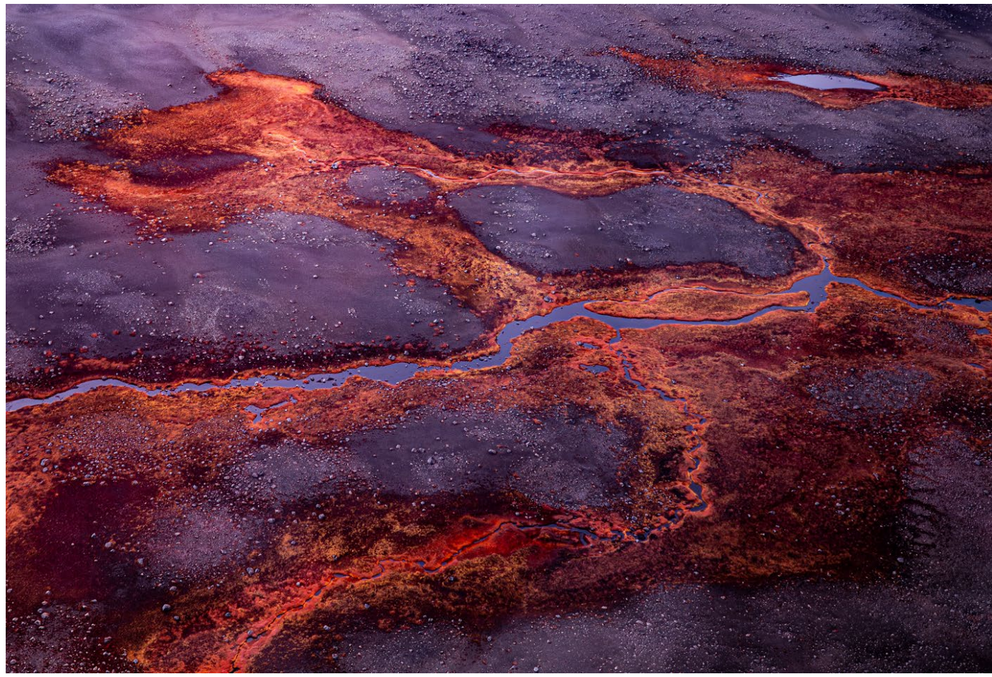
Working with infrared has completely changed the way I look for photographs. I particularly love working in strong sunshine — exactly the kind of conditions a traditional landscape photographer would avoid. Bright light hitting foliage can produce an incredible infrared response, so I find myself searching for contrasts between living and non-living elements: vegetation against rock, new growth emerging from volcanic ground, or forests sitting beneath glaciers and snow.

There's still an unpredictability to it that I love. With experience, I can anticipate how certain landscapes and vegetation are likely to respond, but I never know exactly what I'm going to get. A landscape that looks relatively ordinary to the eye can become extraordinary through the camera.

My work as a travel photographer has also taken my infrared photography to some extraordinary places around the world. I spend much of my time documenting people's journeys through remote landscapes, often by helicopter, which has given me access to perspectives I might otherwise never experience. From the air especially, infrared reveals patterns, textures, and contrasts in the land that can be almost impossible to appreciate from the ground.

Chamonix, France Beneath towering granite peaks, scattered boulders glow turquoise against a carpet of magenta vegetation, giving this familiar wilderness an unfamiliar character.





← **Iceland** Sweeping ridges rise and fall like folds of fabric, their swaths of color tracing the contours of a mountainous world carved through millennia by natural forces.

↑ **Iceland** Glowing orange channels branch across dark volcanic ground, forming an intricate network reminiscent of veins, arteries and the hidden anatomy of a living body.

I'm particularly drawn to landscapes where there's a tension between beauty and fragility. In Iceland, Norway, and my home in the French Alps, I photograph glaciers that are visibly retreating, volcanic craters, and immense lava fields that can appear almost devoid of life, alongside tiny areas of vegetation beginning to grow again. Through infrared, that new life can blaze pink or red against the barren landscape, making the contrast even more striking.

For me, infrared isn't about making a landscape look surreal simply for the sake of it. We see so many photographs of beautiful places that even extraordinary landscapes can begin to feel familiar. I love being able to take somewhere recognizable and make the viewer stop for a moment and look again. The colors may seem otherworldly, but the light creating them was already there — we simply couldn't see it.

My infrared work is constantly evolving, and that's perhaps what excites me most. Every new landscape brings different light, terrain, and possibilities, and I still feel as though I'm discovering what the medium can do. I want to keep taking it into new environments around the world, exploring the raw beauty and fragility of nature in ways I couldn't with conventional photography.

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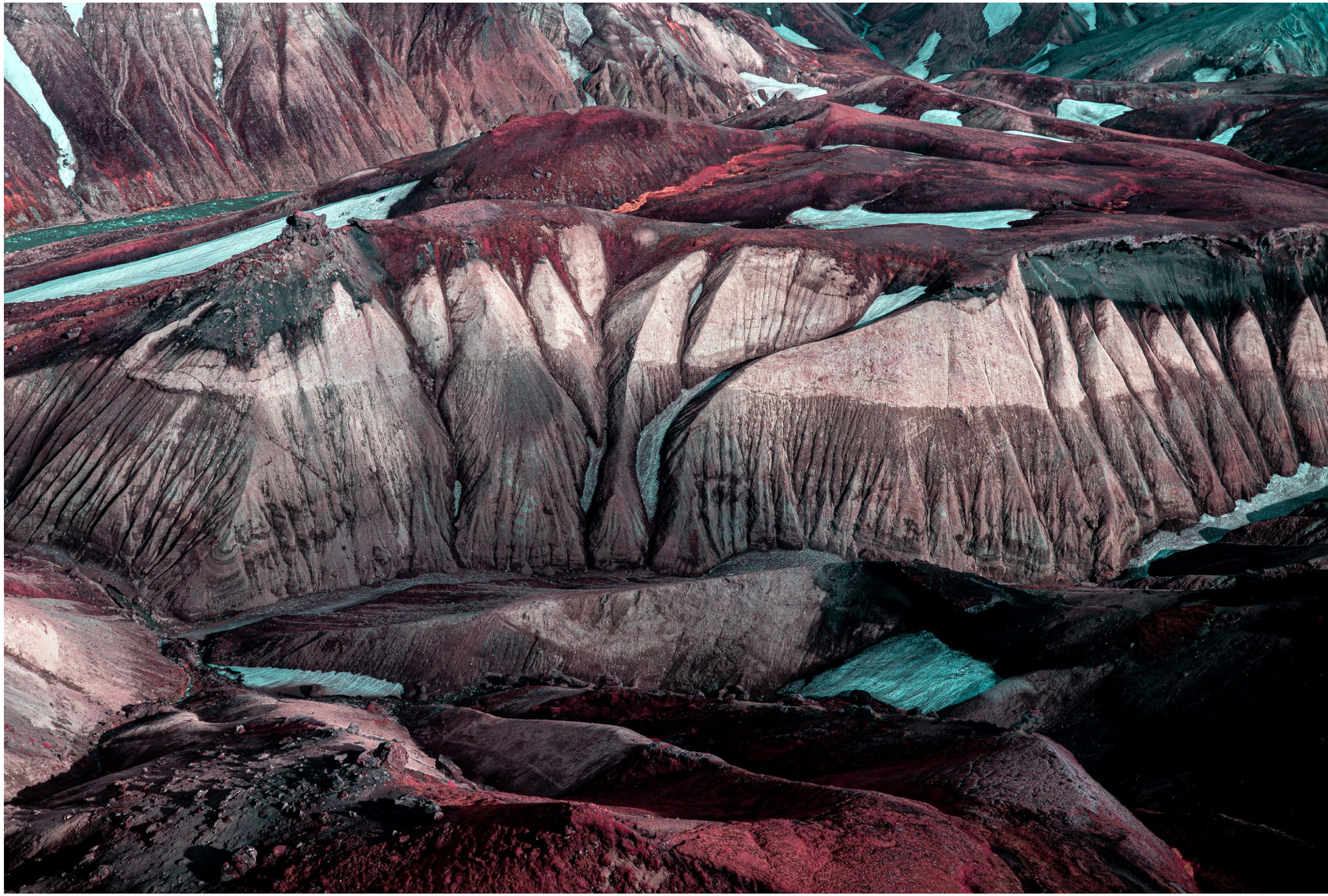
*See more of **Katie Farr**'s work at www.farrawaypeaks.com.*



Iceland Sculpted by glaciers and volcanic activity, these extraordinary rock formations reveal the striking raw woven textures and geological history of the landscape.



Pandas

Rewilding an Icon

WORDS AND IMAGES BY AMI VITALE

LEAVING HOME FOREVER must be terrifying. So, when Zhang Xiang, whom we called "Hope" in English, was about to become the first captive-born female giant panda released into the wild, I did the only thing that seemed sensible: I dressed as a tree.

I was part of a film crew documenting Hope's release in Sichuan Liziping National Nature Reserve in China. But I wanted to blend in so as not to frighten her with my camera. I hid behind a tree, trying to disappear into the landscape. I watched as she took her first steps toward a life for which she had been carefully prepared.

Afterward, Zhang Hemin, affectionately known as "Papa Panda," came over. He was touched that I had considered the experience from the panda's perspective. That moment changed everything. What began as a single assignment opened the door to a world I could never have imagined. I was given extraordinary access and began what became a three-year journey documenting China's ambitious effort to return captive-born pandas to the wild.

P22-23: Wolong National Nature Reserve, Sichuan Province, China Pandas were once so elusive they seemed almost mythical. They had existed for millions of years, but remained unknown to the Western world until 1869, when a French missionary first documented them scientifically.

→ Dujiangyan Panda Base, Chengdu, China At around one year old, young pandas learn to navigate their environment. Developing essential survival skills, like climbing trees and foraging for food, is key to preparing them for life in the wild.



Challenge Accepted

The challenge for me as a photographer was enormous. The giant panda may be one of the most photographed animals on Earth. We have turned pandas into global icons — fluffy, cuddly and sleepy — seemingly built for stuffed animals and birthday cards.

The wild panda is something else entirely. Elusive. Solitary. Remarkably difficult to find. In the steep, misty bamboo forests of central China, pandas are perfectly adapted to disappearing. Fewer than 2,000 individuals remain in the wild, and their survival depends not only on protecting and reconnecting their forest habitat, but also on understanding how to maintain a healthy population that can survive without human intervention.

That is where China's rewilding program comes in. For decades, Chinese scientists have worked to solve the complicated puzzle of panda conservation: breeding animals in captivity, protecting habitat, studying their behavior and, ultimately, determining whether a panda born in captivity could actually survive in the wild.

It turns out that releasing a panda isn't as simple as opening a door. Before a panda can be released, it must prove that it can survive. Young pandas are raised in increasingly complex forested enclosures where they learn to find bamboo, water, shelter, and to navigate terrain similar to what they will encounter in the wild. Their mothers play an important role in teaching them natural behaviors, while researchers closely monitor their progress and development.

The Solution

There's one rule above all others: Pandas must never become habituated to people. How do the keepers accomplish that? The humans working with pandas destined for the wild must become pandas themselves. Only the animals prepared for release received this treatment. Keepers and researchers wear full-body panda costumes so the young pandas wouldn't associate humans with food, care, or safety. The costumes are scented with panda urine. Pandas rely heavily on smell, so apparently looking like a panda wasn't enough. You have to smell like one, too.

I did what any right-minded photographer would do. I packed away my tree costume and donned a urine-scented panda costume. Let me tell you, rocking a panda suit is harder than you might think. You can't see your feet. Your vision is limited. You sweat spectacularly. And walking through the mountains dressed as a giant black-and-white bear while carrying camera equipment isn't exactly subtle. You look like a bank robber who took a very wrong turn on the way to the getaway car.

Beneath the absurdity was a remarkably serious idea. If these animals were ever going to survive on their own, they couldn't think of humans as their protectors. They weren't being prepared to become ambassadors. They were being prepared to disappear.

→ Wolong National Nature Reserve, Sichuan Province, China Pandas evolved from meat-eating ancestors, gradually developing adaptations that allowed them to survive almost exclusively on bamboo, abundant in their mountain habitat. Bamboo makes up about 99% of a giant panda's daily diet.

P28-29: Bifengxia Panda Base, Sichuan Province, China For their first three months, these tiny pandas are in the very best hands! Specially trained panda nannies keep their little bellies full, their bodies warm, and their days filled with plenty of sleep, as they grow.



The Result
One of the photographs that took me the longest to make was of Ye Ye, a 16-year-old female whose cub, Hua Yan, was being trained for release.

For nearly a month, I climbed the same mountain day after day dressed as a panda. Then, one morning, she emerged from the mist. For a few fleeting moments, everything came together, and then she was gone.

That photograph taught me something I hadn't expected when I began this story. Wildlife photography isn't always about getting closer. Sometimes it's about learning how to step back. We can become so focused on making the picture that we forget we are visitors in their world. The privilege is being allowed into that world at all.



Wolong National Nature Reserve, Sichuan Province, China A panda keeper takes advantage of a mother foraging for food to do a quick two-month health check on her cub. Wearing a panda costume prevents the cub from becoming habituated to humans.



↑ **Wolong National Nature Reserve, Sichuan Province, China** Ami Vitale at the ready to photograph pandas being prepared for release into the wild.
Photo by Robin Cox.

→ **Wolong National Nature Reserve, Sichuan Province, China** A panda keeper in disguise cleans and tidies the enclosure where pandas eat while a curious cub watches from outside.



The Message
China's panda story is ultimately much bigger than cute animals and clever costumes. It is a story about persistence. For more than three decades, scientists, conservationists, and forest workers have worked to breed pandas, protect habitat, reconnect fragmented forests, and develop new ways to strengthen wild populations. There have been setbacks and failures along the way, but the effort is beginning to show results.

Today, panda numbers have risen from historic lows. It's one of conservation's more hopeful stories — a reminder that protecting a species can take decades of painstaking, often invisible work. And the goal was never simply to save pandas in captivity. It was to give them something much harder and much more important: A life in which they no longer need us. A life in the wild.

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*See more of **Ami Vitale**'s work at www.amivitale.com.*



Bifengxia Panda Base, Sichuan Province, China While their mothers spend roughly 15 hours a day eating bamboo, panda cubs can be found climbing trees, where they build strength, learn to sleep safely, and practice predator avoidance.



A Revolution of Beauty

Simone Sbaraglia’s Evolution

WORDS AND IMAGES BY SIMONE SBARAGLIA

AS I SAT IN A BLIND photographing pelicans, I thought about how different my life had become. Twenty years ago, I sat in a windowless office, inside the enormous building that is the IBM Research Center in Westchester, New York. In front of me, numbers and symbols chased one another across a computer screen. Behind me, a blackboard was covered with mathematical formulas. At the time, I knew almost nothing about photography, animals, or the natural world.



P36-37: Lake Kerkini, Greece Three Dalmatian pelicans run across the water at sunrise, their open wings and orange bills framed by the softly colored sky.
FUJIFILM X-T2, FUJINON XF 10-24mm f/4 R OIS lens. Exposure: 1/640 sec., f/4, ISO 200.

→ Komodo National Park, Indonesia A Komodo dragon surveys the coastal landscape, flicking its forked tongue as the wide-angle perspective reveals its island habitat.
FUJIFILM X-T2, FUJINON XF 10-24mm f/4 R OIS lens. Exposure: 1/125 sec., f/16, ISO 800.



Today, nature and photography have invaded nearly every part of my life. When I'm not traveling, I'm working on images, preparing exhibitions, teaching, or planning my next journey. Somehow, I have lived two lives, although the border between them is much less distinct than I once believed.

A Wave of Inspiration

In my first life, I was a mathematician, originating in Rome and finding what I had been looking for in the United States; a place where I could work among some of the finest scientists in the world. In 2003, a spontaneous decision changed my life during a trip through the American Southwest.

Then I saw photos of "The Wave," an extraordinary formation of sandstone shaped by wind and water over millions of years in Paria Canyon-Vermilion Cliffs Wilderness on the Arizona-Utah border. I was struck by its beauty and had to see it with my own eyes.

Until then, I had used a camera mainly to produce holiday memories. Standing in front of The Wave, I felt emotions surface, and I was struck with inspiration to pick up my camera. The feelings inspired by nature were grounding, and the possibility of sharing them through photography was exhilarating and felt somehow important.

In that moment, out in nature, it felt as if a bulldozer had knocked down the walls of my windowless office. I never put my camera down again. I left IBM, returned to Italy, and began what I jokingly refer to as "my second life." For the past 20 years, I've been both a nature photographer and a mathematics professor at a local university.

P40-41: Son Tra Peninsula, Vietnam A red-shanked douc langur peers through dense tropical foliage, its vivid face emerging as a small flash of color among the leaves.
FUJIFILM X-T3, FUJINON XF 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6 R LM OIS WR lens. Exposure: 1/250 sec., f/8, ISO 1600.

← **Yala National Park, Sri Lanka** A Sri Lankan leopard rests on a granite boulder, one of fewer than 1,000 individuals remaining in the small country.
FUJIFILM X-T2, FUJINON XF 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6 R LM OIS WR lens with 2× teleconverter. Exposure: 1/250 sec., f/11, ISO 1250.

I photograph to give a name and form to the emotions I feel in front of an animal or a landscape.



↑ **Yala National Park, Sri Lanka** A grey langur pauses on the bare branches of a tree, silhouetted against the delicate pink and violet colors of sunset.
FUJIFILM X-T2, FUJINON XF 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6 R LM OIS WR lens.
Exposure: 1/160 sec., f/5.6, ISO 200.



→ **Foping, China** Two golden snub-nosed monkeys huddle together in heavy rain. Backlighting catches the falling water and outlines the wet golden fur of this endangered species.
FUJIFILM X-T2, FUJINON XF 100-400mm f/4.5-5.6 R LM OIS WR lens.
Exposure: 1/160 sec., f/8, ISO 640.



Shifting Paradigms
With time, however, I realized that mathematics and photography have a commonality. Mathematical research is a purely rational activity, but anyone who has worked through a difficult problem knows how much solving it depends on imagination. A mathematician searches for relationships inside complexity and tries to isolate what is essential, looking for an order that's present but not immediately visible.

Creating a great photograph of nature presents a similar challenge and thought process. There's complexity in every environment, especially when working with wildlife. Having a vision requires imagination, but isolating the image within the environment requires skill and critical thinking. Harnessing the different elements in the environment — light, color, behavior, and form — is similar to solving a math problem. One must observe the apparent chaos and find order to produce something meaningful.

Photography gradually became, above all, a means of understanding. It gave me a reason to explore the world and a window through which to understand it, and myself, more clearly. I photograph to give a name and form to the emotions I feel in front of an animal or a landscape. Only after I've understood the emotion can the photograph become an act of communication. The message of an image is so often, "Look at what I saw," but my message is closer to, "Feel what I felt."

It took me years to arrive at this awareness. At the beginning, I photographed wildlife from a distance with powerful telephoto lenses. I was concerned with finding the animal, recording its behavior, and producing a technically correct image. My photographs documented the natural world quite effectively, but they said very little about me or my experience of being there and bearing witness.

Vakona Reserve, Madagascar A ring-tailed lemur reaches towards my wide-angle lens. Its curiosity and direct gaze transform the close encounter into an intimate portrait.

Then I sent my portfolio to an agency in London. An editor replied that my pictures were technically good, but they were simply documents of nature. Anyone with decent equipment and sufficient technical competence could have taken them. It was a severe judgement and an extraordinarily generous one. I'll always be grateful to that editor because those words liberated me. From that moment, I became less concerned with the faithful representation of nature and much more concerned with the faithful representation of my feelings about it.

Investing in a Photo
My own response was to move progressively closer to the animals to capture more intimate portraits of their lives. Distance can easily become detachment. If I remained detached from what was happening, the viewer of the resulting photos might be detached as well.

Physical proximity, however, is only the visible part of this approach. The real purpose is participation. I want the animal to be aware of my presence, to accept me and, eventually, to allow me into a small part of its life. Only then do I feel that I can begin the process of turning my visions into reality. The process requires patience, respect, and a willingness to return without the pictures I had hoped for.

Before every project, I study the species, its behavior, and its environment. On location, I work with guides, rangers, or researchers who know the animals far better than I do. I first spend time with the animals, learning their behaviors and signals, while they learn that my presence isn't threatening.

For example, when photographing primates, every day in the jungle involves hours of trekking, crossing streams, enduring insects and tropical rain, and trying not to lose contact with animals that move through the vegetation far more easily than we do. Most of the photographs that matter are made during the final four or five days of each assignment. By then, the animals have grown accustomed to me, and I've learned enough about their behavior to anticipate some of their movements. The photographs are thus the last stage of a much longer process. The earned comfort level of the animals allows more intimate photos to be made.

Getting close must never become an act of aggression, however. An animal's wellbeing comes before an image. I never bait wildlife, and particular care is necessary around nests, young animals, or any situation in which our presence may alter natural behavior. The boundary between helping nature through photography and exploiting it can be thin. I try to remain aware of that boundary, knowing that the simple act of staying near an animal is already a form of disturbance. Showing these creatures at their most beautiful is also my way of thanking them for their patience.

Once the animals accept me, I often work with wide-angle lenses. They create a very different relationship from that of a long telephoto. The animal remains unmistakably present, while the surrounding habitat becomes part of the portrait. Perspective places the viewer inside the scene and gives the sensation of sharing the subject's space.

Wide-angle photography also requires closeness to be genuine. A telephoto lens can create the appearance of intimacy from far away, while a wide-angle lens cannot conceal the physical distance between photographer and subject. The resulting pictures carry some trace of the time, trust, and mutual awareness that made them possible. I strive to portray the soul of an animal, and it is difficult to see a soul from a great distance.

Sulawesi, Indonesia A crested black macaque approaches my wide-angle lens while the rest of the troop moves around a forest pool in the background.



I envision the image before it exists, then go looking for the conditions that may allow it to take shape.

Transitions
Working this way demands light and compact equipment. In a forest, following primates that may travel many miles in a day, mobility matters more than carrying every possible lens. My transition to the FUJIFILM X system was a gradual consequence of this way of working. I needed equipment that could follow me through the forest for an entire day without becoming the center of my attention. Its balance of image quality, portability, and direct control allows me to move freely, change position quickly, and work at the animal's level.

This is particularly important with wide-angle lenses, where a few centimeters can completely alter the relationship between subject, environment, and viewer. The camera didn't create my desire for proximity, but it made that proximity easier to translate into images. I can stay close to the group and concentrate on behavior instead of thinking about the contents of my camera bag. The equipment must be studied and organized at home so it can almost be forgotten in the field.

After roughly 15 years devoted primarily to wildlife, I began to work more seriously with landscapes. At first the change seemed substantial. A landscape doesn't observe me, become nervous, or decide whether to accept my presence. There's no trust to earn in the way there is with an animal. Yet, I soon discovered that my approach remained surprisingly similar.

Landscape photography also demands planning, sometimes over months or years. I study the geography, the seasons, the direction of light, the weather, the movement of the moon and stars, and the possible viewpoints. I envision the image before it exists, then go looking for the conditions that may allow it to take shape. The landscape still has the final word. Plans often fail, the expected light doesn't arrive, clouds cover the sky, or the elements collide in an entirely different way from the one I had imagined. As with wildlife, control is always partial.

→ **São Miguel Island, Azores, Portugal** An aerial view reveals a small crater lake encircled by trees, creating an unexpected eye-like shape within the surrounding fields.

P52-53: Bokty Mountain, Kazakhstan Star trails circle above the layered slopes of Bokty Mountain, connecting the desert's geological forms with the movement of the night sky.
FUJIFILM X-T5, 12-24mm manual shift lens. Exposure: 1/25 sec., f/1, ISO 125.



Nature is immersed in apparent chaos, yet within that chaos there's order, elegance, and perfection.

The FUJIFILM GFX system entered my work as landscape photography became a more important part of it. Medium format encouraged a different rhythm. Wildlife often asks me to move quickly after weeks of patient preparation. Landscape photography allows me to slow the final act down, refine the position of every element, and study the smallest transitions of light. I have little interest in producing a neutral description of a place. I want to understand what I feel there and build an image capable of conveying that magical feeling.

The detail and tonal depth of the larger GFX sensor are important, especially when I print at a large scale. Its greatest influence has been on the way I see. It encourages precision and contemplation, qualities that connect naturally with my mathematical search for structures, proportions, and relationships within apparent chaos. The X and GFX systems accompany two very different working rhythms, yet they serve the same purpose: allowing the equipment to recede so that the experience, the subject, and the emotion can come forward.

Rediscovering Roots

Once I have my gear set so I don't have to overthink it, my mathematical background becomes apparent. In a forest, a mountain range, a volcanic desert, or a coastline, I instinctively look for repetitions, layers, symmetries, curves, intervals, and relationships between masses and empty spaces. Nature is immersed in apparent chaos, yet within that chaos there's order, elegance, and perfection. Composition allows me to isolate this order and turn a complex place into a clear emotional statement.

Long exposures can change the consistency of water and clouds, while an elevated viewpoint may transform geological formations or vegetation into abstract shapes. Color creates atmosphere and directs the emotional reading of the scene. None of these choices is neutral. As Richard Avedon observed, once a fact becomes a photograph, it becomes an opinion. The position of the camera, the moment of exposure, and everything excluded from the frame are already interpretations.

P54-55: Haukland Beach, Norway
The northern lights sweep above a snow-covered bay at twilight, their green forms contrasting with the soft colors along the horizon.
FUJIFILM X-T5, FUJINON XF 16-55mm f/2.8 R LM WR II lens. Exposure: 0.6 sec., f/11, ISO 125.

→ São Miguel Island, Azores, Portugal
A rocky islet extends into the Atlantic beneath a star-filled sky. A long exposure transforms the surrounding ocean into a calm surface.
FUJIFILM X-T5, 12-24mm manual shift lens. Exposure: 17 sec., f/1, ISO 125.

P58: Boszhira, Kazakhstan The pale spires known as the "Fangs," rise from the desert at twilight, their sculptural forms catching the final pink light.
FUJIFILM X-T5, 12-24mm manual shift lens. Exposure: 1/55 sec., f/1, ISO 125.







Wildlife and landscape photography eventually meet in the same place. Both ask me to observe patiently, move beyond the first impression, and decide what's essential. Both require knowledge and imagination. With animals, I build a relationship of trust. With landscapes, I build a relationship with place, light, and time. In either case, the finished photograph must allow another person to enter that relationship.

As the years passed, my sensitivity to the fragility of the natural world grew. I started out calling myself "a nature photographer." As I witnessed environmental degradation, almost without deciding to do so, I became a photographer of species and environments at immediate risk. Again and again, I'd photograph an animal and later discover how uncertain its future had become. Sometimes I fear that my images may serve only as a memorial to a world that's vanishing.

In more optimistic moments, I believe they can do something else. Scientific information can explain ecosystem destruction, measure a population, and demonstrate the consequences of our actions. These facts are indispensable, but facts alone don't always move people. We protect what has entered our emotional life. My goal is to turn threatened species and places into emotional portrayals to inspire the viewer to take action.

P59: Mangystau Region, Kazakhstan Moonlight and a star-filled sky transform the eroded desert formations into an otherworldly landscape resembling the surface of another planet.

← Kirkjufell, Iceland Kirkjufell rises above a frozen waterfall during blue hour, when the first stars appear at twilight.
FUJIFILM X-T2, FUJINON XF 10-24mm f/4 R OIS lens. Exposure: 2.5 sec., f/8, ISO 200.

If a primate is perceived as an individual, with a gaze, a character, sentiments, and social relationships, its disappearance ceases to be an abstract statistic. If a landscape inspires wonder, its destruction becomes a personal loss. Beauty grabs attention, and attention can beget empathy, attachment, responsibility, and even action.

George Orwell wrote that in a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act. I've come to believe that in a time surrounded by destruction, spreading beauty can also be revolutionary. My ambition is modest but persistent: to contribute, image after image, to a revolution of beauty.

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*See more of **Simone Sbaraglia**'s work at www.simonesbaraglia.com.*



→ **Campo Imperatore, Italy** At sunrise, low clouds flow between the rounded Apennine hills while the first warm light picks out a single grassy ridge.
FUJIFILM GFX100RF, FUJINON GF 35mm f/4 lens.
Exposure: 0.4 sec., f/8, ISO 80.

Trees

A Tapestry of Life

WORDS AND IMAGES BY DANIEL KORDAN



AS A TRAVEL PHOTOGRAPHER, I see trees everywhere I go while exploring the world. They all look different, but they're usually considered "background" or "part of the scenery." However, I've come to see trees as more than just part of the landscape. They're silent witnesses to the passing of time. They're the breathing soul of our planet, the lungs of the Earth, drawing in the invisible poetry of the atmosphere and returning life with every whisper of their leaves.

From ancient forests cloaked in morning mist to the solitary palms swaying against a golden horizon, trees stand as nature's most graceful guardians, quietly sustaining the delicate balance of our world. Through my lens, I endeavor to capture their majestic forms and intricate textures. Their personalities.

As a photographer, I find an extraordinary kind of beauty in these moments; the delicate dance of shadows across an ancient tree's bark, the emerald glow of new leaves after a storm, or the quiet dignity of a single dead tree, living on as part of the landscape. These aren't merely beautiful scenes to preserve in a photograph. They're intimate portraits of life itself. Each tree breathes with the rhythm of the planet, absorbing carbon dioxide, releasing oxygen, nurturing biodiversity, and reminding us that the wilderness isn't separate from humanity, but an essential part of who we are.

P64-65: South Korea The Korean pine tree is a prominent symbol of Korea's rich natural heritage and cultural identity. The majestic trees have adorned the Korean peninsula for centuries, playing an important role in the lives of both North and South Koreans.

← Walakiri, Indonesia Though beautiful and iconic, these Sumba dancing trees are dying. They're very fragile, and human impact and climate change have left them struggling. Time is of the essence to implement tree restoration.

They curve, sway, and bend in gestures that look unmistakably like a slow, eternal choreography.

Yet, as I travel across landscapes both wild and fragile, I'm increasingly aware that the lungs of the Earth are under threat. Forests disappear under the weight of human ambition, and with every fallen tree, we lose more than a patch of green — we lose habitats, living history, and a little of the breath that sustains our future.

My photographs, therefore, are more than souvenirs of distant places; they're invitations to pause, to witness, and to care. I hope each image of a dancing tree, a mist-covered woodland, or a lone tree standing defiantly in a barren landscape, inspires a deeper reverence for these quiet giants. To protect trees is to protect the air we breathe, the beauty we inherit, and what we pass along to future generations.

Dancing Mangroves

I've spent years chasing light across the globe, but the mangrove trees of Sumba, Indonesia, command a different kind of reverence. Standing knee-deep in the shallow, glassy waters of the Savu Sea, these remarkable *Avicennia marina* trees don't merely grow. They curve, sway, and bend in gestures that look unmistakably like a slow, eternal choreography. Locally revered as the "dancing trees," they appear suspended in a fluid performance against the backdrop of Indonesia's dramatic equatorial sunsets.

These mangroves are a testament to the resilient botanical engineering of our planet. They survive where ordinary plants perish, thriving in an environment of high salinity and oxygen-depleted soils by utilizing highly specialized root systems that breathe through pencil-like structures rising vertically above the mud.

Walakiri, Indonesia Far from being a mere aesthetic wonder, this coastal fringe acts as a critical nursery, offering vital sanctuary to juvenile marine life while protecting the coastline from the raw, erosive power of ocean surges.

Ashen Sentinels
High on the jagged caldera rim of Mount Ijen on the island of Java, Indonesia, the air carries the sharp, heavy sting of elemental earth, a place where photography becomes an intense physical battle. Surrounded by shifting plumes of toxic volcanic gas stands a scattering of skeletal, twisted trees. Stripped of their foliage, their bark gnarled and bleached by acid rain and intense volcanic heat, these dead trees overlook the world's largest highly acidic crater lake.

The contrast is devastatingly beautiful; the stark, dark lines of ancient timber framing a body of water that glows with an otherworldly, neon-turquoise hue, a coloration born from intense concentrations of sulfur and hydrochloric acid. When the first light of dawn finally broke through the sulfureous haze, revealing a gnarled, blackened branch framing the glowing abyss of the lake, it felt like capturing a raw, unfiltered portrait of our planet's fiery infancy.

Java, Indonesia High-altitude zones are typically dominated by hardy species, plants uniquely adapted to survive on nutrient-poor volcanic soils. Yet, shifting and concentrated gases overwhelm even the toughest flora, leaving behind these striking monuments.



Java, Indonesia Within this extreme ecosystem, vegetation fights a constant battle. When stable, these deep root systems help secure the volatile, crumbly volcanic slopes, preventing catastrophic mudslides.





Stepping into the De Djawatan Forest in Banyuwangi, also on the island of Java, is like breaking through the fabric of time itself.

Solitary Grace

Across the mist-shrouded ridges of South Korea's sacred mountains, the silhouette of the Korean pine tree stands as an enduring symbol of resilience, longevity, and spiritual balance. For centuries, these trees have been deeply woven into the cultural identity of the peninsula, frequently depicted in traditional ink wash paintings for their ability to remain unyielding against the harshest elements.

Whether clinging precariously to a rocky precipice over a sea of clouds or standing in a fog-bound grove, their heavily textured, plated bark and gracefully contorted trunks evoke a sense of deep, meditative calm.

In the mountain ecosystems of Northeast Asia, the Korean pine is a foundational species. Thriving in cold, high-altitude climates, its large, nutrient-rich seeds are an indispensable food source for an array of alpine wildlife. They, in turn, disperse the seeds across the rugged terrain, giving life to new trees that help anchor the mountainsides against erosion.

A Timeless Canopy

Stepping into the De Djawatan Forest in Banyuwangi, also on the island of Java, is like breaking through the fabric of time itself, entering a landscape that feels completely primordial. Towering high above a labyrinth of green pathways are giant monkey pod trees, their massive, sprawling branches heavily carpeted in thick cloaks of epiphytic ferns.

The monkey pod tree is a structural marvel of the tropical world, defined by its immense, symmetrical crown that can span over a hundred feet across. This vast canopy serves an extraordinary ecological purpose.

Sheltering a microclimate of intense humidity and shade beneath it, the canopy creates a multi-layered ecosystem that provides a complex network of habitats for countless insects, birds, and small mammals amidst a rapidly developing agricultural landscape.

P74–75: South Korea The long, trailing fronds of various mosses, using the trees for structural support, catch moisture and nutrients directly from the Javanese air, trapping the humidity beneath to create a rich microclimate.

← South Korea A Korean pine tree can live up to 700 years. After 100 to 200 years of growth, it enters the fruitful youth stage, and after 300 to 400 years, it enters the fruitful adult stage, bearing pine cones that produce pine nuts.



Classical Elegance
The rolling hills of the Val d'Orcia in Tuscany are perhaps one of the most harmoniously sculpted landscapes in human history. Rising like sharp, dark green exclamation points against the undulating, golden earthen waves are the iconic Italian cypresses.

Whether planted in a tightly clustered ring atop a lonely knoll or lining a long, winding dirt road leading to an ancient stone farmhouse, these slender, columnar trees give the Italian countryside its unmistakable, timeless rhythm.

The cypress is perfectly adapted to the Mediterranean climate, utilizing deep taproots to seek out water far below the parched summer soil while its dense, compact foliage minimizes water loss through evaporation. Historically introduced to the region thousands of years ago, these rows of windbreaks protect fragile topsoil and vineyards from the sweeping, dry winds of the region.

P78-79: South Korea The Korean Pine is a precious tree species with both economic and ecological value. Ecologically, it serves the function of conserving water and soil while supporting biodiversity.

← Val d'Orcia, Tuscany Despite representing Tuscany, the cypress trees were originally introduced from the eastern Mediterranean and Anatolia (Turkey) by the Etruscans.



Val d’Orcia, Tuscany According to regional tradition, single or grouped cypress trees acted as ancient road signs for pilgrims; one tree meant a rest stop, two meant a tavern, and three indicated a hostel.



Hokkaido, Japan Some trees are planted by the Japanese or left between fields to minimize soil erosion. The majority of Hokkaido is still wild, so it's not uncommon to see wildlife sleeping under such trees.



Hokkaido, Japan Ecologically, even a single tree standing in an open field serves as a vital winter hunting perch for migratory birds of prey looking for small rodents moving beneath the snow crust. And the root system from a tree plays an important role in preventing soil erosion.

Known as, “Sakura,” primarily the Yoshino cherry tree, these blossoms are celebrated globally for their deep cultural resonance.

Silent Winters
Winter in Hokkaido, Japan, is a masterclass in absolute stillness, but behind that serene beauty lies an environment of extreme technical hostility for a photographer. The northernmost island of Japan is swept by freezing Siberian winds, burying the rolling agricultural plains of Biei and Furano under a thick, pristine blanket of powder snow.

Rising alone from these vast, blinding white fields are solitary trees, most famously, the lone spruce known widely as the Christmas tree. Under a muted, pastel sky where falling snow blurs the horizon, these isolated trees stand as stark, beautiful monuments to solitude.

Ephemeral Splendor
There’s arguably no image that encapsulates the soul of Japan more profoundly than the delicate pink blossoms of the cherry tree framing the snow-capped symmetry of Mount Fuji, an alignment of natural elements that requires years of experience to time correctly.

Known as, “Sakura,” primarily the Yoshino cherry tree, these blossoms are celebrated globally for their deep cultural resonance, serving as a vivid reminder of the beautiful, melancholic awareness of the impermanence of all things.

The expansive root systems of the cherry trees stabilize the banks against spring meltwater erosion, and as the blossoms fall, they return vital organic nutrients directly to the aquatic ecosystems, marking a transcendent seasonal rebirth.



Fujisan, Japan In Japanese culture, sakura are a profound symbol of the transience and beauty of life, as their brief prime bloom mirrors human mortality.

Fiery Autumn
As autumn sweeps across the ancient temples and moss-covered gardens of Kyoto, Japan, the landscape erupts into a dazzling palette of crimson, orange, and gold, offering a masterclass in composition and light control.

At the heart of this seasonal transformation is the Japanese maple. Cultivated for centuries within the serene confines of Zen temple grounds, these trees have been carefully pruned and integrated into traditional landscape architecture to create living works of art that celebrate the transition of seasons, a time revered locally as “Koyo.”

Kyoto, Japan Kyoto’s red maple tradition centers around Momijigari (red maple leaf hunting), a centuries-old cultural practice. People of all ages search for their own perfect branch or leaf.



Mystic Fog
High in the volcanic mountains of Madeira, Portugal, lies Fanal, an ancient, mist-drenched plateau that feels completely disconnected from the modern world, a place where I spent weeks tracking weather patterns to capture its true essence.

Fanal is home to a critically important remnant of the ancient, UNESCO-listed Laurisilva, a rare subtropical laurel forest that once covered much of Southern Europe millions of years ago. Walking among these prehistoric, twisted til trees, some of which have stood for over 500 years, is a deeply haunting experience.

As the thick Atlantic fog rolls over the ridge, the gnarled, moss-covered limbs of these giants appear to reach through the gloom like ancient spirits. My field strategy at Fanal requires embracing unpredictable shifts in weather. The fog can go from a beautiful, soft mist to a blinding, wet whiteout in a matter of minutes.

Madeira, Portugal Thick Atlantic fog rolls over the gnarled, moss-covered limbs of these giants, appearing to reach through the gloom like ancient spirits.



Madeira, Portugal To create a sense of depth, I use the massive, fallen, moss-covered trunks in the foreground as leading lines, guiding the viewer's eye through the heavy atmosphere toward the ghostly silhouette of a standing laurel.

The Sunken Graveyard
Deep within the towering, apricot-colored dunes of the Namib Desert lies Deadvlei, a stark, white clay pan that preserves one of the most hauntingly beautiful graveyards on Earth, a location that demands extreme precision in composition.

Over a thousand years ago, an ephemeral river flooded the area, allowing camelthorn trees to take root and flourish. But as the climate shifted and the massive dunes migrated, they choked off the water supply, sentencing the grove to a dry, lingering death. Today, scorched black by centuries of relentless desert sun, these skeletal remains stand as a powerful monument to the impermanence of water.

Because the environment is so dry, the wood of these camel thorn trees can't decompose. They're effectively sun-mummified, frozen in their final reaches toward the cosmos. When alive, these trees were the lifeblood of the valley, utilizing exceptionally deep taproots to access hidden water tables, providing vital shade and nutrients that sustained desert-adapted wildlife.



Deadvlei, Namibia These trees grew around 900 years ago when the Tsauchab River flooded and formed temporary pools. They died roughly 600 to 900 years ago when climate changes and shifting sand dunes blocked the river.



Yet the true wonder of this diversity lies not only in the roles trees play, but in the individuality of their forms, textures, colors, and characters.

Volcanic Rebirth

Many times, in the 1960s through the 1970s and most recently in 2012, the earth split open in the remote wilderness of Kamchatka, Russia, as the Tolbachik volcano unleashed a massive fissure eruption, creating a landscape of devastating ruin that I flew over via helicopter to document.

For months, rivers of white-hot basaltic lava flowed across the terrain, while columns of ash and toxic gases choked the sky. Near the Leningradskaya research station, a beautiful forest of larch and pine was caught directly in the path of the heavy ash fall.

Today, what remains is a stark, post-apocalyptic dead forest, a vast plain of black volcanic cinder populated by the charred, skeletal remains of trees that were suffocated where they stood. Yet, even in death, this forest plays an integral role in the slow process of volcanic ecological succession.

A Quilt of Diversity

The diversity of trees across our planet is one of nature's most extraordinary treasures. From the towering redwoods of California to the ancient baobabs of Africa, each species tells a different story of adaptation, resilience, and belonging. Every tree has evolved to thrive in its own environment, shaped by centuries of wind, rain, sunlight, and the intricate relationships it shares with the life around it.

Together, the world's tree species form a remarkable tapestry of ecosystems, providing shelter and sustenance for countless species, enriching the soil, regulating water cycles, and helping to stabilize our planet's climate.

Yet the true wonder of this diversity lies not only in the roles trees play, but in the individuality of their forms, textures, colors, and characters. To lose a species of tree is to lose a unique expression of nature's creativity, a living chapter in the story of our planet that can never be rewritten.

As I travel the world with my camera, I'm reminded that every tree, whether standing alone on a windswept hillside or growing among thousands in a dense tropical forest, has its own place in this intricate web of life.

Protecting the diversity of trees is therefore about more than preserving landscapes. It's about safeguarding the extraordinary richness of life on Earth and ensuring that future generations can continue to discover, experience, and marvel at the many forms through which nature expresses itself.

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*See more of **Daniel Kordan**'s work at www.danielkordan.com.*

Kamchatka, Russia The crimson light reflecting from my headlamp off the charcoal-colored wood created a powerful visual metaphor, making the dead tree appear as if it were still pulsing with the volcanic heat that destroyed it.

Gurcharan's Kenya

New Light on Familiar Faces

WORDS AND IMAGES BY GURCHARAN ROOPRA





KENYA HAS ALWAYS been home to me. I was born and raised in Nairobi. Although I spent many years living and working in the UK, returning to Kenya in 2012 changed the way I saw the country. I picked up a camera and set out to explore my home in a new way, through photography.

As a local, I have the luxury of traveling to different parts of Kenya with a particular species or environment in mind. Amboseli National Park, for example, is somewhere I go to spend time with elephants, while Ol Pejeta Conservancy offers opportunities to photograph lions and rhinos. That said, the biodiversity in these locations is so vast that you never know what might be around the next corner.

This unpredictability is one of the things I love most about photographing Kenya. The wildlife may be familiar, but the light, weather, landscape, and behaviors are constantly changing. I'm less interested in simply documenting an animal than in finding a way to show it differently.

I love to harness different elements and bring them together in a photo. Light is a huge part of that. I often find myself waiting for the first or last light of the day, looking for backlight, shadows, mist, dust, or even complete darkness. Sometimes the light is soft and subtle, and sometimes it completely transforms a scene. Sometimes I bend the light to create something new and different from what you might expect from a wildlife photograph.

Kenya also gives me the freedom to experiment. I use slow shutter speeds, intentional camera movement, unusual angles, and low-key or high-key lighting techniques, alongside more traditional approaches. Some of my favorite photographs have come from simply being patient and allowing the moment to develop.

That's what keeps Kenya special. I can visit a place with a particular animal in mind, only to find something completely unexpected. There's always another road to travel, animal to discover, and piece of light waiting to be woven. And after all these years, I still feel incredibly lucky to find new inspiration in my own backyard.

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*See more of **Gurcharan Roopra**'s work at www.gurcharanroopra.com.*

P98-99: Shompole Wilderness, Kenya Zebras stir up dust at a watering hole, catching the backlight to create a misty effect. Lowering the white balance enhanced the blue in the photo.

← Loisaba Conservancy, Kenya A female leopard photographed using a low-key approach, with the light falling just across her face. Her damaged eye adds a striking blue to the portrait.





P102-103: Nairobi National Park, Kenya As a zebra ran across the savanna, I photographed it with a slow shutter speed while panning with its movement. The resulting blur gives the image a strong sense of speed and motion.

← Ol Pejeta Conservancy, Kenya The early morning cold and mist rising from the midden came together along with the morning sun to illustrate the rhino's peaceful moment.



→ Solio Game Reserve, Kenya A male leopard walks across a fallen acacia tree at night. Artificial backlighting highlights the leopard's regal posture.

P108–109: Solio Game Reserve, Kenya
A Southern white rhino bull stands in the early morning mist, keeping watch over his territory.





← **Nairobi National Park, Kenya** A serval mother with her kitten, seemingly on one of its first trips away from the den, cautiously and protectively introducing her kitten to their environment.

↑ **Shompole Wilderness, Kenya** A caracal locks eyes with my camera in a heart-stopping moment as it drinks water in the early morning hours.





← Ol Pejeta Conservancy, Kenya A ground-level camera positioned in the path of a passing Southern white rhino captured this dramatic pose.

↑ Nairobi National Park, Kenya Photographed from ground level, the zebra rolling on the ground creates an effect that makes the image look as though it was taken from the air.

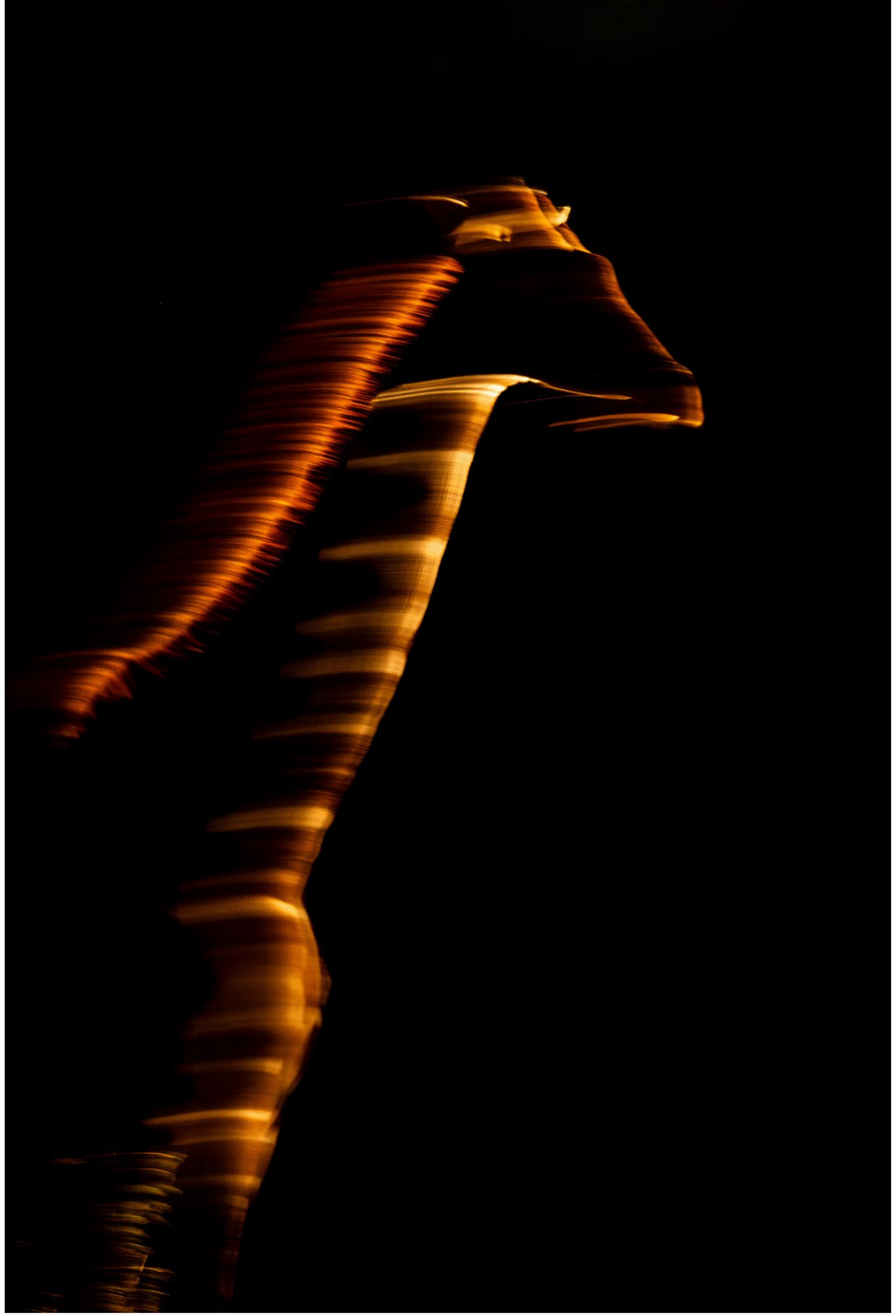


Ol Pejeta Conservancy, Kenya A male lion and its cub watch over the kill after the male has eaten, while the rest of the pride feasts on the remains.

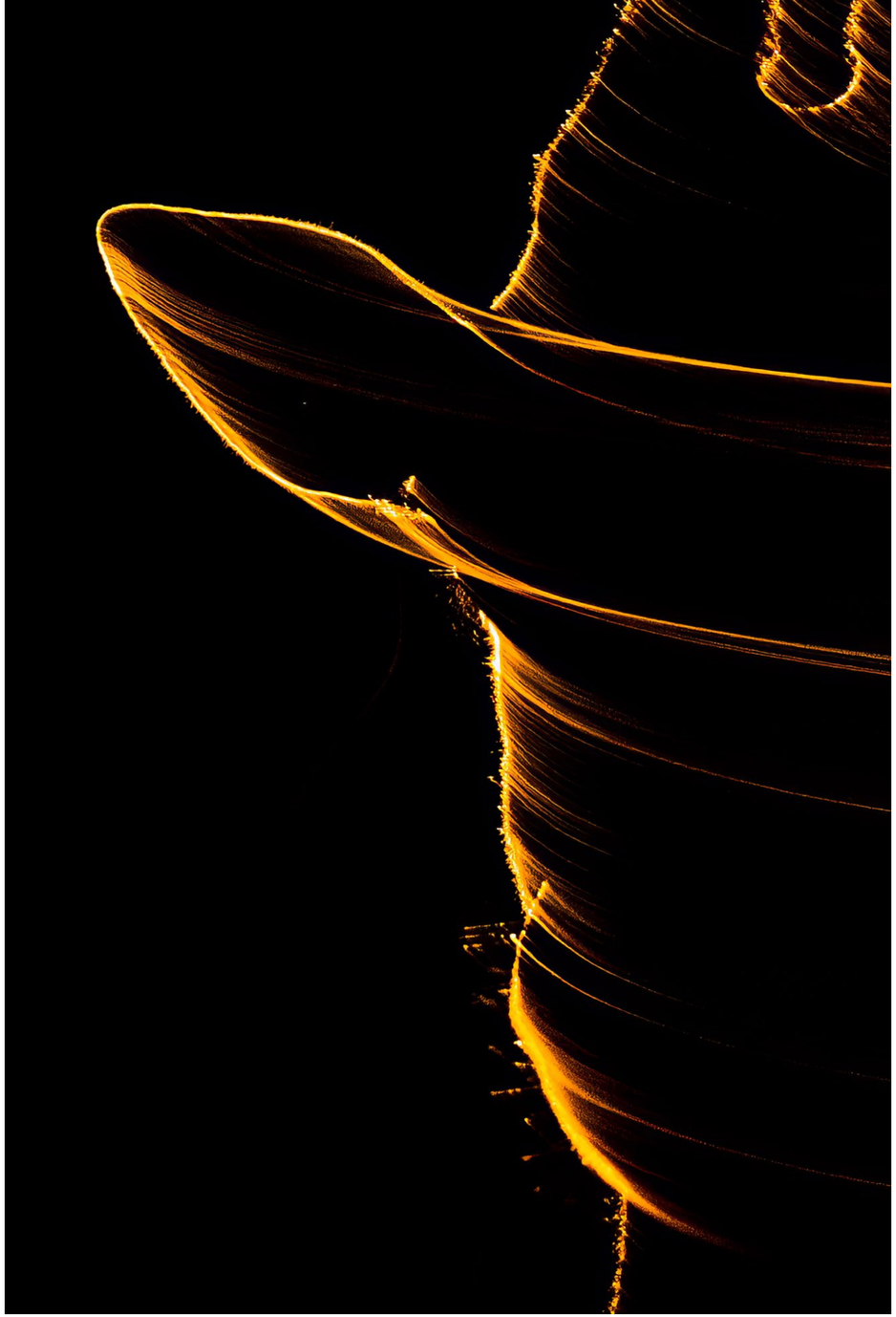
P116-117: Amboseli National Park, Kenya Elephants cross the dry lake lake, searching for water, while one stops directly over my camera to inspect it carefully with its trunk.

↑ Kimana Sanctuary, Kenya Two elephants play-fight, testing their strength and honing skills they'll need as they mature into adults.

Shompole Wilderness, Kenya As I waited in the hide, this giant appeared from the darkness and came so close that I had to point the camera upward to capture him.



Ol Pejeta Conservancy, Kenya I used a slow shutter speed and intentional camera movement (ICM) while photographing a backlit giraffe, adding motion as the giraffe moved through the frame.



Ol Pejeta Conservancy, Kenya ICM and backlighting caught the giraffe's movement, giving a familiar subject a more creative and abstract look.



The Cost of Convenience

WORDS AND IMAGE BY NUR TUCKER

DIVING IN ONE OF MY FAVORITE locations, I came across a pair of anemonefish sheltering within the tentacles of their host anemone. But lying beneath them, almost at the entrance to their home, was something that didn't belong there: a plastic toothbrush.

As I composed the photograph, my dive guide instinctively reached to remove it. I quickly signaled for him to leave it, just for a moment. Without the toothbrush, I'd have made a beautiful image of anemonefish in their natural habitat. With it, the photograph tells a vastly different, more important story.

The toothbrush was old and algae-encrusted, a reminder of how long our discarded objects can remain in the marine environment. Plastic toothbrushes take hundreds of years to break down. Something we use briefly can persist in nature for generations.

This image is a stark reminder. Nothing we throw away truly disappears. We can't remove every piece of debris from our oceans, but we can all make choices to ensure less of it gets there in the first place.

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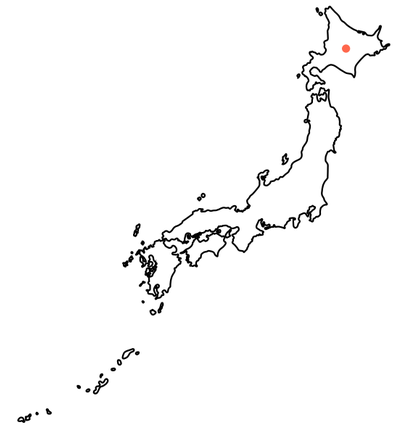
*See more of **Nur Tucker**'s work at www.nurtucker.com.*

Hokkaido, Japan

IMAGES AND WORDS BY
JEREMY WOODHOUSE



Hokkaido, Japan



MY INTEREST IN WINTER WILDLIFE in Japan began when I saw a photograph of a monkey carrying a snowball. The photograph was made in the mid 1990s on Japan's main island, not on Hokkaido, but that photo planted a seed of an idea. I wanted to experience Japan in winter and photograph the wildlife that lived there. That journey began in 2005, and since then, I've returned to Japan half a dozen times.

P124-125: Shiretoko National Park, Hokkaido, Japan With the soft pink light of sunrise and the powerful gaze of this white-tailed eagle, I wasn't concerned about having too much lens. Filling the frame and concentrating on the strength of the eagle yielded an intense photograph.

← Tsurui-Ito Tancho Sanctuary, Hokkaido, Japan Looking for a different way to portray these elegant red-crowned cranes, or "tancho," I set out to experiment with panning. The dark background and slender birch trees provided the perfect setting for this impressionistic image.

Fair warning, it's cold in Hokkaido, which affects not only your photographic experience but your gear. The cold itself becomes part of the experience. Batteries lose their charge quickly, condensation when entering a warm building is a constant concern, and operating a camera with gloves is frustrating. Yet, standing beside a misty frozen river before sunrise creates a connection with the landscape that's difficult to achieve any other way.

Where the Cranes Dance

Hokkaido, Japan's northernmost major island, became a particular fascination. Its winter landscape is extraordinary; deep snow, frozen lakes, drifting sea ice, misty rivers, and a remarkable concentration of wildlife. For a photographer, the attraction isn't simply the animals, but the relationship between wildlife and the landscape. Despite the extreme cold, pockets of open water remain. Geothermal activity keeps some rivers, lakes, and pools free of ice, creating vital refuges for wildlife, especially waterfowl.

One of my favorite winter rituals takes place before sunrise at Otowa Bridge, which crosses the Setsuri River. On the coldest mornings, when temperatures can fall below zero degrees Fahrenheit, dozens of photographers arrive in darkness to set up their tripods along the bridge. At these temperatures, moisture from the warmer river can form a delicate coating of hoar frost on the surrounding trees. Everyone is waiting for the same spectacle, red-crowned cranes standing in the shallow water as the first light touches the frosted trees.



Akan National Park, Hokkaido, Japan Nakajima Island rises from the heart of Lake Kussharo at sunrise, viewed from Bihoro Pass. In winter, hundreds of whooper swans fly into Japan's largest caldera lake, having migrated from their breeding grounds in an even colder Siberia.



Akan-Mashu National Park, Hokkaido, Japan Each winter, Lake Kussharo becomes a haven for hundreds of the largest swan species, whooper swans, drawn to the geothermal springs along its shoreline. The water is ice-free even through the coldest months, allowing the swans to rest and feed.



Shiretoko National Park, Hokkaido, Japan Constant eagle activity during our cruise out to the drifting ice afforded me the luxury of experimenting with intentional camera movement (ICM) to capture Steller's sea eagles in flight, their orange beaks adding a punch of color..

The cranes stand almost motionless in the water, sometimes partially disappearing into the mist. Photographers stand shoulder to shoulder, waiting for the perfect combination of frost, mist, cranes, and warm morning light. Then a crane calls, another responds, or two birds suddenly begin to dance. An individual may take flight, and shutters fire, like machine-guns, along the bridge as everyone tries to capture the moment.

The Setsuri River is more than a photographic backdrop. Its flowing water remains open when much of the surrounding landscape is frozen, allowing the cranes to roost overnight in relative safety. Standing in the river also reduces their vulnerability to predators such as red foxes, making these open stretches of water an important winter refuge.

The Eagles Have Landed
A similar phenomenon occurs around Lake Kussharo, where geothermal activity creates warm pools at the water's edge that remain unfrozen even when the surrounding landscape is locked in snow and ice.

Further northeast, on the Shiretoko Peninsula, the small fishing port of Rausu provides another extraordinary winter experience. Here, the ephemeral drift ice from the Sea of Okhotsk becomes a stage for Steller's sea eagles and white-tailed eagles.



Shiretoko Peninsula, Hokkaido, Japan
From a boat amid the drifting ice, I positioned myself with the sun directly ahead, anticipating that a Steller's sea eagle might choose the tallest chunk of ice as its landing place. Anticipation and planning can be just as important in wildlife photography as the moment itself.



The relationship between the eagles and Rausu's fishing industry goes back many years. Eagles naturally followed fishing boats and fed on fish lost or discarded from nets. By the early 2000s, fishermen and boat operators had recognized that the birds could also attract photographers. By the time I first visited Rausu in 2005, boats were already taking photographers toward the drift ice and using fish scraps to attract the eagles.

There's a strange ritual to these trips. The boat leaves the harbor in bitter cold, heading toward the drifting ice. Once there, fish scraps are placed on the ice or thrown into the water. Keen-eyed Steller's sea eagles, which often roost in the trees around Rausu, head toward the ice. White-tailed eagles join them, and suddenly, the quiet landscape becomes a frenzy of wings, talons, and competing birds, all against the backdrop of mountains of the Shiretoko Peninsula.

Rausu, Hokkaido, Japan This grove of birch trees was crying out for intentional camera movement (ICM). By using a slow shutter speed and smoothly moving the camera during the exposure, I was able to blur the trees into this simple, graphic interpretation of the winter forest.



The practice of artificial feeding isn't without controversy. Concentrating large numbers of wild eagles around boats can alter their behavior, and the practice has prompted concerns from Japanese environmental authorities. For photographers, it raises the uncomfortable question about the line between observing wildlife and manipulating it. The photographs can be spectacular, but they represent a very different experience from watching an eagle naturally hunt.

Why I Keep Visiting

Hokkaido also offers quieter, often elusive, encounters with mammals. Red foxes moving across snow-covered fields can become a splash of color against an enormous white landscape. Bears, deer, foxes, and Japanese flying squirrels are wildlife endemic to Hokkaido. These encounters require patience and a willingness to accept that sometimes the landscape is as important as the animal.

After so many visits, Hokkaido continues to call me back. Perhaps I'm still chasing the feeling created by that first photograph of the monkey carrying a snowball. Ultimately, it isn't simply the wildlife that that brings me back. It's the experience of standing in the darkness and cold, waiting for the first light to touch a landscape that's literally frozen in time, and wondering what remarkable image might appear before my eyes.

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*See more of **Jeremy Woodhouse**'s work at www.pixelchrome.com.*

Akan-Mashu National Park, Hokkaido, Japan
While driving to Lake Kussharo, we spotted this fox with carrion in its mouth. As we stopped to get a better look and photograph the scene, hoping to identify the prey, it darted off into the wintry landscape.

Acorn to be Wild

WORDS AND IMAGE BY KEVIN LOHMAN

CRAZY THINGS HAPPEN when you're out with your camera. On this particular morning in May 2026, I was visiting a local park in Santa Cruz, California, when I spotted a 7-week-old great horned owl perched low in a pine tree. I stopped to watch the young owl and lifted my camera to take a few photographs.

Just as I pressed the shutter for a burst of images, a squirrel suddenly launched itself from a nearby branch and flew directly toward the owl. It landed squarely on the owlet's head, knocking both of them out of the tree. I was shocked by what I had just witnessed — and amazed that I happened to be taking aim at exactly the right moment.

Both animals landed on the ground and appeared to be fine. The young owl eventually climbed back into a tree, but remarkably, the encounter wasn't over. During the hour and a half I was there, a squirrel knocked the same owlet out of the tree two more times. After years of observing and photographing great horned owls, I had never witnessed anything like it.

Following the third encounter, an adult female owl began hooting, and the young owl eventually made its way back up into a nearby tree and joined her. The mother began preening the owlet, and the two finally settled down together.

I still wonder if it wasn't the same squirrel, making a game out of dive-bombing the owlet.

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*See more of **Kevin Lohman**'s work at www.kevinlohman.com.*



wild eye

A LENS ON THE UNTAMED WORLD

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